

# A Time To Build

Michael Hatcher, Editor

2007 Bellview Lectures

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# PREFACE

Liberalism is a great problem in the Lord's church today. We must ever stand against those who would loosen those things associated with God's Word. However, there is the tendency to so concentrate our fight against error, that we lose sight of the need to continue to build up the church. This lectureship is designed to remind us and help us in building the Lord's church. If we fail to build—grow, the church will cease to exist in our time and area. If we fail to build stronger Christians, we leave the door open for apostasy. Building the Lord's church is a vital subject and we offer this book to help faithful brethren to accomplish this task.

There are many individuals who play an important role in the production of this book and conducting the lectureship, such as the overseers of this congregation. They have a love not only for this congregation but for the church as a whole, thus this lectureship. The Bellview congregation is, albeit not a large congregation numerically, a hard working congregation which loves the Lord and the Truth. Without the dedicated help of so many of its members, this lectureship could not continue.

We greatly appreciate all of those who write for and speak on the lectureship. These men freely give of their time, effort, and energy for the good of the brotherhood and this lectureship. These men are sound in the Faith and love the Lord and His church. They willingly spend their time writing these chapters for the good of the church. We appreciate these men for their willingness to serve the Lord and His church.

Special appreciation is extended to Denise Mowery and Gary Summers in their work on this book. Sister Mowery, the secretary at Bellview, does a great deal of work both on the lectureship and this book. Along with formatting the book, she reads each chapter and checks references for accuracy sake. Brother Summers willingly gives his time in giving the book a final proofreading to ensure proper grammar and to make sure that the book is accurate in every way. We greatly appreciate all these in their work for the kingdom.

Finally, it is our prayer that this book will be of invaluable service to you to years to come. Prayerfully, it will help brethren further the cause of Christ and help each of us build up the church.

*Michael Hatcher, Director and Editor; March 22, 2007*

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# A MIND TO BUILD

*Geoff Litke*

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## INTRODUCTION

Lawrence Peter Berra (better known as Yogi Berra) once said, “Baseball is 90% mental—the other half is physical.” Another time he is reported to have said, “Half the game is 90% mental.” Overlooking the absurdity, he does make one good point concerning baseball: “You have to get your head in the game.” Today, religious people fully expect a non-mental Christianity. More and more they demand a less demanding Lord. They want service with minimal thinking, but 100% of Christianity involves 100% of the mind. It is not enough to think about faithful living 90% of the time. Neither 95% nor a whopping 99% is acceptable. Christianity takes **all or nothing**.

Paul wrote to the church in Colosse: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection [*mind*—ASV] on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:1-2). Every child of God must set his mind to building eternally, and this he must do perpetually if any fruit shall be reaped from this life (1 Cor. 15:57-58).

When the Lord contended with the Pharisees and Sadducees, a certain lawyer tempted Him by asking about the greatest commandment. Jesus responded by quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-9: “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment” (Mat. 22:37-38). The greatest commandment involves the mind and entails action. The Lord elaborates on this principle in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). After the lawyer gives these two commands, to which our Lord responds with the powerful words: “This do, and thou shalt live” (10:28). Then came the parable, followed

by the exhortation: “Go, and do thou likewise” (10:37). Serving God continually puts Him first in the mind.

The Lord declared His intent to build His church (Mat. 16:16-18). Before the foundation of the world God had a mind, a purpose, to build the church (Eph. 1:3-11). Even death would not stop that aim. The depth of Christ’s mind-set as a builder revealed itself upon the cross. At all costs (even His blood—Acts 20:28) Christ would build His church. The intent to build up the church did not stop at His death. The foundation was laid, and apostles would build thereon. The Gospel accounts begin to tell of Jesus’ work, which continued through the Holy Spirit and apostles. After writing his letter of the life of our Lord, he begins his next letter by writing: “The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

The apostle Paul preached Christ and in doing so showed the world God’s wisdom through the church (Eph. 3:10-11). Establishing the church through preaching is God’s selected method of building (1 Cor. 1:21). Others worked with Paul in those efforts of building on the foundation of Christ (1 Cor. 3:1-11). In the absence of a complete written Bible, miracles were in the world as a scaffold to provide for men what was necessary to do the work of building the church (Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Cor. 13). The mind-set of a builder should not die with Christ or the apostles but continue to edify through the Word. Paul, facing his death, told the elders of Ephesus: “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Christ gave all and more than any human could give to build. He equipped the apostles and first century church to build in a way no other generation would. Still, the church continues to need edification through the written Word. Salvation needs declaring and the borders of the kingdom enlarging. So the great commission stands:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen (Mat. 28:18-20).

Today, many of the Lord’s people have forgotten that His driving purpose of salvation is inseparably connected to the establishment and

edification of the church for which He shed His blood. They are much like those of Israel whose neglect of building incurred sharp words of rebuke through the prophet Haggai:

Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built. Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, *Is it* time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house *lie* waste? Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages *to put it* into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD (1:2-8).

Therefore, the problem today is not like problems of old: it is not inactivity or lack of industry, but ignorance and apathy—the people do not have a mind to build.

The rest of this chapter will focus on the building of the first temple, David's thinking as it relates to that, the rebuilding of Jerusalem by the people's purpose to so do under Nehemiah's leadership, the need for edification and evangelism to build up the church today, and the place of the mind of man in building with wisdom.

### **DAVID HAD A MIND TO BUILD**

God distinguished David in the Scriptures calling him “a man after mine own heart” (Acts 13:22). While the terms of endearment no doubt refer to David's humility, they were in fact spoken before his failures and statements of penitence (Psa. 32, 51). Kingdom-mindedness captures David's character through and through.

Upon David's introduction as the national hero and man of courage, his focus was not personal—but for the kingdom. While the armies of Israel crouched in caves trembling, the commission to take the land and drive out the heathen went unheeded. Additionally, God's name was blasphemed among the nations. This concerned David; the borders of the Kingdom were neither secured nor expanded. With a driving zeal for God's Name:

David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who *is* this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God? (1 Sam. 17:26).

Even in David's sin of numbering the people, his concern for the kingdom did not waiver. His sin was in trusting his military prowess to accomplish God's purpose rather than God's power. In David's meditations on God he considered his own house and was humbled that he had done this for himself, yet he had not built for God. Therefore, he purposed in his heart to build the temple. He consulted Nathan about his desire:

Now it came to pass, as David sat in his house, that David said to Nathan the prophet, Lo, I dwell in an house of cedars, but the ark of the covenant of the LORD *remaineth* under curtains. Then Nathan said unto David, Do all that *is* in thine heart; for God *is* with thee. And it came to pass the same night, that the word of God came to Nathan, saying, Go and tell David my servant, Thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not build me an house to dwell in (1 Chr. 17:1-4).

David's mind was purposed towards building, and none of his other duties nor difficulties would deter him. While God's refusal to allow David to build the house would have quenched the zeal of lesser men, David continued heartily with a mind to have the temple built.

David then launched into an energetic and mammoth preparation for the building of the temple.

So David prepared abundantly before his death (22:5).

Now, behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the LORD an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver; and of brass and iron without weight; for it is in abundance: timber also and stone have I prepared; and thou mayest add thereto (22:14).

In spite of all the wars in which he had engaged, all of the treacheries with which he had been surrounded, and with his many domestic troubles he never lost sight of his purpose to build the house of God. Further, "All this, said David, the Lord made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern (1 Chr. 28:19) (Elkins 240-41).

In the dedication of the temple, David's mind to build was pronounced as a credit to his concerns. Solomon addressed the people:

Blessed *be* the LORD God of Israel, which spake with his mouth unto David my father, and hath with his hand fulfilled *it*, saying, Since the day that I brought forth my people Israel out of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build an house, that my name might be therein; but I chose David to be over my people Israel. And it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. And the LORD said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou

didst well that it was in thine heart. Nevertheless thou shalt not build the house; but thy son that shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house unto my name. And the LORD hath performed his word that he spake, and I am risen up in the room of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. And I have set there a place for the ark, wherein *is* the covenant of the LORD, which he made with our fathers, when he brought them out of the land of Egypt (1 Kin. 8:15-21).

The obvious lesson is that, with humility and a passion to serve God, we will accomplish His will, we will be concerned about that work, and we will be remembered for it. “And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God” (1 Chr. 22:7).

This same mind to build will captivate the heart of every faithful child of God today. They will do whatever they can, even when they cannot do all, they will find a way to do all they can. Christians will not simply go about considering good works; but they will consider, prepare, and pass on those concerns to their children, and other Christians. Parents should raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:1)—including a mind to build. Christians should teach others to teach others (2 Tim. 2:1-2). While women cannot preach publicly as men do (1 Tim. 2:1ff), they should not allow that to quench their mind to build—they should teach others. Paul wrote to Titus exhorting him to exhort the older women:

That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, *To be* discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed (Tit. 2:4-5).

When these verses are not heeded, the name of God is blasphemed as much as when Goliath defied the armies of the living God.

The challenge to build the kingdom exists upon multiple fronts with opposition from within oneself through sin, opposition of the world, and opposition within the church. Building the kingdom must involve a personal edification (Psa. 1), raising one’s children properly (Deu. 6:7ff), and proper work in the church. Let us all have David’s mind to build.

### **THE PEOPLE HAD A MIND TO BUILD**

The Lord’s work languishes when His church fails to have the type of heart that the great man David possessed. The point of the “faith hall

of fame” in Hebrews 11 holds true today, that by faith they overcame. David’s faith made him great—not uncommon valor, good genetics, or some super talent which eludes the average member of the church today. The same faith which felled Goliath can destroy mediocrity and apathy in the church today. This faith took Jerusalem from a heap of rubble (after the destruction of Solomon’s temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.) to a thriving capitol which was full of life. The people took the cause to their own heart, and (like David) they had a mind to build.

In 536 B.C., Zerubbabel led the first group home to build the temple under the authority of Cyrus (Isa. 44:28). With encouragement from Haggai and Zechariah, they completed the task in 516 B.C. They had a mind to build. In Ezra, Bible readers find a people returning to Jerusalem for a spiritual rebuilding in the hearts of those who lived there. They also had a mind to build.

In Nehemiah, one man’s mind to build infected all of the people. Nehemiah dwelt in comfort; though a servant, he worked in the palace for King Artaxerxes of Persia (Neh. 1:11-2:1). Nehemiah’s “mind to build” tugged at him when he heard the people were in affliction, the wall was broken, and the gates burned. Therefore, Nehemiah went before the king wearing grief on his face (which was unlawful) because of the sorrow he possessed for his homeland. He had a desire to return home. As events unfolded, the king took interest and allowed Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem with resources to build the city again.

Nehemiah met trouble at every turn, yet his devotion to the work never wavered. “And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I *am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?” (Neh. 6:3). In the face of Samaritan opposition, Nehemiah shouldered the responsibility of edifying the workers.

Second, Nehemiah realized, like David and other builders before, that building never precluded fighting. Since they were intent and devoted to building, they also had to be armed to fight the opposition. These were a people not content to allow their efforts stand for nothing, and the product of their labor be destroyed. They would fight to obtain the desired result.

Even over the noise of construction, one could hear the clatter of weapons. In the world (or the pagan mind), the sword and the trowel may seem mutually exclusive, but in building for God they seldom find themselves apart. Through faith we can learn this important truth. Many

believe building is somehow a process of peace alone; however, it is not peaceful from man's standpoint. Christians build to attain peace and foster peace, but the process is not necessarily peaceful. Paul wrote, "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Rom. 14:19). Yet, in the same book Paul had written, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Rom. 10:1). The desire of Paul's heart for his fellow Jews led him into preaching in synagogue after synagogue, and he was usually driven out with malice.

God sent Jeremiah out not only to build but to destroy. To destroy is a part of a good building process: "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (Jer. 1:10).

In describing the wise man, James holds the value of purity above that of peace. Peace without purity is only a pseudo-peace. Yet, peace will follow when we have purity.

Who *is* a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife *is*, there *is* confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, *and* easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace (3:13-18).

Nehemiah's mind, heart, and devotion were not merely that of a superintendent at a job site, but a servant of God first and foremost—one who had a zeal for His name. In this way, Nehemiah was not unlike Ezra, of whom it is said, "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do *it*, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10). Ezra not only prepared his heart, he prepared his mind with a well thought-out purpose. He would teach of God and His will, thus preparing the people to participate in the construction led by Nehemiah. Therefore, these people would achieve great success because they "had a mind to work" (Neh. 4:6).

The busy-work existing in most congregations will never attain to the power of the mind to work when joined with unity in purpose. It was not each man doing what he thought was best, but working together to accomplish the greatest cause. If they had not been working

together in unity of purpose, the wall would have been built in some areas without any work done in other areas. These people had a mind to work, a mind to build, and they worked in unity.

### BUILDING WITH WISDOM—PROVERBS

The process of building never promised a cakewalk to success. The picture of building brings to mind a striving with a grit uncommon in most people's conception of Christianity. In Matthew 7, the Lord referred to the obedient as one who built on the rock. Only a few verses prior, He noted the life of service as one who enters the strait (narrow and treacherous) gate (Mat. 7:13). The Lord spoke more concerning this "strait gate" when He called on His disciples to strive to enter in (Luke 13:24).

Some will serve *half-mental*, realizing too late the need to **strive**. Jesus said, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (13:24). These shall hear the sad words: "Depart from me, all *ye* workers of iniquity" (13:27). When the Lord said "strive," He used the Greek word *agonizomai* which has traveled down into the English as "agonize." Half-mental is not even close to describing the effort the Lord demands, the focus He deserves, and the consideration He desires. The Hebrews were admonished to live faithfully. They were reminded of the Lord's own strife and the faith of those gone before.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds (Heb. 12:1-3).

The cross was the price paid to build the church (Mat. 16:16-18; Acts 20:28). It required of Jesus a building mind-set focused on the task, enduring the pain, and envisioning the accomplishment. In contrast, half-mental leads to half service, and half service is full death—there is no half salvation (Mat. 7:13-14). Do not become "wearied and faint in your minds"; instead bulk up and press on giving glory to God. Christians ought to be "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). Never give half your mind to God and half to the world (2 Tim. 2:4; cf. Mat. 6:24; Jam. 1:8; 4:8).

This building and striving is driven by wisdom and the fruit thereof. The Lord's wise man builds on a strong foundation. Wisdom herself builds on a perfect and solid foundation.

Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso *is* simple, let him turn in hither: *as for* him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine *which* I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding (Pro. 9:1-6).

These seven pillars are a foundation, seven being Divine perfection. Psalm 19:7 says, "The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple." The Psalms also say, "The sum of thy word is truth; And every one of thy righteous ordinances *endureth* for ever" (Psa. 119:160—ASV). The New Testament carries the same idea stating:

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The Word is a foundation for wisdom's house. Truth is the sum total of what God teaches on any subject through His Word (John 17:27).

Moreover, the invitation into wisdom's house extends to the simple (one who is open to instruction), not merely the rich, fortunate, good looking, well dressed, or they of exceptional intelligence, but all who will come. In the third place, wisdom calls one out of foolishness and into understanding, for the two are mutually exclusive. Trying to hold to both constitutes a double-mindedness as found in James (1:5, 22-25; 4:4). When one is in wisdom's house, he is in understanding which comes by God's Word unto edification (Eph. 3:3-4). Knowledge and wisdom are not separated by a chasm as some suppose, but walk side by side in step. They are not closed to any who look into God's Word—young or old:

My son, eat thou honey, because *it is* good; and the honeycomb, *which is* sweet to thy taste: So *shall* the knowledge of wisdom *be* unto thy soul: when thou hast found *it*, then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off (Pro. 24:13-14).

Finally, Solomon states: "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom" (Pro. 9:10). The Psalmist said, "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do *his*

*commandments*: his praise endureth for ever” (111:10). The attitude of Godly fear leads one to the wells of wisdom, to drink from wisdom’s table, eating of her bread. The attitude of Godly fear causes those in the street to see the need to hasten into the shelter of understanding founded upon the perfect truth, that they may rise above the foolishness of the world (Eph. 5:15).

Had God seen fit to preserve the ark of Noah, it would, no doubt, hold the esteemed position of the chief of the wonders from the ancient world. Noah was a builder who hastened into wisdom’s house when beckoned. Noah walked in God’s ways (Gen. 6:8, 22; Pro. 11:5-6). The world was walking in wickedness and foolishness; so God determined to destroy the world with a flood (Gen. 6:5-7). Noah feared God and the judgment to come, whereas the foolish thought Noah’s preaching was absurd. Fear moves one to build; fear gives the wisdom to see the sense in building.

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith (Heb. 11:7).

Noah’s fear prompted a wisdom to build and a mind to build. He built with wisdom’s counsel on the seven pillars. The Holy Spirit says, “Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he” (Gen. 6:22). This attitude of doing what God commands marks out true righteousness and not the present-day pragmatism or a worldly sense of *good*. The Psalmist said, “My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments *are* righteousness” (119:172).

Noah’s fear led to the saving of his house; they escaped the flood by obedience to God. With a mind to build they laid hold upon a place of refuge and safety: “But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil” (Pro. 1:33).

Noah is like the wise woman of Proverbs 14 who builds her house (14:1). She likewise would move with fear, and find a place of refuge: “In the fear of the LORD *is* strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge. The fear of the LORD *is* a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death” (14:26-27).

Having a mind to build is not a question of intellect, but of attitude. Often the church today does not evangelize nor edify (build) for brethren do not have a mind to work. Solomon penned, “A scorner seeketh wisdom, and *findeth it* not: but knowledge *is* easy unto him that

understandeth” (Pro. 14:6). Those who love to murmur will not build according to God’s pattern, but they will tear down their own efforts (Phi. 2:14). These are the scorners who will not find peace.

Building without a proper foundation will bring destruction. “The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish. There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death” (Pro. 14:11-12).

The doctrine of evangelistic pragmatism is a flood certain to destroy the works many churches have built unto themselves. Among the liberals, some will use this false and faulty doctrine to justify instrumental music to stop turning away a world who does not believe it should be an issue. Brethren who still give lip-service to authority will circle the wagons to endorse compromised institutions and false teachers. They think that, by so doing, they can reach a wider audience. The end thereof are the ways of death because they are building on the shifting sands of man’s wisdom. Man, by his own wisdom, did not know the righteousness of God!

There are others in the church today who are equally pragmatic, walking by what seems right to them. They not only do not build on the rock, they do not build at all. They do not build upon the sayings of the Lord (Mat. 7:21ff) but are innovators who go beyond what is written (1 Cor. 4:6). Solomon warns against association with those who seek new ways instead of building with the Word. “My son, fear thou the LORD and the king: *and* meddle not with them that are given to change: For their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both?” (Pro. 24:21-22).

When a congregation tries to build with man’s wisdom, and there is a departure from building with the wisdom from above, then it departs from God. The Lord’s church will no more be spared from judgment by paying high tribute to an institution, which considers itself essential to the relevance of the church today, than Israel was spared from Nebuchadnezzar’s sword through tribute to the broken reeds of Egypt and Assyria.

Little changes can bring destruction before the architects of the highways into the holy city erect their bypasses by their own judgment. The Tay bridge disaster is an apt illustration of such experience-based wisdom failing. Thomas Bouch, the bridge’s designer, based his structural design “...solely on experience. No codes had been written for Sir

Thomas Bouch to follow” (Tay Bridge). A flaw in the design led to the bridge’s demise.

At approximately 7:15 p.m. on the stormy night of 28 December 1879, the central navigation spans of the Tay bridge collapsed into the Firth of Tay at Dundee, taking with them a train, 6 carriages and 75 souls to their fate (Martin).

The “We tried that” doctrine is as tired and worn out as it was 30 and 50 years ago. It is often termed pragmatic evangelism. The results will not be seen concerning how well any authorized work succeeded until the day of judgment. Brethren who say that an evangelistic form will not work (no matter what the form might be) simply do not have a mind to build. “Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established” (Pro. 24:3). The psalmist would say: “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh *but* in vain” (Psa. 127:1).

Building with wisdom begins with a proper attitude. That attitude gives the wisdom which comes exclusively from God’s Word the ability to yield a mind that will build, building zeal in that mind, hastening obedience, and producing authorized activity to the salvation of one’s own soul and them that will hear (1 Tim. 4:16; 1 Cor. 1:11-21).

## CONCLUSION

The time to build runs past those who lack the mind to build every hour. David had a mind to build and redeemed the time with wisdom. Nehemiah had a mind to build and would allow no opposition or failures of the past to douse his purposed plan. Noah had a mind to build, for had he not, both he and his family would have perished in the flood. Above all, Christ had a mind to build and woe unto those who refuse the mind of Christ yet claim to bear His precious name. When the Gospel freely went forth from Jerusalem on that Pentecost of Acts 2, David’s throne shone from heaven, and thereon Christ sits in His kingdom. In His act of sacrifice, He made it possible for those who had a mind to build by faith to be with Him in heaven (Rom. 1:16-17). James wrote:

What *doth it* profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be *ye* warmed and filled; notwithstanding *ye* give them not

those things which are needful to the body; what *doth it* profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone (2:14-17).

A working faith is the faith of a builder. Consider David's mind to build:

I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together: Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the LORD. For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, *and* prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace *be* within thee. Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good (Psa. 122:1-9).

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# IT IS TIME TO BUILD

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## INTRODUCTION

The theme of this great lectureship, *A Time To Build*, is to be highly commended. It is so needed among my brethren today and is a theme whose time has come!

Let us turn our attention immediately to Ecclesiastes 3:3: “A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up.” A time to build? No! The inspired writer said it is “a time to **build up!**” All Christians must have the desire, drive, and determination to **build up** those things which are good, godly, and great. There has never been a greater need to do so than today as we are completing the first decade of the twenty-first century! Sin is having a field day both in and out of the church of my Lord. In the Word of God the exact phrase “build up” is found in Nehemiah 2:17, Psalm 89:4, 102:16, 147:2, Ecclesiastes 3:3, Isaiah 60:10, and Micah 3:10. Let us take our direction from Nehemiah 2:17 in which the returned exiles were encouraged to “come, and let us **build up** the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.” Brother C. C. Crawford observed:

Nehemiah did not start out to build a *new* wall, but to *restore* the original wall which had been broken down in certain places. It was not his purpose to labor on the walls at the points where they were up to the original level, but to rebuild at the places where they were down (314).

Christ needs followers today who know that He built only one church, who know the identifying marks of the everlasting kingdom, and who realize there are no faithful Christians in any denomination.

The Lord does not need Christians who argue there are Christians in the man-made denominations, that one church is just as good as another, and that we should soft-pedal or water down the Gospel of Christ because of “who” might be offended by the Truth. There have been times when this preacher has preached pretty plain on a controversial topic, and I will stop and apologize to the listeners. I explain: “If what I’ve said has stepped on your toes, then I apologize, not for any truth of God’s Word, but for being a lousy shot! I was not aiming for your toes, but I was aiming for your heart!” Preachers of the Gospel always seek to be found “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15).

We often sing the words, “Stand up, stand up for Jesus.” Well, brethren, it is time for all of us to stand up for Jesus and to build up those things which stand in need of being restored. It is this writer’s intention to present this lesson in the form of an acronym—i.e., BUILD. Hence, it is a time to **build** up the:

- B — body of Christ, have
- U — unity in the church,
- I — integrity among us,
- L — love for brethren,
- D — discipline in our ranks

They were a little below the level at such points as the “all-sufficiency of the Scriptures,” the personality and work of the Holy Spirit, “rightly dividing the word of truth,” etc., and considerable rebuilding was needed at these points (Crawford 316-17).

The points this scribe has listed need considerable rebuilding today.

### **A TIME TO BUILD UP THE BODY OF CHRIST**

The church of the New Testament is presented in the metaphor of a body. This figure speaks eloquently of both its unity and fellowship of believers. Most of us are able to recall a time when it was unusual to attend a Gospel meeting and not have at least one lesson dedicated to the old-time Jerusalem Gospel about the establishment of the church of the Bible. Nowadays it is unusual to hear a message on that subject either in a Gospel meeting or in a year of preaching from the local pulpit. Has it ever occurred that such may be one of the reasons the Lord’s church is not growing as rapidly as she once did?

We need to be spreading the word, about the Word of the Lord on this vital theme. Jesus Christ is the “saviour of the body” (Eph. 5:23). Let us teach clearly that the body and the church are one and the same institution. The majority of the religious world today does not know what the inspired apostles taught along this line. Paul wrote, “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence” (Col. 1:18). Please note that the body is the church and the church is the body. Again, Paul penned, “Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church” (Col. 1:24). The inspired apostle informs all that the church of Christ is the body of Christ in this one verse. We are told by Paul, “*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling*” (Eph. 4:4). Paul informs us that there is one body and thus only one church!

Let us remind others that Christ is the head (singular) of the church (singular) which is His body (singular). You would need professional help to misunderstand this great truth. Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, “And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23). LeRoy Brownlow wrote:

One body and one head. In the religious world we see hundreds of bodies, each claiming to have the one head, Christ. What a picture! What a beast! or shall we call it a beast? It has no name for it was never heard of in the natural world. It has hundreds of bodies and each body fights all the other bodies, and yet each body is guided and directed by the intelligence of one head. Do not get scared—you will never see that kind of a thing in the animal kingdom. But you can see hundreds of warring bodies in the religious world, each claiming to have Christ as its head. Surely, a man has eyes with which he cannot see and ears with which he cannot hear when he accepts this thing as reasonable in the religious world, knowing that it is unreasonable in the natural world (26).

The latter part of Ephesians 4:12-13a says, “the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” Since there is only one church of the New Testament that Christ promised to build and that He died for (Mat. 16:18; Acts 20:28), then we must determine not to divide or make man-made denominations of that blood-bought **body of Christ!** We must make the message crystal clear that there is only **one body** and that

body is the church belonging to Jesus Christ the **one head** of that one body.

### A TIME TO BUILD UP THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

God has given us a specific pattern, and we must follow that pattern specifically. When it comes to the body of Christ, we must understand that God does not want devilish division or damnable doctrines of men to disrupt or destroy the unity of the one body of Christ.

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

Unity is a biblical subject. The psalmist writes, “Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!” Psa. 133:1). Paul would say:

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...  
Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ ( Eph. 4:3, 13).

It is God’s **unity** we must endeavor to keep and not man’s **union!** These two are not compatible. The denominationally-minded cannot comprehend this beautiful truth. Mr. Merrill C. Tenney wrote, “Paul of Tarsus, Luther of Germany, Wesley of England, and Moody of America would find deep unity with each other” (249). Mr. Tenney failed to realize that Luther, Wesley, and Moody would all fall short of the writings of the inspired Paul when it came to the subject of religious unity!

My uncle, the late brother A. L. Harbin, used to illustrate this point by saying you could catch two tomcats, tie them together by the tail, and in that condition throw them over a clothesline. You have **union**, but not **unity!**

Paul speaking to the elders of the church at Ephesus, says, “Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30). Think about this. How many times have you seen a local congregation that was divided and destroyed by someone coming from the outside? How many times can you recall some one from within: a teacher, an elder, a preacher, or perhaps just a wealthy member who breaks the unity of a local church? Many times it only takes one grumpy member who was born in the *kickative* case and the objective mood to disrupt an entire congregation. When

this author was in High School science lab, he observed as the instructor took a glass beaker that was so finely tempered that he drove a nail through a 2 x 2 board, using the beaker as the hammer! Then, he took a small steel ball and held it about six inches above the neck of the beaker and dropped it. The steel ball hit the bottom of the beaker and it shattered into hundreds of shards. It was able to take a lot of pounding from without, but just a little rattle from within destroyed the beaker. So it is with the local congregation. To maintain unity and withstand friction and fraction, the local church must concentrate on being together.

*That ye be perfectly joined **together** in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10)*

God hath tempered the body **together** (1 Cor. 12:24)

In whom all the building fitly framed **together** groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:21)

In whom ye also are builded **together** for an habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:22)

Being knit together in love (Col. 2:2)

And knit together (Col. 2:19).

Do you not get it? When the church comes **together** united in Christ and His Word, it will maintain unity in the face of all fear, fraction, and friction, that the enemies of the cross of Christ can bring against it (Phi. 3:18)! The great preachers of generations past preached publicly that they would prefer to be one of the soldiers who stood beside the cross of Christ, and thrust His side with a spear, than to be the one who would purposefully divide the body of Christ, which is His church! We need preachers, elders, teachers, and directors of that caliber in the Lord's church today. May we all work to achieve that unity.

