

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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NO. 3

HOW MANY CHURCHES DOES JESUS HAVE?

By DAVID GRIFFIN

Unfortunately, this question is not one of the burning concerns of the age. However, to the person who claims to love the Lord and the New Testament scriptures it should be a question of great importance, because the New Testament delivers an unequivocal answer...

There Is One Church

No doubt most people today will consider this a bold and narrow claim. But it is a New Testament declaration, plain and simple. When Jesus was in the region of Caesarea Philippi, Peter confidently confessed to Him, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). Jesus commended Peter for this confession and replied, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (all quotations from the NKJV). During this, the second year of Jesus’ earthly ministry, he promises, “I will build my church.” This promise carries at least 3 important implications: 1) the church of Jesus Christ was at that time still in the future—he said “I will build...” He had not yet built it. As we survey the New Testament time-line, we find that he did not built it until nearly a year later with the events of Acts the second chapter. 2) Notice that Jesus promises to build his “church”—singular. He does not promise to build “churches.” A multitude of organizations called churches exists in the modern age. They cannot all be the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise. 3) Any church that claims to be built by some person other than Jesus Christ cannot be the church that Jesus built. If it was built by someone else, it was not built by Jesus and thus cannot be his.

Consider the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Ephesian congregation. He wrote the letter after the events of Acts 2, after Jesus had built his church. In Ephesians 1:22-23 Paul writes about Jesus and his church as follows: “And He (the Father) put all things under His (Christ’s) feet, and gave Him (Christ) to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” Among other things in this passage, Paul mentions “the church,” then gives the defining phrase, “...which is his body.” The word church is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia* (ek-lay-SEE-ah). Here in Ephesians 1:22-23 it refers to “the global community of Christians, the (universal) church” (BAGD 2000)—i.e. all Christians in every place throughout the world at any given time in history are here called “the church, which is his body.” The word “body” in the context of Christ being made its “head” (v. 22) is a simple metaphor. It pictures the church as a human body that acts and behaves by the directives of its “head” Jesus Christ. Thus in the language of Paul the words “church” and “body” are used interchangeably. “God gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body” or conversely, “...to be head over all things to his body, which is the church.” in fact, Paul actually uses this converse expression almost verbatim in Colossians 1:18 “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead...” It is indisputable, therefore, that in Paul’s language, the terms “body” and “church” are interchangeable, as different ways of describing the same spiritual entity the universal, global community of Christians.

With these definitions in view, let us consider another passage in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. In Ephesians 4:4-6, Paul continues the metaphor of the church as the body. “There is one body,” says Paul, “and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” There are seven “ones” in this reading. In verse 4, Paul clearly

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Editorial

VIOLENCE IN OUR TIME

By GREG GAY

Our group of seven had just placed our order when the police officer walked through our section of the busy restaurant saying firmly, "This building is being evacuated. I need everyone to leave through the side door, now!"

Within a few seconds, we were outside wondering what was going on. From what I hoped was a safe distance away I looked back to see a grandson politely holding the door for everyone as they left the building. "This is not a good time to be so polite," I remember thinking as I called his name for him to leave his post and scurry to safety along with the rest of our group.

Standing there, random thoughts of perils kept running through my mind: Perhaps somehow a robbery is involved. Is it a bomb threat? If it is a bomb, are we far enough away? Is this a terrorist thing and someone is about to blow themselves up or start shooting everyone?

When the situation was not resolved within a few minutes, we left the area to go to another restaurant. As so often happens in a large city, the evacuation of the restaurant did not make the news and apparently nothing happened other than the restaurant's business was disrupted and the patrons were inconvenienced, some mid-meal. Our event appears to have been a false alarm.

Sometimes though, the alarm is not false. Sometimes the person strolling through the crowd is not a law enforcement official helping everyone to safety; he or she is bringing violence and death into the peace of everyday lives, forever changing families, communities, and nations.

Today, the World Health Organization attempts to track and report trends regarding violence. Their belief appears to be that the rule of law would curb most violence, if enacted and enforced in every nation throughout the world. They report: "The enactment and enforcement of legislation on crime and violence are critical for establishing norms of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and creating safe and peaceful societies. On average, the laws surveyed were reported

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QUERIST COLUMN

By *RONNY F. WADE*

The subject of addressing our prayers to Jesus or God the Father has been one of discussion and disagreement during the past few years. Good sincere brethren have differing views on various passages dealing with this topic. Last month in this journal we published an article relative to writings in the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah's Witnesses) about this subject. Rather than writing something new, I have chosen to re-run an article published several years ago, in the Querist Column, which sets forth my views on addressing Jesus or God the Father in our prayers.

