

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 is 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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ANNOUNCEMENT

BRETHERN: Since I am to have surgery in less than two weeks, Bro Ronny Wade will publish the next issue. Until after July, send all material for publication to him at P.O. Box 14352, Springfield, MO 65814. After that time, you may resume sending to me as usual. My thanks to Ronny for his great help. -Don L. King

WHEN SHOULD I LEAVE A CHURCH?

By KEVIN W. PRESLEY

One does not have to look far to see that the heading of this article is a question that arises fairly often. Some have a casual attitude toward local church membership and drift from church to church as circumstances change or as they grow restless. There are regions with a high concentration of congregations that worship according to the scriptures and it is difficult to keep track of who belongs where because people so easily and frequently change from one church to the next. This writer can personally think of people who have been members at one time or another of nearly every congregation in a 30-mile radius of their home. Any time a disturbance arises; someone offends them; or things grow stale and they become restless, they move along and try another congregation for a while. Some follow the larger crowd or the appeal of more excitement wherever those things happen to be at the time. On the other hand, some are careless with their soul and they remain too long in a church. No matter how far that church drifts away from the truth, because of tradition, familial ties, or mere apathy, they will not leave.

This is not a matter to be treated lightly. The Christian's attachment to a local church is a serious thing because the local church is the only visible, organized group to which one can belong. Our membership in the church of Christ as a whole merely consists of a mutual relationship we have with God through Christ. A child of God's involvement in the work of the kingdom takes

place at the level of the local church. The local church alone calls Christians together for worship (Acts 20:7; Heb 10:25). The local church is responsible for the edification of its own (1 Cor 14:12,26). Christians are accountable to their local church and no other (Heb 13:17). This accountability includes the role of the local church in disciplining its own unruly members (1 Cor 5:4). There is no organized entity besides or larger than the local church that is authorized to even exist, much less carry out these functions. Modern technology and modes of travel have made the world a smaller place and unfortunately, the lines that demark local churches and their sphere of operation and influence are blurred. Many Christians seem to see themselves as members of the church at large and drift from place to place with little to no accountability or attachment. This is not scriptural nor productive. Each disciple needs to join together with a local body of believers and be a faithful, consistent, dependable, and fruitful member of that church. This begs the question though: Do there come times when one should sever the relationship to their local church and join with another?

It is granted that circumstances sometimes dictate this matter. A man is charged with providing for his household and therefore he may have to move in order to do this. There may not be a viable path for a young family in some small rural community and they may have to relocate to make a living. Perhaps an opportunity arises for the gospel to be carried to another part of the country and an evangelist works to begin a new work in new territory and it may be that a family can be of particular help by going and being part of that work. Wisdom might dictate a number of circumstances where it is prudent for one to relocate to another church. Many of the excuses that are offered, however, are frivolous or even selfish, sacrificing the welfare of a local church upon someone's altar of self-enrichment or self-satisfaction. So, one should approach this question circumspectly.

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Guest Editorial

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

By DAVID GRIFFIN

The modern religious scene is full of “Christian organizations.” Such organizations range from the literally thousands of denominations, to the numberless evangelistic associations, ecumenical councils and alliances, Bible societies, radio and television networks, and a host of other well intentioned endeavors. In general, these institutions have been built by the sincere efforts (and sometimes not-so-sincere efforts) of dedicated men and women. Since this condition has existed for such a long time, many people take it for granted. Few, it seems, consider how the current situation compares to the church in New Testament times. This article therefore discusses some fundamental aspects of the church’s organization as described in the New Testament.

The Word “Church”

The word church occurs 121 times in the New Testament. It is a translation of the Greek word ekklesia (pronounced eng-khy-SEEah), meaning “a gathering” or “an assembly” that has been called into session or service. It is one of the most common designations for that blessed and privileged multitude of people described in the New Testament as having been called out of the world and into the spiritual family of God (2 Thess. 2:14). Regarding the church’s organizational structure, the word ekklesia, or church, has two primary uses in the New Testament: 1) local, 2) universal.

The Local Church

Paul the Apostle wrote to Christians in Corinth: “Paul, called to be an apostle ... to the church of God which is at Corinth.” The “church ... at Corinth” was a single, local congregation that met for worship in that city. The congregations in Philippi, Thessalonica, or Jerusalem are not in view in this passage. It is purely of local significance. A similar passage appears in the first letter of Paul to Thessalonica: “Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians ... “ (1:1). Again, Paul has in view the local group of Christians who were organized as a congregation and met for worship in a local city. The congregations at Antioch, Ephesus, or Corinth are not in view here.

When addressing congregations in a wider region or province, New Testament authors are always careful to

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QUERIST COLUMN

By CLINT DEFRANCE

Question: Does the Scripture authorize pre-planned, regularly recurring, invitation-only Bible studies?