### **A TIME TO BUILD UP INTEGRITY AMONG US**

*Integrity* is found in the Authorized Version only at Genesis 20:5-6, 1 Kings 9:4, Job 2:3, 9, 27:5, 31:6, Psalms 7:8, 25:21, 26:1, 11, 41:12, 78:72, Proverbs 11:3, 19:1, 20:7. This word comes from the Hebrew *tumoh* or *tam laiv*, and is defined: "integrity, uprightness, perfect heart, or upright." Integrity was required under the Old Law (Deu. 16:19-20), it is part of the make-up of the just man (Pro. 11:3-5; 20:7; 28:6), and it is required where you need an honest administration (1 Sam. 12:4-5). With this all too brief introduction to the meaning of integrity, let us look briefly at the life of Job.

In Job 2 we are introduced to the second series of Satan's attempted seductions of Job. He smites Job's body with sore boils from the sole of his feet to the crown of his head. Job seeks some small relief by scraping himself with broken pieces of pottery outside the city. Here comes Job's wife. Surely she is coming to help give him mercy in his misery! Then, we recall the words of James:

Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job (Jam. 5:10-11).

"Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die" (Job 2:9). No wonder Socrates said 2,500 years ago, "By all means marry: if you get a good wife, twice blessed you will be; if you get a bad wife, you will become a philosopher!" Satan seemingly spared the life of Job's wife so he could use her to tempt him some more. However, the question she posed to Job is a query that needs to be asked today: i.e., "Dost thou still retain thine integrity?"

The church of my Lord needs elders and preachers who can still retain their integrity. Heed the warning, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD" (Amos 8:11). That famine of failing to hear the Word of the Lord God is present today. Some preachers, elders, and directors of schools of preaching seem more interested in tickling the ears of men than in preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified (2 Tim. 4:3-4). There are false teachers and false doctrines that need to be opposed and exposed: i.e., instrumental music in the worship, neo-Pentecostalism, Calvinism, re-evaluation and reaffirmation of the eldership, fellowship with non-Christians, fellowship with false teachers, faith-only or grace-only to be saved, divorce and remarriage, songs of praise to Christ, A.D. 70 heresy, Holy Spirit leading separate and apart from the Word, et. al. These and dozens and dozens of other errors too numerous to mention are running rampant against the ramparts of righteousness this very day. Let the leaders in the Lord's church follow in the footsteps of Elijah, God's prophet.

And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the

commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim (1 Kin. 18:17-18).

Elijah refused to be called the trouble-maker in Israel; he was simply God's spokesman, trying to call sinful and fallen Israel back to peace with God. Today the Lord's church needs preachers and elders who will "stand in the gap" (Eze. 22:30) and call departed Israel (the church) back to the Lord's side. Is the peace disrupted by a strong stand for righteousness or by those who have compromised the divine Word of God? When a man or a group of men set themselves in array against God's Word and lead others into error and departure from the one faith, is it sinful to oppose such? If so, then how do we explain the words of Paul?

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).

Paul still stated: "Preach the Word" (2 Tim. 4:2). When did these charges get changed? Brother Foy E. Wallace had once preached a strong lesson. A lady approached him following that lesson and reminded him of the song, "Accentuate the Positive and Eliminate the Negative." Brother Wallace replied saying, "Don't Fence Me In!"

Peace and harmony will not come from winking at error and ignoring sin. That has been tried for far too long—and it has failed miserably. When false teaching and doctrines are cuddled rather than condemned, when false teachers are rewarded rather than reprimanded, and when elderships have quit working and have started winking at such, and have stopped overseeing and have started overlooking, is it any wonder that faithful men have decided to hold their peace and the body of Christ has been rent asunder in many places? Brethren, the only cure for this problem is for congregations one at a time to get rid of all Captain "D" elders and preachers. This author did not learn about Captain "D" eating places until moving to Texas. Upon looking at their menu, they have one item called "boneless chicken." Boneless means lacking in backbone or courage. Chicken is slang for one who is a coward. Hence, the church needs to get all the Captain "D" elders and preachers replaced by men of integrity and courage. The Lord's church needs men who know the Word (1 Pet. 3:15), men who live the Word (1 Tim. 4:16), and men who impart the Word (2 Tim. 2:2; 4:2). "If any

man speak, *let him speak* as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11). We are in need of men who will proclaim that the church of the first century must be the church of the twenty-first century (and every century). The church of Christ continues to have the same head and Savior (Eph. 1:22-23), the same doctrine (Heb. 13:8-9), the same name (Rom. 16:16; 1 Pet. 4:16; Acts 11:26), the same authority (Mat. 28:18-20), the same scheme of redemption (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:2-4; et. al.), the same worship (Acts 2:42), and the same hope (Eph. 4:4; Heb. 11:1).

The late and lamented brother J. T. Marlin used to proclaim frequently, “The church of Christ has not changed; the church of Christ must not change; the church of Christ cannot change; for if she does—she will no longer be the church of Christ!” Amen and amen!!! May God give us men of such courage, conviction, and integrity today!

### IT IS TIME TO BUILD UP LOVE OF THE BRETHREN

We know we must love God, and we know that we have been commanded to love our enemies. Sandwiched somewhere in between our love for God and that love for our enemies, we are commanded to love the brethren. What do the following references all have in common: John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17, Romans 13:8, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, 1 Peter 1:22, 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11-12, and 2 John 5? Every one of those passages states unequivocally that Christians must “**love one another.**” Hebrews 13:1 declares, “Let brotherly love continue.” Well, brethren, it must exist if it is going to have a chance to continue! Let us learn to love the brotherhood.

We must learn to love the weak brother. “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, *but* not to doubtful disputations” (Rom. 14:1). This simply means that we do not dispute with him over decisions of scruples or matters of personal opinion. The text deals with a brother/sister in Christ who is weak spiritually. This scribe does not believe an injustice is done to the text to apply it to my brother who is weak physically, mentally, or even one who may be socially weak. We love the weak brother by receiving him, and that is the exact opposite of shunning him. We are to strengthen the weak brethren, as well as encourage and uplift them. “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Rom. 15:1). Let us take note of those last five words: **and not to please ourselves!** When we pick out the brethren with whom we prefer to associate, have we not then at the same moment picked out those from whom we will

disassociate ourselves? When we shun or ignore the weak brother to go with our selected little clique, then whom are we really pleasing? Then a few months or years down the road we wonder why that weak brother has quit the church! Hebrews 12:13 warns: “And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.” Let us love enough to set the proper example, and to not allow our Christian liberty to cause a soul to be lost in the ceaseless ages of eternity. We should not bind a personal opinion upon others; sometimes do not even express an opinion to show love toward the weaker brother or sister in Christ.

We must learn to love the offended brother.

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift (Mat. 5:23-24).

Notice that we are the offender in this context. God demands positive action on our part. This is a portion of the Sermon on the Mount. The background is set under the Law of Moses. In today’s vernacular (in the church), Christ is saying if we come to the church house to worship, and we remember that a brother has anything whatsoever against us, let our worship wait a while. **First, be reconciled!**

*First* used by Jesus Christ in the Greek is the identical word that He uses in Matthew 6:33: “But seek ye **first** the kingdom of God.” If we have offended another, then God says to us—**first**—be reconciled! God demands positive action on our part.

Finally, let us learn to love the trespassing brother. Usually we are quick to counter: “He did the wrong to me, let him come to me. It is not my problem!” Are we sure about that? Listen to Jesus:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican (Mat. 18:15-17).

See! It is our problem if brotherly love continues to abide (Heb. 13:1). Unfortunately, many brethren have written their own *Reader’s Digest Bible* of Matthew 18:15-20 which states, “If thy brother sin...go...show...his fault...and...tell it unto the church.”

The instruction of our Lord is pointedly plain: (1) Go to him **alone**, (2) if that fails then take one or two as witnesses, (3) if he refuses, let it be known to the church, and (4) if he will not hear the church, then let him be like the gentile or publican—i.e., withdraw fellowship in a public way. If we ourselves refuse to forgive a penitent brother or sister in Christ, then we ourselves will never receive forgiveness from God. We must be willing to forgive the penitent (Mat. 6:14-15; Luke 17:3).

Some have abused Matthew 18:15-20 by trying to make it apply to the known false teacher who has spread his error by papers, tapes, DVDs, television, radio, computer, public podiums, etc. Across the years this writer has had several men to call or write to me: “Brother Whitlock, you did not call me or talk to me before you exposed my teaching about....” The response has generally been: “Well, you did not talk to me before you taught this error...practiced this error...promoted this error...and it has gone all over the nation. This is not a **personal offense**; brother, this is an offense against the cross of Christ, the church of Christ, and the Gospel of Christ!” This shall ever be my rebuttal to false doctrines and/or false teachers who seek refuge for their manifold errors within the passage of Matthew 18:15-20. “This shall not pass.”

### A TIME TO BUILD UP DISCIPLINE IN OUR RANKS

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us (2 The. 3:6).

J. T. Marlin called this “The Forgotten Commandment.” A. L. Harbin called it “The Ignored Command.” Eldred Stevens called it “The Overlooked Commandment.” We know what each man meant. Most brethren know the passage is there, most brethren can cite it on request, but very few have actually seen this command carried out. We have reached the point where the congregation that actually practices church discipline is the exception rather than the rule. Please notice that Paul did **not** say I have a suggestion, a hint, or any such thing. Rather, Paul said it is a **command**!

New Testament discipline involves instruction, training, and punishment. Let us always remember that the punishment phase is the final and last resort and is done for the saving of the soul. Let us never forget that church discipline is a biblical topic and command of God. “In meekness instructing [correcting] those that oppose themselves; if God

peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth” (2 Tim. 2:25). Stronger measures are commanded in 1 Corinthians 5 against an immoral man in their midst. Seven times in thirteen verses Paul instructs the church at Corinth to take action against the immoral man *in the camp*.

He that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you (2)

To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh (5)

Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump (7)

I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators (9)

Not to keep company (11)

With such an one no not to eat (11)

Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person (13).

Paul admonishes, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Rom. 16:17). Imagine the cessation of false doctrines, teachings, and errors among us, if the church of my Lord around the world should suddenly start obeying Romans 16:17! Unfortunately, too many elders, preachers, and teachers have no use for obedience to the Word of God. “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count *him* not as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother” (2 The. 3:14-15). Again, let us note the latter part of the instruction as given by the inspired Paul. Marshall Keeble said, “It never hurt the apple tree for the dead, rotten apples to fall and hit the ground!”

The reason that many congregations do not obey the Lord’s command in this regard is that they are afraid of **who** might be affected. So it is decided to “let it ride, or sweep it under the rug!” Brother Crawford wrote: “But Nehemiah and his helpers believed in God and went right ahead with their work. So did the pioneers. They were not infected with the microbe of ‘religious courtesy’” (319). Again:

Note how Nehemiah rid himself of the traitors in his ranks, 5:13. He called upon the people to put out of their ranks all that were unworthy. The same method should be employed by the churches of Christ; they should purge their ranks of all unworthy preachers.... Any minister...or evangelist who will accept financial support and sustenance from brethren who believe the New Testament message and want it preached in its purity and then use funds so contributed for the dissemination of materialistic and rationalistic propaganda, is a

*hypocrite* in the fullest sense of the term. ...let all churches of Christ purge themselves of wolves in sheep's clothing who are spreading the propaganda of compromise and disunity (Crawford 320-21)!

What could conceivably happen among the Lord's people if these words were to be taken to heart by all faithful brethren?

The Lord loves and He disciplines. A father loves and he disciplines. The church loves and she? Many churches that do not discipline use as their excuse, "But we love them too much!" There is a Greek word for that: **baloney**! Discipline is the flip-side of love. You show me any congregation that does not discipline the disorderly who refuse to repent, and I will show you a congregation that does not love! A failure to discipline is a failure to show **love**!

Paul states in the first part of 1 Corinthians 6:9: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" Consider that when we fail to discipline the unrighteous, we are condemning that one to eternal damnation. Call it what you will, brethren, but that is **not** love! Discipline will be hard to do. It is easy to ignore, excuse, or look the other way. The question resolves itself to: "Will we love enough to obey the Lord's commands, or will we hate the souls of men enough to ignore the sin?"

"Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him" (Luke 17:3). Notice the latter part of that passage: "**If** he **repent**, forgive him." Some are more than willing to obey the first part of Luke 17:3, but not the latter part. However, if we refuse to forgive a penitent brother/sister in Christ then we will never know forgiveness ourselves (Mat. 6:14-15).

## CONCLUSION

"For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull *them* down; and I will plant them, and not pluck *them* up" (Jer. 24:6). This is a passage of precious promises. God's people had been carried into Babylonian captivity in 606 and 597 B.C. respectively. In captivity God was with them and beheld every wicked work and each labor of love. These words were written about 600 years before the coming of the Messiah and about 60 years before the release of the ransomed remnant of the righteous. God would build them up and plant them (both are positive) and He would not pull them down or pluck them up (both are negative).

There must be that right combination of positive and negative for anything to work. Would you like to have a car with a battery in it that

contained positive posts only? How about a battery with negative posts only? No way, it takes both! Our lesson has been: “It Is Time to Build.” One antonym of build is *wreck*! Among belongings given to me by the family of the late and beloved J. T. Marlin, I found this poem: “Wreckers.” No author’s name was attached.

#### WRECKERS

I watched them tearing a building down,  
 A gang of men in a busy town;  
 With a ho-heave-ho and a lusty yell,  
 They swung a beam and a side wall fell.  
 I asked a foreman, “Are those men skilled,  
 And the men you’d hire if you had to build?”  
 He gave a laugh, and said, “No, indeed!  
 Just common labor is all I need.  
 I can easily wreck in a day or two  
 What builders have taken a year to do.”  
 I thought to myself as I went my way,  
 Which of these roles have I tried to play?  
 Am I a builder who works with care.  
 Measuring life by the rule and square?  
 Am I shaping my deeds to a well-made plan,  
 Patiently doing the best job I can?  
 Or am I a wrecker who walks the town,  
 Content with the labor of tearing down?  
 Says I to myself as I grumbled and growled:  
 “I am sick of the church” and then how I scowled!  
 “The members are unfriendly, and the sermons too long;  
 In fact, it seems that everything is wrong.  
 I don’t like the singing; the building’s a disgrace  
 For signs of neglect are all over the place.  
 I’ll quit going there! I won’t give a dime;  
 I can make better use of my money and time.”  
 But then my conscience said to me:  
 “The trouble is you’re too blind to see  
 That the church reflects you, whatever it be;  
 Now come and pray, and serve cheerfully.  
 Stop all your fault-finding; boost it up strong;  
 You then will be happy and proud to belong.  
 Be friendly, and willing, and sing as you work,  
 For churches aren’t built by members who shirk!”  
 It’s a good thing to remember,  
 An even better thing to do:  
 Never work as a wrecking member,  
 But rather with the construction crew!

Can we say that we are part of the building crew, or would we have to say that we are members of the wrecking crew? If every earthly friend forsakes us, let us be able to say with Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9: “*We are* troubled on every side, yet not distressed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed” If so, then we will also be able to say with Paul:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

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# PRINCIPLES OF BUILDING

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## INTRODUCTION

“I have never seen the church so fragmented in my entire lifetime,” a member of the church recently lamented. He is right. The year of 2005 was a disastrous one for the Lord’s body in America, and the fallout continues. The question is: “Where do we go from here?” While we mourn what has happened, we dare not allow the work of the Lord to suffer while we sit around “diggin’ up bones,” as Randy Travis sings.

I’m a diggin’ up bones, I’m a diggin’ up bones.

Exhuming things that’s better left alone.

I’m resurrecting memories of a love that’s dead and gone.

Well tonight I’m sittin’ alone diggin’ up bones.

The songwriter realizes the futility of dwelling on the past, but he cannot help allowing himself moments of pity, even though such indulgences are counter-productive. It is better to forget those things which are behind and reach forth to what may yet be accomplished (Phi. 3:13). America has drifted far downstream from her roots and needs a severe and compelling dose of evangelism. Many other countries are in worse shape, having moved even further away from godly principles than America has. If ever the church needed to build and grow with fervency, it is now.

## PROPERTY

Before human builders can go to work, they need a piece of property. They may desire a location by a lake or one amidst tall, shady

trees. Physical features may play an important role in making a selection, but for Christians our field (location) is the world. God sent His Son to this world to redeem it from its sins (John 3:16). People in every nation need the Gospel because the whole world lies under the influence of Satan (1 John 5:19), and Jesus is its only hope.

Christians know that the church everywhere in the world needs to be built up. We do not need, therefore, to concern ourselves with **where** we shall build; the answer is **everywhere**. Members of the body of Christ already dwell in nearly every nation. We must build and expand on what has already been established.

### THE ARCHITECT

Business firms, once they obtain a site, will try to find a suitable architect. Once again, Christians need not concern themselves with such matters. Jesus is the head over His body, the church (Eph. 1:22-23). Just as the physical body is well designed, so is the spiritual body. When He established this temple, He placed in it apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph. 4:11). The apostles and prophets were temporary, but when they had been guided into all truth (John 16:13; Jude 3) and taught all things (John 14:26; 2 Pet. 1:3), brethren had available in written form what they had taught orally (2 The. 2:15). Inspiration thus ceased, along with the miracles and signs that confirmed the Word (Mark 16:20).

Jesus designed the church to continue with elders (pastors or bishops) and deacons (Phi. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13). The temple (church) functions best when qualified men are placed into these positions and faithfully execute their duties. Of course, some have strayed from the Architect's plan by replacing elders and deacons with a *pastor* and a board of deacons. Our Lord never intended in His church that one man rule an entire congregation; for that reason He specified **elders** (plural). Preachers (evangelists) also work with churches to spread the Word (1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Tim. 4:1-5). God never assigned women in these leadership roles, although some have departed from the Divine design. Faithful brethren continue to follow the plans of the Architect.

### THE PRICE

Everything costs. The Lord's church has already been purchased by the precious blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). Redemption could not be obtained with such temporary and worthless items such as silver or gold (1 Pet. 1:18). The kingdom prophesied of old by Isaiah, Daniel,

Joel, and Micah is greater than any political system or social club. Nothing on earth has ever matched the Lord's church in terms of the privileges she enjoys or the responsibilities with which she is charged. Neither Ted Turner's nor Bill Gates' combined wealth would be sufficient to make a down payment on the church. All of Hollywood's glamour could not add to the glory of the Lamb or the body of lost souls whom He redeemed.

### THE FOUNDATION

Every building must start off with a foundation. The walls may later be decorated with the most lavish wallpaper; a beautiful chandelier may adorn the entrance. Staircases may be made of ivory or overlaid with gold. The floors may shine and sparkle; dazzling pictures may grace the walls. All the spectacular beauty which men can create, however, will be worthless if the foundation is not solid. Building on the sand will only lead to ruin, as Jesus taught (Mat. 7:21-27). A good foundation is built upon rock.

The church possesses just such a foundation. Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and Jesus proclaimed that upon this truth He would build His church (Mat. 16:15-18). Gautama Siddhartha, better known as Buddha, was not the Son of God. Muhammad convinced his disciples that he had visions, but he still is not the Son of God. All of the millions who follow these two men have for their foundation sand. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). Another passage talks about the household of God being "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*" (Eph. 2:20; cf. 1 Pet. 2:6).

How fortunate Christians are that all of these things have been taken care of for us. As we consider building, the property has already been secured, the architect has already drawn up the plans, the price for obtaining the building has been paid, and the foundation and cornerstone have been selected and proven. God has even provided the building permit. Since we have not been required to do all of the preliminary work, we can focus on erecting the edifice from this point onward.

With all these preliminary but essential tasks taken care of, one might think that the remaining work would become increasingly easy, but such is not the case. Everything accomplished in establishing the foundation has been well defined and well put together, but the reason

is that God has done it all. He has been able to achieve His purpose because He has been in control. The ongoing effort of building the church is the place where problems arise.

### THE CREW

As the comic strip character Pogo is often quoted as saying, “We have met the enemy, and they are us.” God’s plan operates perfectly until it involves human beings who do not submit to Him; then all manner of problems develop. Some of the workers do not want to work. They would rather let a few people do the construction, while they stand around smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee (figuratively speaking). They prefer to hear stories of the ways in which their co-workers spent their weekends and what they are planning to do next. Socialization takes precedence over completing the building on schedule.

Unfortunately, some laborers dislike other members of the team. One group complains about the way another group does its work. Their technique is slightly different, and everybody knows there is only one right way to get the job done. Some have had skirmishes with other crew members and are not about to work with *them*. In fact, if they had their way, the others would be fired, but failing that, ignoring them proves a close second option.

Some workers are so inspired by the greatness of the building that they want to incorporate a few embellishments not in the original plans. Generally, they are confident that the Architect **meant** to include their wonderful notions in the blueprints (surely it was an oversight!). After all, He never said **not** to build it that way. Besides, their intense sincerity is more than sufficient to compensate for such mundane matters as complying with the directions.

A day at the construction site is reminiscent of a Keystone Cops’ farce. While the faithful, hard-working crew is making progress on the fifth story, one group is still on the ground floor, wondering if the temporary elevator is safe. The group on the third floor of the east wing has meticulously followed the building instructions and for good measure have added a few regulations they are confident should have been in the Manual. They feel certain they will have to redo the work done by those on the fifth floor. The group on the left wing is excitedly discussing how to make the seventh floor attractive, even though the

elevator does not yet reach floor six. Somewhere, in a pickup truck, the Builder, with clouded vision, is observing all the workers.

Did He not know that human beings would have all these problems? Yes, for He made them in His image. He put in the Manual everything needed to avoid these problems and warned men not to tamper with it (Deu. 4:2; Pro. 30:5; Gal. 1:8-9; Rev. 22:18-19). Joshua was charged not to go to the right hand or the left (Jos. 1:7-9). Workers were commanded to do only what they are authorized to do (Col. 3:17). No one was allowed to add what God had not required (Acts 15).

What about problems among the workers? The Manual contains procedures that are designed to handle conflicts (Mat. 18:15-17), but some did not consult it, and others did not follow it. When one worker disagreed with the Code of Conduct, some brethren wanted to talk to him, but he refused to speak to them. One entire crew violated the building code but remained silent and would not discuss the issue with anybody. One zealous worker wrote post-it notes to several members of the crew, complaining about a foreman, but he would not acknowledge any return correspondence. How difficult it is to build when various crews will not speak to one another! And how ironic was it that at certain pep talks for the crew some of those same *silent* workers would then fondly speak about their respect for the Manual!

### THE BUILDING MATERIALS

The Architect ordered just the right amount of materials for the project. An ample supply of good works was available, along with faith, hope, love for God and one another, unity based upon truth, peace, Christian evidences, zeal, knowledge, and humility. Some of the workers in the west wing broke unity and truth in half, leaving the latter commodity behind, but other workers picked it up and playfully hit each other over the head with it.

Imitating that action, some tried the same thing with love for God and one another. They ran off with the former portion, failing to see why the two parts were designed to be connected. The left-wingers removed the extra portions of "love one another." They ignored the piles of knowledge and Christian evidences, however; they just did not see that the building needed them. The good works were carted off regularly, and zeal was used generously by all the different groups of workers. The pile of peace left behind was exceeded only by the stacks of humility.

## ACTUAL BUILDINGS

### Moisture Control

Actual buildings today involve such technical considerations as moisture issues, which might lead to mold or mildew. The Lord's church has moisture problems with those working in the west wing. They are trying to decrease the amount of water that it takes to get inside the building designed by the Architect. Someone might protest, "None of the liberals have advocated pouring or sprinkling in place of immersion." No? Perhaps it would be helpful to look at the strategy of the anti-moisture crew.

The engineers of the current apostasy knew that most brethren understood that baptism is by immersion. If there were three things that Christians once knew with absolute certainty, they were: (1) One must be baptized by immersion in order to have his sins removed and to be added to the Lord's body; (2) Instrumental music is not allowed in worship; (3) Denominationalism is wrong and not authorized by God. Emissaries of Satan wanted to eliminate these distinctive marks of the church designed by the Lord to make us like all the denominations around us. The problem was, "How could that be done, when members of the Lord's church are so entrenched in these positions?" Some brethren have always advocated that we go back to Egypt, but most of them were not taken seriously.

Step one was to broaden our base of fellowship; once brethren begin traveling this road, they would eventually reach the desired destination. The Joplin Unity Meeting of 1984 was a clever move. "No one is being asked to compromise," came the assurances. Really? The idea was to create friendships and lower resistance to those leading in false worship, but an even more subtle approach was at work.

Rubel Shelly's group (at that meeting) took it upon themselves (undoubtedly at his instigation) to define: "Who is a Christian?" The definition was significant. It included baptism (immersion in water), but the words, *for the remission of sins*, were missing. Perhaps others besides this writer caught this omission, but little (if anything) was said about it. The importance of the definition might be clearer when it is taken together with various comments that some from the Christian Church made, such as, "I've never really cared for Baptists, but they've been immersed, too," and, "We have more brethren besides those in this room."

What Shelly effectively did was to remove the purpose of baptism from this act of obedience to God. If all those immersed (regardless of their motivation) are brethren, then not only are Baptists our brothers—so are Pentecostals and Mormons. Is it time to welcome into the family of God good old *brother* Joseph Smith, who both repudiated and enjoined polygamy? Does this minor inconsistency really matter in this postmodern era? After all, if two men can teach doctrines exactly opposite of each other and both of them be right, why cannot the same man contradict himself and be right on both positions? Apparently, there is no such thing as *madness* any more.

“But,” someone objects, “at least the amount of water involved has not been decreased.” Would that be parallel to saying that the Architect built a beautiful door that leads to nowhere? He failed to install a door that leads *inside* the house; He built a wall extending out from the corner of the house and put the hand-carved door in it. Baptism that is not *for the remission of sins* will not get anyone *into* the church; it is an act with no purpose. Yet, Jimmy Allen came along in 1991 with his book, *Rebaptism?* in which he advocated that the purpose for baptism was irrelevant. To him, a person did not need to know that baptism was for the remission of sins, so long as he wanted to be baptized to obey Jesus.

Three years ago Jeff W. Childers and Frederick D. Aquino wrote a booklet, *At the River's Edge*, and distributed brotherhood wide with the endorsement of Jack Reese and Abilene Christian University. The booklet does explain that baptism is essential and that *baptism* means “immersion,” but it never mentions that the purpose for baptism is the forgiveness of sins, nor is there a single reference to the blood of Christ, which provides baptism its power. How can both the meaning (forgiveness of sins) and the mechanism that makes it work (the blood of Christ) be removed from a discussion about baptism? Efforts such as these, while purporting to uphold the truth, only remove us farther from it and closer to denominationalism.

“Still,” the lament continues, “there has been no reduction in the amount of water used.” Only on the surface is this assessment accurate. Those in the Christian Church, Baptists, and several of our brethren from the west wing continue to immerse. Those whom they fellowship, however, do not. Many Christian Churches practice “open” membership, which means that, if someone comes to them from a denomina-

tion, they will accept them as members **whether they have been immersed or not.**

Furthermore, even those individuals and religious groups who immerse will fellowship those who do not. Rubel Shelly, for example, fellowships Presbyterians, who not only teach Calvinist doctrine but also practice sprinkling in place of immersion. Shall the Methodists and the Lutherans be excluded? If we fellowship even one religious body that sprinkles, where can we legitimately stop? What about Catholics? Max Lucado decided years ago that he could have solidarity with them. About thirty years ago, this writer heard Dr. George Beasley-Murray, the Baptist, speak on the importance of baptism. He presented Romans 6:3-5 just as the Bible presents it. Later in the day, however, he made it clear that, despite what the Bible teaches about baptism, he could not exclude from fellowship Quakers, who do not baptize with **any** amount of water.

Each step leads further away from the Truth. Those in the left wing have fallen off the scaffolding and cannot get up. A preacher and a congregation in Texas (far removed from Jimmy Allen) had a former Baptist visiting them with his Christian wife. He had been immersed to join the Baptist Church and thought he was saved, but he eventually learned that he needed to be baptized properly (not from them, however, but from his family and from visiting elsewhere periodically). This group was ready to accept him into membership based on his Baptist baptism. Rather than agree with their liberal views, he had the good sense to find a congregation of the Lord's church that believed and practiced the truth, where he was immersed for the proper reason.