Question: Do the following verses teach that it is permissible for, and perhaps even expected of, Christians to pray to Jesus: Acts 7:59, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, 1 Timothy 1:12, 1 John 5:13-15 etc.?

Answer: For purposes of space, we will refer to only one of the verses listed above, Acts 7:59, "And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." The Acts passage demonstrates that, at least on this occasion, we have an example of someone directing a prayer to Jesus. Some of the commentators make mention of the fact that it is a "rare situation," i.e. that it happens infrequently. Others use the verse to prove the divinity of Christ. They reason that if Stephen would pray to Jesus, it proves that he is God, i.e. divine. To conclude, however, that such is permissible, does not indicate that it is expected. Several things need to be considered. First of all in 1 Timothy 2:5, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;" again, Hebrews 7:25: "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." These two verses teach that access to God is through Jesus our high priest. The clear implication is that we need to get to God. The path is through our Lord. He mediates and intercedes. Our prayers do not stop with him, but He with intercessory powers delivers them to God our Father. In Matthew 6:9, we read "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name." Many other passages attest to the practice of praying to God, i.e. Romans 10:1: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." 1 Corinthians 1:4: "I thank my God always on your behalf..?" Philipians 1:3: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine..." We could go on and on, but this is sufficient. In my opinion it is a mistake to contend that we pray to Jesus and not God. It is also a mistake to teach that we pray to God and not Jesus. The truth is that we pray to God, through Jesus. It is not a case of either or. We do not pray to one, to neglect or oversight of the other. Any such interpretation would do violence to plain Bible teaching.

THE VALUE OF FRIENDS

By *JOHNNY ELMORE*

When I left home to preach the gospel over sixty-two years ago, I did not expect to make a lot of money and in that expectation I was not disappointed. But I did discover something much better than lots of money and that is the value of friendship. Down through the years, I have been privileged to find true friends who have sustained me and helped me when I needed it the most. I have met some brethren who have made sacrifices to provide for my family's necessities. We have been sheltered, clothed, and fed while away from home in the Lord's service. I can never forget the many acts of kindness and hospitality.

Solomon said, "A friend loveth at all times" (Proverbs 17:17). I have found that to be true. A few times I have called upon friends to provide a bed in the wee hours of the morning, and they lovingly complied. At other times, I have needed other services and they were willingly supplied.

Cicero suggested that friendship abates misery. That is because friends help carry the burdens that we are called upon to bear. He also suggested that friendships double our joy. One of the most inspiring thoughts that we can cherish is that everywhere we look we can count people as our friends.

Jesus said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John 13-15).

There are many names by which believers are designated in the New Testament. They are called brethren, heirs, children, sons, sheep, servants, members of the body of Christ, but there is no term of designation more intimate than that of "friend." When we are enjoying fellowship as friends, we enjoy it without a special sense of obligation or need.

Most of us know what it is to sit in the company of a true friend. There is expressed confidence, equality,

enjoyment, and liberty. And the Lord Jesus deigns to call us “friends.”

The twelfth chapter of John pictures the Lord Jesus in the home in Bethany with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. In John eleven, there is the account of the raising of Lazarus as “our friend.” In the twelfth chapter we see three bodily postures that indicate various attitudes of relationship. In verses 2 and 3 we note that Martha was standing for service. Mary was kneeling at Jesus’ feet for worship. But we read that Lazarus sat. How beautifully this indicates the friendly relationship existing between our Lord and this member of that Bethany family.

We read that Abraham, the “friend” of God, sat in the place of friendship with God (Gen. 18:1). We are told: “David the king came and sat before the Lord (1 Chron. 17:16). And how great it is that you and I can “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”(Eph. 2:6). What a friend we have in Jesus!

SOUND SPEECH AND PURE LANGUAGE

Col 4:6 Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man. Titus 2:8 Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you Zeph 3:9 For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.

That a holy God expects his people to use pure language goes without saying. And too often the cause of Christ is hindered and the name of the church ruined by the language those people use, who ought to be better. It is our intention in this 3 part series to talk about gossip, euphemisms, and improper religious terms.

The word “gossip” is not found in our English Bibles. The attitude that causes it, a full description of it, and synonyms for it are. In our modern lackadaisical era we have become calloused to words which one time would have gotten our mouth washed out with soap. This is no doubt due in part to the things we watch and the things we allow in and around us.

Today we want to consider the idea of gossip. Gossip as a noun refers to idle talk or rumor, especially about the personal or private affairs of others; and as a verb it means to talk idly, especially about the affairs of others; go about tattling. The idea of gossip has a very negative connotation because it generally refers to the destruction of another person’s character. This is biblically called slander, or backbiting. The apostle Paul calls the people who involve themselves in this type behavior, busybodies. Let us consider some scripture.