Answer: From the perspective of this writer, the arrangement described above is scriptural and should be practiced by Christians everywhere. In Acts 20:20, the apostle Paul summarized his work with the congregation at Ephesus in these words: "I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house..." in verse 31 he adds that this work was ongoing for "three years." A word is in order about the meaning of Acts 20:20. In recent years there have been a few efforts to re-construct the meaning of this passage from the historic, commonly accepted understanding, especially regarding the phrase "house to house." Some suggest that this refers to worship services in house churches and is contrasted to preaching in an open square. Others say that the word house should be read as "household" or "family" and thus conclude that Paul is limiting the scriptural parameters of a private study to people who are biologically related, or in some way, members of the same family. Neither of these interpretations enjoy logical or scholarly support. J. B. Rotherham translated the verse, "publicly and in your homes." Today's Christian New Testament says, "teaching you both in public and in private." Beck's Translation says, "In meetings and in homes." The contrast is simply this: Paul taught in public gatherings (assemblies of the congregation, gatherings in the open square, etc.) and in private gatherings (intimate meetings in the homes of Christians that were apparently confined to a closed group). If Paul continued this practice for three and one-half years, it was clearly "regularly recurring," and as Paul was very familiar with the attribute of God, that He desires things to be done decently and in order, in a way that avoids chaos and confusion, it is only reasonable that they would have been pre-planned. Therefore, the scripture authorizes preplanned, regularly recurring, invitation-only Bible studies. If apostolic examples are a pattern, as this writer believes they are, Christians should learn from this example that much good comes from gathering for private studies outside the regular

assembly. In places where no such studies occur, bible knowledge is generally lacking among the members.

[Note: We should point out the major differences between the arrangement defended above, and the popular Sunday School or Bible Class system of modern religion. In churches that use Bible classes, the gatherings are open to the public, advertised on the marquee, and arranged by the elders or leadership of the church. Leslie Thomas called "the Bible school... the church at work" (What the Bible Teaches, p. 150-151). The Sunday School or Bible Class is unscriptural. Private bible studies, like the ones described in Acts 20:20 must be individually arranged, and reasonable efforts must be taken to ensure they fit the description of "private." Regarding efforts to keep studies private, something must be said about the way in which modern social media outlets (i.e. Facebook) complicate the matter. When pictures or other information about a private event are placed on Facebook, that event is thus brought into the public sphere. Christians who recognize the importance of private Bible studies must be appropriately cautious and thoughtful in this regard.]



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THE HEREAFTER

BY BILLY D. DICKINSON

Humans are the only ones of this earthly domain who can speak the word “eternity” and contemplate on that future destiny awaiting us after death. All other creatures are happy to simply be immersed in time and live in the here and now. However, man was created in the “image of God” (Gen. 1:27), involving the idea that we have a built-in desire for spiritual things, and that’s why material possessions are not a permanent source of satisfaction. If you have ever had a desire that no worldly experience could give you, that is living proof of a consciousness of God as part of your nature. No wonder Jesus declared that “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4)!

Indeed, God has placed in each of us a curiosity about the “Hereafter,” a natural capacity to probe and be intrigued, and this is evident when even children inquire about tomorrow, death and the life beyond. Those questions, of course, aren’t always easy to answer, especially when you’re dealing with young minds, but in this we see attempts to understand how God made us and what life is all about. I remember a conversation I had with James Orten years ago, after he had been to Malaysia preaching the gospel, and he explained how Malaysians are especially interested in knowing about “the state of man after death.” By announcing this as a major topic to be discussed, many visitors attended their services, and this was used as a beginning place to point them to Jesus - the One who conquered death and “hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

Sooner or later everyone must ask themselves the question, “After the here and now, what’s hereafter?” It has been said that we live our lives on a little island that we call “time,” an expanse that is bound by two vast seas of eternity, and we can allow our minds to wander back into the unending recesses of time past. We can also move forward into the future (as far as can be imagined), but when the mind can go no farther, there is still eternity. Furthermore, regardless of the direction our minds can take us in, we will discover that God is there! Eternity involves the endless past, the unending future and God’s present experience of earthly time. Indeed, when we need answers about the “Hereafter,” we should be looking to God because He “inhabits eternity” itself (Isa.57:15).

The Bible makes an inseparable link between time and eternity, showing that one has an effect upon the other.

An example is how Peter ended his second epistle with this outburst of praise toward Jesus Christ: “To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen” (2 Pet. 3:18 NKJV). As we think about “now” and “forever,” let us remember that we will spend infinitely more time in the “afterlife” (another word we sometimes use) than we will here in this material world. One time a preacher visited an older man, saying to him, “At your age you should be thinking about the hereafter.” Jokingly, the reply was: “Oh, I do that all the time. No matter where I am, whether it be the living room, upstairs, kitchen or downstairs, I ask myself, ‘What am I here after?’” When you think about it, the old man had stumbled upon a good question for us to consider in life-- What are we here after? The sad reality is that too many people are only living for the here and now, seeking to lay up for themselves “treasures upon earth” (Matt. 6:19), while they fail to live in view of the vast eternity that awaits them.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRIORITIES

While God has bound man to time in this old world (Job 14:1), He has also given us the ability to live “above time.” What do I mean by that? I mean that we have the capacity to remember yesterday, to apply spiritual principles to our daily living and to plan for the future. As one man put it, “Our consciousness of God is part of our nature, but the suppression of it is part of our sin.” That’s right! We live in a fallen world where sin has led mankind away from God, leading to a false sense of priorities, and many are failing to lay up for themselves “treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:20). That’s why we must allow God’s word to reshape our thinking, causing us to “seek those things which are above” (Col. 3:1), because only in Christ can our deep-seated needs find fulfillment.