How many churches are still following the Architect's plan on something as fundamental as the entrance into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13)? Once we abandon the purpose for baptism and begin to fellowship unauthorized religious denominations, the boundaries will continue to move until we finally have nowhere to stop. Eventually, we will fellowship as brethren everyone who calls God, "Father," and Jesus, "Lord," as Max Lucado boasts of doing. The *slippery slope* argument is generally not a valid one; it is usually hypothetical. In this case, however, it has not only occurred but has been well documented over the past twenty-five years. Brethren, we have a moisture problem in the church!

The Architect must be furious with those who have tampered with His Manual. He never authorized anyone to make such changes in His

Blueprints. They will, of course, eventually suffer His wrath, but they will take with them many laborers, whom they have influenced. Truly, as Paul wrote, their god is their belly (Rom. 16:17-18), and they crave their own disciples (Acts 20:30).

### Atmosphere (Air Circulation)

In constructing modern buildings, air circulation is important and necessitates air blowers, return ducts, and other paraphernalia. Monoxers are installed to check the level of carbon monoxide in the air, lest someone be overcome by the odorless gas and die. The Architect of the church installed some safety features to insure that the proper atmosphere be maintained.

The major control is the *agapostat*, which measures the amount of genuine love that exists among brethren. Many concepts masquerade as love, but genuine love is **unconditional**. God demonstrated this kind of love by sending Jesus to die for our sins while we were yet sinful (Rom. 5:8). God did not say, “I will love you if...” or “I will love you when...” Even those in the world understand the difference. On their 1988 album, *The Hits*, REO Speedwagon included a song written by Kevin Cronin, titled, “That Ain’t Love.” The love in this song is between a man and a woman, but it involves the same principle. In the chorus the singer states:

That ain’t love.  
I believe you’ve got the wrong emotion.  
That ain’t love.  
At least it doesn’t feel like love to me.  
As long as I say what you wanna hear,  
Do what you wanna do,  
Be who you want me to be,  
You think that’s love.  
Well baby that ain’t love to me.

Obviously, the kind of love described above is **conditional**! Therefore, it does not resemble the love of God. God extends His love toward all—even those who have ignored and rejected Him. Jesus died for the fanatical Muslim and the atheist. No one is excluded from responding to that love; God will save all those who comply with His conditions of salvation. What? Can unconditional love have conditions? This seeming contradiction can be explained thus: God’s love, grace, and mercy are **available** to all; they are unconditionally **offered**, but He has specified the way one’s sins are to be forgiven, which are conditions of

acceptance. The love that prompts God to offer salvation is not based upon our behavior. Conditions only enter the picture when we begin to discuss salvation's appropriation to us.

Christians have the obligation to love one another—as Christ has loved us (John 13:34-35). This highest order of love does not render “evil for evil; but always” pursues what is good for oneself and “for all” (1 The. 5:15—NKJV). We must constantly ask ourselves: “Am I being motivated by love?” Check the *agapostat*. Some workers erroneously think that, if a brother questions, criticizes, or rebukes them, he does not like them, or they *have it in* for them. Love should not be so shallow. “Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful” (Pro. 27:6). Truly, egos can be damaged, but the question is: “Do I need to be rebuked?” Surely, we do not want friends who are just going to tell us what we **want** to hear. God does not do that; He tells us what we **need** to hear. It would be wonderful to only speak words of encouragement one to another, but sometimes exhortations are necessary (Jude 3).

Even those who fall away God still loves. He encourages spiritual workers to restore them (Gal. 6:1), and frequently many return. Some laborers are immoral, like the man in 1 Corinthians 5; some are lifted up with pride, such as Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8); some are losing their zeal, as were those in Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7). God loves them nevertheless and wants their souls rescued once again (Jam. 5:19-20).

For the air to circulate properly, all of the units and component parts need to function properly. Deadly gases cannot be allowed to build up anywhere within the church. Our monoxer is the Manual. When some of the workers depart from that Word, out of love the rest of us must warn them of their unruly behavior (2 The. 3:6) and protect the rest of the crew by rejecting those who would divide us (Tit. 3:10).

### Communication

Whether walkie-talkies or the more modern cell phones are used, those building up the edifice must communicate with each other. Within the past two years it has become increasingly common for brethren to refuse to speak to one another. In the New Testament, there are some thirty passages that use *one another*. In about twenty of them Christians are enjoined to act in a positive fashion towards each other; ten others contain negative prohibitions so we will not injure or harm each other. After much diligent research, the verse remains unlocated that says,

“Ignore one another.” Yet, silence seems to be the new response of choice; where do the Scriptures authorize treating fellow workers this way?

Someone might frivolously remark that Jesus did not answer those who brought the woman taken in adultery. At least He wrote on the ground, which is more writing than many are willing to do today. When they pressed Him, He did speak to them, advising them what to do, and they all left. “Oh, but He was silent at His trial.” Yes, He was, and the reason is that He knew they had already rendered a guilty verdict in their minds before bringing a single false witness to testify against Him. Jesus knew that even the truth would not receive a fair hearing among such ungodly men.

When else did Jesus or His apostles ever refuse to answer questions posed to them? Those who neglect to reply to inquiries made of them do not follow the pattern established in the Scriptures. In fact, the Architect made it clear that, if anyone has something against a brother, he should go to him and talk to him about it (Mat. 18:15-17). He also made it clear that, if someone knows that a brother has something against him, he should go and talk to him about it (Mat. 5:23-24). What a marvelous, Divine plan—to make certain that problems are cleared up with proper communication!

Suppose one brother lends another brother \$100. The borrower was supposed to return the money in one month’s time. Two months have now passed, and the money remains owed. The lender does not know why unless he asks. Did the brother forget? Does he not intend to repay the loan? Too embarrassed to ask him face to face, he mails the borrower a brief note, reminding him of the sum borrowed and the date of return agreed upon between the two of them. A few more weeks go by, and he receives no reply. Now hard feelings are beginning to develop because the borrower has not acknowledged the debt or communicated any plan to return the \$100.

How easy it would have been for the borrower to say, “Brother, I am still having a problem. Can you give me a few more weeks?” It is difficult to interpret silence, however, and most of us instinctively draw the conclusion (whether correct or not): “This brother is not honest; he has something to hide; he is playing the part of a coward.” The one who remains silent must bear the blame for these conclusions, since he had the power to communicate and set the record straight. This writer and many others have answered questions cheerfully, being thankful for the

opportunity to clarify a position, statement, or action. We therefore do not understand the posture of silence, nor does the Architect sanction such behavior.

A civil war almost broke out among the tribes of Israel on the west and the east of the Jordan, but communication prevented the conflict. Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an altar on the west side of the Jordan before they crossed over to return to their land. This action was misinterpreted, and all Israel gathered together to fight their brethren (Jos. 22:12). First, however, Phinehas and ten rulers went to discuss the matter with them. Those questioned explained that no thought of rebellion had ever entered their minds and that the altar was there to remind them and their children that they were one nation with their brethren west of the Jordan. Their brethren were fully satisfied. But what if they had snubbed an opportunity to meet? What if they had refused to provide an explanation for their actions? They would have been attacked; communication is necessary for peace and for building.

### **Patience**

The workers must exercise patience—both with one another and the new workers that have been added to the team. Jesus, when explaining the parable of the sower, says that the good ground represents those with an “honest and good heart”—and that they “bring forth fruit with patience” (Luke 8:15). Procuring more building materials requires wisdom. Workers must know how to ask questions of prospects, as well as how to answer them. Quite often, even after extensive study and prayer, a potential stone in the temple balks at obedience or breaks off the conversation. Truly, the sower might become discouraged were it not for the occasional harvest.

In dealing with those who are thinking about becoming stones, we can exercise the greatest of patience. If the student asks the same question three times, we carefully clarify it each time. If frivolous objections to the Scriptures are made, we gently explain the passage once again. So where does all of that tenderness go when that individual obeys the Gospel and becomes a worker? What if Jesus, when Peter denied Him three times, said, “That’s the last time I’ll have anything to do with you, Peter. Do you know how patient I have been with you for three years? And you pay Me back by denying Me! It’s obvious that you can’t be trusted. I’m turning over the keys of the kingdom to John.”

All of the builders need to be encouraged. We need just as much patience with our brothers and sisters as those still learning the Gospel. None of us has yet reached perfection, and the strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak (Rom. 15:1). Patience demands that we bear with and forgive one another (Col. 3:13).

### CONCLUSION

The church has a perfect foundation, cornerstone, and Manual. The first and foremost principle involves following the Blueprints we have been given (Gal. 1:8-9; Rom. 16:17-18), which means forbidding anyone to change the terms of admission into the building. The Designer only provided one entrance (John 3:5). The atmosphere inside must reflect that of the Architect, who showed love in all that He did. Communication is paramount and a prerequisite to the unity of the laborers. Patience must be extended to everyone—whether in or out of the building.

How pleasing it would be to the Building Inspector to find that everything was going according to His plan! What a positive force Christians could be in this world if we were all busily engaged in this task. It is always a time to build, to sweep away the debris of past failures and deficiencies, to reach out for additional building materials, to form and shape these living stones according to the Manual. When the last person has repented and been baptized for the forgiveness of his sins (the one door into the temple of Christ), and the last brother has been encouraged to be faithful, then may all who have conscientiously worked on this, the grandest of all buildings, hear those words: “Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Mat. 25:21).

### WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

# BUILDING WHILE BATTLING

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## INTRODUCTION

The inspired apostle Paul taught that the Old Testament Scriptures “were written...for our learning” (Rom. 15:4). Thus, in thinking about the approach to take in studying this timely and important subject, this writer’s mind ran to Nehemiah 4:1-23. Herein one finds God’s people doing the thing that is the subject of our study in this chapter—“building while battling.” Thus, we begin our study with what Nehemiah came to realize as he sought to build the walls of Jerusalem—there can be no correct building for God without, at the same time, battling those who oppose God’s building and His builders.

Nehemiah was in the business of restoring Jerusalem for the purposes God intended for the city under the Law of Moses. For the Jews to be safe in their efforts to accomplish the restoration of all things according to the Law of Moses, the principle of “first things first” demanded that the Jews have the necessary protection from the evil influences and outright attacks of their enemies. However, the Jews’ enemies recognized this fact as much as Nehemiah did; therefore, they set about to stop the building of Jerusalem’s wall.

Because the Jews faced a constant threat of and actual opposition to their work, they became profoundly weary and at times discouraged. However, because “the people had a mind to work” according to God’s

Will, they completed the wall and were victorious over their attackers (Neh. 4:6b, 9, 16-23).

Their mission was accomplished because Nehemiah and his countrymen realized that it was not a case of working **or** fighting; to the contrary, it was one of working **and** fighting. If Nehemiah and the people had not realized this fundamental principle of what is involved in getting the Lord's work done and acted accordingly, their efforts to restore all things according to the Law of Moses would have failed. Thus, **the time for building is also the time for battling.**

Today, Christians are working to build the walls of spiritual Zion—the church of Christ. (Let us emphasize that we mean by *Christian* and *church of Christ* what the Holy Spirit-inspired writers of the New Testament meant when they employed such terms in their writing of the New Testament.) This work pertains to the saving of those souls of mankind who are accountable to God for their actions (Rom. 14:11-12). Such persons are separated from God by their sins, cannot save themselves, and, therefore, must be saved by someone else (Rom. 3:23; 6:23; Isa. 59:1-2; Eze. 18:4; Mark 16:15; 2 Tim. 2:2). That Savior is none other than Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the only begotten Son of God (John 1:1-14; Col. 1:14-22; John 3:16; 8:24; 12:48; 14:6; Mat. 28:18-19). Further, it is the case that Jesus saves the lost **only** through His Gospel as men believe it and obey the terms of pardon set out only therein (Mark 16:15; Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Rom. 10:16; 2 The. 1:7-9; 1 Pet. 1:22; Heb. 5:8-9; John 14:15; Luke 8:11; Jam. 1:18; Rom. 10:17; Acts 17:30; Rom. 10:10; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 10:48; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12; 1 Pet. 3:21; Acts 2:41-42, 47). Thus, we are to be always busy preaching the Gospel to the alien sinner (those who have never known Christ as their Savior), edifying (spiritually build up) the church by teaching the Truth of the Gospel that pertains to the church's work, organization, worship, Christian conduct, and the final eternal reward in Heaven for the faithful members of the same (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 15:58; Gal. 5: 19-26; 6:1- 2, 7-10; Jam. 1:27; Rev. 2:10; 2 The. 3:13).

To think that we can be busy builders, building according to the authority of Christ (Col. 3:17), and not have opposition and persecution from Satan's crowd, is to live a pipe dream and deny reality. Further, to live such a fantasy is nothing more than rejecting the bold Truth of God's Word pertaining to said opposition and persecution that accompanies faithful service to God.

## **IF YOU ARE GOD'S BUILDER, TROUBLE KNOWS WHERE TO FIND YOU**

It should be obvious from only a cursory reading of the New Testament books of the Gospel that, as Jesus went about doing good (building), He was embroiled in various battles with His enemies (Acts 10:38; John 8:12ff). In fact, part of the good our Lord did was done through His spiritual battles caused by His confronting, exposing, and refuting those who were steeped in error. To His disciples in general and His apostles in particular, Jesus plainly forewarned them of the persecution that would be their common lot as they went about preaching the Gospel, defending the New Testament system, and living Godly lives (Mat. 5:10-12; John 15:18-21).

For some strange reason, many in the Lord's church have bought into the false idea that if we can some how learn to do good, there will be no opposition, therefore no controversy, and, thus, no persecution. In view of all that is in the Bible that contradicts such an absurd concept, why many church members have been duped by it is beyond this writer. However, the fact that certain church members have been deceived into believing said ludicrous doctrine, is further proof that if the Bible boldly teaches one thing, certain people are bound and determined to run contrary to it.

Paul wrote to Timothy concerning the certain persecution that would accompany their good works. He wrote, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim 3:12). If no other Bible references existed but the previously-quoted one regarding Christians suffering for their faithful service to God, Paul's statement to Timothy would suffice to clearly show us that if one works for the Lord, one must expect some kind of persecution from God's enemies. However, to Timothy he also wrote, "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of *this* life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:3-4). Paul saw Timothy for what a faithful preacher of the Gospel actually is—a soldier in the army of the Lord. However, he saw nothing in Timothy that he had not first observed in himself. In coming to the end of his life, he wrote to Timothy declaring, "I have fought a good fight" (2 Tim. 4:7). Paul understood the same thing as did the apostle Peter when he wrote regarding the devil's disposition toward Christians as they go about building for the Lord. Peter declared: "Be sober, be vigilant; because

your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). We too must understand what Paul and Peter did, specifically, that **as builders for the Lord we are actually inviting the devil’s agents out for a fight**. May we correctly conclude then, that the greater the worker (builder) one is for the Lord, the greater attention Satan is going to give to such a person? That being certain, the words of Paul to Timothy previously quoted, along with passages of like sentiment, further show the importance of Christians learning the following fact—**that to build as God directs such building, one must be prepared to do battle**.

### THE APOSTLE PAUL, ONE WHO BUILT WHILE BATTLING

To more fully emphasize the importance of our topic, we want to examine the attitude and life of the apostle Paul. Among mortals there has not arisen a greater servant or builder of God than was Paul. In reading the New Testament about Paul’s work in building for the Lord, we quickly see that the apostle to the Gentiles was a battling builder. For his tremendous sacrificial service to his Lord, Paul received horrendous persecution from the enemies of Christ. However Paul declared to the Philippians that he was “set for the defence of the gospel” (1:17). As if to emphasize the preceding point, the apostle to the Gentiles also wrote, “For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and *there are many adversaries*” (1 Cor. 16:9). With the many opportunities Paul had to build up the kingdom, he recognized that with those opportunities came the Lord’s adversaries—in the case of the “great door and effectual” mentioned by him in the previous verse, there were “many adversaries.”

**Paul never met an adversary he did not like.** He looked upon opposition by the Lord’s adversaries as a great expeditious instrument whereby he could proclaim the Christ. Notice Paul’s attitude and conduct in Acts when he was given the opportunity to defend himself before the mob, the Jewish council, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa (Acts 21:37-26:25). Moreover, we have no reason to believe when Paul stood before Caesar to give an account of himself that he would have changed his message from what it was when he stood before Felix, Festus, or Agrippa.

One of the things we learn from God’s faithful servants of the first century is the fact that God providentially used adversaries to spread

the Gospel. In view of the previous statement, notice what Jesus told Paul: “Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (Acts 23:11). If we do the good works necessary for building up the church, building that was characteristic of the faithful members of the Lord’s church of the first century, the devil will see to it that we will be confronted by his henchmen. When this confrontation happens, for the faithful, this means only one thing—the battle is on and there is no retreat to be sounded by the faithful soldier of the Lord. The church of the first century understood the preceding point—to build where error is ruling, error must be attacked and destroyed before Truth may reign in error’s stead. Why is it the case that many Christians today do not or will not see this important aspect of faithful service to God since it is so clearly taught in God’s Word?

### **THE SUCCESS OF THE MILITANT CHURCH OF THE FIRST CENTURY**

Of the early church’s growth Luke recorded, “But the word of God grew and multiplied” (Acts 12:24). This is inspirations way of declaring that the faithful brethren were busy building for the Lord—as the church taught the Scriptures and the people believed and obeyed them, the Word of God changed their lives. This is the result of the early church taking Jesus seriously concerning His commission to them to teach the Gospel to others (Mark 16:15; Mat. 28:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:2). They preached the Gospel to the alien sinner, edified the saints, and in their benevolent activities built up the church as they kept their lives holy. They were truly practicing “pure religion and undefiled” (Jam. 1:27).

Those first century Christians discharged their obligations to God without a single tool that many in the church today claim we must possess to be successful in building for the Lord today. Let us note some of the tools that many church members today think are imperative for us to have and use if the church is to grow, which tools the early church did not have:

1. A preacher who is a great speaker, a people-mixer, possessing a formal education, and lots of money
2. A beautiful building in a fine location in the right area of the community and with lots of money in the church treasury

3. The church's acceptance by the local people and lots of money
4. Successful business men or their equivalents in the leadership of the church with their money to accompany them
5. Freedom of religion and lots of money
6. A nation at peace with even more money
7. Good weather at the right time of the year with lots of money
8. "Good prospects" for conversion with lots of money
9. Everything convenient for us and lots of money
10. Young people camped, rallied, entertained, and played with and lots of money
11. "Youth ministers" and a lot more money
12. Christian education, which takes much money from every direction for ever
13. Brotherhood projects (radio, TV, etc.) with lots of money.

Thus, many churches have developed the attitude of the Federal Government—if there is a problem, much money is the solution.

Let us note some of the things the first century church had with which to accomplish the task of preaching the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). Most of the preachers were of a mediocre background—academically and otherwise. By his enemies even Paul's speech was said to be contemptible (2 Cor. 10:10). Our requirements for formal education would rule out the fishermen apostles from Galilee. The cause of our Lord prospered without any building owned by the church at all. On various occasions first century Christians were run out of town rather than the community receiving them with open arms. In 1 Corinthians one and three, we learn that they were considered as fools and off scouring. The church was a building church even under the harsh rule of the Roman Caesars. As the opposition mounted, the more the church grew. The first-century church had everything but peace. Where do we find any first century Christian praying: "We are thankful we are gathered here without fear of molestation"? What about good weather and opportune times? These items seemed to be of no consequence to those faithful brethren of the first century (Acts 20:7; 2 Tim. 4:2; Acts 20:31). They had neither prospects nor conveniences as we have come to expect them. They had no baptistery, heated or otherwise, no air conditioning, no heat, no baptismal clothing, etc. Their prospective members were such fellows as the Philippian jailor, Saul of Tarsus, the ruler of the synagogue, and the wicked Corinthi-

ans—persons that would not be considered to be “good prospects” by many modern-day church members.

To be successful builders as the first century church was, we need to notice the marks of their attitude that are lacking today. Consider the following: We must forget about being popular with all facets of society. Jesus said, “Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets” (Luke 6:26). We must realize there will come times when we must make a clear distinct choice for God and His system but against men (Acts 5:29). We must have fearless preachers of the Word of God—preachers who will sacrifice their lives to preach and defend the Gospel whether they are paid well or not because they love God, the Gospel, the lost, and the church. We do and not need “good humor,” “hand-holding,” “baby-sitting” denominational pastors filling our pulpits as public relations men. We have developed such sectarian denominational pastors because we have rushed to gain a place of prominence among the sectarian denominations and the secular world. Why would we want such a position, and what does it say about the character of a person who conceives the work of a Gospel preacher to entail such conduct? The answer is seen when we understand why Israel of old wanted a king—to be like the people round about them rather than to be as God demands they and we should be.

There must be in us a great dependence on God. So much so that we will be a praying people as the first century brethren were. “Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 The. 5:17-18).

Further, many of us lack faith, vision, and optimism in the Lord’s work. How many of us are examining the area were we are located with the desire and intent to expand the influence of the Gospel in the lives of our neighbors? We have all manner of options to use in discharging our obligations to teach the Truth to the world—radio, television, the Internet, CDs, home Bible studies, newspapers, Bible correspondence courses, Gospel meetings, Vacation Bible Schools, lectureships, printed matter, etc. What would the first century church have done with these great tools in their efforts to spread the Gospel? But the real question is what are we doing with them? We actually have these marvelous tools for our use for which the early church could only wish, if they could even conceive of such expedients by which the Gospel could be spread.

What did our brethren of 2000 years ago possess that too many modern Christians sadly lack? They possessed love of and faith in God and His Truth; they were convicted by the Truth, thus, converted, sanctified solely on the basis of Truth, and they possessed a fervent zeal to do their duty to God no matter the cost to themselves (Phi. 3:12-15).

Having noted the previous important points regarding the work of the church then and now, we do not desire to run to the extreme that money does not have its place in the building up of the church. It does have its proper use in the building up of the church and the Bible has much to say regarding its correct use. However, the Lord's church does not have to possess money or these other tools previously listed before we can do what God requires us to do in building for Him. That is our point at this place in our study.

What is said of the Macedonian brethren regarding why they gave of their means as they did (though they had little when compared to the Corinthians) is another important point we desire to make and emphasize. Of the Macedonians' reason for giving more than what Paul thought they could give, he wrote that they "first gave their own selves to the Lord" (2 Cor. 8:5). When each Christian realizes that the church is built up **only** when each member of it loves the souls of those lost in sin to the point of desiring to teach them the Gospel (as well as loving their own brethren), we will never accomplish what the first century church did. The key ingredient for being faithful servants of Christ and thus builders of God is seen in Paul's statement to the Corinthians when he wrote that Christians must "abound to every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8). When each Christian abounds in good works (as the Bible defines and uses *good works*) the church will be a "building church."

It is sad but true that some of us are convinced that the "cheapest way is the best way" when it comes to building for the Lord. Because brethren love *their* money and material things, it does not take much to convince them that the cheapest way is the Lord's way. Thus, the amount of some brethren's faith in God is directly proportionate to the amount of money in the treasury. Have we ever given any serious thought as to how the Lord at His coming is going to view church coffers full of money—money that is not out working to spread and defend the Gospel? Remember, the one talent man was not condemned because he had only one talent, but because he did not use it properly (Mat. 25:24-30).

## THE CHURCH MILITANT

The church is Christ's army. As Christ's army, it faces a battle—a fight. Thus, Paul told Timothy to “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3; also see Eph. 6:10-17). The church of Christ, therefore, must be a militant church. By *militant* we mean “engaged in warfare: Fighting. Aggressively active: combative; Syn. Aggressive.” Thus, as we turn to focus on this aspect of the church's conduct, we understand that the church is to oppose error and in doing so engage the enemy in spiritual warfare. We are to do this by aggressively obeying the Captain of our salvation in (1) preaching the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15-16) and (2) not permitting the advocates of error free course in or out of the church (Acts 15:1-2; Gal. 2:5).

Concerning religion the first century populace was a society that was largely indifferent regarding religion. The church was declared by those who were opposed to it as having “turned the world upside down” and as “every where...spoken against” (Acts 17:6; 28:22). Never the less the Lord's church impacted that society for good in a great way. In a very brief period the first century church (as the Lord had commanded them to do—Mark 16:15) had discharged their obligation to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to the world—“to every creature which is under heaven” (Col. 1:23). How was it able to do so much for the Lord in such a short period of time?

The church of the first century was unwilling for the one true and living God to be just another god among the gods (Eph. 4:4-6; Acts 17:22-29). They knew that preaching in kindness and love did not mean compromising the Truth to any degree (Eph. 4:15). Further they understood that love is always subservient to authority and never rises above or makes null and void God's authority (Col. 3:17; John 14:15; 1 John 2:3-5; 5:2-3). “Uncertain sounds” did not describe the preaching done by the apostles and evangelists (notice the plainness of Paul in Eph. 4:4-6 and in Acts 17:24-31; also see 2 Cor. 3:12).

Christ was not presented as a savior among many saviors. Paul declared but one Savior, Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:5). Notice how the church did the same as did Paul, declaring that men could be saved only through Jesus Christ of Nazareth (Acts 3:19-22; 4:12). Those Christians did not compromise the truth of John 8:24.

The world was “turned upside down” because the church contended that the Gospel was the one and only message that could save man from

sin and keep him saved (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-4). Thus, those faithful brethren did not allow any tampering with the Gospel message, no matter how small a thing it may have seemed to some, to go unchallenged, unrebuked, and uncondemned (Gal. 1:6-9; 2:4-5, 11, 14).

They aggressively rejected and opposed the false idea that “one faith is as good as another.” They preached that there is “one faith” (Eph. 4:5). Steadfastly and consistently the first century brethren contended for the genuine source of faith (Rom. 10:17; John 8:31-32; 17:17; Luke 8:11).

Though they were persecuted for boldly preaching the Gospel as they fled from their persecutors, they “went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). They attacked the Jewish authorities with the Sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). They challenged any and all to refute their message. To the highly learned Greek Philosophers, they preached “Christ the wisdom of God.” Their soldier lives were not dear to them in the battles they fought for their King. They were willing to give themselves away because they had learned that to live for the Lord was to die to the world (2 Cor. 5:17-19; Rom. 6:3-5). They knew the Lord had taught:

If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it (Luke 9:23-24).

Because of their love of and trust in God, they kept the army of the Lord pure (Acts 5:1ff; Gal. 6:1; Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 5:1-2, 4-5, 7, 9-13; 2 The. 3:6). The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride or vain glory of life was not permitted to abide in the soldiers in Christ’s first century army (1 John 2:15-17; Col. 3:1-8).

## CONCLUSION

Unlike today, the people of the first century loved or hated the church—there was “no in-between.” It was the subject of conversations all over the world. Have we restored the aggressive nature of the Lord’s church? Are there efforts being put forth by weak and insipid brethren to thwart the restoration of spiritual aggressiveness in the Lord’s body? To ask these questions is to answer them—indeed there are such efforts being made. It is being done under the guise of godliness, love, and kindness that in reality are false concepts of the same. Love declares the Truth of God’s Word in no uncertain terms. It also exposes false doctrine for what it is—soul-damning error. The world must learn that

not only does the Gospel of Christ differ from the doctrines of men, but that the difference in the Gospel and man's doctrine is a heaven or hell difference for every responsible person living today.

For some ignorant, but well-meaning brethren, to object to the previous important points that are seriously lacking in today's church by stating: "We must make a positive approach; we must not build up prejudice by preaching any negative matters," we must militantly respond to such a false view by directing them to our Lord and His apostles' teaching and practice in preaching and defending the Gospel. Will our modern-day *positive* preachers willingly ignore the candor and frankness of the Christ and His apostles in their proclamation and defense of God's Word?

There will be no building according to the Lord's plan except there is the disposition of mind in every builder to battle as well as build. In fact, a part of spiritual building is spiritual battling. Thus, in that which was written aforetime for our learning we read about the Jews in Nehemiah's day:

And it came to pass from that time forth, *that* the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers *were* behind all the house of Judah. They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, *every one* with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other *hand* held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and *so* builded. And he that sounded the trumpet *was* by me (Neh. 4:16-18).

Remember the good and faithful words of Caleb of old when concerning entering the land of Canaan he declared: "Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it" (Num. 13:30). Our Lord has not commanded us to do that which we are unable to do. When our mind-set is the same as Nehemiah and his building, battling Jews, today's church will get the attention that will set it apart from all other religions. Men will then understand that we are serious about doing the Lord's Will.