Keep in mind that slander, backbiting, gossip are synonymous or nearly so with each other. And that they refer to an accusation, true or false, that is maliciously uttered, with the express purpose or designed effect of damaging the reputation of another. We think of some leading men in the OT as prime examples of this type, though their accusations were true they were accused with the purpose of destroying their character. See Job 1:9- 11 & Daniel 3:8-12. In these passages these men, were justly accused and God brought it about for righteousness. In spite of the trials they went through they were faithful, we can be too.

In the Bible there are repeated warnings against mankind practicing evil-speaking

- Ps 34:13 Keep your tongue from evil,
- And your lips from speaking deceit.
- Prov 15:28 The heart of the righteous studies how to answer,
- But the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.
- Eph 4:31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.
- Col 3:8-9 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,
- I Peter 3:8-10 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For “He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit.”
- Note the company the gossip keeps. Romans 1:28-32, 2 Corinthians 12:19-21, 2 Timothy 3:1-9.

Mr. W.E. Vine defines the Greek term which has been translated as “busybodies” as those who are concerned over-much with others business and neglectful of their own. Paul says young widows ought not to be taken into the number, which is supported by the treasury lest she become a busybody. (1 Tim 5:11-13)

There is one other element of great concern among us as Christians. This will do as much to harm the church as gossip and slander and it is closely related to that. This action is indicative of a heart problem. It is something that our American society who has enjoyed multiple generations of freedom of speech, voting and of the idea that the government is in the hands of the people has a major problem dealing with. That is the sin of speaking evil of dignitaries. Please note: 2 Peter 2:9-11, Jude 8-9, Romans 13:1-2, Titus 3:1-2

The word rendered “dignities” here, means properly honor, glory, splendor; then that which is fitted to inspire respect; that which is dignified or exalted. It is applied here to men of exalted rank; and the meaning is, that they did not regard rank, or station, or office—thus violating the plainest rules of propriety and of religion. Jude, between whose language and that of Peter in this chapter there is a remarkable resemblance, has expressed this more fully. He says, (2 Peter 2:8), It is one of the effects of religion to produce respect for superiors; but when men are self-willed, and when they purpose to give indulgence to corrupt propensities, it is natural for them to dislike all government. Accordingly, it is by no means an infrequent effect of certain forms of error to lead men to speak disrespectfully of those in authority, and to attempt to throw off all the restraints of law. It is a very certain indication that men hold wrong opinions when they show disrespect to those in authority, and despise the restraints of law. - Barnes notes

Prov 10:18-21 Whoever hides hatred has lying lips,
And whoever spreads slander is a fool.
In the multitude of words sin is not lacking,
But he who restrains his lips is wise.
The tongue of the righteous is choice silver;
The heart of the wicked is worth little.
The lips of the righteous feed many,
But fools die for lack of wisdom.

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ABUSE OF THE CHURCH TREASURY

By PAUL O. Nichols

Change usually comes slowly - almost imperceptibly. In most cases, at first digression comes into the church almost undetected. It often comes by degrees and slips in unnoticed. Because this is true we have to constantly reaffirm our understanding of truth as revealed in the Scriptures. The apostle Peter says, “Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth” (2 Pet. 1:12).

One step into error leads to another. Generally speaking, we are not inclined to take a giant leap into digression. Even the most unwary and less spiritual might call that into question. However, it certainly is possible that we might inadvertently be led into practices for which there is absolutely no scriptural authority, unless we are constantly on guard.

The question is often asked by Christians who are less than spiritually minded “What’s wrong with it?” Or they will try to justify some practice by using the excuse, “They do it at such and such place.” This is, in spite of the fact, why the apostle Paul writes, “For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves; but they measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves are not wise” (2 Cor. 10:12). A practice is not justified just because someone or some other church is doing it. The word of God is our standard and nothing else.

In recent years we have developed a practice all over the brotherhood which has had a tendency to weaken congregations and encourage lack of study. The apostle Paul says, “For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted” (1 Cor. 14:31). To prophesy means “to speak forth the word of God by divine impulse” Although today we do not have teachers who are divinely inspired, we do have teachers in the church who are told, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 3:11). We speak that which is inspired by the Lord and revealed by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the principle is the same.

When various speakers take their turn teaching in the

assemblies of a congregation we do so “one by one that all may learn and all may be comforted”. In this way all in the congregation are learning together and all are growing together as a congregation. In Acts 13:1, we are told, “Now there were in the church which was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers...” Paul and Barnabas were two that were named. Apparently there were several that did the teaching in the congregation, some inspired and some not. They all used their talents and abilities to instruct and encourage the other members of that church.