The story is told about a traveler who was lost in a rugged area of West Texas, so he stopped at a farm house and knocked on the door for directions. A freckled-face lad tried to help him out, giving the following directions: “Go straight down the road about two miles. The road will be pretty rough and sandy, but you’ll make it alright. Then you’ll come to a cemetery, but after you go through it, there will be a smooth, paved road that will take you to your destination.” Dearly beloved, that’s exactly the way it is in life! It can be a pretty rough road between here and the cemetery, but if we’ll live for the Lord, all of our troubles will end at death. “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth,” we read in Rev. 14:13, “Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.”

THE NEED FOR PREPARATION

There is an eternity before us, but there are two options

of which we have a choice: “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Matt. 25:46). It really is up to us to choose our eternal destiny, either heaven or hell, and we do that by the decisions we make and the way we live our lives. Did you ever read one of those “Choose Your Own Adventure” books? They were popular several years ago with children, where you would read along and make certain choices, and you decided how the story would end. This is the position we find ourselves in as free moral agents.

Someone put it this way: “We may travel the sea of life without Christ, but what about the landing?” The answer is that if we land on eternity’s shore without Jesus as our Savior, we are going to be lost forever. It should be a sobering thought to realize that the “Hereafter” for us will be determined by what we do with Christ “here” in this life. The issue that Pilate had to decide in the long ago--- “What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?” (Matt. 27:22) --- is the same issue that must be dealt with today. That ancient procurator of Judea made the wrong decision because he only took into account earthly considerations, like strengthening his alliance with Herod and pleasing the bloodthirsty mob, and he now faces eternity with the blood of the Son of God on his hands. Let’s don’t make the same kind of mistake that Pilate did in the long ago.

NO ESCAPE

There is no way that any of us will escape eternity. One preacher put it so eloquently: “After your spirit wings its way out of your body; after the casket lid closes; after pallbearers have borne your body in solemn procession; after you are taken to the cemetery; after you are lowered in the grave; after clods have rumbled ominously on the coffin top; after the last tear has fallen and the last muffled sob is heard; after the last mourner has turned aside from the graveside and your body lies all alone ... There will be an eternity.” That’s right!

When your “here” in this life is over, what kind of “Hereafter” will you face? Heb. 2:3 asks, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation...?” Although this was a rhetorical question, the answer was given later on in the epistle-- “See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven” (Heb. 12:25/ NKJV). Think about it!

PAGES FROM THE PAST

The following article, by Brother Bennie Cryer, is from the December 1982 issue of the Old Paths Advocate. In this article Bennie discusses the idea of church cooperation and its history in our brotherhood. He also shows us that even though a practice may seem good, we must be willing to put it aside if it is proven wrong by the scriptures. -Rick Martin

A Brief History of Church Cooperation Among Us By Bennie Cryer

The growth of the brotherhood has exceeded the expectation of many of its friends and most of its enemies. This growth can be well described with impressive numbers but, for the purpose of this article, it is best described in willingness to lay aside practices when they have proven to be wrong. It takes maturity to do that whether you are an individual, a congregation or a brotherhood, for, as a brotherhood, we admit to mistakes in the past and thank God for those who stood steadfastly for the faith and taught us the way of the Lord more perfectly. Such is the case regarding congregational cooperation in doing evangelistic and benevolent work. Let me relate to you a brief history of some of our experiences with it, struggles in overcoming departures from the truth and warnings about the seed of error still within that we must continue to watch lest the liberal plant of unscriptural cooperation (God does regulate congregational cooperation.) spring up and spreads its destructive poisonous tentacles among us. The dates you read after a statement refer to the issue of The Old Paths Advocate that contained the information.

CALIFORNIA BEGINNING

I serve as an elder in a congregation that credits its beginning to the work of two of our preachers who were being paid from what later proved to be an unscriptural fund that was created on the west coast for the purpose of doing mission work. It was an effective plan, but effectiveness does not make a plan scriptural. In this plan several congregations would pool a suggested one-half of their contributions into a special fund. (11-1-42). This fund was extra-congregational and controlled by selected brethren. Preachers were “engaged” at the annual Labor Day meeting by the leaders of fifteen or more congregations and instead of being paid by a congregation, they would be paid out of the special fund (10-1-43). If the preacher happened to receive some extra money from a congregation he was to report this to the brethren in charge of the fund and this was deducted

from his monthly salary. As new congregations were established they were encouraged to participate in "The Systematic Mission Work Program" as it was referred to (1-1-42, 3-1-42). A number of preachers were being supported from the fund at the same time. From one end of California to the other local congregations were started under this system. The growth was so phenomenal that one brother wrote, "They are doing a great work, and I pray brethren everywhere will follow their example..." (6-1-42). By 1943 preachers reported, "we are "enroute to that great work in California" (1-1-43). Most of the preachers who worked under that fund would not do it today, but I have to observe that, at that time, they could blister The American and Foreign Missionary Societies and the divisions they caused, but as of yet they could not see they were operating under the same type fund. It just had not gotten as large.

THE FUND IDEA SPREADS

World War II helped spread this idea. A prominent brother from California feared a Japanese invasion of Los Angeles and went to Missouri to investigate the possibilities of moving there for the duration. While there he gave a glowing report of the work in California and one of the brethren in Missouri, after hearing and reading about the mission fund's success, wrote, "We have recently agreed upon putting into practice about such a plan for the next two years at least...Funds are building up ... " as the "churches are cooperating nicely in a financial way" (3-1-42). When this fund eventually came to an end, evidently in 1946 or 47 it was reported that a small balance remained in it (1-1-46). Some of the strongest objections to the plan came from brethren from Missouri, and, as has been shown in recent years, they now stand opposed to anything that even looks like a centralized fund or decision-making body outside of a local congregation.