### **WORK CITED**

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

# TEARING DOWN TO BUILD

*Danny Douglas*

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## INTRODUCTION

As our theme indicates, this is: *A Time To Build*. As the wise man states, there is: “A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up” (Ecc. 3:3). Therefore, it is necessary not only to “build up,” but also there is a certain amount of breaking down that needs to be done. The topic of this chapter is: “Tearing Down to Build.” We will consider the fact that the principle of tearing down to build is scriptural in nature. We will look at some specific Bible examples of tearing down to build, and consider various lessons to be gleaned from them. It will also be emphasized that God has provided that which will enable us to do the necessary tearing down. We learn from the Scriptures that it is impossible to further the cause of Christ and to do the Lord’s work, without setting forth to tear down the strongholds of Satan. We will make applications of this principle, as we consider areas wherein tearing down needs to be done today.

## THE PRINCIPLE OF TEARING DOWN IN ORDER TO BUILD IS SCRIPTURAL

God’s commission to Jeremiah was:

Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant (Jer. 1:9-10).

*“This is a great summary statement of the work Jeremiah was to do”* (Deaver 4).

God gave the prophet the means whereby he was to accomplish his task, and that is, by putting His words into Jeremiah’s mouth. By the way, this is a significant statement for the verbal (word for word) inspiration of the Bible, or the fact that the Bible is God-breathed, and that every word of the Scripture is from God (2 Sam. 23:2; Psa. 12:6-7; Pro. 30:5-6; Mat. 10:19-20; 1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:13; 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; Rev. 22:18-19). Today, God’s men do not receive the Words of God miraculously, as did His inspired spokesman in Bible times. Nonetheless, we do have the inspired Word of God to make us complete and to thoroughly furnish us unto every good work (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Hence, we may accomplish the work of tearing down and building that God would have us to do.

God had set Jeremiah over the nations. His authority over the nations consisted in the fact that he would be God’s spokesman, and that in his mouth would be the all-authoritative Word of God, which no ruler or army had the power to destroy or overcome.

He is not set over the kingdoms as a prince to rule them by the sword, but as a prophet by the power of the word of God... Jeremiah was set over the nations, the Jewish nation in the first place, and other nations, some great ones besides, against whom he prophesied; he was set over them, not to demand tribute from them nor to enrich himself with their spoils, but to root out, and pull down, and destroy, and yet withal to build and plant (Henry).

Moreover, Keil and Delitzsch well remark concerning God’s action of putting His words in Jeremiah’s mouth (i.e., inspiration), and the power of the Word of God:

By means of it God has consecrated him to be His prophet, and endowed him for the discharge of his duties; He may now entrust him with His commission to the peoples and kingdoms, and set him over them as His prophet who proclaims to them His word. The contents of this proclaiming are indicated in the following infinitive clauses... The word of God is a power that carries out His will, and accomplishes that whereto He sends it, Isa 55:10ff. Against this power nothing earthly can stand; it is a hammer that breaks rocks in pieces, Jer 23:29 (27-28).

The Word of God from Jeremiah would determine the destiny of nations.

Prophets are said to do that which they foretell shall be done; for their word is God's word: and His word is His instrument whereby He doeth all things (Gen 1:3; Ps 33:6,9). Word and deed are one thing with Him (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown).

It is important to consider, that the authority of God was invested in Jeremiah to tear down evil and the influence of wicked men. Jeremiah was commissioned to do a mighty work. Concerning these entrenched evils and powerful nations, he was to “root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down” (Jer. 1:10). The idea of throwing down here is: “More exactly, to tear in pieces” (Barnes). However, the ultimate purpose was for the good of mankind, including God's own people. The all-wise Jehovah God realized that this tearing down was necessary, if any real good was to be accomplished. By the inspired Word of God, Jeremiah would call men to repent and turn from sin unto God's way, but those who refused would have to suffer the judgments of Almighty God (Jer. 6:16; 7:1-20).

This principle of tearing down to build, is exemplified time and time again in the history of God's people in the Old Testament. Although God had warned them against the worship of other gods, sadly, there came a time when idolatry swept across the land and they fell into the displeasure of Jehovah—the true and living God. However, a survey of Israelite history will reveal the valor of certain kings who sought to destroy idolatry in the land.

For example, one of the significant reformers among the kings of Judah was king Asa. Although within a few years of his death, he compromised with Benhadad, king of Syria, for most of his reign he was a faithful and good king (1 Kin. 15:11, 14; 2 Chr. 14:2; 15:17). He was wise in realizing that any positive effort to restore the true religion of the living God and Jehovah's standard of godly living must be coupled with the negative effort of ridding the land of idolatry and immorality. Inspired history reveals:

And Asa did *that which was* good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God: For he took away the altars of the strange *gods*, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves: And commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment. Also he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the images: and the kingdom was quiet before him (2 Chr. 14:2-5).

And he took away the sodomites out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made (1 Kin. 15:12).

In fact, Asa even removed his own mother from being queen because of her idolatrous practices:

And also *concerning* Maachah the mother of Asa the king, he removed her from *being* queen, because she had made an idol in a grove: and Asa cut down her idol, and stamped *it*, and burnt *it* at the brook Kidron (2 Chr. 15:16; cf. 1 Kin. 15:13).

Thus, his actions were without nepotism, a much-needed example for Christians today, including preachers, elders, and professors in schools supported by our brethren.

Another great lesson to be learned from the reign of Asa is that when God’s people do the right, by tearing down evil and following good, God will be with them and bless them (2 Chr. 15:1-19). This will draw others to God and His truth. This principle is unfolded before our very eyes in the history of Judah. Many people from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon, who originally had followed Jeroboam, joined themselves to Judah and Benjamin when they recognized that God was with king Asa:

And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and the strangers with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh, and out of Simeon: for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the LORD his God *was* with him (2 Chr. 15:9).

In churches of Christ today, if we will love and obey the truth and oppose all evil, God will be with us and bless us. Consequently, people in wayward congregations and denominational bodies, as well as non-religious people, who desire the Truth and the presence of God, will be drawn to sound congregations of the Lord’s people. For example, when God put to death Ananias and Sapphira for lying unto Him, sincere people were not driven away from the church but rather drawn unto it: “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:1-14). In like manner, when we endeavor to tear down evil and uphold the right—including withdrawing fellowship from the disorderly—people will respect the church, and they will be willing to listen to the truth (Mat. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 The. 3:6;).

Following the death of king Asa, his son, Jehoshaphat, came to the throne of Judah. This favorable comment is recorded concerning him: “And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the LORD: moreover he took away the high places and groves out of Judah” (2 Chr. 17:6). He, like

his father before him, saw the importance of tearing down the places of pagan worship and the images thereof to please God.

Several years later, following the reign of Ahaziah and the death of his wicked mother, the people of Judah—under the leadership of the priest Jehoida, and with the determination to be the Lord’s people—again made great efforts to tear down evil in Judah: “Then all the people went to the house of Baal, and brake it down, and brake his altars and his images in pieces, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars” (2 Chr. 23:17). They recognized, and rightly so, that God would not be with Judah if the worship of false gods was tolerated among them.

Good king Hezekiah is an example of a leader who sought to restore true worship in the house of the Lord (2 Chr. 29:20-36). Like other wise kings before him, he realized that God could not be truly honored without ridding his people of idolatry:

Now when all this was finished, all Israel that were present went out to the cities of Judah, and brake the images in pieces, and cut down the groves, and threw down the high places and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh, until they had utterly destroyed them all. Then all the children of Israel returned, every man to his possession, into their own cities (2 Chr. 31:1).

Interestingly, this particular effort of tearing down evil was not confined to Judah and Benjamin but it also extended to Ephraim and Manasseh—which formerly had submitted to Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. Hence, when God’s people do right, it increases the opportunity for those who are in error to turn to the truth.

### **THE WORK OF TEARING DOWN EVIL RESULTS IN THE BUILDING OF GOD’S WORK**

The last good king of Judah was Josiah, who came to the throne at the tender age of eight years old. As a result of his determination to seek after the true and living God, sweeping reforms began to take place in the land:

And he did *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined *neither* to the right hand, nor to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images. And they brake down the altars of Baalim in his presence; and the images, that *were* on high above them, he cut down; and the groves,

and the carved images, and the molten images, he brake in pieces, and made dust *of them*, and strowed *it* upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them. And he burnt the bones of the priests upon their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. And *so did he* in the cities of Manasseh, and Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali, with their mattocks round about. And when he had broken down the altars and the groves, and had beaten the graven images into powder, and cut down all the idols throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to Jerusalem.... And Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that *pertained* to the children of Israel, and made all that were present in Israel to serve, *even* to serve the LORD their God. *And* all his days they departed not from following the LORD, the God of their fathers (2 Chr. 34:2-7, 33).

Josiah was obviously determined to thoroughly cleanse Judah of idolatry and every semblance thereof. Yet, he did not stop there; he also sought to destroy evil wherever possible, even in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon, and Naphtali, and in all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel.

One of the great lessons from Josiah is that when we are determined to tear down evil, positive opportunities for God begin to take shape. After destroying idolatry, he set forth to repair the house of the Lord his God. During this process, a great discovery was made: “And when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found a book of the law of the LORD *given* by Moses” (2 Chr. 34:14). As a result, the law of God was read to Josiah and later before all the people. The young king was firm in his resolve that all in Judah would be obedient to God and keep His law. He demanded that all the people show respect for the Word of God and be attentive to the reading thereof:

And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, great and small: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the LORD. And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book. And he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand *to it*. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers (2 Chr. 34:30-32).

Thus, by demonstrating reverence for God and His Law, he is a valuable example for our youth and for all of us today. Young people can

make a difference in the kingdom of God, if they, like young king Josiah, will remember their Creator and be reverent to Him and keep His commandments (Ecc. 12:1, 13-14). Leaders in the church would also do well to take heed to his faith and courage as a true spiritual leader. Truly, God will be with us if we, like Josiah, will fear and obey God and be resolute in destroying evil. It should be obvious that his work in destroying darkness resulted in the spiritual up-building of the people of God. Like Josiah, who beat “the graven images into powder,” may we also be thoroughgoing in our efforts to destroy false doctrine and all evil, beating them “into powder” with the Gospel!

The need to “tear down” is often seen in the local congregation. No, we are not to tear down one another! “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another” (Gal. 5:15). Yet, in many congregations there are a number of unscriptural things that need to be dismantled. Consider a few examples. If elders are not scripturally qualified or if they are upholding things that are unscriptural, the faithful need to work to remove them—not by popular vote but by following the New Testament pattern (1 Tim. 5:19-20; 2 Tim. 1:13). If a preacher or a Bible teacher is teaching error or practicing sin, he needs to be shown the error or his way and to repent (Tit. 3:10-11). Sometimes, it is the case with elders, preachers, teachers, or deacons, that they may repent and remain in their respective positions. The man of God, who goes into congregational situations and finds that there are changes that need to be made, needs to begin prayerfully teaching and working toward the necessary changes being as patient as possible without compromise. This writer moved into a congregation and soon realized that false versions of the Bible were being used in children’s classes and that questionable works were being supported. He accordingly endeavored to help brethren to see the truth on these matters. Another example, which often comes to the forefront are false practices and compromise in youth work. This is the “Achilles’ heel” with many congregations. In one situation where this preacher moved, the church was conducting children’s classes during Lord’s day worship. Gladly, the brethren were willing to eliminate this practice, when it was placed before them. However, some leaders/elders will not listen, especially if one of their family members disagrees with the Truth. Yet, we must do all that we can to save the local church and to insure that she will be sound and faithful in years to come (Eph. 5:23-27). The local work will

never move forward and be built up unless everything that is displeasing to God is eliminated.

In the New Testament, we see the work of tearing down and building which Paul did as an apostle of Jesus Christ. In the great work of turning souls from darkness to light, consider Paul's three-year period in Ephesus (on his third missionary journey). Luke records, concerning the time period in which he disputed daily in the school of one Tyrannus: "And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). Hence, proclaiming the Lord Jesus involved Paul in disputing, which is to argue, to reason with, conversing, and discussing, as the word *dispute* indicates (Vine 175). The implication is that Paul was debating in behalf of the truth as he reasoned with the people of Ephesus and on other occasions (Acts 17:3; 18:4).

These New Testament examples notwithstanding, there are those who insist that there is no place for debate or any controversy whatsoever in the realm of religion. Such an attitude displays an ignorance of the Truth which is by its very nature controversial, and it also manifests an unawareness of the fact that the work of converting souls to Christ involves the tearing down of false ideas and sin in people's lives. The dismantling of false ideas in people's minds is truly the Lord's work, and it involves one in a battle for the minds of men and brings the Christian soldier into direct conflict with the devil himself—who works persistently to destroy souls (1 Pet. 5:8).

As a result of Paul's Gospel preaching in Ephesus, confirmed by the miracles that accompanied it, the following results transpired:

And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed (Acts 19:17-20).

This plainly indicates that Paul's work in the Gospel resulted in tearing down the works of darkness which had formerly characterized the lives of these Ephesians. This tearing down paved the way for them to faithfully follow Christ in the way of salvation. The charge which the Lord had earlier given him, in turning people from darkness to light, is exemplified in this work at Ephesus:

To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me (Acts 26:18).

Without doubt, it is absolutely impossible to build the good, to build up the Lord's work, without tearing down the work of Satan.

Later, around A.D. 60, when Paul addressed a well-established congregation in Ephesus, he wrote:

Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him (Eph. 1:15-17).

Their establishment in the faith was due to his successful work of tearing down the works of darkness among them earlier, through the preaching of the Gospel (Acts 19:8-20).

### **THE SOLDIER OF CHRIST HAS THE POWER TO TEAR DOWN THE STRONGHOLDS OF SATAN**

The words of Paul to the Corinthians establishes the fact that the Christian, with Christ working in him, has the power to tear down the strongholds of Satan:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

In this passage, Paul has in mind his detractors at Corinth and their worldly methods, to whom he referred in verse two: "wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh." Paul declares that the Christian must use the weaponry of God, and not of the world. Brother Lipscomb states:

The spiritual weapons are the only ones the child of God can use, and they, through the power of God that goes with and is in them, are mighty to the overturning of the strongholds of sin. The Christian can lawfully use no other. And God's power to overturn the strongholds of sin cannot go with one using fleshly or carnal weapons. For a Christian to use these is to drive God out of the battle he wages (129).

For an example of the stated principle, when Paul came to Corinth, he did not use worldly means to turn men from darkness to light—in a

city where all sorts of dark works were considered a way of life even in the former lives of his converts (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11). He declared that the power to save men from sin was not by worldly means:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching *was* not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (2:1-5).

It is true, in the age before the completion of the New Testament, signs (miracles) did attend the preaching of the apostles and other Gospel preachers to confirm the Word (Mark 16:15-20; Heb. 2:3-4). Here, Paul refers to the "demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Yet, let it never be forgotten that the purpose of this miraculous power was as a means to an end, with that end being the New Testament. Today, with the completion and confirmation of the New Testament, the miracles have ceased—as God promised that they would (Eph. 4:11-13; 1 Cor. 13:8-10). Today we have the same powerful Gospel that Paul proclaimed in Corinth, and to which he referred (1 Cor. 2:1-5). Indeed, we have all the power that we need to pull down the strongholds of Satan. Of this power Paul was not ashamed: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Indeed, when Paul came to Corinth he had "no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove[d] *them*" (cf. Eph. 5:11). He was able to do this by preaching the Word of God which has the power to reprove all evil, to rebuke and convict those who are involved therein, and bring them to repentance (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 4:1-2; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12; Acts 2:36-38).

Regarding the strongholds which must be pulled down, Albert Barnes observes:

The word here rendered "strongholds" (ὀχυρώματα) means, properly, a fastness, fortress, or strong fortification. It is here beautifully used to denote the various obstacles *resembling* a fortress which exist, and which are designed and adapted to oppose the truth and the triumph of the Christian's cause. All those obstacles are strongly *fortified*. The sins of his heart are fortified by long indulgence, and by the hold which they have on his soul. The wickedness of the world which he opposes is strongly fortified by the fact that it has seized on strong

human passions; that one point strengthens another; that great numbers are united. The idolatry of the world was strongly fortified by prejudice, and long establishment, and the protection of laws, and the power of the priesthood; and the opinions of the world are entrenched behind false philosophy and the power of subtle argumentation. The whole world is fortified against Christianity; and the nations of the earth have been engaged in little else than in raising and strengthening such strongholds for the space of six thousand years. The Christian religion goes forth against all the combined and concentrated powers of resistance of the whole world; and the warfare is to be waged against every strongly fortified place of error and of sin. These strong fortifications of error and of sin are to be battered down and laid in ruins by our spiritual weapons.

With all this being said, God has given the charge to Christians to pull down these strongholds, and to destroy any reasoning, thought, imagination, or contemplation of actions, which would be in opposition to the knowledge of God (2 Cor. 10:3-5). This would apply to false religion, immorality, worldly philosophy, or any other thing which “exalteth itself against the knowledge of God.” It is interesting to note two closely-related terms in this context. The “pulling down” (*kathairesis*), in verse four, refers to destruction, and “casting down” (*kathaireo*), in verse five, means to demolish (Vine).

All these Satanic strongholds notwithstanding, “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17), is equal to the task. Paul declares that his weapons were “mighty through God.” It is vital in tearing down Satan’s work to understand that the weaponry which God provides is “mighty through God—*Greek*, ‘mighty to God,’ that is, mighty before God: not humanly, but divinely powerful” (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown). It is sad today, but there are a number of individuals and congregations who are not satisfied with the weaponry that God has provided. In attempting to do the Lord’s work, they are appealing to other means, such as entertainment, drama, recreational facilities, higher degrees, outward display, sensationalism, sophistry, ear-tickling preaching, and other worldly means. However, the only way the Christian can stand against the wiles of the devil and triumph over the powers of darkness is by putting the whole armor of God and wielding the sword of the Spirit. The Christian must put on: the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:10-17). The Word of God is able to

thoroughly fit and outfit the Christian soldier completely, if he will submit to, and rely upon, the Scripture.

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

It is imperative that the Lord's servant cast down everything in his own life that is in opposition to God's Word, and bring every thought into captivity "to the obedience of Christ." Brother Lipscomb makes this pertinent observation:

This brings out the truth that the lifework of the Christian is to cast down all the imaginations and everything that exalteth itself against the knowledge of Christ and casting these out of his heart; bring every thought of his heart to the obedience of Christ. No heart is actually clean in the sight of God until the very thoughts and feelings and impulses of the heart are brought into subjection to the will of Christ.... The teaching of the word of God is to bring to nought the mere reasonings of the mind, and everything that sets itself up against the revelation of God.... The end sought is to bring every thought of the heart and mind into obedience to Christ, which is a difficult thing to do. Evil thoughts will arise in our minds, excited by fleshly lusts, yet by constant prayer, watchfulness, and persevering effort the very thoughts that spring from the heart can be brought into subjection to the will of Christ. The heart can be so trained that the thoughts that arise in it will be of God, of our duties and obligations to him, and of the high and exalted privileges and blessings that are bestowed on us as his children (130-31).

Of a certainty, the Christian must have confidence in the fact that Christ and His power is greater than Satan and the power of darkness. It is through Christ and His blood that God delivers man "from the power of darkness" and translates him "into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13-14). In answer to the charge that He cast out demons by Beelzebub, Jesus described Himself as "stronger than he" (the devil), in the illustration of the strong man and his palace:

But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth (Luke 11:20-23; cf. Mat. 12:28-30; Mark 3:27).

The fact is, Jesus demonstrated His power over Satan and the spirit world on many occasions, one of which was by casting out demons. Moreover, by His redemptive work He destroyed the devil and conquered death, and He provided the means for remitting sin (Heb. 2:14-15; John 12:31-33; Mat. 26:28; Eph. 1:7). Indeed, because Christ (Who lives in the Christian) is greater than Satan (who is in the world) Christians have the power to overcome: “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

In the afore mentioned illustration by Jesus, He represented the devil’s undisturbed powers and subjects as “goods in peace,” but One stronger than he came and disturbed this “peace” (Luke 11:21-22).

The reasoning here is clear and forceable. So long as Satan, the strong man armed kept his palace and no mightier foe assailed him, he had things his own way and his household goods were undisturbed; but when the Son of God came down upon him with far mightier forces, he wrests from him his old weapons and quickly divides his spoils (Boles 235).

Jesus Christ came and disrupted the devil’s dominion, and tore down His work. In bearing the sin of many, Jesus has rescued souls from the clutch of the devil and divided “the spoil,” as Isaiah predicted:

Therefore will I divide him *a portion* with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (53:12).

The Son of God has paved the way that henceforth His faithful followers might continue the great work of tearing down the bastions of Satan and building up the work of God! However, let us not think for a moment that such efforts will not be met with fierce opposition from our adversary, as seen when Paul and His colleagues in the Gospel were accused of “turn[ing] the world upside down” (Acts 17:1-7). “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12).

### **TEARING DOWN EVIL IS FOR THE ULTIMATE GOOD OF THE CHURCH AND FOR ALL PEOPLE**

God’s ultimate purpose in tearing down is for His glory and for the spiritual good of mankind. In Jeremiah’s case, the purification of God’s people and the judgment of the nations would result in the glorification of God, and the salvation of souls. God’s commission to Jeremiah was

“to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant” (Jer. 1:10). Albert Barnes well states:

There are four words of destruction, and but two words of restoration, as if the message were chiefly of evil. And such was Jeremiah’s message to his contemporaries. Yet are all God’s dealings finally for the good of His people. The Babylonian exile was, for the moment, a time of chastisement; it also became a time of national repentance (see Jer. 24:5-7).

God had set His eyes upon His people whom He chastened for good. Although His plan was to establish them in their land again, after the Babylonian captivity, it is clear that His utmost desire was their wholehearted return to Him and coming to know Him, as Jeremiah declares:

Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for *their* good. For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull *them* down; and I will plant them, and not pluck *them* up. And I will give them an heart to know me, that I *am* the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart (24:5-7).

Although not all in Judah repented, there were a number who did, and this made all the Divine chastening worthwhile, even as today when God chastens His children and they repent (Heb. 12:5-11). Later, Jehovah God expressed the fact that the tearing down was to build and to plant:

And it shall come to pass, *that* like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the LORD (Jer. 31:28).

God’s all-wise oversight allowed that all who would return to Him could do so. The fact that God’s work of uprooting is good for His people is often repeated in His God’s dealings with the New Testament church. In purging the church in Jerusalem of the married couple who had lied to the Holy Spirit, He could see the horrible consequences upon His church overall if such an action had gone unchecked (Acts 5:1-14). In like manner, when Paul commanded the Corinthians concerning the incestuous brother: “To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus,” he desired the repentance of the fallen brother, but He

was also concerned with the leavening influence of the unrepentant brother upon the body of Christ (1 Cor. 5:1-13). When Jesus rebuked the churches at Pergamos and at Thyatira for permitting evil in the church, He demanded the repentance of the guilty and that the faithful take the proper action (Rev. 2:12-29). He was doing this for the good of the church and to save souls from eternal hell! Many other examples of tearing down to save and to build could be given, but the point is clear: Tearing down evil is for the ultimate good.

Those who love God, Christ, the truth, and the church today are those who have the courage to rebuke, correct, reprove, and root up evil. Albeit, there are those who will accuse us of lacking love in so doing. When Paul penned his stern rebuke and warning to the Galatians, he asked: "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16). Surely, none would be so foolish as to think that he was their enemy for rebuking them! Yet, some of them were foolish: "O foolish Galatians" (Gal. 3:1). The work of tearing down is not an easy work, but if we love Christ and the souls for which He died, we will be willing to unsheathe sword of the Spirit and tear down, uproot, pluck up, root out, pull down, and destroy evil when it rears its ugly head!

### **VARIOUS EXAMPLES OF WHERE TEARING DOWN NEEDS TO BE DONE TODAY**

The work of tearing down will involve the faithful in destroying evil wherever it may be found, including: destroying false ideas and the love of sin within people's hearts and minds, refuting false teaching and sinful activities in the local church, opposing unscriptural movements and false teachers in the brotherhood, withstanding ungodly philosophies of this world, striving to destroy worldliness and immorality in people's lives, and opposing and exposing powerful and unscriptural organizations.

Again, the Word of God has the power to tear down Satan's fortifications, whether in the heart, in the brotherhood, or as a movement among men! "*Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?*" (Jer. 23:29). In connection with casting down anything that would exalt itself "against the knowledge of God," consider Paul's warning to the church at Colossae: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after

Christ” (Col. 2:8; cf. 2 Cor. 10:5). The work of the Gospel verily involves tearing down evil in the heart and mind of man. Let us now consider a few examples of how the Scriptures will destroy any sin or sinful philosophy within the heart, mind, and life of man:

1. The consequence of lust and the love of sin is not equal to the pain of eternal hell fire. It would be far less painful to sever a bodily member than to lose one’s soul in hell (Mat. 5:27-30; Mark 9:42-48; 2 Tim. 3:4). Thus, the teaching of Christ should destroy the **love of sinful pleasure** in one’s life.

2. The teaching of the New Testament should forever destroy the evil philosophy of **evolution** in one’s mind. Jesus confirmed the Genesis account of creation, including the twenty-four hour days (Mark 10:5-9). God made Adam and Eve on the sixth day (Gen. 1:24-31). Now, the theistic evolutionist demands eons of time before the creation of Adam and Eve on the sixth day, but Jesus said: “But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female” (Mark 10:6). On various occasions, Jesus confirmed the inspiration of Moses and his authority as a lawgiver (Mat. 8:4; Mark 7:10; 12:26; Luke 5:14; 24:44). To deny the veracity of the Genesis account of creation and the inspiration of Moses is to say that Jesus was mistaken. This, in turn, is to deny the fact that Jesus was omniscient (all-knowing), and hence, it is to deny His Deity. Thus, one cannot be a Christian and an evolutionist at the same time!

3. The teaching and example of Jesus Christ on self-denial and submission to the will of God should destroy **humanism** within the heart—which teaches that man is the measure of all things (Luke 9:23; Mat. 7:21; 26:39-44; John 6:38). The Gospel teaches that Christ is the Central One to look to and not man. His Word is the standard, and not man’s (John 14:6; Rom. 1:16; Phi. 3:16).

4. The Lord’s teaching on covetousness and warning against the love of riches should destroy covetousness and the sin of **materialism** in one’s life (Luke 12:15-21; Mat. 19:16-22; 6:19-21, 33).

5. Moreover, the fact that God’s Word is eternal and the unchanging standard by which we will one day be judged is devastating to the worldly philosophy of **relativism** (1 Pet. 1:23-25; Rom. 2:16; John 12:48; 2 John 2). The fact that the truth exists destroys this fatal philosophy (1 Tim. 2:4).

6. Furthermore, Jesus wiped out the **modern-day church growth movement**, which ignores biblical principles to swell numbers

and is pragmatic in nature. If He had been a **pragmatist**, he would have kept the numbers coming by continuing to feed them with loaves and fishes, but instead He presented teaching with which many were offended and turned back to walk no more with Him (John 6:22-71).

7. Moreover, all **false religion, including denominationalism**, is subject to destruction by the Word of God. God condemns a multiplicity of religions bodies (Eph. 4:4). His Word is opposed to division and diversity of doctrines (1 Cor. 1:10). Christ is totally against the doctrines of men and will worship (Mat. 15:7-9; Tit. 1:14; Col. 2:23). He is opposed to the exaltation of man and religious titles (Mat. 23:8-10). Jesus Christ, not men, has all authority in heaven and on earth (Mat. 28:18). To recognize any other as Lord, or any doctrine but Christ's, is to be an enemy of Jesus Christ (2 John 9; John 14:6; Mat. 12:30). One day all those things which are not of God "shall be rooted up" (Mat. 15:13).

**Here are some things that need to be torn down and destroyed today, because they are without the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, they are outside of His doctrine, and they are sinful (Mat. 28:18; Col. 3:17; 2 John 9):** schools or colleges which no longer uphold the Word of Christ, publications and books which teach error or compromise, bookstores which foment false doctrine, the spirit of compromise, politics, respecter of persons, liberalism, anti-ism, egotism, para-church organizations, strife, sinful division, slander, backbiting, adulterous marriages, fornication, lasciviousness, dancing, social drinking and all drunkenness, mixed swimming and immodest apparel, putting schools on equality with the church, exaltation of schools over the church, exaltation of school professors ("Ph.D.s" and administrators over Gospel preachers, elders, and other members of the body of Christ), false Bible versions, drama, unscriptural youth programs, the leadership of women in the church, humming and instrumental sounds instead of singing, singing during the Lord's Supper, unity meetings with denominations, following men and their writings over the Bible, the idea that the Scriptures are not all-sufficient and that a direct operation of the Spirit is necessary, the divided assembly, unscriptural singing groups, unscriptural organizations, pragmatism, evolution, humanism, lukewarmness, modernism, instrumental music in worship, abuses of the Lord's Supper, and all false doctrines!