There is a difference in local teachers and preachers of the gospel. The apostle Paul said he was ordained an apostle and a preacher and a teacher (2 Tim. 1:11). All apostles were teachers. All preachers are teachers, but all teachers are not preachers. There are preachers of the gospel called evangelists, and there are local congregational teachers. The field of an evangelist is the whole world. The responsibilities of a local teacher are in the congregation where he claims to be a member. This is the rule. There may be exceptions to the rule. However, where is a scripture that will justify a local teacher making regular speaking appointments with as many churches as he can so as to use the church as a source of a second income. This practice relieves congregations of the responsibility of developing their own teachers. Some brethren are too lazy to study so they can teach a decent lesson. It is easier to get others to come in and do the teaching and then just pay them out of the church treasury. If they had to pay these teachers out of their own pockets, likely the practice would soon cease.

Certainly there are small struggling churches which need help until they can develop their own talents and shoulder their own responsibilities as a congregation. But unless they are encouraged to do that, they will likely continue to depend on others. Instead of their having to study and get the experience of teaching, they may be crippled by well meaning brethren. If they have others doing what they should be doing, they will never study the scriptures and learn to teach, as they should. Of course, all are not teachers and some will never be. But if there are men in congregations who could become teachers, they are certainly not encouraged to develop their talents if others will come in and relieve them of the responsibility. Some are just naturally lazy and will not study. Of course, it is much easier for them to ask

others to do the teaching. If a person will not study he can never make a teacher, because he has nothing to teach.

Brethren would be hard pressed to find scripture to justify our using the church treasury to pay every Tom, Dick, and Harry every time one gets in the pulpit. The apostle Paul says, “Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:14). If a person will scrutinize the context, it is not difficult to see that by inspiration the apostle means that those who make preaching their life’s work need to be supported just as the Levite priests were supported to give themselves to the work of the Lord. The twelve tribes of Israel received property on which to make a living when the land was divided up in Canaan after the long journey from Egypt. The only tribe that did not receive a large amount of property was the tribe of Levi. The Lord did not want the priests encumbered with other work, He wanted them to give themselves entirely to their duties as priests. He did not want them to be part time priests. And when Paul wrote to Timothy, an evangelist, he said, “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all” (1 Tim. 4:13- 15). Timothy was a full time evangelist.

There is no use of one’s making the argument that the apostle Paul made tents. He did that to support himself and others with him when they had not adequate support from the churches. That was in order to survive. That was not because they could make more money in secular things, working toward a big retirement and just preach on the side for a second income. It takes lots more faith in the Lord and in the brethren for a person to make preaching a life’s work. There are many more sacrifices and privations in life to be suffered by those men who give themselves wholly to the preaching of the gospel. It is true that full time preachers do not have retirement provided by brethren to rely on when they are no longer able to do the work. In fact, there is no such thing as retirement for him. Yes, such men have to “walk by faith and not by sight”. When one preacher who had spent his lifetime preaching the gospel had a stroke and could no longer do the work, his wife was told that the church was going to discontinue his support and she

would have to get a job. Yes, brethren sometimes are thoughtless and uncaring, but such does not change the scriptures. It is true, we have to buy our own cars for transportation, pay for car repairs and buy tires, pay our rent or mortgage, pay our taxes; by law, pay our own social security (15.3 percent of our income), pay for health insurance ourselves, do our Christian duty and give to the Lord as we are prospered, ad infinitum. And at the end of a life of preaching, the brethren often turn the “preacher out to pasture”. This kind of treatment does discourage men from making full time preaching their life’s work, but full support belongs to such men who are willing to walk by faith and make the sacrifices as are necessary (1 Cor. (9:14)

HOW MANY CHURCHES DOES . . . continued from page one

says, “There is one body.” In this same letter to the Ephesians, we have already seen that he speaks of the “body,” which he identifies as “the church,” the entity over which God placed Christ as “head” (1:22-23). Thus when Paul says, “There is one body,” he is saying, in effect, “There is one church.” Just as “there is one Spirit,” not many; and “there is one hope,” not many; and “there is one Lord,” “one faith,” “one baptism,” and “one God”--not many Gods, Lords, faiths, and baptisms--there must, of necessity, be only “one church” because there is “one body.” This is the inevitable conclusion to which this plain language forces us.

What about “Churches” in the New Testament?