OKLAHOMA NEXT

One of the preachers from Oklahoma, after conducting meetings in California, observed that California was to be commended for keeping preachers in the field, and, in contrast to that work, he reported: "a lot of brethren in Oklahoma believe in keeping the preachers in the field, but the wrong field-the cornfield. Brethren let us do some mission work" (1-1-42). Keeping the preachers out of "the cornfield" almost became a battle cry for Oklahoma mission work, if not for the whole brotherhood. "The Systematic Mission Work Program" became a reality in Oklahoma when one year later it was reported in the January-1 943 issue that a number of brethren met at Sulphur, November 1, 1942, and adopted "the following plan" which included forwarding money from local congregations into a centralized, extra-congregational fund. Several congregations selected

one man to receive and distribute the funds. From this fund the preachers were to receive "adequate support" according to the six-point plan.

FURTHER GROWTH OF THE IDEA

"The Centralized Fund" idea continued to grow in similar fashion until it had found its way into congregations in at least six different states even though it was "foreign to the spirit, tenor and teaching of the scripture." (11-1-57).

CENTRALIZED FUND ENTERS AREA OF BENEVOLENT WORK

When our conscientious objectors were placed in work camps during World War II they found themselves needing financial support. The money required for this work was sent from individuals and congregations to a centralized fund and the money distributed as needed by the brother responsible for it (4-1-43). It seemed the easiest and most effective way of doing that work. The scripturalness of such plans was seriously questioned by only a few until the latter part of that decade. FOREIGN FIELDS This area has not escaped "the centralized fund" application. From the gathering of support to send preachers and their families overseas to the support of indigenous preachers, poor members and orphans of foreign countries the centralized fund idea has had its advocates and practitioners (12-1-57). By the 1950's a general movement against the centralization of funds and power had developed to such an extent that one preacher actually withdrew his name from the list of missionaries volunteering to go to Africa because "the fund" had reared its head again in collection of money to send them. About this time another centralized fund came to an end out of which African preachers were being supported. (8-1-58). Those responsible for the administration of this and other funds "surrendered" their preference of what they called a "more systematic and workable" plan. (8-1-58). Foreign work took on new momentum and forged speedily ahead when a suggestion, which everyone could agree on was adopted. That suggestion was summarized in a report of one preacher in this way: "... it is my sincere feeling that the present system of centralizing the funds for this work, and all other foreign work, as well as here: at, home, will continue to be questioned if a change, and a small one really, is not affected ... Let us support the African work and all mission work, but in a way that cannot be questioned-to the preacher direct" (4-1-58). Since that time the "direct method" has been mostly employed in our work at home and abroad and has proven to be very effective.

AN OLD PROBLEM IN A NEW SETTING

The centralized fund idea lay almost dormant during the

next two decades. However, its seed still existed for, as you probably have already noted, some brethren merely surrendered their “preference” when they agreed to work under and with the direct support plan. They still suggested that their plan was “just as scriptural as any that had been suggested...” (12-1-57). So, because of this, we have carefully, prayerfully and scripturally guarded our mission programs. However, some have forgotten to be just as careful in our approach to benevolent work and now problems have arisen in the area of caring for orphans and the poor. If it is wrong to centralize funds for evangelistic work, it is equally as wrong in the field of benevolence. Wise brethren found a scriptural, peaceful and workable solution to this problem in the late 1950’s. God bless us with wise brethren like that now, so some future writer can look into our history in this matter and credit us with standing for a “thus saith the Lord” and working together on that basis.

WHEN SHOULD I continued from page one

Unfortunately, there are situations that demand that one leave a church. When a church, for example, departs from the doctrine of Christ, a person cannot remain and be right in God’s sight. Sometimes churches drift and eventually leave the truth. One will find differences of views and varying degrees of faith and strength in any congregation but sometimes those differences reach a level and pertain to areas where one’s own soul is compromised by being part of such a church. As far as this writer is aware, the bible never directly speaks of the scenario of one leaving a church for reasons of conscience but it clearly speaks of how one is to react to heresy and apostasy. “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed.” (2 Jn 1:9-10) Jesus had ought against the church at Pergamos because they held to the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans which He hated. What a congregation believes, preaches, and practices is a primary test of that church’s faithfulness to Christ. Even if a church does good works but does not embrace sound teaching it is not approved in the sight of God. When a church promotes dangerously false teachings that pervert the Bible doctrine of grace, negating the essentiality of obedience, etc., or when the word of God is questioned and its authority is impugned, that church is leaving the faith and if it will not turn around, there comes a time I must leave.

When a church corrupts its corporate worship and work,

a faithful Christian cannot stay. A church may have deficiencies and serious problems without corrupting all who are members of it but those things in which the church corporately participates create a different situation altogether. Rev 3:4 says that there were some in the erring church at Sardis who had not defiled their garments but this implies that those who had not done so were not guilty of the sins of those who were defiled. If a church corrupts the public worship how could there be those there who remain undefiled if they participate in the unscriptural worship? And then how could someone NOT participate in worship which the Lord requires and be undefiled? The defilement under consideration in Jesus’ letter to Sardis involved matters of personal sin and not corporate sin.