**Here are some things which needed to be built up in our minds and emphasized in our hearts, because they are scriptural and**

**according to the doctrine and authority of Jesus Christ (Mat. 28:18; Col. 3:17; 2 John 9):** the church is the fullness of Christ; the doctrine of the one church of Christ; the verbal and plenary inspiration of the Bible; the teaching of Christ on marriage, divorce, and remarriage; the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures; the glory of the local church; the glory of Gospel preaching; the authority of elders; evangelistic zeal; opposition of error; church discipline; sermons filled with Scripture (from sound and accurate Bible translations); fervent love from the heart; restoring the erring; benevolent works by the local church; daily Bible study; earnest prayer; respect for sound preachers and elders (not disdain); sacrifice for Christ; training of preachers, teachers, elders, deacons, and personal workers; respect for parents; caring for our elderly; godly homes; love of the truth and hating every false way; exalting the name of Jesus Christ and the church of Christ; debating and contending for the truth; mothers who are “keepers at home”; the sanctity of life; good works and glorifying the heavenly Father; godly living; stand against all sin and for the right; true Worship; fear of God; love of God first; and all righteousness and truth.

Let us be involved in the lifelong work of tearing down evil and building the good! If we will hate evil and love righteousness, like Christ, and accordingly live godly lives of obedience to God, we will be found pleasing to Him in the Judgment (Heb. 1:9; 5:8-9; Rom. 12:9; Tit. 2:11-12; John 14:15; Mat. 6:33). However, if we tolerate evil and fail to tear it down, and do not build up God’s work, then we will be rejected of God in that day (Jam. 1:22; 4:17; Mat. 7:21-23; 2 The. 1:7-9; John 14:21-24). As Jesus taught: **“Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up”** (Mat. 15:13).

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# BUILDING ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN

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Ken has preached in a number of states as well as having done mission work in England (1968-1972 and 1985-1992) and Canada (1974-1977). He has preached in Gospel meetings and spoken on numerous brotherhood lectureships. He served as a part-time instructor at the "West Virginia School of Preaching," editor of *Old Paths* magazine (primarily distributed in Great Britain), and has had articles published in various brotherhood publications. Since returning from England in 1992, each year he has made mission trips to England along with a mission trip to India. Since the beginning of the year 2000, he has served as evangelist with the Belvedere Church of Christ in South Carolina.

## INTRODUCTION

This author believes this to be a vital topic for at least two reasons. First was the fact that so many brethren seem to have lost, to one degree or another, the biblical understanding of building according to the pattern. Some seem content to work towards a union with the Christian Church, not on a basis of their giving up error, but rather some are willing to give up the biblical ground upon which brethren had previously stood and thus now accepting the very things whose introduction into the work and worship of the church caused the departure of many over a hundred years ago.

Second, having come out of the Christian Church myself some thirty years ago because of its digression, this writer can speak as one who, for a time, was "on the other side of the divide." Having seen that digression for what it was, and is (for that digression has deepened over the years even among those that are referred to as the Independent Christian Church), it grieves my heart to see many brethren turn from the pattern revealed in the Word of God and some even decrying the very idea of a pattern, teaching that there is no such thing as "pattern theology." Furthermore, digression is not confined to those that we have correctly referred to as being *liberals* but even among those who

have been considered *conservative* or *sound* some are moving away from the pattern that has been revealed. Sadly, this scribe believes that such has come about, in many instances, because of a failure of some to teach how one establishes biblical authority. This preacher has labored in a number of congregations and found that, often, even though they would have considered themselves to be *sound* and they were practicing “sound doctrine,” many could not show how to establish biblical authority for what they believed and practiced. In the following pages, let us see what is necessary to “build according to the pattern” and also show how brethren have, and are, departing from that pattern—even some whom many have considered to be *sound*.

## IS THERE A PATTERN OR BLUEPRINT?

### There Is a Pattern

In everyday life, we see the need for a pattern or blueprint being followed that one might attain the desired result. My wife, Linda, is always “making something” (I do not know how much she has spent on the various materials that she has used for things for our home and gifts for family and friends, but I can assure you that it is far less than it would have been had she not used her talents in this way). She does crocheting, sewing, and machine embroidery. All of these require a pattern to be followed to get the correct result. Many times she has had to undo her work because she had, inadvertently, failed to follow the pattern (too many or too few stitches, wrong size, etc.). Had she not undone her work, she would not have come up with the desired result. Carpenters and builders need to have blueprints to build the desired object or building. If they fail to follow the blueprint, they do not make the desired object or build the desired building. If a seamstress makes several dresses according to a pattern, without changes or alterations, they would be identical. A builder constructing several houses and following the same blueprint, without making any changes, would build identical houses.

The writer of the Hebrews letter penned the following words that were inspired by the Holy Spirit:

Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, *that* thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount (Heb. 8:5).

This passage teaches that there is a pattern for the work of the people of God. Indeed a pattern has always played a vital role in man's religious service to God. In years gone by it would have been considered an "article of faith" among Christians. However, for a number of years men have arisen who have ridiculed the contention that there is a pattern for work and worship in the church. They claim that there is no pattern found in the New Testament for the church. They will criticize the concept of following a pattern in spiritual matters claiming that it makes Christianity ritualistic and binds the Christian to tradition. Some claim that it violates our "Freedom of Religion." However, man cannot be left to himself to decide what to do in matters of religion for when left to himself, man ultimately chooses the wrong way (Jer. 10:23; Pro. 14:12). A number of years ago, Goebel Music penned *Behold The Pattern* in an effort to answer the contention of the liberals among us who claimed there was no pattern.

### What Does the Bible Say Concerning the Pattern?

In studying the Old Testament it is clear that it declares a pattern for the work of God's people. Let us note some verses that explicitly teach the concept of a pattern. First, two verses from the book of Exodus. "According to all that I shewed thee, *after* the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make *it*" (25:9). "And look that thou make *them* after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount" (25:40). Both these verses use the same Hebrew word for *pattern* (*tabniyth* from the root word *banah*) that *Strong* defines as: "*structure; by impl. a model, resemblance:—figure, form, likeness, pattern, similitude*" (122).

In Numbers 8:4 we read:

And this work of the candlestick *was of* beaten gold, unto the shaft thereof, unto the flowers thereof, *was* beaten work: according unto the pattern which the LORD had shewed Moses, so he made the candlestick.

Here pattern (*mareh*) is defined:

a *view* (the act of seeing); also an *appearance* (the thing seen), whether (real) a *shape* (espec. If handsome, *comeliness*; often plur. *The looks*), or mental) a *vision*:—X apparently, appearance (-reth) X as soon as beautiful (-ly), countenance, fair, favoured, form, goodly, to look (up) on (to), look [-eth], pattern, to see, seem, sight, visage, vision (*Strong* 72).

We read in Joshua 22:28:

Therefore said we, that it shall be, when they should *so* say to us or to our generations in time to come, that we may say *again*, Behold the pattern of the altar of the LORD, which our fathers made, not for burnt offerings, nor for sacrifices; but it *is* a witness between us and you.

Here the Hebrew word is the same as that used in the passages from Exodus.

### **Pattern Concepts in the Old Testament**

First consider Noah in the building of the ark (Gen. 6:13-16). God gave specific details to Noah. The ark was to be constructed using gopher wood, having rooms in it, and being sealed with pitch “within and without.” The exact measurements are given (three hundred cubits long, fifty wide and thirty high) with a single window, a single door, and three stories high. The instructions were exact, clear, and constituted a pattern or blueprint that Noah was to use in building the ark. Some might quibble that we do not know what gopher wood was or the exact measurement of a cubit, but we can be certain that Noah did. As a result we read, “Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he” (Gen. 6:22).

In Exodus 25 and following, God instructed Moses with respect to the building of the tabernacle. Remember that, as quoted above (25:9, 40), we see that Moses was reminded that it was to be built according to the pattern that had been shown to him in the mount. In Exodus 25:1-9 we see that certain offerings were to be made for the construction of the tabernacle, and instruction was given concerning even the colors of the materials to be used. Then the exact detail concerning the construction of the ark of the covenant were given (25:10-22) with gold and shittim wood to be used as well as the exact details concerning the cherubim that were to be placed on top of the Ark. Then, beginning with verse 23 and continuing in the next chapters, we read exact instructions concerning the table for the showbread, the candlestick, and all the other utensils and parts of the tabernacle, as well as the garments for the priest.

In Joshua 6, God instructs Joshua how the children of Israel were to take Jericho. The men of war were to march around the city once a day for six days while seven priests carried the ark around the city. On the seventh day, the men of war and the seven priests with the ark were to march around the city seven times and then the priests were to blow a long blast on their rams horns. Verse 20 informs us that all things were done according to the pattern that was revealed. What happened? The

city walls fell flat, just as God had promised. Would that have occurred if the children of Israel had not heeded the instructions that Joshua gave to them as they had been revealed to him by God? We know they would not have fallen.

### Pattern Concepts in the New Testament

The New Testament is a better covenant established on better promises. When we examine it, we observe a pattern or blueprint for God's people today. One Greek word that we need to consider in this regard is *tupos*. Vine defines it:

primarily denoted "a blow" (from a root *tup*—seen also in *tupto*, "to strike"), hence, (a) an impression, the mark of a "blow," John 20:25; (b) the "impress" of a seal, the stamp made by a die, a figure, image, Acts 7:43; (c) a "form" or mold, Rom. 6:17 (see RV); (d) the sense or substance of a letter, Acts 23:25; (e) "an ensample." Pattern, Acts 7:44; Heb. 8:5, "pattern"; in an ethical sense, 1 Cor. 10:6; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:7; 2 Thess. 3:9; 1 Tim. 4:12, RV, "ensample"; Titus 2:7 RV, "ensample," for KJV "pattern"; 1 Pet. 5:3; in a doctrinal sense, a type, Rom. 5:14 (202).

From its definition, we can see that it denotes an exact image to be copied, an exact model to be imitated, an example that would serve as a warning, and a pattern to be copied. Let us notice how it is translated into English.

In some verses it is translated *example* or *ensample(s)*:

Now these things were our **examples**, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted (1 Cor. 10:6).

Now all these things happened unto them for **ensamples**: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come (1 Cor. 10:11).

Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an **ensample** (Phi. 3:17).

So that ye were **ensamples** to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia (1 The. 1:7).

Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an **ensample** unto you to follow us (2 The. 3:9).

Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an **example** of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity (1 Tim. 4:12).

Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being **ensamples** to the flock (1 Pet. 5:3).

Notice these other ways in which it is translated:

Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the **figure** of him that was to come (Rom. 5:14).

But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that **form** of doctrine which was delivered you (Rom. 6:17).

Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the **fashion** that he had seen (Acts 7:44).

Finally, we note that it is also translated *pattern*.

In all things shewing thyself a **pattern** of good works: in doctrine *shewing* uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity (Tit. 2:7).

Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, *that* thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount (Heb. 8:5).

Another Greek word that we need to consider that is used in the New Testament is *hupodeigma*. Vine defines this word:

lit. "that which is shown" (from *hupo*, "under," and *deiknumi*, "to show"), hence, (a) "a figure, copy," Heb. 8:5, RV, "copy," for KJV "example"; 9:23; (b) "an example," whether for imitation, John 13:15; Jas. 5:10, or for warning, Heb. 4:11; 2 Pet. 2:6, RV, "example" (202).

It is translated in the KJV four times as example, one time as pattern, and one time as ensample:

For I have given you an **example**, that ye should do as I have done to you (John 13:15).

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same **example** of unbelief (Heb. 4:11).

Who serve unto the **example** and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, *that* thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount (Heb. 8:5).

Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an **example** of suffering affliction, and of patience (Jam. 5:10).

And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned *them* with an overthrow, making *them* an **ensample** unto those that after should live ungodly (2 Pet. 2:6).

*It was* therefore necessary that the **patterns** of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these (Heb. 9:23).

There are also other passages in the New Testament that teach that there is a pattern or blueprint to be followed if one is to be pleasing to God.

First, Christians are duty bound to pass on the Truth that the apostles received from Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen (Mat. 28:18-20).

We note that the apostles were commanded to teach what Jesus taught them to those who became disciples and those disciples, in turn, were to do the same thing. The apostle Paul, by inspiration, wrote, “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). Let us note there were things (truths) that Paul had taught to Timothy which Timothy was required to pass on to others. Both of these passages teach that there are truths that the apostles had received and these same truths were to be taught to the next generation of disciples.

Also, we are taught that Christians are not to look to the words of men over the words delivered from God.

And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think *of men* above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another (1 Cor. 4:6).

If the Corinthian brethren were not, and, indeed, Christians today are not, to think of the words of men above that which is written by Paul and other inspired men, then the Bible teaches that the doctrine being taught (which doctrine is binding) is more important than the ones doing the teaching.

Furthermore, Christians will be judged by the words of Christ: “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). If the words of Christ are to judge us, then it follows that there are particular things that are binding.

Again, Christians are to neither go beyond nor change the truth of God’s Word.

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book (Rev. 22:18-19).

This last passage speaks specifically about Revelation and in general about all inspired Words, that we cannot either add to or take away from the Word. If there is no pattern, then how could we be commanded to not add or take away from the Word? John teaches that we will not have the blessings of God if we do not abide in the doctrine of Christ in 2 John 9-11. If there is no pattern, there is no doctrine to in which we are to abide.

### THE PATTERN TO BE FOLLOWED

There is a pattern that Christians are to follow in different aspects of their lives so they might be pleasing to Almighty God. Let us look at the characteristics of this pattern—specifically how it applies to the church. The apostle Peter wrote:

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue (2 Pet. 1:2-3).

Further, the apostle Paul wrote:

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Both of these passages make it clear that Scripture comes from Deity, thus indicating that it is authoritative. Authority has to do with the matter of power and jurisdiction. In everyday life we recognize and understand the concept and importance of authority and the rule of law. When such breaks down, we see the misery, strife, and chaos that it brings. That Deity has authority is assumed in the fact that God is our Creator and thus has such power and jurisdiction over us; therefore, the

Bible does not spend a great deal of time in an effort to prove that He has that authority. The fact that He made us means He has power and jurisdiction over us. He has the right to tell us what to do and what not to do; He expects us to do it, and will punish us if we fail.

Matthew writes: “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (28:18). This clearly shows that all authority has been bestowed on Him. The writers of the New Testament, as the writers of the Old, wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit. Thus, the New Testament Scripture is an authoritative document, an authoritative pattern. Peter tells us that Deity has given to us “all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3) and Paul tell us that all Scripture has been given that “the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:17). Clearly, then, the authoritative pattern that we have received is perfect or complete, providing us with all that we need to do every good work. It is better than anything that man could provide (Isa. 55:8-9) and needs no corrections or additions (Rev. 2:18-19). No amendments or codicils need to be added in the way of creeds and books of discipline or new revelation. Thus, we are to be content with its completeness and follow its Divine and authoritative pattern.

Let us note one area of the pattern that God has revealed—that which concerns the church that Jesus established. In studying the New Testament, we see that there is a pattern that is revealed with respect to the name, the organization, the work, and the worship of that church. God has given a pattern for the name of the followers of Christ (Christian— Acts 11:26) and for the church (church of Christ—Rom. 16:16). Thus, the revealed pattern does not allow for other followers of Christ or churches to be named after men, doctrines, etc. The church has but one foundation, Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11; Mat. 16:18); thus it cannot be built upon men or on doctrines of men. The law of the church is revealed in Scripture (1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). There is only one way of entry into the church—through baptism (immersion) into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38, 47; Gal. 3:26-27). The pattern is revealed for the organization of the church: local congregations with their own bishops (elders) and deacons (Acts 14:23; Phi. 1:1; Eph. 4:11). No provision is made for any organization beyond the local congregation, and thus there is no authorized pattern for synods and denominational bodies to have jurisdiction over certain churches. The worship of the church is also regulated by God’s pattern (Acts 2:42;

Eph. 5:19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; etc.). That pattern authorizes worship on the first day of the week that consists of prayer, singing, giving, preaching of the Word, and the partaking of the Lord's Supper. Partaking of the Lord's Supper on any other day of the week or using instrumental music to accompany the singing are not found within the revealed pattern. Regarding the work or mission of the church, a pattern is given that limits the church to evangelism (Mat. 28:18-20), edification (Eph. 4:16), and benevolence (Jam. 1:27). This work, is to be done through the local congregation; there is no pattern given to conduct the work of the church through missionary and benevolent societies separate and apart from the local congregation.

### **DO WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO CHANGE THE DIVINE PATTERN?**

When we look at the Word of God, we see that God did not allow Moses to build the tabernacle of his choice. He did not tell him to do as he pleased in its construction so long as it made him feel good. He did not tell Moses that it did not matter how he carried out the commands of God so long as he was sincere and that it was all done in love. Today, man wants a *tabernacle* that meets the "felt needs" of the people rather than that which is in harmony with the will of the heavenly Father. Indeed, Deity did not, through inspiration, teach that it was permissible to "choose the church your choice." Further, Deity did not tell people, "If it feels good, do it," or that being sincere is all that is necessary, and so long as one has love, the details are unimportant. Yet, men and women seem to think that they are free to do as they please and have churches that meet the supposed needs of the people. Truly, the Word of God teaches that the New Testament is indeed the pattern for the church and that it alone makes Christians only and the only Christians.

Let us look at the example of the tabernacle that God commanded Moses to build for the worship of God's people under the Old Covenant. Could Moses have moved the laver inside the tabernacle and it have been "according to the pattern"? Could he have had the altar of incense in the outer court and it have been "according to the pattern"? Could he have moved the brazen altar into the holy place and it have been "according to the pattern"? Could the laver and the table of showbread have been removed entirely and the tabernacle stayed "according to the pattern"? Could one, other than the High Priest, have gone into

the holy of holies on behalf of the people and it have been “according to the pattern”?

According to the Scriptures, the laver was for washing prior to the priests entering the holy place; to move it inside the holy place would mean that the priests would enter the holy place without having been cleansed. Baptism is the washing (Acts 22:16) that one undergoes before going into the holy place (the church—the place where Christians are found, all being priests unto God—1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6). Those who would teach that one becomes a Christian and then is baptized are not following the divine pattern. The altar of incense is spoken of as being the prayers of the saints (Rev. 5:8). Prayer is the blessing and privilege of those who have been saved from sin, not sinners outside of the church (John 9:31). The brazen altar is where the sacrifices were offered and figure the sacrifice of Christ our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 9:14, 22, 26, 28). To move the sacrifice into the church, in the form of the Roman Catholic mass, is contrary to the pattern that has been revealed. We have already seen that the laver is representative of baptism into Christ, and, although it is not specifically stated, it is clear that the table of shewbread would represent the Lord’s Supper. Some, such as the Salvation Army, would remove the requirement of baptism and the obligation for Christians of partaking of the Lord’s Supper, such actions would not be in harmony with the pattern.

The High Priest under the Old Testament clearly pictured the Christ who is our High Priest (Heb. 3:1; 9:11; 10:21). Only the High Priest was able to enter the holy of holies with the sacrifices to cleanse from sin. Christ is the only Savior and He has entered into heaven with the blood of His sacrifice (Heb. 9:11-15). None other can offer sacrifice to God under the New Covenant and be “according to the pattern.” Hence, the Roman Catholic priest who presumes to offer the “sacrifice of the mass” acts presumptuously and without divine authority. Further, under the picture of the tabernacle, there is no mention of instrumental music being used in the worship. When it is mentioned, it is only mentioned as being in that part of the temple known as the outer court. The instruments were played by the Levites, while only the priests blew the trumpets (2 Chr. 29:25-28). There is no record of the trumpets or any other instruments being taken by the priests into the holy place that is a picture of the church wherein only the priests could go (Heb. 9:6-7). To have brought such into the holy place would not have been “according to the pattern.” Thus, can instrumental music be used in the

church today and worship be “according to the pattern”? Indeed, none of the Scriptures that mention Christian praise to God have any reference to the use of instrumental music. Christians have been given the pattern to sing.

Yet, today, we have elders, preachers, and others who see no problem in deviating from the pattern that has been revealed in the New Testament. It seems that many are unwilling to heed the warnings in God’s Word nor to learn from history in seeing what happened over one hundred years ago that led to the beginning of the Christian Church. What became the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has completely given up on any pretense of following the New Testament pattern with its complete denominational structure. Others, still claimed to follow the New Testament, and as a result, today we have what are referred to as the Independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ (Instrumental). There are those “among us” (and I say that very loosely as they have, by their own teaching and practice have departed from the pattern) who advocate unity with those of the Independent Christian Church without there needing to be repentance for departing from the pattern; some actually encourage those of the Independent Christian Church to continue in their departures from the pattern. Is it any wonder that there are those that advocate such when they themselves have departed from the pattern?

### **SOME EXAMPLES OF DEPARTURE FROM THE PATTERN**

Over the last thirty years we have seen many departures from the pattern as brethren abandoned the Truth of God for the doctrines and commandments of men. Many of these have been well-documented. Here we will note just a few examples of what is now occurring in departing from the pattern as it relates to the two matters that are identical with those that brought about the establishment of the Christian Church: the matter of instrumental music in worship, and the use of societies to do the work of the church. This author renounced these departures from the pattern when coming out of the Associated Churches of Christ in Australia, but over the last couple of decades or so brethren have been drifting into practices that are departures from the New Testament pattern.

### Instrumental Music

With respect to the matter of instrumental music in the worship and missionary societies, we see those who are willing to fellowship the Independent Christian Church and indeed unite with them without those of the Independent Christian Church renouncing these errors. This was clearly seen in the many efforts that were put forth towards such *unity* in 2006, marking 100 years from the time the United States government census recognized the existence of a separate body. Among these were the meetings held at Abilene Christian (so-called!) University during the 88<sup>th</sup> Bible Lectureship in February 2006 and also the grand *show* at the North American Christian Convention of the Independent Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky in June 2006. Let us note some quotes from some who participated in this so-called *unity* effort as recorded in *The Christian Chronicle* of August 2006:

In an emotional display of love and acceptance, several prominent leaders of a cappella Churches of Christ and instrumental Christian Churches joined Walling and Stone in exchanging personal Bibles. Walling challenged the 6,000 people who packed the Kentucky International Convention Center that night to go home and do the same.

“Are you willing to go home and shape the future of our brotherhood for our children by reaching out because of grace to say, ‘I love you in the name of Jesus Christ, brother?’” Walling asked the crowd. “And if somebody says, ‘Well, he’s a brother in error,’ you tell him, ‘Do we have any other kind?’”

“We are all in error,” Walling added. “That’s why we come every Sunday to say, ‘God, forgive us.’”

Almost everyone in the audience—which convention organizers said included as many as 1,000 members of a cappella congregations—stood and accepted the challenge.

The dramatic exchange of Bibles capped the third, and final, night of the annual non-voting, lectureship-style meeting of Christian Churches. Besides Walling, a cappella leaders who participated in the Bible exchange included ministers Marvin Phillips and Jerry Taylor as well as Abilene Christian University President Royce Money and Rochester College President Mike Westerfield (Ross 1, 29).

Clearly, as far as Walling is concerned, it is already one brotherhood. Note others who were there from what the *Chronicle* describes as “acappella churches.” That same article also records the following:

The session at which Walling spoke mixed instrumental and a cappella hymns as praise teams from the Richland Hills Church of Christ in

Texas and the Southside Christian Church in Orlando, Fla, performed together.

Keith Lancaster from the group Acappella led a non-instrumental rendition of Awesome God, followed by both praise teams singing a modern-day Rock of Ages, accompanied by a piano, drums, electric guitars, a trombone and a trumpet (29).

Clearly, there was no respect for the biblical pattern displayed at this travesty of a “celebration” of “brotherhood”!

In the quote from *The Christian Chronicle*, it mentioned the “praise team” from Richland Hills in Fort Worth “performed” with a “praise team” from the Southside Christian Church in Orlando, Florida. (We do not have the space here to discuss how “praise teams” and performing are not part of the pattern of worship revealed in the New Testament.) Apart from the involvement of the “praise team” with the Independent Christian Church at their convention and the fact that Rick Atchley, “Senior Minister” is a leading proponent of “unity” with the Independent Christian Church, there is other evidence of their compromise with the errors of the Independent Christian Church. The church’s web site reveals that they are involved in supporting a “church planting” of a group known as “BridgeWay Church.” On that church’s web site we read:

BridgeWay Church is a non-denominational community of Christians. Our authority is the Word of God, our Lord is Jesus Christ, and our desire is to share God’s love and message of hope with Flower Mound and surrounding communities.

Also, the web site states: “BridgeWay is affiliated with a fellowship of churches that have roots in the American Restoration movement, including churches of Christ and the independent Christian church.” Thus, Richland Hills is already in full fellowship with the Independent Christian Church.

Therefore, it was no real surprise to learn that the Richland Hills church—an apostate congregation of many years standing—was about to introduce instrumental music into one of its services during February 2007. Under the headline “Nation’s largest congregation adding instrumental service,” *The Christian Chronicle* of January 2007 writes concerning the decision of that congregation to begin an additional service on Saturday night that would include the Lord’s Supper as well as using instrumental music (again, we do not have the space to discuss serving the Lord’s Supper on a Saturday evening being a violation of the Divine pattern). On Richland Hills’ web site it is now stated: “Wor-

ship Assemblies: Sunday (Acappella Worship) 8:00 AM and 10:45 AM  
Beginning Saturday, February 10, 2007 Instrumental Worship - 5:00  
PM” (“Worship”).

Note what Rick Atchley stated as reported by the *Chronicle*.

Senior minister Rick Atchley—a national leader in efforts to foster better relations with instrumental Christian Churches—told the congregation the decision should help ease crowding at Richland Hills’ two Sunday morning services. Moreover, he said, it will allow the congregation to “reach more people who need Christ” (Ross “Nation’s” 3).

Note part of the reasoning of Atchley, he “told the congregation the decision should help ease crowding at Richland Hills’ two Sunday morning services.” Moreover, he said, it will allow the congregation to “reach more people who need Christ.” Well, there is a good scriptural reason for abandoning the New Testament pattern, “ease crowding”! It may “reach more people who need Christ,” but will it enable them to be converted to Christ?

Again, the *Chronicle* reports what Atchley stated:

“We didn’t make this decision on a Tuesday and announce it on a Sunday,” Atchley said in the adult Bible study, citing much study, prayer and fasting by the elders. “This has been part of about a three-year journey that the leadership has been on.”

We wonder how much true “Bible study” went into making this decision for it is clear that the journey that the leadership has been on has been one to lead the congregation further into the wilderness of sin!

Quoting Atchley again, the *Chronicle* writes:

“I greatly appreciate a cappella praise,” Atchley told Richland Hills members. “There is no intention of this leadership to force anyone to worship any other way if that is their choice.... But I firmly believe that if Richland Hills is to be most faithful to God’s word and Christ’s mission, we must become a both/and church with regard to instrumental and a cappella praise” (8).

So, there we have it, according to Atchley, the use or non-use of instrumental music is a matter of “choice”! Atchley has pontificated, and we are therefore free to chose to not follow the Divine pattern of worship. Where in the Scriptures is it taught that the church is to be a “both/and church” with regards to the matter of worship? It is interesting to note that, during the presentation that he made to the church in the Bible Study, he stated:

about 1994 the Holy Spirit said to me in the middle of my sermon, that's what you and all the preachers like you are doing who haven't for years believed that the worship of God with instruments is wrong but you, by your silence, let people think it's wrong, to allow the body to be disrupted and do so under the plea, "We're just maintaining peace. But that's not peace, it's cowardice." I knew then that the day would come I would have to teach this lesson.

Not only is Atchley pontificating, he claims he is doing so because he received a *revelation* from the Holy Spirit who "spoke" to him. It is strange that he waited about twelve years to make known this *revelation* from the Spirit—such **cowardice!** When one claims extra revelation from the Spirit, he can teach whatever he desires claiming that the Spirit taught him. Clearly, Rick Atchley has more problems than simply denying the New Testament pattern and seeking to lead others astray with that false teaching.