There is no question but that the word “churches” (plural) occurs many times in the New Testament. For example, Acts 9:31 says, “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified.” On one occasion Paul writes of what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:28). In his instruction to Corinth on giving, he says, do as “I have given order to the churches of Galatia” (1 Cor. 16:1). Paul writes to the church at Rome in 16:16, “The churches of Christ greet you.” In 1 Corinthians 16:19, while writing from Ephesus in Asia, he tells the Corinthians that “The churches of Asia greet you.” Paul told the Thessalonian Christians that, “we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions...” (2 Thess. 1:4). Finally, we have the repeated refrain from the book of Revelation, “He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev. 2 & 3). In all, there are some 34 such uses of

the word church in the plural in the New Testament. How are these statements to be harmonized with the earlier passages we studied which state that there is one church?

Answer: In these passages, the use of “churches” (plural) refers to local congregations of the universal body. In fact, wherever the word church occurs in the plural, the translation could just as well be “congregations.” Thus all of the “churches” (or congregations) of the New Testament collectively compose the “one body” of which Paul speaks elsewhere. Therefore sometimes the New Testament uses the word church in the universal sense (where it is always singular) and sometimes in the congregational sense (where it is sometimes singular and sometimes plural); but in whichever sense a particular passage uses the word church, it still refers the one “body,” “the church” of which Christ is the head. Therefore, we conclude that the Bible says there is but one church.

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EDITORIAL . . . continued from page two

to exist by 80% of countries but to be fully enforced by just 57%” (Global Status Report on Violence Prevention, 2014). Of course, “acceptable behavior” would logically include a common belief system that encourages respect for all and violence toward none, which unfortunately, is not universally accepted.

While the World Health Organization is not religious in any way, they have stumbled upon the purpose of government in the world from a biblical perspective. World governments are identified as serving God in a special way, not as part of God’s kingdom, but as protectors of the common citizenry by using the fear of punishment as a deterrent to violations of law.

Paul was inspired to write: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour” (Rom 13:1-7).

One area of increasing violence today involves killing in the name of religion, either because of the religion of the murderer, or because of the religion of those being killed. Jesus talked about those who would think they were serving God in killing the disciples: “They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me” (John 16:2-3). While those words were addressed to those who would be first century Christians, it is amazing how very current they are today in many places around the world, including the United States.

In October 2015, when a gunman opened fire at a community college in Oregon, survivors reported that the shooter asked individuals if they were “Christians.” If they said “Yes,” he replied: “Good, because you’re a Christian, you’re going to see God in just about one second... And then he shot and killed them” <http://www.people.com/article/umpqua-community-college-gunman-allegedly-targeted-christians-report>

Today, none who are persecuting those who claim any allegiance to Christ are doing anything new. They are at the end of a long line of those who have done the same throughout the centuries.

In the first days of the church, our brother Stephen was killed when an angry mob threw rocks at him until he died (Acts 7:58-59). On the heels of Stephen’s death, a zealot named Saul decided to do his best to destroy the Lord’s church. “And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem... As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison” (Acts 8:1,3).

Imagine being at home in those days when the banging on the door was a demand to know if there were any Christians inside. At that moment, the inhabitants faced a horrible situation: lie and live (maybe), or tell the truth and die a horrible death. Either choice had both immediate and eternal consequences.

Years later, when Paul talked about that time in his life, he remembered the violence in which he participated. “And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him” (Acts 22:20). He also reflected: “I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities” (Acts 26:9-11). Since Paul was a witness against those who would not recant their faith in Christ, he was also most likely among the first to throw rocks at them to kill them

(Deuteronomy 17:6-7).

We are to be thankful for those in our nation whose work is to protect all citizens and to administer appropriate punishments allowed by law regardless of religious affiliation. At the same time, we need to remember it is not our place as Christians to be administrators of those punishments. Vengeance is not ours (Hebrews 10:30) and carnal battles are not ours to fight: Jesus said to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight” (John 18:36). A practical application of these truths is that we cannot serve in the military, or in a gun carrying position of law enforcement, or in a political system as a judge or legislator.

Refusing to participate in the law’s vengeance does not prevent us from taking advantage of all the rights we have as citizens of the land in which we dwell. Paul used his Roman citizenship to avoid being flogged (Acts 22:25) and to appeal his legal case before Caesar (Acts 25:11). This was within his rights as a Roman citizen and was not a violation of the law of God.

Of course, there is no guarantee that all the laws of any nation will be appropriate for Christians. It may be that some laws of a land are contrary to the Bible’s instructions. In that event, we have no choice but to respectfully decline to follow that particular law since we must obey God first (Acts 5:29), even as we do our best to be loyal and faithful citizens of our nation. For example, if the freedom to assemble were withdrawn, we would quietly gather for worship anyway.