BUT WHEN SHOULD ONE NOT LEAVE A CHURCH?

The circumstances thus far described are tragic and place many innocent, conscientious Christians in a difficult, yeah heartbreaking situation. Just as tragic, in this writer’s view, is when people forsake a church for unjustified reasons and leave that church further weakened and perhaps spread trouble and difficulty to other unsuspecting churches.

1) One should not leave a church because the members are not as strong as they should be. An environment may indeed reach a point of futility and hopelessness that one feels for their own families’ sake they must make a change but most often this is not the case. Some play musical churches hoping they will finally light upon the ‘perfect’ church that is the spiritual utopia they have long sought. Perfect churches do not exist. There will ever be those who are stronger and weaker, younger and older, wiser and not so wise, agreeable and not agreeable in every church at one time or another. “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.” Gal 4:19 “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.” (Rom 15:1) Instead of leaving a struggling church, why not commit to affecting its spiritual growth? One person or one family can often be the catalyst for revival in a dying church. The godly example of one family may lead others to more righteous living. The commitment and sacrifice of one may lead others to want to seek first the kingdom of God. The knowledge or zeal for the bible on the part of one can pique the interest of others in learning more themselves. The joy and enthusiasm of a family may spark a new sense of optimism within a congregation.

2) One should not leave because of fun, games, and excitement in another place. This is a temptation

particularly, it seems, among younger people. “Big meetings” can create a false expectation in the minds of young and spiritually immature Christians of what the church should always be. While casual association among Christians is a wonderful thing, this is not the primary reason churches exist. Churches exist to be a light to their community and hold forth the word of truth (Php 2:15-16). It is sad when young people leave churches where they can make a difference and be the future of the work of Christ in that little community so they can flock to other young people and a large church where they are not so sorely needed. Churches who proselytize people away from smaller churches to come join in their constant activities and their excitement miss the point of the church’s design and do a disservice to the work of Christ as a whole.

3) One should not leave a church to avoid rebuke, discipline, or a personal conflict. Christ’s solution to biblical rebuke is to heed it. (2 Ti 4:2-3) His antidote to church discipline is nothing short of repentance. (1 Cor 5:5, 2 Cor 7:8-11) The remedy for personal conflict is to “go” and not “run”! (Mat 18:15-17, Mat 5:23-24) Today, though, the concentration of congregations in an area along with the ease of travel has created a long and complicated history of Christians fleeing problems and conflicts and taking them to neighboring churches. Problems are never truly solved and in many cases, souls are liable to be lost as a result. Running to another congregation will not heal division and does not glorify God. Granted, remaining and not humbly and sincerely working to resolve differences will not solve them either. We should do all we can to remain and be reconciled to those from whom we are alienated. Also, fleeing to another church because it is soft on sin and does not preach the full counsel of God will not make one more acceptable to God.

Many local churches are in trouble. Some are sick and others are dying. The greatest tragedy is, many of them don’t have to be. Brethren need to stop floating about and using churches as a convenient rest stop along the road of life and, as much as possible, commit to a congregation and diligently work to strengthen it and make it what it can and should be. All Christians should “love the brotherhood” (1 Pe 2:17) but loving the brotherhood and strengthening the brotherhood occurs at home. Young people should be taught and exhorted to commit themselves to their home church and be a vital part of its continuance and further development. Older Christians can instill that principle within them by their own example as much as anything else.

THE NEW TESTAMENT continued from page two

use the plural. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul says: “...I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea... (1:22). Likewise, he references a group of congregations when addressing the church at Corinth: “As I have given order to the churches of Galatia [concerning the collection for the saints], so you must do also... (1 Cor. 16: 1). Another passage is Romans 16:16: “the churches of Christ greet you.” It is important to stress that when Paul says, “the churches,” he does not mean, “the denominations.” He refers to the several congregations of that one New Testament body (Eph 4:4) that meet for work and worship in specific geographical areas. Even though Romans 16:16 includes many churches across an area wider than a single city, the passage still retains the local congregation concept by its use of the plural-”the churches of Christ greet you.” Accordingly, Paul’s salutation in Romans 16:16 does not reference the universal church as acting collectively through a common agency, controlling entity, or head.

The Universal Church

In contrast to the local sense, the word church is also used in a universal sense in many passages. In this sense, “church” is not limited to any specific place or province, nor is it even restricted to a single point in history. Instead, it is the church universal, the aggregate of all people who have been saved in Jesus Christ or who will ever be saved in Jesus Christ. Matthew 16:18 is a case in point. Here the word church appears the very first time in the New Testament. Peter has just confessed Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (v. 16). The Lord then blesses Peter for this confession and adds this promise: “...I will build my church...”

The whole message of the New Testament makes it clear that Jesus is not promising here to build only a single local congregation, nor a single denomination. Rather, he promises to build the “church-universal.” The church Jesus promises to build would become the spiritual body composed of all faithful Christians everywhere, organized congregationally in the various geographical locations of the world.

But the church Jesus promises to build in Matthew 16 is not just geographically universal! It is also chronologically universal. Accordingly, Paul teaches that the church is ultimately to extend to all ages, beyond the first century. In his letter to the Ephesians he pens these stirring words of praise and promise: “To Him

be the glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph. 3:21, NKJV). Clearly, the word church here has its most inclusive sense to embrace all places and all ages, including the first century and beyond. The implication is that whatever the church was to be in the first century, it should be in future centuries.