Since the church is to have communion with their instrumental service on Saturday night, they are also a "both/and church" when it comes to when the Lord's Supper is to be partaken. It makes one wonder how long it will be before they become a "both/and church" with respect to the Bible pattern for church membership and they start accepting the "pious unimmersed." When one starts down the "slippery slope," it is downhill all the way. Look at where the Christian Church (Disciples) is now—and it started by trying to be a "both/and church" with respect to the instrument and the missionary society. Even the Independent Christian Church has many that do not believe or practice baptism for the remission of sins, it having become a "both/and" situation in many places. Such is lamented in *The Restoration Herald*, a magazine of note among the Independent Christian Churches.

However, Richland Hills is not alone in introducing instrumental music into the worship. The *Chronicle* continues, in that same article, stating:

A growing but still small number of Churches of Christ nationwide host instrumental praise gatherings outside of regular worship services where the Lord's Supper is offered. A few congregations—including the 1,700-member Farmers Branch, Texas, church—have added instrumental services with communion. But Richland Hills is, by far, the largest and most influential congregation to do so (8).

### **Missionary and Benevolent Societies**

Today, there have grown up among those who claim to be following the New Testament pattern a number of what are often termed "para-

church” organizations that are nothing more than missionary and benevolent societies to do the work of the church that violate the pattern that God has set forth in His Word.

The best known of these is “The Churches Of Christ Disaster Relief Effort, Inc.” This organization was formed in 1990 in Nashville, Tennessee, by the authority of men. It operates with a board of directors of and an advisory board. They describe themselves, on their web site:

We are a non-profit corporation, tax-exempt - state taxes and federal income tax under section 501(a) of the Internal Revenue Code as an organization described in section 501(c)(3). Only eleven employees are paid in the entire organization. Unpaid volunteers are the secret to success of our organization (“About Us”).

Additionally on that same web page:

The Disaster Relief Effort is voluntarily supported by Churches of Christ, individuals, churches, corporations, and other non-profit agencies nationwide. In 2001, 1041 congregations in 38 states and 2668 individuals or families from 39 states supported us financially. In addition, 37 leading corporations from across the country donated substantial amounts of product (“About Us”).

From their web site, one might get the impression that the church was ineffective in the work of benevolence prior to the establishing of this organization to carry out the work of the church. However, history shows that churches have worked successfully in the past to deal with disasters without the aid of any man-made organization. Although the work of benevolence in which the organization engages is laudable, we need to remember “the end does not justify the means.” Sadly, however, too many brethren today seem to be operating under that principle rather than being guided by a “thus saith the Lord.” This organization even has the gall to use the name “Churches of Christ” in its title in an effort to give it legitimacy among brethren! However, the truth is that the organization is not authorized by the Scriptures to do the work of the church on behalf of the congregations anymore that the missionary and benevolent societies of the Christian Church that were established in the mid to late 1800s to do the work of the church. Churches are not authorized by the Word of God to pay man-made organizations to do their work of evangelism, edification, or benevolence.

The board of directors, through a statement on the web site, state:

**We purpose** in all things to bring glory to God in this effort. This is his work. He has blessed it and helped it along. Whatever glory,

attention, praise, or good that has come is from Him and to Him (“Statement”).

How can this be “his work” when they seek to bring glory to God through a man-made organization? Scripture teaches that glory to God is given in the church (Eph. 3:21).

Those who argue for and practice that which violates the Divine pattern blaspheme God and dishonor the Savior, Jesus Christ. They do this by rejecting the covenant of Christ (Heb. 9:15). They accomplish this by implying that God has not provided everything we need for righteous living even though the inspired Word teaches that He has provided all that is necessary (2 Pet. 1:3). They also imply that God cannot instruct His creation in a way that they are able to understand.

### **CONSEQUENCES OF NOT CONTINUING IN THE PATTERN GOD HAS GIVEN**

The Bible gives us numerous examples of people who were pleasing to God, some we have previously noted, However, we need to note some examples of those who were either unwilling to follow the Divine pattern or simply neglected to follow it.

In Leviticus 10:1-2, we read of Nadab and Abihu who were presumptuous and offered “strange” fire before the Lord that He had not commanded. This attitude resulted in their lives being taken.

Uzza meant well when he tried to keep the ark of the covenant from falling and was struck down because the ark was not being moved according to the pattern that the Lord had revealed. The Levites were to carry the ark, but when they have first sought to bring the ark to Jerusalem, they had not followed “due order” (1 Chr. 15:2, 13).

Again we read of the pride of King Uzziah who made the assumption that God would be honored with his desire to offer incense. However, his failure to observe God’s pattern caused him to be a leper for the remainder of his life (2 Chr. 26).

In the New Testament we read of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) who brought sin into the church by lying to both man and God. They suffered God’s wrath because they failed to respect God’s pattern for holiness within the body of Christ.

In Revelation we read the letters to the seven churches in Asia. Five of those churches are told by the Lord, through John, of things that were not right among them. They were told that they must repent or the Lord would bring judgment upon them (Rev. 2-3).

When we do not continue in the pattern that God has given, it cuts us off from the blessings of Almighty God. Paul wrote to the Galatian brethren, who had moved away from the pattern. False teachers had come in among them, perverting the Gospel by seeking to bind the keeping of the law of Moses upon brethren:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

Clearly, Paul indicates that if one does not continue in the Gospel that he had given to them, they would be cut off from God. Thus, this passage shows that Paul taught a pattern for their adherence and that strict adherence was necessary for Christians to receive the continued blessings of God. The abandonment of the pattern meant a loss of salvation.

Furthermore, not continuing in the pattern will cause men to be deceived by false doctrine.

That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ (Eph. 4:14-15).

Let us note several important facts. First, the potential for one being deceived by false doctrine necessarily implies that there is a true pattern for religion. Also, when one is deceived he abandons the pattern God has given. Only by continuing in “the truth” will individuals be guaranteed to be pleasing to the Lord.

Furthermore, when one abandons the pattern, faithful Christians have the divine obligation to cut ties of fellowship with those who err from the truth to ensure that they continue following the pattern. When scriptural discipline is not carried out when necessary, brethren find themselves failing to adhere to the Lord’s pattern themselves. “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Rom. 16:17).

## CONCLUSION

We have proved several important principles in this study. First, there was a pattern for God's people under the Old Testament that they were obligated to follow. Further, we noted that there is a pattern for God's people revealed in the New Testament that God's people today (Christians) are obligated to follow. We have also shown that those who depart from the pattern are not pleasing to God. Under the law we see where there was sometimes immediate punishment for those who violated the pattern. Even under the New Covenant, in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, immediate punishment was meted out to them because of their sin. However, God did not always bring immediate punishment, but Scripture clearly shows the end of those who do not obey God and go beyond that which has been revealed. We are not pleasing to God today if we stray from the pattern given in the New Testament for the Lord's church.

If we are to be faithful to God, then we must build "according to the pattern," as those who were pleasing to God in the Old Testament and in the first century church did. When we build "according to the pattern," we will have the same name, foundation, law, requirements of membership, etc., as did the church of the first century. To be the church of the New Testament today, it must be identical to the pattern set forth in Scripture and followed by the church of the New Testament. If we have anything that is not revealed in the New Testament or we leave out that which was part of the church of the New Testament, we have not built according to the pattern. We need to remember the following Scriptures.

Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the 1 keep the city, the watchman waketh *but* in vain (Psa. 127:1).

But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up (Mat. 15:13).

Many are working intently to build and have indeed constructed a visible organization, but if it is not "according to the pattern," it is not that which has been planted by the Father, and it will be rooted up in the last day.

Remember: the Tabernacle of Israel was made **according to the pattern of God** (Exo. 25:9; Heb. 8:5). Under the New Covenant, **all** authority is given unto **Christ** (Mat. 28:18). He has set the pattern as typified in the Old Testament tabernacle, and man has **no** right to

change it. **Christ** is unchanging—“the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Heb. 13:8)—thus He has **not** changed what He set down. Let us **not** change what Christ has commanded. Let us build His church—**not** any other. Let us build according to His pattern—**not** the pattern of men.

Are you following the pattern?

Hold fast the form [pattern—ASV, NKJV] of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 1:13).

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee (1 Tim. 4:16).

Are you a friend of Jesus, do you truly love Him?

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you (John 15:14).

If ye love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15).

Do you truly love God?

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous (1 John 5:3).

We need to remove from our spiritual vocabularies, “I think,” or “I feel,” and go back to seeking a “thus saith the Lord.” In the long ago, God said through Moses, “O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!” (Deu. 5:29). May we all be willing to search the Scriptures for the pattern that He has given. Let us faithfully build according to God’s pattern, denouncing all changes and alterations, and we will have exactly what God intended.

Truly then, the Bible is the final revelation and authority that reveals the pattern that God has set forth. May we ever heed its teaching, and may we ever “contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). Let us not allow the church of the Lord to be infiltrated by those who would pervert the Gospel by denying that the Scriptures are the final revelation and authority—those who would seek to add to or take away from God’s Word, and those who would seek to label the seeking of biblical authority and the biblical pattern as being “The Pursuit of Trivia” (as one English preacher stated a number of years ago). Truly, it is “time to build according to the pattern.”

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# BUILDING ON THE PROPER FOUNDATION

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## INTRODUCTION

A building is only as good as its foundation. If the foundation is flawed or weak, the building will not stand. The church must be built on the proper foundation to stand. The church of Christ, which we read about in the Bible, is the very institution built upon a firm foundation. Paul writes:

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22).

To build on the proper foundation, there are several things which must be included. This chapter will deal with the foundational principles of the church which Jesus built. Each principle must be present for it to be built on the proper foundation.

## THE PROPER FOUNDER

The proper founder of the church is Jesus. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). Isaiah prophesied about the foundation of the church. “Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner *stone*, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall

not make haste” (Isa. 28:16). Jesus Himself, prophesied that He would be the founder of His church. “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mat. 16:18). Jesus is the only one with the right to be the founder of the church.

Leroy Brownlow writes:

The fact that a religious body exists is proof that it was founded by someone. There is in the world today a multiplicity of churches, different in origin, doctrine and practice; therefore, each was either scripturally or unscripturally founded by either the divine or a human builder. Hence, it is important to know whether the builder of a church was scriptural or unscriptural. If a church was founded by an unscriptural builder, that church must of necessity be unscriptural: the work of man and not of Christ (7).

Denominations today were founded by men instead of Christ. None of these churches have the right to exist with the wrong founder. A church founded by Calvin, Smith, Wesley, or any other man is not the scriptural church. These men did not shed their blood for the church. If they had shed their blood, it would still be unscriptural for them to exist because Christ is the only one with the right to establish the church. Paul states to the Ephesian elders, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). Since the church was purchased by Christ, all others have the wrong founder and wrong head.

### THE PROPER PLACE

To build the church on the proper foundation, it must include the proper place for building. The Bible shows the proper place for the foundation of the church. Isaiah writes:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3).

Isaiah writes that the “word of the LORD” will go forth “from Jerusalem (2:3). Jesus states this fact in Luke 24:47: “And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations,

beginning at Jerusalem.” He continues and says, “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). The Apostles did as the Lord commanded and remained in Jerusalem. On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), the Spirit filled the Apostles and they began to speak with other tongues. In verse thirteen, Peter stood up with the eleven and began to preach. The result was that approximately three thousand souls obeyed the gospel that day (2:41). Notice the words of verse 47: “Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” Those who were saved were added to the church which was founded at the scriptural place—Jerusalem. Any church not founded in Jerusalem is not the scriptural church. The church of Christ is the only church founded in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, as prophesied in the Bible. Denominations were founded in Rome, England, Germany, America, and other places around the world. These were all founded at the wrong place by the wrong men and, therefore, cannot be the scriptural church.

### THE PROPER TIME

For a church to be scriptural, it must have been established at the proper time. In Isaiah’s prophesy, he writes:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it (Isa. 2:2).

The mountain (seat of government) will be established “in the last days.” What are the last days? Are they the end times or the last dispensation of time. A look at the Hebrews letter will give an answer.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds (1:1-2).

At one time, God spoke to the people by the prophets of the Old Testament. Now, in the last days, He speaks to us by His Son. Jesus speaks because He has all authority from the Father (Mat. 28:18). The words He speaks will one day judge us. “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48).

In Acts 2, Peter is quoting Joel's prophecy and states: "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh" (2:16-17). According to Peter, we are in the last days. The last days began on Pentecost with the establishment of the church. Therefore, the church which Jesus built was built at the proper time. Any church today established after the day of Pentecost in A.D. 33 is not the scriptural church.

Other churches were established by men at times other than Pentecost. The Catholic Church was founded in 606. The Lutheran Church was founded in 1517. The Episcopal Church was founded in 1533. The Presbyterian Church was founded in 1560. The Baptist Church was founded in 1606. The Methodist Church was founded in 1739. The Mormon Church was founded in 1830. The Jehovah Witnesses Church was founded in 1879. The Seventh Day Adventist Church was founded in 1900. Many others have been founded since 1900. All of these churches were started by men in the wrong place at the wrong time. These are purely man-made religions that do not have a scriptural right to exist.

### **THE PROPER ORGANIZATION**

For the church to be scriptural, there must be the proper organization. Denominations today are organized through synods, conventions, councils, etc. The New Testament church knows of no such organization. Through these denominational organizations laws are made and passed for that particular religion. Although man does not have the authority to make laws in religion, he does so regularly through the organizational meetings of that denomination. Things such as how often the Lord's Supper is taken, the mode of baptism, when salvation takes place, etc., are not to be determined by man. God already made these laws and gave them to man in His Word.

Each congregation is to be autonomous in nature. Denominations will often have one man or a board of directors over a group of churches in a given area. This idea is foreign to the Bible. Each congregation makes her own decisions in matters of judgment without outside dictation from other churches or councils.

Denominations will not only make decisions in judgment but also in doctrine. There was a small Methodist church in a town where this author preached whose preacher (a man) was terminated for inappropri-

ate behavior. A woman was brought in to be their *preacher*. Many of the members expressed dissatisfaction because they did not agree with having a woman preacher. Because the Methodists in general do not have a problem with women in the pulpit, the members' protests went unheeded. The Methodist hierarchy made the decision and the members had no say in that decision. This is typical with denominations and their practices.

The proper organization of the church is revealed in the Word of God. The Bible teaches that the church is overseen by elders and served by deacons. "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" (Phi. 1:1).

### **Elders**

The elders, bishops, overseers are the men who shepherd (pastor) the church of the Lord. There are a plurality of elders in each congregation. There is not a "one man rule" in the Lord's church. In every New Testament example, there are multiple elders overseeing a congregation. They have a grave work in which they are engaged. They are watching the souls of the members over which they rule.

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

It is the responsibility of the elders to feed the church. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). The elders are also to "convince the gainsayers" (Tit. 1:9).

Many elders have become nothing more than a board of directors to spend money for the church. In many congregations, the elders are so busy deciding how to spend money, they often forget about those who have left the service of the Lord. The preacher is usually expected to bring the erring back, while the elders continue to spend the money. Many elders are doing the work of deacons, while the deacons do little or nothing. While being good stewards of the money is important, elders often forget their work is to "watch" for the souls of the members. There are many other responsibilities of the elders which are not mentioned, but it has been observed the great task in front of them.

The qualifications of elders are found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. They must meet all of these qualifications to serve as a scriptural elder. Many men are put in the position of an elder without meeting all of these qualifications. These men will ultimately destroy a congregation because of arrogance and pride. Many elders who are not qualified feel a sense of power and will rule with an iron fist to prove *oversight* and *rule* at a particular congregation. Peter writes:

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:2-3).

Those who “lord over” the church prove themselves unfit for the position in which they have been placed. It has been said, however, “If a man can be appointed as an elder, he can be disappointed.” This preacher heard an elder say, “Once an elder, always an elder.” He did not think that the congregation could put him out of his position because they did not have the authority. Too many elders have this ungodly attitude and will pay eternally for it one day.

### **Deacons**

The deacons are the servants of the church. When called upon to help the church or any of her members, the deacons provide a valuable service. Their work is not as clear as that of an elder. In Acts 6, however, we read about the seven who were chosen as servants. Although, they are not called deacons, the same word is found in the text and the task is virtually the same that deacons perform. The qualifications for them are found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. They must be completely faithful to Christ to meet the qualifications. Their wives also must set a good example for others. Many wives have disqualified otherwise good men from the position of deacon because they were not the kind of Christians they should be.

A misconception that some have is that a deacon is a “junior” elder. There is no such concept or doctrine taught on the pages of God’s Word. Some believe they are “elders in training.” It is logical to think that a deacon, who is faithful and growing each day, will one day meet the qualifications of an elder. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. There may be a godly man in the congregation, who is not a deacon, but who meets the qualifications of an elder. Some might think that he must first become a deacon, then later an elder. This teaching is not found anywhere in God’s Word.

## Members

Members are a vital part of the organization of the church. The members have responsibilities to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10; Mark 16:15-16). Members also *minister* (serve) in both word and deed (Col. 3:17). This is done to other saints and also to the lost. There is a great responsibility to restore the erring (Gal. 6:1), which many members leave undone. It is generally thought that the preacher or elders are the **only** ones who try to restore the erring. While it is the responsibility of the elders to watch for the souls of the members, it is also the responsibility of the members to care for one another. Paul writes:

For our comely *parts* have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that *part* which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but *that* the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular (1 Cor. 12:24-27).

We often do a poor job of helping our own brethren to return to the Lord. It appears that some are afraid to approach a brother or sister who has fallen for fear that person might be offended. Some will stand back and allow that person to die lost for fear of offense. The church today must be “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” and overcome fear (Eph. 6:10).

## PROPER WORSHIP

For a church to be scriptural, there must be proper worship. Worship is a vital part of Christianity. Everything done in worship must be with the authority of Christ (Col. 3:17). There are five things mentioned in the New Testament that are to be done on the Lord’s Day during worship: singing, praying, preaching (teaching), the Lord’s Supper, and giving. Many churches today have either added to or taken away from those five acts of worship. Denominations will do in worship what they please without regard to the Scripture’s teaching of the acts of worship. All too often in sectarian worship there are bands, choirs, solos, skits, drama, plays, etc. Sadly, these same things are seen in many congregations claiming to be the Lord’s church. Many churches today have begun “Children’s Church,” also known as “Children’s Bible Hour.” There is not one shred of authority for authorizing such. This is another innovation from man, not God. Notice each item of worship in which we are to engage on the Lord’s Day.

## Singing

Paul writes:

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:19-20).

The Lord commands **all** to sing in worship. This is reciprocal action on the part of all in the assembly. This does not allow for a choir, solo or group singing in worship. Some churches today have given microphones to the four or five “best” singers so they will *drown* out everyone else to make the singing sound better. There is no authority for even doing this gimmick. We are all commanded to lift up our voices in praise to God in worship. Some try to use 1 Corinthians 14:26 to allow for solo singing, but this is not even remotely the context of this passage. Why would the Lord allow something to be used at this time in worship, then have Paul write a contradictory statement to another church? To say that Paul taught solos in 1 Corinthians 14 contradicts what he wrote to the Ephesians in 5:19.

Ephesians 5:19 also teaches that the act is *singing* not playing. Most denominations use mechanical instruments of music in worship without the authority of God. Some argue “what is not specifically condemned is authorized.” Nowhere in this verse can one legitimately argue that playing is authorized in worship. Many today look at this as a matter of opinion rather than doctrine. Denominations will not even debate the issue anymore. There is not a single example in the New Testament where playing was involved in worship. James writes, “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms” (5:13). James is writing to Christians in everyday life. There is no authority for the use of instruments in singing praises to God **outside** of the worship. Paul, in Ephesians, teaches only singing in worship and James, in James, teaches only singing outside of worship. Why, then, will some condemn the use of instruments **in** worship, but use the same songs with the instrument **outside** of worship? It is hard, actually impossible, to show consistency by condemning denominations **in** worship while singing the same songs **outside** of worship with the instrument.

## Praying

Prayer is vital to Christian worship. This is an opportunity to go before the throne of our heavenly Father for thanksgiving, request, and

petitions. Jesus knew the importance of prayer and regularly spent time in prayer. In His great sermon on the mount, He taught them how to pray (Mat. 6:9-13). Paul told the Thessalonians to “pray without ceasing” (1 The. 5:17). Christians today need to take time to pray as often as possible. We need to pray for the sick, for the lost, for the church, for our government and those in authority, for our families, for our enemies, for the elders in a congregation, for the preacher, for one another, etc. We need to have prayers of thanksgiving for all with which God has blessed us, for Christ, for the Bible, and the list could go on.

In worship, men are in the leadership positions and are the ones who are to lead the prayers. Paul, in referring to the public worship, writes, “I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (1 Tim. 2:8). The Greek word for “men” is ἄνδρας (*andras*), which is accusative plural masculine of ἀνὴρ (*aner*) which “is never used of the female sex; it stands (a) in distinction from a woman.... (d) in general, a man, a male person” (Vine 34). Vine properly states that it is never used to describe a woman. Women are never to be in leadership roles in the church. Denominations have for years allowed women to lead prayer in worship. Some in the church today are advocating women taking an active leadership role in worship, including leading prayer in the presence of men, which is a clear violation of God’s Word.

### **Preaching—Teaching**

Preaching is the means whereby the Gospel message is spread throughout the world. “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Paul teaches the Corinthians the importance of preaching: “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor. 1:21). Preaching and teaching is a very serious responsibility. Because it involves the use of the tongue, the teacher (preacher) will be judged in a harsher way: “Be not many *of you* teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment” (Jam. 3:1—ASV). A major problem today is there are many false teachers in the church. These teachers (preachers) are leading souls to a pathway of destruction by their perverted doctrine. The Bible warns of false teachers throughout the New Testament:

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction (2 Pet. 2:1).

John writes, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). The church today is dealing with false teachers just like church had to in the first century.

### Lord’s Supper

The Lord’s Supper is a time to remember the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Paul declares:

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

The Lord’s Supper is taken each first day of the week. In Acts 20:7, we read, “And upon the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.” The disciples assembled together to break bread (take the Lord’s Supper). This was done on the first day of the week. Some argue that it does not say the first day of *every* week. The disciples met the first day of **every** week, and when they assembled, the Lord’s Supper was taken. It is to be taken as often as the contribution is given. According to 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, the contribution is taken every first day of the week. Most will not argue about the giving, but will deny the Lord’s Supper each week.

To have the proper foundation of the church, the Lord’s Supper must be observed each Lord’s day.

### Giving

A collection is taken each first day of the week. The Bible commands one to give of his means as God has prospered him. The denominational concept is the Old Testament teaching of a “tithe.” One of this writer’s teachers stated that he did a survey among churches of Christ concerning the amount of contribution given each week. This

survey encompassed several congregations, and an average was taken. The average collection for each member was four to five percent. Since we live under a better system than the Old Testament (read the book of Hebrews), Christians today should seek to give **more** than ten percent, but according to this study, the average member is only giving about half of that. Notice the words of Paul: “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, *so let him give*; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). How many members today truly give cheerfully and liberally? Giving is just as important as any other act of worship. When we violate God’s teaching concerning this matter, we commit sin and need to repent.

### THE PROPER NAME

It is important to exalt the name of Christ. Many religions today exalt the name of the founder of that particular organization. To wear a name that does not exalt the name of Christ is to disgrace the name of Christ. When we wear a human name, it undermines the authority of Christ. “The church has no special name, but is spoken of in several significant appellations” (Brownlow 29).

In the Bible it is called “my church” (Mat. 16:18); “the church” (Acts 2:47); “the church of God” (1 Cor. 1:2); “churches of Christ” (Rom. 16:16); “the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12); “the church of the living God” (1 Tim. 3:15); “the church of the firstborn” (Heb. 12:23). A church today may wear a scriptural name, and yet not be scriptural in other areas. These churches are not the church found in the Bible. We wear the name “church of Christ” today, not as a title, but as a description of ownership. Since Christ is the *owner* of the church (Acts 20:28), we must follow His teaching and doctrine.

### CONCLUSION

To be the church of the New Testament, we must have the proper foundation. By having the proper Founder, being established at the proper time, in the proper place, with the proper organization, with the proper worship, and wearing the proper name, the church can build and be pleasing to God. Many other points could be added to identify the church in the Bible, but these are sufficient to build on the proper foundation.

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# BUILDING BETTER HOMES

*Wayne Blake*

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## INTRODUCTION

We look around today and wonder what has happened to the home. Each of us remembers when we were children; the feeling we had of being protected, being safe, and the joy only a child can experience. Today we will look at the prospect of building the home as would be pleasing to God.

### **The Past**

Some of this author's fondest memories were being able to go out all day and play, whether on a bike, a horse, or on foot. I enjoyed summers where the only fears were maybe a snake or shooting a B-B gun and actually killing a bird, or being concerned with the mud which had gotten all over me and what my mother would say. Days were filled with nothing more than time to explore and see what God had placed on this earth for me to enjoy. We did not worry about a television or computers or video games. We spent our days filled with reading books, swimming in the pond or lake, and enjoying family.

We were able to see our family—grandparents, cousins, uncles, and aunts—on a regular basis. We enjoyed those times together. We were able to worship together and sit around campfires singing hymns. I remember being taught about God through the words and actions of those around me. The strongest drinks were maybe tea or a coke. Someone could talk about God in any setting and not cause uproar.

Our family was close, and children were given the things they needed—not always the things they wanted. We were taught about right and wrong based on the Scriptures. Boys were taught to respect women and to earn a living. Women were taught to love their husbands

and take care of their children. Divorce was not something common, except in Hollywood.

School was a place to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic. If kids got in trouble at school, most parents were not worried about lawyers or money; they wanted their child to obey. Paddling was feared and was a deterrent to most to stay out of trouble. Teachers were respected, and they kept students in line, or discipline would follow.

In those days, vandalism was stealing a flag, or cutting donuts in the lawn by driving a truck, or maybe even picking up a person's car and moving it into a space that would be impossible to drive out of without help. The list of things could continue but the point is to remind us of times from the past regarding the home and the society we lived in then.

### The Present

When you turn on the television or go to Wal-Mart, you see that the family is in decline. Morality is a foreign word to so many today; teaching children to be polite is an oddity. When society decided to make abortion legal and wives to join the work force, society began a series of events that resulted in the deterioration of the home. Young women and men are allowed to do basically anything they want regardless of the consequences. Society has come up with every conceivable *sickness* to allow for bad conduct and sin. Alcoholism is a disease, and children are diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (or ODD for short) to account for “disruptive antisocial behavior” (“Oppositional”). It is interesting to note that the *symptoms* of ODD are:

- frequent temper tantrums
- excessive arguing with adults
- active defiance and refusal to comply with adult requests and rules
- deliberate attempts to annoy or upset people, blaming others for his or her mistakes or misbehavior
- often being touchy or easily annoyed by others
- frequent anger and resentment
- mean and hateful talking when upset
- seeking revenge.

Teachers and parents are not to spank or show that they are upset by these behaviors because the child cannot help it and may feel that he or she is “bad.”

Immodesty is allowed and even encouraged in children. The wearing of short shirts, see-through, and “less-is-best” is the norm. Girls as young as 7 or 8 are allowed to wear make-up and dress in any way that Barbie or Brittany condones. Amazingly, parents actually buy this type of clothing for their little girls and help them apply the make-up! Boys want to be *gangstas*, *pimps*, and abusers of women. Kids want to be individuals and yet their individuality is nothing more than conformity to the world. There is the need to dress in ways that show they are older and more *mature*, yet they drag their dolls and throw their temper tantrums like the immature children they are. These actions are tolerated because parents either do not know what to do or they do not care to be involved enough to care.

Parents do not want to be authoritative, but would rather be their children’s friends. Buddy, pal, and friend are the pet names they use in addressing their children. Children can hit, curse, and even defy parents because parents do not want them to “hate us.” They are given anything they want because “I want better for my children than I had” is the mantra. Parents want children to have privacy so they do not ask where they are going or what they are up to when they leave home. Parents do not know what they do on the computers or their cell phones because we do not want to be “like our parents.” Parents do not want them to be unsafe; so they are put on birth control and give them condoms. Parents do not want them drinking or doing drugs in a bad environment; so it is allowed to happen in the house to avoid worry about them going somewhere that is not *safe*.

Children are encouraged to be involved in extra-curricular activities; however, busy schedules keep them from attending worship on Sunday night or Wednesday night. The prom is important to children; so parents must not tell them no when they ask to go. Children are not taught the Bible or have Bible studies because they get that on Sunday or Wednesday. The “youth minister” plans activities for our children; we want entertainment because the children need to be entertained and not tested and questioned—they get enough of that in school.

In our present society, children cannot just go out and play all day without adult supervision. Gone are the days where a child could go from dawn till dusk and tell us of their many adventures—there are too many predators. Strangers are watched and not wanted around our children. We cannot allow them their freedom because of the horrid things in the news.