If violence against those who believe in Christ comes to our community, or even our home, may we have the same faith and courage as all those who have suffered and died because of their faith in God. The Holy Spirit inspired special mention for redeemed martyrs: “And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held” (Revelation 6:9-10).

If government based persecution happens where we live and it appears dangerous to continue to live there under such circumstances, it is difficult to know what course is best. Still, it is not appropriate for Christians to arm themselves and become part of a movement to drive

out the government. The scriptures tell us to “honor the king” (I Peter 2:17).

We have Bible examples of what others did in similar circumstances. When the church was persecuted in Jerusalem after the death of Stephen, most Christians fled from the area so they could live where there was less danger (Acts 8:4). Similarly, when the Roman ruler Claudius did not want any Jews in Rome, Aquila and Priscilla left town and found a new place to live in Corinth (Acts 18:2) Moving to a new area in our community, another state, or even another nation may all be considered if persecution invades where we live.

As God’s faithful, our task in a world of increasing violence is to remain a people of peace. Paul wrote, “Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:17-18).

In my recent restaurant experience, it was frightening to be asked to leave, to have the peace of the moment disturbed. I cannot imagine what it was like to be in San Bernadino, California, Roseburg, Oregon, Charleston, South Carolina, and Paris, France when multiple individuals were slaughtered there in recent months.

Let us not forsake our faith and let us not be afraid in such difficult times. Rather, let us remember the words of Jesus as he instructed the twelve: “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). 1820 Casterbridge Dr., Roseville, CA 95747. papagreg@aol.com

Our Departed

GLADYS SHEHEE was born September 29, 1923 and left us for the world beyond on January 30, 2016 at the age of 92. Sister Shehee was a member of the Hartford Highway Church of Christ in Dothan, AL for the last several years. She obeyed the gospel as a young woman in Earlytown, AL and was a cousin to some of those who remain at Earlytown to this day. Gladys was married to Bro. Alonzo Shehee who passed away in 2007. They had one son, Freddy Shehee. She is survived by Freddy and his wife Tena; 3 grandsons and granddaughters; and

3 great-grandsons. It was always a joy to be in Gladys' presence. She was a devoted and hard-working wife, mother, and grandmother and she loved the Lord Jesus Christ. In the last several years she gradually lost most of her sight but her bright, blue eyes still sparkled with life and wit. She will be missed by her family, her small community of Bellwood, and by her brothers and sisters in Christ who knew and loved her. It was my privilege to speak to those who gathered to remember her and be reminded of the appointment we must all eventually keep. Kevin Presley

CUTTER -- Brother Jack Austin Cutter was born Sept. 5, 1933 near Crescent, OK to Albert and Juanita Cutter. Jack passed from this life Jan. 24, 2016 with Hospice Care in Tulsa, OK. Except for a short period of time when the parents moved their family to Kansas, he lived at the location of his birth until he graduated from high school. Afterward, he moved to Oklahoma City and worked until entering evangelistic training in 1953. After traveling and training with Brother Billy Orten, he was ordained an evangelist by the 7th St. congregation, Oklahoma City.

On Oct. 9, 1956, Jack married Norita Carol Blankenship of Huntington, WVA. To this beloved union 4 children were born. They are Tina Howard, Sheryl Kemp, Jackie Smith and Todd Cutter. There are 7 grandchildren: Trey Smith, Amanda Smith, Christopher Kemp, Austin Smith, Emily Howard, Nathan Cutter and Hannah Cutter. There are 2 great grandchildren: Channing Smith and Makayla Smith. Jack is survived by 10 siblings: Elwin, Rosemary Astley, Jerry, Winston, Phyllis Head, Duane, Charles, Melvin, Alberta Blalock, and Glen, all faithful members of the church. There is also a host of nieces, nephews, cousins surviving,

Jack's first love was preaching, evangelism, one-on-one personal work. One-on-one in converting people he had no peer. He knew what to say, what not to say, what to do, what not to do. It was a joy to sit and listen and watch this master. His evangelism took him into MO and AR from 1956 to 1968; later to CA at Concord, Ceres and Sanger. When necessary, he would work with his hands, sell Bibles to make ends meet for a growing family. Upon returning to OK he made his home at Tulsa. My conviction is that whatever the church is in Tulsa County, it is very much due to the work of Jack Cutter. Certainly, many others are credited with the work they have done as well.