The few passages noticed thus far are only a sampling of the 121 occurrences of the word church in the New Testament. Yet these few examples are representative of the church’s local and universal character in the long ago. Significantly, the largest and only organizational form one finds in the New Testament is that of local congregations, organized under their respective elders and deacons (Phil. 1:1). Nowhere in the Scriptures is the universal church organized “universally” or even semi-universally by district, state, province, nation, ethnic group, or dogma and doctrinal stance.

With these biblical teachings in view, it is safe to say that the apostles and first-century Christians would not recognize modern denominationalism, with its Presbyteries, Synods, Ecclesiastical Councils, its Regional and International Headquarters, all acting as separate and competing governing bodies over their respective sectarian adherents. The landscape of modern Christendom, with its monolithic ecclesiastical superstructures, its confusing network of parachurch organizations, and its bewildering labyrinth of complex contradictions stands in the most conspicuous contrast to the simple picture of the church as portrayed on the canvas of the New Testament Scriptures.

Modern Misuses of the Word Church

In the centuries following New Testament times, the religion Jesus established strayed, inch by inch, step by step, from its original form and purity. Shortly after the first century ended, the church began to adopt beliefs and practices that were unknown when the apostles lived. This departure occurred on many levels, only one of which was a corruption of the basic organization of the church. These circumstances were attended by the infusion of new meanings into the word church, meanings completely alien to biblical usage.

One such new meaning is church as a synonym for “the clergy.” This use conveys the idea that those who occupy a place of so-called “apostolic succession,” comprise “The Church” (capital letters) while all their subjects (i.e. “mere members”) are known only as “the laity” or “parishioners.” From this usage stems the notion that “The Church” is the governing institution to

which the “laity” ultimately yields its willing and reverent submission. One reads the New Testament in vain to find this sense of the word church or to find the constructs of “clergy” and “laity” that gave rise to it.

Another new meaning for the word church is its use in a national or ethnic sense and often with the connotation of rivalry with other “national churches.” The Russian Orthodox, the Church of England, or the American Church are just a few examples that come to mind. Again, such distinctions are foreign to New Testament language. As noticed above, when New Testament authors refer to a plurality of congregations in a given area, they do not refer to “The Church of Galatia” or the “The Church of Judea” (with “Church” singular and the “C” capitalized). They call them “the churches of Galatia” (1 Cor 16: 1), “the churches of Judea” (Gal. 1:22), and “all the churches” (1 Cor. 14:33). There is no National Church in the New Testament that is somehow different and separate in its basic nature and organic structure from some other National Church.

Last, the modern convention of employing the word church in the sense of a denomination in order to differentiate one contending faction from another on the basis of a prominent leader or some exclusive doctrine is also foreign to New Testament usage. People sometimes ask, “What church are you a member of?” In this context “church” is an exact synonym for denomination. However, careful students of the Bible have noticed that the Scriptures say nothing of a “Church of Apollos,” a “Pauline Church,” the “Church of the Circumcision,” the “Church of the UNCircumcision,” the “Church of Immersion,” or some other such label to “denominate” one first century group from another. In fact, it is this very sort of sectarian standoff and brand-name labeling that Paul clearly condemns in 1 Corinthians chapters 1 through 4.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the New Testament Scriptures are the final and authoritative source for knowledge of all things pertaining to the apostolically guided church. It stands to reason that since there are no living inspired apostles today, the church as described in the New Testament should be the final and authoritative model for what the church should be today—not only in faith and worship, but even of church organization. Thus, that ancient institution calls out to the modern world from the pages of Scripture, pleading that those who name the name of Christ set aside all the humanly devised organizations and methods and adopt only those that are of apostolic origin.

CARING FOR THE ELDERLY AND SICK PARENTS

By RICK MARTIN

At the age of 68, my mother had a debilitating stroke. She lived for eight more years and they were very difficult years. They were difficult for her, for my family and for me. It is my desire that this article will give you some advice in dealing with your parents if you are in a comparable situation.

First, we should have pity by putting ourself in their shoes. Proverbs 14: 29 says, “He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.” Most of our anger is due to a lack of understanding. We may believe that our parents earn our anger, but, most of our anger is immature, uncalled for, and unbecoming of a Christian. In Luke 7:35 the Lord shows us how to put some depth into our perspective. The place is the house of Simon, a Pharisee. During the meal, a certain woman arrived. Simon, the host, saw a nuisance. To him this woman was an embarrassing distraction. Jesus did not see it that way. Jesus saw a depressed, hurting person who was looking for a change and direction from God. The fact that Simon saw none of these shows us that we often fail to see these things in so many of the people we meet. The question is, what do we see in our parents? We need to see beyond the decline of their physical and mental abilities to see the parents who loved us. We should recognize how difficult and frightening it must be to live with the changes that are taking place in their lives. We should work to be more understanding and compassionate.

Secondly, we should ignore insults rather than arguing with them. That is not an easy thing to do. Proverbs 19:11 says “The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.” Proverbs 17:9 says, “He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.” Even more to the point, Eccl. 7:21-22 says, “Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.” Here we are told to ignore an insult. This is good advice when dealing with the confused insults of a parent who cannot help what age or sickness is doing to him or her. When we take it on ourselves to correct every little misstatement it will only add to the problem of a confused mind. Patient loving kindness is the best defense for dealing with a confused mind of an elderly, sick parent.