We are surrounded by homes where there is no father present. This author was told by his wife that, in a second grade class of 18 students, only 2 children had both parents in the home. No wonder they feel left to their own. Marriage is looked at as a commitment only as long as both parties stay happy. As soon as things get rough, the marriage is over—with the children being dragged right along.

Fornication and adultery are a joke and the norm, while virgins or those who have long, faithful marriages are considered an oddity. Images on television, movies, and the internet are constantly pushed upon us. Rosie and Ellen are lauded as role models for young women who want to *come out* of the closet and adopt children into their lesbian homes. Adoption by homosexual couples is considered better than allowing the children to remain in foster care or some heterosexual homes. Brad and Angelina are adopting children by day while “living together” as they raise children together and amass a baseball team. Single women want to live alone and yet have children without a male in the home. The home is truly in dire straits.

This barely scratches the surface regarding the problems we find in our homes. We seek now to look into God’s Word and give God the place He is being denied so often—the home. The time to build the home is now. May we all work to change and protect one of the greatest things God has given to mankind—the home.

### **GOD HAS THE PLAN**

From the garden to the present, God has a plan for the home. Left to his own, man will change and develop the home into something God never intended. This scribe does not dare think he has all the answers to every situation that arises in the home, but one thing he does know is that God has a plan, and it is up to him to try and stick with that plan if his home is to be blessed by God. We will look now at the home including the marriage, parents, children, grandparents, and then make application regarding what the Scriptures say about each person’s role in building up the home.

### **THE HOME IN GENERAL**

No institution so affects society as does the home. History tells us that nations have been toppled because of the deterioration of the home. Rome, by the first century, was crumbling from within with its Godless humanism, turmoil in government, and its “open marriages.” This penman remembers reading of one woman who had now entered into her

twenty-third marriage with a man who had been married twenty times before her. We think that we have divorce problems today, but history shows us that divorce is a long-standing problem.

Just as society can be affected by the home, so can the church. The church (in any given community) will never be as strong as the strength of the average home in that church. When there is failure in the home, there is failure in the church. God placed high value upon the home, and it is up to those in that home to listen and learn from the Word of God. When man tampers with what God has authorized, there is going to be disaster.

In Ephesians, Paul discusses the duties of each—the husband, wife, and children (5:22-6:3). In the following sections we will discuss what Paul has written and make modern applications and state abuses of said passages.

### THE MARRIAGE

History shows us that it is natural for a man and woman to enter into some type of relationship where the home is established and children are born. God instituted the first home and marriage with Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:21-25). They were to “cleave” to one another, and Jesus recalled this event as the plan God had from the very beginning (Mat. 19:6). The modern movement pushing same-sex marriage is not authorized by God and is condemned along with other types of illicit sexual activities—fornication (1 Cor. 6:9-11, 18). The marriage is to be held in honor and be undefiled (Heb. 13:4). Marriage today is under attack and must be upheld and honored.

The *new* thing we are seeing a rise in is cohabitation—living together. The couple will live together as a *trial* before they decide if they want to marry. This is interesting because of the reasons given for it being done. This preacher knows a young girl that lives with her boyfriend. She comes from a home that was one that had several step-fathers. Her mother has been married four times and now lives with her fifth soon-to-be husband. What this young girl learned from this experience is that men are expendable and will not stick around; so she wants to ease into it by living with her future husband first. What we see is a backlash of the many divorces we see today, leaving the children involved with no confidence in the institution of marriage. It is a fact that marriages entered into by those who live together first have a greater risk of ending in divorce than those who do not live

together first (“Live”). Research indicates that this situation produces a marriage less likely to succeed because the parties are not tied together; they still are like roommates. There is no tie to the kids or to the mates.

The statistics of those cohabitating are phenomenal (“Cohabiting”). In 1965-74, cohabitation consisted in about 11% of all homes. By 1999, over half of all marriages were preceded by cohabitation. Across all age groups, there is a 45% increase in cohabitation. Some estimate that between 60-80% of all marriages are preceded by cohabitation. Marriage has changed, and many are reacting to the growing number of divorces that have become a way of life.

God instituted marriage and wanted those marriages to be for the lifetime of those involved. There are only two reasons for a person to be given the right to dissolve the marriage—death and adultery (Rom. 7:1-4; Mat. 19:2-9). God instituted marriage, and, therefore, it is important that we enter into a marriage with the understanding of what it is we are doing.

Many today disregard what the Bible teaches regarding marriage. Congregations increasingly have to deal with those in adultery and fornication. The matter will continue to get worse before it ever gets better. Because of the lack of discipline and the lack of teaching, many even in the Lord’s church are confused about marriage. They gather from the influences of the world how a marriage ought to work and what it consists of for them. The Lord’s church is currently going through a division concerning the basic and forthright teaching of Matthew 19. We must teach the Word of God and do it with love and compassion for our hearers. We need elders, preachers, deacons, and leaders who will obey God and His plan for marriage.

### THE PARENTS

When one is single or newly married, he cannot even fathom what it is like being a parent. Those first few months and years we are growing into our marriages. We are getting used to the idea of finding time for one another, our work, and the work needed to be done in the church. We have all types of information telling us how to be a good parent, but we must get something clear: If we are going to build the right home and be the parent God wants us to be, we do not go to Dr. Spock, *Redbook*, *Modern Parenting Magazine*, or *Reader’s Digest*. All need to go to the Bible. God created man, and God knows what man

needs to be a good parent. We are told that to be a successful parent is to have tons of money, the best house, the finest car, cash in the savings, IRAs, and on and on. But what is the success that God finds pleasing to Him? Look what was said of Abraham:

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him (Gen. 18:19).

In what way was Abraham found to be successful? By being obedient to God and teaching his children to be obedient.

Paul addressed marriage and showed how it is like the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22ff). Christ died for the church, and therefore the husband ought to do all he can to cherish the wife; in turn the wife is to love and submit to her husband. The wife and husband must honor the roles that God has given each. There is no greater blessing than a home that honors God and will obey Him rather than the world and its standards. In the corporate world, any business that is going to be successful must have some leader that makes the final decision regarding the direction the company will go. In the home, God has commanded the husband to be the leader, and the final decision rests with him. The wife has her say, and should, regarding the everyday running of the home, but the final decision, good or bad, rests with the man.

In the society we live in today, the idea of a wife being in subjection to her husband is *backward* and not *hip*, but the Christian must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:20). This needs to be established before the wedding! If career and independence are most important, then it is not time to be married and possibly bring children into the mix. God wants strong families, role models for the children, and examples to the world. We cannot be those things if we are not willing to obey God and His commands. The chain of command is set: God, Jesus, husband, wife, then the children. When we tamper with this arrangement, we bring upon ourselves disaster.

One of the greatest things parents can do is to make sure they are faithful to God. Abraham was faithful to God, and, therefore, he taught his children the same. If God, the church, and spiritual things are not important and first in their life, parents should not have children. That might seem harsh, but if God is not first in their life, then do not have children. Parents cannot teach children to put God first when He is not

first in their own life. How many children are we now saddled with in the church that show indifference to attendance, giving, and obedience? If parents do not see the wisdom of obeying God, how will the children see it? The church presently has some adults who are unruly and will obey neither the eldership nor God. This is part of the fallout of a generation or two of parents who chose to put other gods first in their lives. Those children are now raising children, and both rebel against authority, commands, and good judgment. Abraham raised his children to fear and obey God; we must be willing to do the same.

A husband and wife must pray together, study the Bible together, willing to be involved in the local congregation, and live honestly and right before all men. We see many new homes beginning with the husband going one way and the wife going another. What is mine is mine and yours is yours. The in-laws are keeping the family stirred up and fighting. God is far from their thoughts. Such is not the environment of a home to build upon for children and later grandchildren.

Selfishness is a way of life. We want everything and want it now. We want to buy what we want and worry about paying for it later. We must stop, take a moment, read from the Word of God, and settle into the role God has given you to fulfill. Do not let the world tell you what a good parent is; allow God to tell you what He wants, and He will bless you in your willingness to be pleasing to Him. All of us will be held accountable for our work here and all of us will be judged according to how we carried out God's commands (2 Cor. 5:10).

The Bible is filled with many examples of those who chose not to raise their children correctly, but one will suffice:

And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel *to be* my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded *in my* habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people? Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed *that* thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt

see an enemy *in my* habitation, in all *the wealth* which *God* shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, *whom* I shall not cut off from mine altar, *shall be* to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age. And this *shall be* a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them. And I will raise me up a faithful priest, *that* shall do according to *that* which *is* in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever. And it shall come to pass, *that* every one that is left in thine house shall come *and* crouch to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread (1 Sam. 2:27-36).

Eli chose to allow his children to run wild, and it says they knew not God (1 Sam. 2:12). They were the priests for the people of Israel, and they were the children of the devil. When parents fail to put God first, they pass this on to their children.

### CHILDREN

Our generation is so removed from the days where we would work in the hot sun and take on chores that would break one's back. Today, a *chore* to a child is basically picking up one's toys and carrying out the trash (and that is a battle at times). This writer does not care to do any of those chores himself, but they must be done. My three-year-old reminds me daily that everything I say and do is recorded in her little head. She heard me say "whatever" the other day, and she reminded me that we were not supposed to say that word. I apologized and told her I was sorry and that she was right. Children are our shadow. What we do they will do, and what we do not do they will not do. When God is important in the home, He will be discussed and songs will be sung in worship to Him. Children will remember when they do something wrong that God is not pleased.

A man whom this author respects and loves very much taught him something he had not thought about that much previously. This penman was watching his children reciting passages of Scripture which had begun almost as early as they were able to talk. This scribe remembered this and tried to instill it in his daughter. Parents tend to think that they need to let their children be *children*, and sadly to many that means not giving them spiritual food. This preacher's daughter amazes him with the ability she has to memorize and remember things that happened

weeks ago. Our children need to be taught to memorize Scriptures and taught about God and obedience.

Parents need to teach their children to memorize and be willing to spend the time to do it. How many times do we hear parents say that it was only yesterday it seems that little Johnny was just a baby? The time flies, and we must fill our children's minds with the Word of God. This is not a principle that God forgot when commanding the children of Israel:

Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons; *Specially* the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb, when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and *that* they may teach their children (Deu. 4:9-10).

They taught their children. How can a child know about God if he is not taught? The greatest gift God can give a parent is the children they are given to raise. If parents will do the raising according to God's plan, they all will be blessed.

Paul again addresses children regarding their role in the home (Eph. 6:1-3). Paul also directs us to remember that disobedience to one's parents is condemned and will cause us to be lost and in sin (Rom. 1:30). If parents are not teaching the child about obedience, they are performing a disservice to and sinning against the child. There are two extremes seen in society: discipline without love (child abuse) and love without discipline (permissiveness). Neither is pleasing to God nor found in the Word of God as favorable.

Discipline is needed in all aspects of life. The sooner a child learns this truth, the better for him or her. When parents will not spank a child, they are showing they truly do not love the child (Pro. 13:24; 22:15). Is this not a principle we use in reminding the brethren that they must discipline the erring? Love seeks the higher good. Sometimes this will make the parent spank, take away privileges, or issue strong rebukes and warnings. It is a sad situation when a child is threatened with discipline and then the parent does not follow through. Kids know our limits. Parents will not be perfect in their actions, but they strive for perfection. Parents that raise children like Eli did (1 Sam. 2-3) will in the last years of their lives regret that they did not reign them in.

Children must also be taught to accept discipline. Parents want to protect their children and take all obstacles from their path, but parents cannot keep them safe from the world. The first day of school will teach a child that he must get along with others and that he must learn how to cope with the different kids with whom he comes into contact. This writer's wife is a school teacher. One of the things she reminds him of is that one can tell the children that have good parenting at home. With proper training, even a rambunctious child knows there are limits.

It is not easy for a single parent to raise a child. While there are abusive relationships, deaths, divorces, et al., children need as stable a home as possible. Parents need to allow for the Word of God to be in their home through teaching and admonishing. They cannot allow the world to become their god and allow their children to be the children of the world.

### **Grandparents**

In the best of families, grandparents play their part in the nurturing of the children and helping the parents to do their jobs as parents. If the grandparents are faithful, they can help parents in nurturing their children. They teach the children that marriage can work and that it is a good thing. They teach that parents need to be respected and obeyed. They show the importance of being family and striving to obey God and being faithful in their service to God. Grandparents can help, but, sadly, they can also be a hindrance.

Grandparents need to understand their way is not the only way. Modern conveniences and helps can get the household duties completed faster if used. With tax rates and cost of living, both parents may have to work outside the home. Even those who choose to *just get by* have trouble buying the basic necessities. With the way that families are scattered now, as opposed to the past, family members may have many miles between each other. This requires the family having to travel during the holidays and not see each other often. Children need to know their whole family to learn from where they came, who they are most like, and what is important.

There is no place for families to fight over how the children are to be raised. Something this author has learned is this: Grandparents have wisdom about things that the young parent might not know or understand. Grandparents have the ability to reach our children on issues that

the parents might be having problems undertaking. They have the ability to be a positive part of the grandchild's life.

Our society is seeing more and more that grandparents become the care givers for their grandchildren, which places a great amount of responsibility upon them. They are to help in the child's education about God, the world, and learning about how to love and respect this earth and take care of the resources God has given man to enjoy. Timothy had a grandmother who taught him the Law, and she was praised for it in Scripture for all time (2 Tim. 1:5). She played a great role and serves as an example of one who placed God above all else.

### CONCLUSION

The space limitations do not allow as deep of a study on the various other aspects of this subject as is needed. Prayerfully, what is presented here will give some direction of just how to build the home. In all the studies this scribe has seen, it all comes down to the same conclusion: Those who are regular attendees of a church (and faithful), are more likely to remain in a committed relationship, and the marriage will not end in divorce. The further a couple gets away from God, the more likely they are to destroy the home and marriage. The Psalmist said the same thing:

Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh *but* in vain. *It is* vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: *for* so he giveth his beloved sleep. Lo, children *are* an heritage of the LORD: *and* the fruit of the womb *is* his reward. As arrows *are* in the hand of a mighty man; so *are* children of the youth. Happy *is* the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate (Psa. 127).

God did not leave man to figure out what foundation he must build his house upon. He is the One upon Whom man must build, and through Whom his building will be blessed. We must be willing as parents, children, and grandparents to live faithfully and allow God to be given the glory for our work.

Society shows us that the family is in trouble. It is time to restore the home as God would have it. If, as a parent, you have not fulfilled your obligations as a parent—repent! If, as a child, you are not obedient to God and your parents—repent! If, as a grandparent, you have has shrugged your obligation to your family—repent! Man will not have

healthy homes if God is not the One on whom he builds his foundations.

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# BUILDING BETTER YOUNG PEOPLE

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## INTRODUCTION

The church of Christ is in dire need of spiritually mature Christians “who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14). Sadly, many who initially obeyed God’s plan to save and to be added to His church have simply sat idle rather than growing. The church, therefore, has reaped the consequences of such inaction. Many are willing and satisfied to follow men who have preached for a long time instead of examining evidence to make a sound judgement for themselves. Peter and the other Apostles said that “we ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Some Christians have concluded that the less they know, the better off they will be. Unfortunately, it is and will continue to be a struggle to convince these individuals that their attitude is wrong and needs to be changed. With these things in mind, it is easy to understand why God said, “Let no man despise thy youth” (1 Tim. 4:12). Children need to be properly trained so when they encounter controversies and difficulties in the future, they will be able “by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” The future strength of the church is dependent upon how well young people are prepared to serve God faithfully.

It is extremely fitting that, in a lectureship devoted to the theme of building, there be a discourse about our young people. Generally speaking, when discussing the idea of building, we tend to think of the future and while imagining of the future, we think of today’s youth. The topics of *building* and *young people* are intertwined.

## BUILDING BETTER YOUNG PEOPLE STARTS AT HOME

Pitifully, though many will agree that building better young people must start in the home, few actually believe it to be true. The denominational world reaches out to young people by offering them fun and entertainment. Such worldliness is creeping into the church. Though God's elders are responsible for feeding the flock (1 Pet. 5:2), including our youth, they are not commanded to babysit or run a three-ring circus of activities to entertain people of all ages. It is also not the role of government to raise children. The responsibility of teaching and training young people lies upon the shoulders of the parents. It does not take a village to raise a child; it takes two God-fearing parents. Elders may assist the home by offering Bible classes, Bible materials, and opportunities for spiritual fellowship and growth, but the onus of raising children belongs in the home.

To build better young people, we need to build better homes. "Except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh *but* in vain" (Psa. 127:1). Parents who try to follow any pattern other than that given by God will be unsuccessful in training their children to be good servants of the Christ. The apostle Paul describes the God-ordained home.

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.... Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right (Eph. 5:22-31; 6:1).

It is within this God-instituted home where children are to be nurtured and admonished. "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

Parents once filled the shoes their own children now wear. Because they have experienced life, both positive and negative, parents are able to impart a *practical knowledge* to their children to aid them in their own journey of life. A “wise son heareth his father’s instruction” (Pro. 13:1), while a “fool despiseth his father’s instruction” (15:5). Therefore, the child is to “hearken unto thy father that begat thee” (23:22). So the responsibility is truly twofold: the parents bear the responsibility of *training* (22:6) and the children have the responsibility of receiving and applying what is imparted by the parents (Smith 91).

The inspired Moses wrote:

Now these *are* the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do *them* in the land whither ye go to possess it: That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do *it*; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And **thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children**, and shalt **talk of them when thou sittest** in thine house, and **when thou walkest** by the way, and **when thou liest down**, and **when thou risest up**. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates (Deu. 6:1-9).

God clearly commands parents to teach their children.

God’s Word teaches parents to indoctrinate their children with its spiritual and moral principles (Gen. 18:19; Deu. 6:4-9; Eph. 6:1-4; Col. 3:20-21; Tit. 2:3-4; etc.). Christian parents who neglect this responsibility have no valid excuse (McClish 78).

Today, there are some parents who believe that their role is to simply get their kids dressed for services on Sunday morning. God entreated His people to teach their children while they were sitting, standing, walking, lying down, getting up—in essence, all the time. God implores parents to keep His will ever before the eyes of young people. “Too often parents want the preacher, elders, or Bible class teachers to prepare their children to face the world and then blame them when their children are overcome by the world” (Kee 102). Preachers, elders, and Bible class teachers play an important role in building better young people, but young people are molded in their home.

An English instructor, who had a great influence upon my thinking, once expounded in regards to the foolish notion that a student could act, study, and work any way he wished while in high school and then totally change once he started college. The point he made was that if one's practice was to be lazy and careless in high school, it would be more likely than not that the student's practice would continue though in another environment. The correlation is this—if the only Bible training a child gets is in three hours at the building in which the church meets and the rest of the time is spent in a worldly home, then the worldliness will win out.

Parents who shirk or neglect their responsibility in training and teaching their children, and in providing them with desired social activities can hardly blame the church when they go astray. Parents whose children go astray often react in two ways. They either become angry and malign the church or they suddenly become hyperactive in “youth activities” (often wanting to take over “youth programs” which their own failure has disqualified them for anything of the sort). At any rate, they have shifted the blame to the church when they should be looking in the mirror (Hayes 222-23).

Building better young people at home requires more than just teaching. It demands corrective and corporal punishment.

The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to *himself* bringeth his mother to shame. When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth: but the righteous shall see their fall. Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul (Pro. 29:15-17).

There is no way to build better youth without teaching them that there is a consequence for wrongdoing. Children who can get away with just about anything in the home are trained to have no respect for authority; they also think they can always do that which is right in their own eyes (Jud. 21:25). If young people are not taught that God requires punishment for disobedience, how will they be prepared to stand before God on the day of Judgment? The training and teaching of children is ultimately to prepare them for that Great Day.

Men have failed to realize that true wisdom demands respect for authority, that the home is the basic unit of society to bring about proper discipline, and that obedience is the end result of such endeavors.... The abdication in recent years of fathers in seeing that the home fulfills its purpose in providing the atmosphere necessary for children to learn respect for authority is sad. Without proper training in self-discipline and obedience, the root of much of our society's

woes, as well as the current disdain for authority in the Lord's church, is made glaringly obvious (Brown, "Keep" 67).

### **FEAR GOD; KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS**

If this one statement in the Bible were instilled into people from their youths, there would be very few empty pews and there would be great rejoicing in Heaven. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man" (Ecc. 12:13). While many philosophers and psychotherapists are mulling the meaning of life, and helping (victimizing is more like it) patients resolve the question: "Why am I here?" God has already given us the answer—"Fear God, and keep His commandments." Young people can build themselves up by studying and applying what God teaches through His holy Word.

Every commandment God has ever given man is because God loves him, and He knows what is best for man. Therefore, to submit to the commandments of God is to bask in the love of God and to keep one's heart from sin (Brown, "Keep" 72).

Young people can be strengthened and edified by examining these four major needs: (1) Respect, (2) Industry, (3) The Need to Choose Friends Wisely, and (4) The Need to Discern Between Good and Evil.

### **Respect**

*Respect* is defined by Webster's Dictionary as "the special esteem or consideration in which one holds another person or thing." *Esteem* means "to have a high opinion of; to hold in high value." Building better young people requires that young people respect themselves. Young people should respect themselves because we are all created in the image of God.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (Gen. 1:26-27).

Young people should respect themselves because once an individual obeys the Gospel plan of salvation, he belongs to Christ.

For he that is called in the Lord, *being* a servant, is the Lord's free-man: likewise also he that is called, *being* free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. Brethren, let

every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God (1 Cor. 7:22-24).

Young people must respect themselves enough to keep their bodies pure. Growing up should be fun and there's nothing wrong with young girls starting to like young boys and young boys liking young girls. However, the Bible clearly teaches that a mature relationship between men and women can **only** be enjoyed by a husband and his own wife who have been married in accordance with God's will. There are many young girls and boys who have become parents while they were still in need of their own parents. Since we are purchased by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28), Paul proclaims we should "therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:20). Bob Winton states:

The context deals with fornication, but the principle of the case permits applications to be made to smoking and drinking alcoholic beverages. We should use our bodies so as to bring the greatest glory to God; this requires that we keep it as pure as possible from all contaminating influences (88).

According to "Mothers Against Drunk Driving," drunk driving is the leading single cause of death among 15-24 year olds. Fourteen teenagers die every day and another 360 are injured in crashes involving drunk driving.

Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, *when* it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, *shalt thou say*, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, *and I felt it not*: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again (Pro. 23:29-35).

According to the American Lung Association, smoking-related diseases claim an estimated 438,000 Americans every year. Cigarettes contain at least 69 distinct cancer causing chemicals. "Nicotine is an addictive drug, which when inhaled in cigarette smoke, reaches the brain faster than drugs" that are injected directly into the veins. Smoking is directly responsible for 87% of lung cancer cases and most cases of emphysema and chronic bronchitis. The bottom line—smoking and drinking are not cool. Smoking and drinking cause many problems physically, emotion-

ally, and mentally. Keeping young people away from these dangerous passions is of great necessity.

Building better young people demands that they respect others.

While the wicked spend much of their time generating that which is empty and worthless, the righteous man is busy planting and watering the seeds of godliness in the lives of those with whom he comes in contact (Yeatts 362-63).

We are commanded to respect our parents (Eph. 6:1-3). We are also commanded to respect our friends and neighbors (Mat. 19:19). Men are even commanded to respect their enemies.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you (Mat. 5:43-44).

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:18-21).

Building better young people also necessitates respect towards God and His laws. If we respect God, we will do as He has commanded. If young people learn to respect God, they will have no problem giving due respect to themselves and others. If we respect God, we will desire to serve Him. We will not serve out of a sense of “have to”; rather, we will serve because we “want to.” Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Respect for God can be seen in our worship to Him (John 4:24), in our speech (Eph. 4:29), and in the way we dress (Pro. 7:10).

### Industry

Building better young people demands that they be industrious. “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16). The church needs workers, and God compels us to use the time we have been given in service. “The harvest truly *is* great, but the labourers *are* few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2).

We have many in churches today who have never been taught to work, and therefore come into the body of Christ believing that they can sit

by and receive the rewards of the vineyard without having to work in it (Kee 105).

This lackadaisical attitude towards work is evidenced in all aspects of our society. There are a lot of lazy people in the world. They want to live the American dream but have it paid for by someone else. “A young person needs to be acutely aware that success is not going to be handed to him without hard work on his part” (Whitten 236). Infusing a desire to work into young people will help them in all phases of their lives.

Most people do not become successful in a haphazard manner. “Plan your work and work your plan” is a modern catch-phrase that is helpful, but Solomon taught the same principle three thousand years ago: “The plans of the diligent surely lead to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty” (Pro. 21:5). Those who fail to set goals have no problem in meeting them (Summers 283).

Solomon also mocks the slothful and warns of his impending consequence.

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, *and* gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? *Yet* a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man (Pro. 6:6-11).

The wise individual will be a worker—a doer and not a hearer only (Jam. 1:22). “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do *it* with thy might; for *there is* no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest” (Ecc. 9:10).

### Choose Friends Wisely

My dad always use to say, “If you run with the dogs, you’ll smell like them.” His point was that, whether deserving or not, you will be known by the company you keep. “Be not deceived: Evil companions corrupt good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33—ASV). Building better young people necessitates a willingness to choose friends wisely. It only takes a little leaven to leaven the whole lump (Gal. 5:9) and it only takes one bad influence to corrupt a good young person. “It is folly to the nth degree and of the deepest kind for one to associate constantly with foolish people” (Taylor 207). Consider the following warnings:

He that walketh with wise *men* shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed (Pro. 13:20).

A man *that hath* friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend *that sticketh* closer than a brother (Pro. 18:24).

Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul (22:24-25).

It is, therefore, *wise* that young people look deeper than the surface of popularity and acceptance. Friends must be chosen because they promote good character in another and because they offer *sound advice* (Smith 94).

### Discern Between Good and Evil

Building better young people demands that they be able to discern between good and evil (Heb. 5:14). “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isa. 5:20). In today’s society, there are many worldly and ungodly influences trying to persuade young people that there is no such thing as evil. Postmodernists claim that no one can know for sure what is right, and therefore each individual must decide for himself. “Woe unto *them that are* wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!” (Isa. 5:21). Sadly, this damnable heresy has also crept into the minds of some members of the church. Some have adopted a “Let’s get along at all costs” doctrine that precipitates the idea that one cannot know who or what is right or wrong. Jesus said, “If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32). To build better youths, young people must know that truth is absolute and attainable. They must know that truth is not dependant upon any situation or circumstance. Knowing truth can only come from hearing and studying God’s Word.

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17).

God expounds unto us the value of knowledge and wisdom.

Wisdom *is* the principal thing; *therefore* get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding (Pro. 4:7).

The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy *is* understanding (9:10).

Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom *is* better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it (Pro. 8:10-11).

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man (Ecc. 12:13).

Better young people can be built by following this mandate. Respecting God and thus respecting themselves as well as others, being industrious and using their time wisely, choosing friends that will help them be as God desires, and continuing to grow in knowledge so they can discern between good and evil will allow young people to become stronger and more effective stewards of God.

Clearly, the most important things in life are those things that shape and mold into the image of his Creator. Discernment, experience, benevolence, pure speech and knowledge are, quite literally, worth more than gold or silver. It is, therefore, wise to seek out things of real value early in one's life and never let it go (Smith 94).

### **OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN**

Building better young people exacts the need to put God and His Will above all else. In the face of persecution, imprisonment, and potential death, Peter and the other apostles defied the religious hierarchy of the day and proclaimed, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Seemingly it is a simple command to follow, but one that is often neglected. Many members of the church of Christ are unwilling to practice church discipline because it may hurt someone's feelings. Some Christians are willing to overlook the sins of a man because he is a friend. Young people need to purpose in their hearts early in life that, come what may, they will never put an earthly friendship above their love for God. Jesus warned that "a man's foes *shall be* they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Mat. 10:36-37).

Peer pressure has, far too many times, destroyed the lives of many young people. Do not be fooled, however, into thinking that peer pressure only affects young people. A staggering number of adults have wandered away from the truth to continue their friendships with those in error. Young people need to be resolved never to follow men rather than God.

Evil men will seek to draw us away after them, but we must not waver, detouring from God's will to the left or right. Instead, we must always

continue pressing onward, not pausing to compromise with evil, but being “steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58) (Goodwin 247).