Jack was not a perfect man. I am not either. For nearly 77 years in the Kingdom, I have worked with wonderful men, but never have I seen a perfect one. Wonderful congregations too, but never a perfect one. Some one

along the way has written "The Admirable Man". Jack Cutter, "it fits to a T". Here it is: if a man is honest with others and himself; if he receives greatly and gives quietly; if he is gentle enough to feel, and strong enough to show his feelings; if he is slow to see the faults of others, but quick to discover their goodness; if he is cheerful in difficult times and modest in success; if he does his best to be true to his beliefs, then he is truly an admirable man". Jack was an elder in the church; once an elder ordained in a plurality, always an elder unless disqualified by personal default or death. That he was not. A real man was he, before he would judge or condemn a man, he would be fair and square and give him a hearing.

I was privileged to know Jack and those of his fathers house for nearly 70 years. I shall never forget our first meeting. We at 7th St. heard of a man near Crescent that we needed to meet. W. M. McLemore, John Spradley, Ray Meridith, Raymond Bray decided we would do that. I was their spiritual junior, a fledgling, going to OU; they honored me in asking me to accompany them. It was a dark night on the Oklahoma prairie when we knocked at Albert Cutters door. What an unforgettable scene met our eyes when this great man opened the door. Children everywhere, open Bibles before them. We were not inside 5 minutes until we knew we had found a man who was in the same Book and on the same page as we. As time went on from that memorable night, and from that very simple farm house, Albert and Juanita Cutter have touched the world, by way of their children and theirs, and scarcely ever left their front door. Son Jerry has preached the gospel on every continent of the universe, excepting the ice cap, Antarctica, the only man I know who has done that. Remarkable!

Farewell, my Brother, my comrade, until the morning breaks and the shadows flee away. Some people come into our lives and swiftly go. Some stay awhile and leave footprints on our hearts, and we are never the same. Jack's funeral was conducted in Tulsa, with a large concourse of loved ones friends, brothers and sisters in Christ in reverent and respectful attendance. We took him back home, on the Oklahoma prairie, and buried him among his people, to await the resurrection of the just. - Don Mc Cord

Announcements

After some discussion with the Hamilton, OH congregation, it has been decided that the Pleasant Grove Church of Christ in Brazil, IN will host the Young Speakers Meeting this year on the weekend it's been traditionally held - the weekend after Mother's

Day (May 13-15). We are looking for several young speakers who would be interested in giving a lesson during the weekend, which is why I am writing to all of you. If any of you know of a young brother who is high school-college age and interested in presenting over that weekend, kindly send me his name and contact information (or have him email me) so that he gets added to our list of speakers, and arrangements can be made. We appreciate your help, and hope that each of you can attend if that fits your schedule!

Eric Anders
Pleasant Grove Church of Christ
Brazil, IN

Meet Matthew Barnes



I'd like to introduce and recommend Matthew Barnes as a gospel preacher. He is 24 years old and has the desire to live his life for Christ and the church. He is a graduate of Northwest High School of Justin, Texas and has attended college classes. I have known Matthew all of his life. He began studying with me in 2013 and has traveled with me also. I have found him to be studious, respectful, loyal to the truth, and a talented preacher and singer. He has also studied with Jimmy Cating, Doug Hawkins (on-line) and George Battey (for a week). He also studied and traveled some with Clint DeFrance. Matthew is currently working with and supported part-time by the Grapevine, Texas congregation and they also wholly endorse him and his work for the church. I encourage our congregations to use him. He will do you good. Call him or text him at (817) 268-3684. His home address is 12626 Azure Heights Place, Rhome, TX 76078. His email address is (the1991matt@yahoo.com) - Johnny Elmore

Field Reports

Ronny F. Wade P.O. Box 14352 Springfield, MO 65814 or ronnywade36@gmail.com We have been blessed with good weather this winter in Missouri, allowing travel with few or no difficulties at all. It has been my privilege to visit and work with a number of congregations in Southwest Missouri and Northwest Arkansas. I have found churches at peace, working together with neighboring congregations for the good of the cause of Christ. What a blessing. We look forward to the following meetings, the Lord willing, in the near future: Birmingham, AL for the annual spring meeting March 20- 27, Walnut Grove, KY April 3-10, Athens, AL April 15-17 and Miami, OK April 4-8. We look forward to seeing many of you at these meetings.

Don L. King, 1147 Sherry Way, Livermore, CA, 94550, old.paths@juno.com, February 15- Towards the end of January we returned from the 35th trip to the Philippines. Bro Frank Brancato went with me this year and we enjoyed working together. The trip went very well and ended with 85 baptisms.