Third, when it’s time to convince our elderly or sick parents to make a major decision, try not to do it alone. 1 Kings 1 illustrates this well. David had become an old, ineffective king who was still trying to hold on to the power of the throne. Ambitious and evil men were cutting up his kingdom. It is easier to pilot a ship to ruin than to admit that we need help, and this is especially so with the elderly. David’s kingdom was falling apart, and Nathan wanted to do something about it, but he didn’t do it alone. He made a team effort with Bathsheba and was successful. This is good example for us to follow.

Finally, we should remember that when we were a child, there were times when we no doubt put our parents through “the works.” We should try to be understanding of their fears, not let unfair remarks become a big deal, and be there to help them as the best person we can be. It won’t always be easy. But, we should remember the most important part: God will remember our labor of love, and that makes everything worth it.

Eph. 6:2 “Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise.”

Announcement

FREE SONG BOOKS - Paul O. Nichols, 14221 Rosehill, Overland Park, KS 66221, I have been authorized by the congregation to make this announcement. The Stony Point congregation of Kansas City has several song books of different titles which we wish to share with other congregations. It is the practice of the Stony Point church to buy new books each time one is offered by our brother, Kevin Presley. As a result we have used books that we would like to share with other churches. We offer these at only the cost to ship them. The books are in good condition - almost like new. The churches who receive them will not be ashamed to use them in their services. Our storage for the books is getting overcrowded, and we need to make room for other things. Remember, the price of the books is only the cost for shipping them. You may send your requests to the address above, and we will be happy to send the books to the address your designate. Please specify the number of books with your request.



Our Departed

TRENT - Annie Korean Trent was born April 6, 1928 in Rexroat, Ok. She departed this life April 11, 2018 at her home in Paramount, Ca. She was preceded in death by her husband of 64 years Doyle, daughter-in-law Janet Trent, grandson-in-law Mike Culver, and granddaughter in-law Megan Trent. She is survived by her 2 children, Donna Stone of Bellflower, Ca. and Geary Trent, of Clovis, Ca. She had 5 grandchildren. Jennifer Nieves of Bellflower, Ca., Darren Stone of Modesto, Ca., Matt Trent of Norman, Ok., Andy Trent of Oakdale, Ca, and Lori Culver of Fresno, Ca. There are 16 great grandchildren. Annie, or as most called her, Korean, was baptized at 13 years old in Healdton, OK. by Fred Kirbo. She was a faithful member of the Church of Christ till her passing.

She married Doyle on July 29, 1948 in Oklahoma and then came to California to start their life together. She was a homemaker most of her life and kept busy with the children and family affairs. Annie first attended the Lynwood congregation when she came to California, and upon its closing went to Montebello, then Cyprus, and had been going to Covina for quite a few years at her passing. She was also known as "Nanny" to most of the friends, family, and acquaintances she had, no matter their age. She was very social and seemed to never meet a stranger. She had a song for everything. Her recall of old songs, and singing them at various times is one memory all in the family will have of her. She will be missed by all. Her grandson Matt Trent conducted her memorial service and Don McCord officiated at the graveside. There was a congregational singing led by Ivan Costa.

Field Reports

Greg Gay, 5109 Chicago Ave., Fair Oaks, CA 95628, 916-804-3787, gregorypgay@gmail.com, June 12, 2018. Since last report we have continued our work at 64th St., Sacramento. We have had some recent visitors from the community as well as visitors due to member influence and invitations, all of which is an answer to prayer. We were able to attend the recent Memorial Day meeting at Turlock with Brandon Stephens. That annual meeting continues to draw large crowds from in and out of state. We were also able to attend a night of Auburn's meeting with Brent Wilson. Brent's education and practice in the field of geology and his ability to apply that knowledge to the preaching of the gospel is a great asset to the brotherhood. I was at Ada, OK on June 3 for a Sunday while visiting family. My sister

Vicky continues her battle with cancer and recently had a pacemaker put in. Thank you for all the prayers that continue to be offered on her behalf It was wonderful to see all who were able to be at Ada that day, including Carl Johnson who was home between meetings. Cassie was able to join me for our meeting at Broken Arrow, OK June 6-10. The congregation requested sermons on the home and I was honored to present material on that topic. The many visitors from near and far included Noah Howard, Clint De France and Randy Tidmore. The congregation is blessed with the work of Bill Ferguson and all there went above and beyond to make our stay very special.

P. Duane Permenter, 94-371 Ikepono St., Waipahu, HI 96797, 800-600-5909, duane_and_laurie@yahoo.com, June 2018. The church at Waipahu continues with peace and we are grateful for this. We are striving to grow the church both spiritually and numerically. Each week we have a study with all the church leaders. The teaching has improved much. Contacts with people are made as much as they allow us to. We have had many other studies although they are not weekly. Our normal attendance is twenty-five on Sunday and nineteen on Wednesday night. Visitors continue to come from the community and also from the mainland. My sister and her family Rosemarie Jones were here recently and it was fun to be with them for a few days. Since moving away from California in 1996, I have not been able to spend much time with her and it was really refreshing to have them. We had many good visits and created some good memories in the process. Greg Gay held us a weekend meeting recently and we had eight or nine community visitors for which we were thankful. The brethren worked hard to get some to attend and were successful. Greg did a good job preaching. I was in Sharonville, OH closing a meeting the weekend Greg was in Waipahu. Presently we are preparing for a week long work with Phillip Prince in June. He is going to preach for us and teach us better how to sing and lead in the assembly. We hope to get some community interest in the singing. We plan to meet at the local elementary school during this time. Last Sunday we moved back to the house for Lord's day worship. We are grateful to the Lord that Livermore was able to assist us during the last few months. It would have been very difficult for the church here to pay the rent and Livermore is to be commended for their support in this. We are glad to be back at the building. If you come to Hawaii we are in the same place, 94-371 Ikepono Street, Waipahu, HI 96797. Thank you for your continued support both by prayers and financial. May God keep you is my constant prayer for you. God bless all.