The work there has been very successful. In the years we have been visiting the brethren, there have been in excess of 4,000 baptisms and it is still growing. New congregations are being established every year and the wonderful part of the work is that it has been done by the local preachers and brethren. Our part is mostly to encourage, preach, and sometimes advise in taking care of some problem they ask about. Lord willing, Frank will have a more detailed report of the trip next month. I know some are concerned about my health. However, I am doing well and the medical tests have reportedly confirmed that there has been no stroke. I feel great and have all along. However, I experienced some speech problems soon after getting home and the Doctors felt they should run some tests. So far, nothing has been found and my personal suspicion is that it may have been a side effect of the anti malaria medication I took over there. At least one Doctor agrees. If we learn more later, it will be reported. Thank you for all your prayers and well wishes, it has been greatly appreciated. We pray for a fruitful new year in the Lord's service. Our thanks to Ronny Wade for taking care of the paper in our absence.

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THE BACK PAGE...

ANSWERING A FOOL

By *CARL M. JOHNSON*

Skeptics are always trying to discredit the Bible as the inspired Word of God and one tactic they often employ is to point to passages they believe contradict each other. One of their favorite passages is Proverbs 26:4-5, where Solomon says, "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes."

The English word "fool" comes from a Latin word which means "windbag" (Webster's New College Dictionary 101). It follows, therefore, that a fool is someone full of air but lacking in substance. A fool may look like a giant, but when the wind is let out of him, he shrinks dramatically.

The word "fool" in Proverbs 26:4-5, refers to one whose stupidity reflects his attitude, not his intellectual ability. There are many highly intelligent people that fit Solomon's definition of a fool. The word describes one who is morally perverted, stubborn, and unreasonable (Wilson's OT Word Studies 172-173).

Solomon says in verse 4, "DO NOT answer a fool according to his folly," but in verse 5 he says, "ANSWER a fool according to his folly."

These two statements seem to go in opposite directions, but they actually do not contradict each other. The statements are a common form of Old Testament Hebrew poetry where one statement is parallel to and balanced by another.

Burton Coffman says these verses "should not be viewed as a contradiction, but as a statement that one's answer to a fool should be governed by the circumstances, sometimes one way, sometimes another." In other words, sometimes it is appropriate to answer a fool, and sometimes it is not.

The phrase "according to his folly" appears twice as a play on words with two shades of meaning. On the one hand, it means "avoid the temptation to stoop to his level; do not use his methods, lest you also be like him."

Expositor David Maas explains, "We should not allow the fool to drag us down to his level. The fool is exasperating; he is looking for trouble, and he often tempts us to oblige him. Since the fool will spout off and speak his mind, we are tempted to lose our temper with him as well. Proverbs instructs us not to allow him to get the best of us, lest we be lowered to his level."

On more than one occasion Jesus refuses to answer fools who question Him and He cautions us that trying to reason with fools is like casting pearls before swine (Mk.11:27-33; Lk. 23:8-9; Mt. 7:6). The apostle Paul tells both Timothy and Titus to avoid foolish questions, "knowing they do gender strifes" (2 Tim. 2:23; tit. 3:9).

However, if a fool is never answered under any circumstances, he may conclude his questions and arguments cannot be refuted and he may become wise in his own eyes. Therefore, while it is generally pointless to try to reason with a fool, there are occasions when we should respond to the fool "according to his folly." In other words, on his own level, using his own flawed logic to put him in his place, so he can hear just how silly and foolish he really sounds.

Irvin Himmel tells the story of a preacher who was discussing various questions written out and submitted by people in his audience. He unfolded a piece of paper and read the question aloud, "When did Job's turkey die?" The audience roared with laughter. In a matter-of-fact manner the preacher replied, "From the looks of the scratching on this paper, he hasn't died yet." There was another roar of laughter. The fool was answered according to his folly, "lest he be wise in his own conceit," then everyone was ready to move on to serious questions.

The apostle Paul answers some fools in Corinth according to their folly. Certain false teachers were bragging about their own credentials as apostles while questioning Paul's. Paul seizes upon their line of reasoning and beats them at their own game. In essence, he says, "You want to compare credentials, I'll compare credentials with you." As he begins listing his incomparable credentials, Paul is careful to remind his readers, "I speak as a fool" (2 Cor. 11:21, 23). He did not relish this kind of approach. Had he remained silent, however, his silence may have been seen as a tacit approval of the claims of the false teachers. Circumstances called for the false teachers to be answered. Paul answered them according to their folly.

While Proverbs 26:4-5 does not contain a contradiction, it does contain a common dilemma. The dilemma is knowing when to answer and when not to answer. Solomon does not give us an easy rule-of-thumb for deciding the matter. It is our duty to evaluate each situation and determine for ourselves the wisest response (Col. 4:6; 1 Pet. 3:1 5). cmjthebackpageqmail.com