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WALKS THROUGH THE BIBLE...

A PROPHET FOR PROFIT

By JERRY DICKINSON

"They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet." (II Peter 2:15,16) The story of Balaam is one of the strangest and most remarkable stories in the Bible. Balaam is an enigma. Was he a real prophet of the Lord? Apparently so, because in the narrative the Lord speaks to him and even inspires his words as a means of blessing the children of Israel. He was a prophet alright - but he was a prophet for profit! Peter said he loved the "wages" of unrighteousness. His gifts were for sale. He was for sale. He is an example of many preachers who are still for sale to this day!

This past week on the ABC evening news program there was a story about a Tele-evangelist out of Baton Rouge, Louisiana who is asking his followers to send him money so he can purchase a private jet airplane that costs 35 million dollars. He wants to pay cash for the plane which would allow him to fly around the world to preach the gospel (he claims). He already has 3 airplanes but needs another one! He also lives in a 35,000 square foot house, all paid for by donations his followers have sent whenever he asked. It is hard to decide which is worse: his gall and audacity or the gullibility of his followers!

There is another preacher from Houston, Texas who claims the Lord spoke directly to him and told him to take the money he had received from his ministry and invest it by purchasing some high priced real estate in Houston. He told his congregation about hearing God telling him to spend the money and the congregation responded with applause and shouts of hallelujah. These men, and a host of others we could reference, are unashamed prophets for profit!

Balak, the king of Moab, sent messengers to Balaam who lived 400 miles away asking him to come and put a curse on the children of Israel. These messengers took with them the "diviner's fee". (Numbers 22:7) The Moabites considered Balaam a prophet who could bless and curse with divine approval, but they also knew he had to be paid for his services. He would bless or curse - but only if he was well paid. He was a prophet for profit! The Lord, however, told Balaam he could not accept the money Balak offered and could not go with the messengers. Balaam did not take it very well! He told the messengers that the Lord "refused" to let him go. The word "refused" indicates that he wants to go, and would go, but the Lord "refused" and would not let him go and receive his fee.

Balak, however, knows his man. "I will just increase his fee," he thinks, and he sends more messengers with more money back to entice Balaam to come. Balaam responds to the offer with high oratory. "I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord to do more or less," he declares with sarcastic fervor. "If Balak filled his house with gold and silver I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord!" Sounds good. The problem is Balaam doesn't mean a word of what he is saying. We know that because right after his high sounding speech he tells the messengers to come into his house and spend the night so he could see what "more" the Lord would say. "More?" He just said he couldn't go beyond God's word to do any more. What is his problem? Balaam's problem is the same one every prophet for profit has, as well as for all of us when we are seeking to circumvent God's plain instructions.

Balaam wants to please himself without displeasing the Lord. Balaam wants to go and get his money and somehow convince himself that he is still on the Lord's side. Maybe the Lord, he thinks, will say something "more" which will let me conscientiously do what I know is wrong. Balaam is not the last person to do that. People know the Bible condemns a certain lifestyle or course of action, but because they want to do as they please they search the scriptures for a loophole (something "more") so they can in good conscience please themselves without displeasing the Lord. It is a dangerous and slippery slope that leads to outright disobedience and ultimate ruin.

Balaam wanted a loophole and found it when the Lord tells him in effect, "Go if you are bound and determined to go, but you will only speak what I put in your mouth." If we are determined to go against the Lord's instructions he will not hold us back against our will, but we cannot alter God's word and we will not succeed. Balaam did indeed go, and he was determined to get his money. The Lord tried to restrain him, and an angel came to stop him, and even his donkey talked to him and rebuked his "madness." All of this did restrain him, to some degree, but in the end God overruled his intention and put a blessing in his mouth so that instead of cursing Israel he blessed them. All of that in spite of his stubborn determination to get his reward.

The Bible indicates that in the end Balaam did get his money by counselling Balak to send Moabite women into the camp of the Israelites to seduce the men to commit fornication and idolatry, causing God to punish the Israelites Himself. Balaam got his reward but lost his life in the end. When the Israelites began their conquest of Canaan they killed Balaam and all his money couldn't save him then. Oh, if Balaam had only meant it when he declared, "I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord to do more or less!"

Let us be careful in reflecting on a character like Balaam lest there is the tendency to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. We all, at times, would like to do something or believe something, even though we know what the Lord's will on the matter is. We want to please ourselves without displeasing the Lord, so like Balaam we search for a scripture that will allow us to do in good conscience what we know is wrong. We ask preacher after preacher, hoping someone will eventually tell us what we want to hear; Beware of the way of Balaam who loved the wages of unrighteousness. Let us love the truth to the exclusion of all other rewards!