Compromising with evil is exactly what many have done and will continue to do. Men who want to keep or desire to gain popularity make excuses and pseudo-defenses for apostate individuals because of the pressure placed upon them by their peers. In like manner, “many youths succumb to peer pressure and do things they thought they would never do. Sinners want company” (Rogers 159). Most people who yield to peer pressure do so gradually. They inch closer and closer to the flame thinking that they are just far enough away so as not to get burnt, and then it is too late. “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Jam. 1:14-15). Temptation leads to a slippery slope of sin which is easy to fall down once you get too close to the edge.

One never acquires a taste for that which he never tries. One who has never experimented with alcohol has no problem with drunkenness... There are simply some sins that seem so much stronger once one has yielded to them for the first time. Sin is a taskmaster (John 8:34; Rom. 6:16), and, once it has a person in its clutches, it can sometimes be very hard to shake. It is always easier not to begin a habit than it is to break one, and youth especially need to remember this with regard to vice and evil companions. A young person who never gives in the first time to strong drink or evil company is the same who will never miss either (Goodwin 258-59).

Matthew Henry compares peer pressure and evil companions to a deadly disease.

Bad company and conversation are likely to make bad men. Those who would keep their innocence must keep good company. Error and vice are infectious: and, if we would avoid the contagion, we must keep clear of those who have taken it (1 Cor. 15:20).

Young people today face peer pressure to incorporate themselves in deeds that would have never been imagined just a generation ago. Determining at an early age to obey God rather than men will be of great importance in the effort to build better young people. The earlier one can distinguish the earthly ties and friendships he has made from the covenant he has made with God, the better opportunity he will have in the future of not giving in to the peer pressure that could lead him to depart from the truth.

## CONCLUSION

It is imperative that Christians recognize the need to build and strengthen the faith of our young people. Building better young people entails faithful parents training and admonishing their children, implanting into the minds of youth the appropriate respect for God and proper authority, and the cognizance to turn only **to** God and **not from** God in an attempt to seek the praise of men. Last, building better young people calls upon them to endure until the end.

Far too many began the journey of righteousness, but, upon being knocked down a time or two, eventually stayed down and allowed their faith to expire, and can no longer be found among the faithful of God. All throughout the Scriptures it is impressed upon the people of God to endure, to persist, to continue, to keep one's hand to the plow, to be faithful unto death, and ultimately to overcome (Mat. 10:22; 1 Tim. 4:16; Luke 9:62; Heb. 3:12-19; Rev. 2:10; Rev. 3:5). The righteous man is not measured by how many times he was knocked for a loop, but by how many times he stood back up by the grace and strength of God and continued to fight as a soldier on the battlefield (Eph. 6:11-17) (Yeatts 373).

Paul exhorted the young man Timothy to

be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:1-3).

Spiritual building is a project that never has an end. Young people will grow old and teach the next generation those things which they learned as youths. Young people will never get to an age where there is no need for growth and building, but the time to build is now. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" (Ecc. 12:1).

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# BUILDING THE CHURCH (SPIRITUALLY AND NUMERICALLY)

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## INTRODUCTION

As we take note of the church within God's scheme of redemption, we will clearly see that it is the fullness of Christ. All of the blessings that are located in Christ are enjoyed within the confines of the New Testament church.

Because the church is an essential component within God's eternal plan, we read of its relationship to Christ. Paul, the apostle wrote:

Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church,

Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:15-23).

Because of this relationship to Christ, it is paramount that the church grow. A detailed study of Acts will produce evidence of the growth, both spiritually and numerically, of the church during the first century. When the Gospel today is faithfully presented in its simplicity in a convincing and persuasive manner, truth seeking individuals will obey this saving message. The fact is that salvation from past alien sins brings about a common fellowship in the totality of saved individuals; it is also the case that this totality of saved individuals is referred to as being the church (Acts 2:47). We thus properly (and with biblical warrant) conclude that scriptural conversions to Christ results in church growth.

### PROPER DEFINITIONS

In our study of this topic, it is crucial that we properly define *church*. While faithful brethren understand the basic meaning of the term (realizing that such is used in contradistinction to that of denominationalism and that the term is indeed used inclusively of the totality of all of those having been saved from past alien sins), some forget that such is used also in the sense of a collective, functioning unit.

*Church* (ἐκκλησία) is used in a general and/or universal sense referring to all of those who are saved in Christ. This is a spiritual relationship to which all those are added by the Lord upon their obedience to the Gospel (Acts 2:47). This relationship in Christ is spoken of in Ephesians 1:15-23. It promised to be built by Christ Himself (Mat. 16:13-19). It has no time of assembly, place to assemble, overseeing elders, or collective function. It is exclusively a relationship that is found in Christ (Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 12:13). Because of its essence it is comprised of saved individuals. It is not comprised of local churches. If the New Testament church in its universal extension were comprised of local churches, such would necessitate a group of universal elders having oversight of this entire operation. It would require a time of assembly and place of assembly for all the churches to assemble as one congregation en masse. Such would also necessitate a super organization beyond that of the local church that would be destructive of our autonomy and independence. During the past two years, we have witnessed how some have attempted to gain control of independent local churches by their political maneuvering and high

pressure methods of centralized work projects. Imagine what it would be like if they had the denominational machinery to gain control of all churches of Christ?

*Church* (ἐκκλησία) is also used in a more limited or local sense. As we study Acts, we note local churches being established and organized according to the New Testament pattern. Local churches were organized for evangelism, edification, discipline of unruly members, and benevolent work. Whereas the New Testament church in its general or universal extension is exclusively a relationship of saved individuals that are in Christ, the church in its local and/or limited extension is a local collective functioning unit of Christians, who have bonded themselves together under a common oversight to accomplish a collective task as a single independent unit (Acts 9:26).

Building up the church (both spiritually and numerically) thus has a dual application. There are spiritual activities that build us up individually as we grow as Christians in the universal body of the saved, and there are spiritual activities that not only have an influence upon us as individuals, but also influence local churches both in spiritual and numerical growth.

### THE ALL-SUFFICIENCY OF THE CHURCH

With our introductory remarks and background information set forth, we thus clearly ascertain that the New Testament church, in its universal extension as the universal body of the saved and in its local extension as a collective functioning unit, can and should promote both spiritual and numerical growth. The New Testament church is therefore all sufficient to accomplish every task that the Lord designed it to accomplish:

But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning

craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:7-16).

An analysis of the forgoing text demonstrates four specific points:

1. **The passage teaches that Christ gave gifts unto men that the church may be filled (Eph. 4:8-10).** Some falsely contend that the gifts under consideration in the text are not classified as miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (Jenkins 58); however, a careful examination of the context proves to the contrary. The office and works of the Apostles and prophets were miraculous in their very nature. When we also consider the fact that, because of process of divine revelation, the Scriptures did not totally exist in written form (that such existed partially in writings as well as within inspired men during the time frame of the book of Ephesians) there was a need for miraculously gifted evangelists, pastors (elders), and teachers. The **gifts**, as per Ephesians 4:7-8, speak with reference to **miraculous gifts** as conferred within the first century to confirm the truth. Acts 19:1-6 gives adequate evidence to warrant such a conclusion.

2. **The design of the gifts are designated in Ephesians 4:12.** Paul uses *perfecting*. Our text indicates that such gifts are “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” The text uses two different Greek prepositions. The first “for” is the Greek *pros* (πρός) and is used relative towards “a thing or a position and state looking towards a thing...of the goal or limit towards which a movement is directed” (Thayer 541). The second and third “for” is from the Greek preposition *eis* (εἰς) and denotes that which governs the accusative case and speaks of “entrance into, or direction and limit: *into, to, towards, for, among*” (Thayer 183). Because the revealed Word of God was not in completed form, the miraculous gifts brought the local churches of the first century to a state of maturity.

Paul teaches that God gave the miraculous gifts that the brethren may be brought to a state of completion to accomplish the work that the body may be built up. *Edify* or *build up* is translated from the Koine Greek term *oikodome* (οἰκοδομή), which is used figuratively of

spiritual strengthening, edifying, edification, or building up (Thayer 440).

In our text *perfecting*, from the Greek *katartismos* (καταρτισμός), is defined as “a *strengthening, perfecting, of the soul...a training, disciplining, instructing*” (Thayer 336). It also speaks with reference to that of putting of a thing or a person into the condition in which he ought to be. This term is used in surgery for the setting of a broken limb or for putting a joint that is out of place back into its proper place. In politics the Greeks used this term to describe the bringing together of opposing factions so that government can go on (Jenkins 60). In the New Testament it is used of mending nets (Mark 1:19) or restoring erring saints (Gal. 6:1). Christians must be perfected and/or equipped, or they will never be in a spiritual condition either collectively or distributively to do that which God intended for them to accomplish.

The work of service as specified in our text is translated from the Greek term *diakonia* (δῆλονία) that is translated as “*service, ministering*” (Thayer 136). While it is indeed the case that such a term is used in the New Testament regarding that of benevolence (Acts 6:1; 11:29; 12:25; 2 Cor. 9:12-13), it is also used in a more general context of service as per preaching and teaching ( Acts 20:24; 2 Cor. 4:1; 6:3; 2 Tim. 4:5; 2 Cor. 11:8).

A time limitation is placed with the text regarding the conferral and exercise of the *gifts* under consideration: “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). These gifts were provisional or temporary by their very design and is an indication that something greater than these miraculous gifts would bring about the completion, perfection, equipping, and building up of the church. The passage explains to us what the greater is—the unity of **the** faith and knowledge of the Son of God. When the Word of God was brought into complete written and confirmed form, the temporary gifts were no longer needed and were thus done away.

3. **The edifying or building up of the body of Christ.** Such is not an optional function of the church. It is mandated by heaven’s call through the Gospel of Christ. It is essential to our eternal salvation and the continued existence of the church in organized form. The church cannot remain in a state of inactivity for long. If it does not grow, spiritual entropy will destroy it. While it may be the case that a local church engages in a great deal of movement and busy work, such

should not be confused with the divinely authorized work set forth in the New Testament that God has authorized the local church to accomplish. It oftentimes is the case that local churches “spin their wheels” without going any where. Such occurs when brethren reject the New Testament pattern and do their own thing.

4. **The local church can indeed accomplish what God has designed it to do.** To affirm that God has given us a perfect pattern by which one can obey the Gospel of Christ, be saved from past sin, and live acceptably in the confines of the New Testament church also necessitates the conclusion that such local churches are obligated to do nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else that is authorized by such a pattern.

When a local church follows the New Testament pattern, the authority of Christ will be respected (Col. 3:17; 2 John 9-11). Such a local church will both worship and study in God’s appointed way, it will seek to evangelize the lost, defend the faith, restore fallen brethren, and assist the poor. Such will bring about edification and will build up the local church both spiritually and numerically. As we examine the Scriptures, we find examples of how local churches of Christ were built up both spiritually and numerically in accomplishing the work of the Gospel.

**The all-sufficiency of the church was accomplished in evangelism.** Christians evangelized from Jerusalem to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (Acts 11:22-23). The church at Antioch sent Barnabas and Saul to evangelize those who were lost in sin (Acts 13:1-4). Among the locations they went was Philippi (Acts 16:31-33). Paul went on to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4), and Philippi financially supported him (Phi. 4:15-16). The church of Christ at Thessalonica sounded out the Word of God throughout the regions of Macedonia and Achaia (1 The. 1:8).

**The all sufficiency of the church was accomplished in worshipping God and studying His Word.** Such was the case with the church at Jerusalem even from the beginning of New Testament Christianity (Acts 2:42). When Paul arrived at Troas, he sought to abide in that location to worship with the church in that community (Acts 20:7). The Hebrew Christians were admonished not to forsake the assemblies of exhortation (Heb. 10:25).

**The all-sufficiency of the church was accomplished in benevolent work.** The church at Jerusalem provided for its own needy

members (Acts 6:1-6). Christians at Antioch sent a contribution for benevolence by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:27-30). The local churches at Macedonia and Achaia sent a contribution to the poor among the saints at Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-26; 2 Cor. 8:9). Galatians 6:10 teaches that we are to do good unto all individuals—especially to those who are brethren in Christ. All divine obligations that exist upon the basis of one's being a Christian and are equally related in collective function to all Christians, these Divine obligations also apply to the local church. Biblical benevolence is a Divine obligation that exists upon the basis of one's being a Christian; it is equally related in collective function to all Christians. Therefore, it is also the case that biblical benevolence applies also to the local church.

The churches of Christ in the first century were capable of doing the work that God had assigned them to accomplish. They did so without forming para-church organizations, such as missionary, edification, or benevolent societies.

When good and honest hearts receive and obey the Word of God, the church of the Lord will be built up spiritually and numerically.

### **VARIOUS PSEUDO MEANS OF CHURCH GROWTH**

The growth of local churches is a component that we all desire. Due to the fact that numbers, as they relate to individuals, point to eternal souls, and also due to the fact that the very essence of the Gospel indicates that the church of Christ (both universally and locally) was designed to grow, it thus is paramount in such a study as this that, when we discuss *building the church (spiritually and numerically)*, we consider the means God has given to build up the church. We should also consider various ways that Satan provides to harm the church of the Lord that are commonly being incorporated into what is *church growth*. Not all growth is God approved. The only type of church growth that meets with God's approval is that based upon the authority of Christ. The only type of numerical growth that finds its basis upon the authority of Christ is that which comes upon the basis of true spirituality, resultant in following the New Testament pattern.

1. **Growth that does not respect New Testament authority does not result in building up the church (spiritually and numerically).** Such a type of building results from compromise and the rejection of God's Truth. We are living in an age of entertainment where some brethren think the only way to grow local churches is to

provide entertainment for the masses. When one understands that the Scriptures authorize by direct statement, implication, and example (and that such authority is either specific or generic), it does not take a great deal of time to ascertain the truth that the Lord's church as a collective unit is not authorized to provide entertainment. Such is the responsibility of individuals and/or the home. Putting the church in the work of entertainment may bring about an increase in numbers; however, such is in violation of Colossians 3:17 and 2 John 9. It will not produce true spirituality at all.

When the authority of the Scriptures is rejected, the flood gates of apostasy are opened. Everything from the introduction of mechanical instruments in the worship assembly to skits and drama will take center stage, and the New Testament pattern is viewed with blatant contempt. This type of mind-set is identified by the attitude: **"I like it, I want it, therefore, I'm going to have it."** Once this attitude is paramount in the attitudes found within a local church, it will not be very long until the Scriptures are totally cast aside. Dub McClish correctly observed:

Some brethren will do anything to bring numerical and financial growth to a congregation. They will mutilate, innovate, and obfuscate the Gospel in order to have it. "Growth (as they define it) at whatever price" is the demon that drives them.

The cry for change in the Lord's church has been heard with increasing frequency and intensity in recent years. Those calling for change in the church seem determined to effect it at whatever cost it may exact on the body of Christ. This cry is heard in various books which our brethren have written (e.g., **The Church in Transition**, by Jim Woodruff, **The Cruciform Church**, by Leonard Allen, **Navigating the Winds of Change**, by Lynn Anderson). It is heard in various journals and papers (e.g., **Wineskins**, **Christian Chronicle**). It is heard in speeches made at lectureships, conferences, and workshops (e.g., Nashville Jubilee, Tulsa Soul-winning Workshop, unity forums with the Independent Christian Church, and various universities). Besides the books that have been written, articles and even workshops are now appearing more frequently that provide instruction on how to accomplish unauthorized changes in local churches. The workshops on "how to grow a church" are generally conducted by liberals who have little respect for Scriptural Truth and who have gotten their ideas from denominational sources rather than from the Bible (17).

**2. Growth upon the basis of having broader perimeters of fellowship authorized by the New Testament will not build up the church.** When one respects the authority of Christ, one will recognize where the line is drawn as to whom we may be in fellowship:

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:3-7).

One cannot have an unscriptural concept of fellowship (joint-participation) and build up the church. Fellowship with one another is contingent upon fellowship with God through Christ. If one seeks to increase the numbers of a local church by extending fellowship to those who have never obeyed the Gospel, the numbers will indeed increase, however those who are brought into such a fellowship remain outside the fellowship of God in a lost condition, and those responsible for extending the perimeters of fellowship become guilty of sin and lose their fellowship with God in their acting without Divine authority (2 John 9-11). When such heresy is practiced, local churches are corrupted and lose their identity and fellowship with God.

The same principle is true regarding extending the perimeters of fellowship to unfaithful fallen children of God that remain outside the realm of biblical fellowship. While indeed it is the case that all individuals who have believed the Gospel of Christ, repented of their sins, confessed their faith in Christ, and been baptized for the remission of sins are members of the New Testament church (and thus are children of God), not all children of God are automatically faithful. John gives clear indication that one, as a child of God, may walk in darkness, lie, and do not the truth (2 John 6). One, in such a condition, is certainly not in a saved state. As a matter of fact, John gives inspired instruction as to how a fallen child of God may be restored to the fellowship of God. By a genuine confession of sins presupposed by repentance and followed by prayer (1 John 1:7-9; Acts 8:22), the fallen child of will be forgiven and restored to the fellowship of God and the faithful.

When God's second law of pardon is either ignored or abandoned, the Lord's church is not built up. If anything, local churches are overtaken in sin and brought down to destruction. When fellowship is extended to those who are unfaithful, we are reminded by Paul that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5:6). When sin is being

practiced within the church, a divine prescription is given to deal with such a problem: “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (5:7). Many brethren have forgotten, or else have never learned, that in some cases there must first of all be some subtractions in the local church before there can be growth both spiritually and numerically.

3. **Growth upon the basis of following the improper model will not build up the church (spiritually and numerically).** A great many of individuals view building the church (spiritually and numerically) as exclusively a numbers game. As already observed in our study, we are indeed concerned about numbers to the point that each number represents a soul; however, God has given us a pattern as to the type of growth He desires as set forth in His Word. Any type of growth that is not contingent upon divine Truth is growth that God hates!

In their quest for numbers, brethren have turned to various denominational preachers and religious organizations to promote church growth. The mega-church is presently the popular approach by the worldly thinking crowd to appeal to the masses. The Willow Creek Church in Park Ridge, Illinois has been a popular community-type church bringing a great deal of attention to this *mega-church* movement. Basically, this mind-set is fed by the modern Madison Avenue marketing techniques of church growth experts advocating a *user friendly* approach to religion. Such is a perversion of the plain Gospel of Christ and nothing more than a promotion of a combination approach to entertainment, social programs, contemporary style music, change flexibility, dressed up false doctrine, and contemporary worship to satisfy the whims of the baby boomers and Generation X. Such an approach to religion is outside the realm of New Testament authority and will be responsible for taking as many members of the church of Christ to hell in our generation as much as any other sin.

This approach to church growth is based on worldliness. It is anti-God, Christ-denying, Bible authority hating, and soul-damning. It must be avoided like the plague. The only alternative to such spiritual poison is a strict adherence to the New Testament pattern.

4. **Growth upon the basis of non-offensive preaching/teaching.** When one only casually reads Acts, discovery is made of the fact that the first century church of Christ was a controversial body of Christians, following a controversial Christ, preaching a controversial

message, waging an unpopular spiritual war for the souls of accountable individuals. These brethren were hated, despised, abused, misrepresented and either converted their opposition or else made them so angry by the message they proclaimed and lived that the opposition persecuted these brethren, tortured them, and even threw many of them to the lions. In spite of all of the opposition and persecution, the New Testament church in the first century grew like a mighty wildfire.

The total essence of the power of the Gospel of Christ finds fruition in the changed lives wherein conviction had been wrought. When one considers the fact that the Gospel must either be preached or taught for one to believe and obey it, such is an indication that Gospel preaching/teaching places those who hear such in a situation wherein they are confronted with their sin and encouraged to renounce such. In all cases of preaching and teaching in Acts, we clearly note that individuals were compelled to give up sin and obey the conditions of pardon to become a Christian. Nowhere in the New Testament does one discover that individuals can obey the Gospel without first of all going through a change of thinking. This is referred to in the Scriptures as that of repentance from the Greek *metanoia* (μετάνοια). Because repentance is a change of mind or will, literally an afterthought or a turning of mind, one can never be placed into a situation where biblical conversion will be accomplished unless one thinks differently about his sinful condition (Acts 17:30-31).

If the church takes the non-offensive preaching/teaching route, then those to whom we preach and teach will never be saved, in that the Gospel was designed to offend individuals while they remain in their sins. On the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ, the Gospel was first presented in its purity and simplicity. Those who heard this Divine message were guilty of rejecting the only begotten Son of God. When considering the evidence as set forth by the inspired apostles of Christ, those who sincerely heard the Truth and accepted the evidence were “pricked in their hearts”—i.e., they were made to be aware of their guilt and sin (Acts 2:37). Until individuals are convinced that they are lost in sin, alienated from God, doomed, and condemned to hell they will see no need to think differently about their present condition, turn from sin and obey the saving Gospel of Christ.

The late brother Roy J. Hearn observed:

Nowadays the quest seems to be for church leaders who are “good mixers,” socialites who can “get along with the denominations, and

please the members.” In 1948, F. L. Paisley, faithful gospel preacher, answered a call for a preacher in a North Texas town. The elders had a set of rules the preacher should follow. Among them were these:

- (1) You are not to mention baptism, except at the close of a sermon.
- (2) You are not ever to mention the name of a denomination.
- (3) You are to preach only to the church, and that so as to make us feel good.

There were other such ridiculous conditions set forth. Brother Paisley was not interested.

So, while the clamor is for good mixers, who will get along with the denominations, use proper method of approach, slip up on the blind side of sinners and make Christians of them unawares, and substitute psychology for gospel, and be like the nations around about us (I Sam. 8:5-20), we are made to wonder why preaching is not as effective today. One great preacher said it like this:

In preaching the Truth of God’s Word, we may be offensive to some people, but if we fail to preach the Truth, we are offensive to all Heaven (95-96).

In consideration of the totality of the Scriptures, it is the case that a faithful presentation of God’s Truth will entail negative preaching and teaching:

Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant (Jer. 1:9-10).

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of our study was to consider “Building The Church (Spiritually And Numerically).” We have seen that it is both God’s desire and plan that the church of Christ grow both spiritually and numerically.

In consideration of this topic we have given a scriptural definition of *church* and have differentiated between both its universal and local extensions. We have noted that God has given us a pattern in the New

Testament that will bring about building the church (spiritually and numerically), and we have deduced from the Scriptures that the New Testament church is all-sufficient to accomplish growth according to God's Divine plan without human innovations, schemes, or organizations.

As we conclude our study of this crucial subject, may we all be reminded that there is truly an outstanding book regarding that of building the Lord's church both universally and locally—spiritually and numerically. Many individuals already have a copy of this book. The author is truly an expert regarding this subject, with His knowledge and wisdom being without question. The principles are time-tested and have proven time after time that, if we put into practice what is plainly set forth, it will indeed work. This particular book was written by the historian Luke as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit. By putting such Divine principles into practice, we will see alien sinners baptized into Christ and unfaithful children of God restored to the faith.

May we see the need to preach the Truth of God in an uncompromising manner, defend the faith, evangelize the lost, restore the unfaithful, and assist the poor. In so doing, we shall save ourselves and those who gladly hear us.

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# BUILDING WORLD EVANGELISM

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## INTRODUCTION

Teaching the Gospel is one of the most wonderful blessings a Christian has in his life. Christians are strengthened in character and wisdom of the Scriptures every time they teach the Gospel to those in need of God's saving words. The church of Christ is strengthened when God's children go out into the world, proclaiming that salvation is available to all. It enables those lost in sin to see the wonderful plan of salvation God has provided for their souls.

God's love for those lost in sin is seen in the giving of His "only Begotten Son." Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). It is God's love for mankind that was the impetus for man's salvation. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

Jesus came to earth to save the lost. "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He paid the sin debt for man, by giving His life at Calvary. Therefore, it is vitally important for Christians to see the need for world evangelism.

## **JESUS WAS CONCERNED WITH BUILDING WORLD EVANGELISM**

The command of Jesus to take the Gospel to the world is essential and urgent. “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16). Christians must take the “words of life” to foreign lands. The people in Mexico, Canada, Germany, Italy, France, Nigeria, and the Middle East all need to hear the Gospel of Christ.

World evangelism includes domestic evangelism. The lost in America are no different from the rest of the world. They are in need of the Savior and His message. Unless Christians carry out world evangelism to every part of the world, including our neighbors next door, people will step off into eternity unprepared to meet God. Today, in the United States of America, there are about 1,265,000 members of the church of Christ and all of them are not faithfully serving the Lord. In India there are about 2,420,000 members of the Lord’s Church (“Decision” 1). That almost doubles the number of Christians in America. In Malawi there are 100,000 Christians. There are more members of the church in Malawi per capita than in any other country. There is always the need for world evangelism, but let us be balanced in mission work and have zealous domestic mission programs as well.

## **SPONSORING CONGREGATIONS**

One of the basic stones in the foundation of establishing churches and doing mission work is having a faithful and strong sponsoring congregation. The sponsoring congregation can be a mighty asset to the success of the mission program, or they can destroy a good work. Sponsoring congregations do not need large numbers or a large bank account, but they must be committed to the Lord and His church.

Sponsoring congregations must be spiritually mature. A sponsoring congregation should be organized with elders who understand the hardships of preaching the Gospel and are patient while the Gospel seed is being sown. In doing mission work for the past twenty years, this preacher has noticed that one of the biggest problems sponsoring and supporting congregations have is an unrealistic expectation of those they send out to do mission work. He has noticed this mostly in churches who are not sponsoring the work but help to support it. It is unrealistic to establish a church and have elders in a year or two. It is

also unrealistic to establish a church and it be self-supporting within five to seven years. (It is not an impossibility for a mission work to be self-supporting in a short period, perhaps five years, but the average time will take longer.) Therefore, the sponsoring congregation should sit down with their missionary and set realistic goals. When there is no planning and setting of realistic goals, success will be, if any, on a small scale.

Sponsoring congregations have the obligations to see that the missionary is supported sufficiently. That means that the missionary and his family should have a reasonable salary, health insurance, and work fund. If the missionary has to take his work fund out of his salary, he is not going to make enough. How many “pulpit preachers” would be willing to purchase their office supplies and pay their own expenses out of their salary?

The sponsoring congregation has the responsibility to see that the Truth is preached by those they send out to the mission fields! First, know the person you are sending to establish a new work. That means you must check all references, schools, and as much of his work record as possible. One will not preach the Truth if he is not living by the Truth. The missionary must be honest in his dealing with man and God, as all Christians should be.

Sponsoring congregations need to visit the mission work as often as possible to see that Truth is being preached and also to encourage those they have entrusted to proclaim the Gospel. Those preaching the Gospel need to be uplifted, strengthened, and urged on too. Mission work has many great rewards, but there are a number things in any work that can discourage. It does not matter how much success a preacher and his family have in doing the Lord’s work; they will always need encouragement.

There is a heavy duty and responsibility in sponsoring a mission work. Churches must have the resolve to complete the work once started, as long as the missionary and the new congregation are faithful to God and His Word. To leave the work for no apparent reason would be the same as leaving a young child to fend for himself, if one starts a mission work and just walks out on it.

### **TRIALS IN MISSION WORK**

The New Testament church faced one trial after another. It started from the very beginning of the church. The first gospel sermon was not

accepted by all. In Acts 2 some mocked the apostles: “Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine” (2:13). The early church was persecuted. Peter and John were put on trial after healing the lame man and preaching the resurrection of Jesus (3:1-4:22). There were troubles from within the church because widows were neglected in the daily distribution (6:1-7). Stephen was put on trial and killed for preaching the gospel (7:1-60). Saul, a very zealous Jew, tried to destroy the church of Christ. It is written: “As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed *them* to prison” (8:3).

The churches established by the apostle Paul had many trials and problems to overcome. The church at Corinth had problems and struggles. They had a sectarian spirit (1 Cor. 1:10-17). They yielded to sin by allowing sexual immorality to defile the congregation. A man was allowed to have his father’s wife (5:1-13). The church at Corinth perverted the Lord’s Supper (11:17-34). These examples are not all the sins and trials they faced. The churches of Galatia faced trials from false brethren making a vigorous attack against the Gospel of Christ. Paul warned the elders from Ephesus against false teachers who would come from outside of the church and from within the church. He said:

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:29-30).

The New Testament church faced many trials and problems, but they overcame sin and the trials of life by following the doctrine of Christ.

Why do congregations send out missionaries and expect that there will be no problems? Is that realistic? In establishing one mission work, the men of the mission committee said: “In your communication to us, we do not want to hear of any problems.” First, there will always be problems and trials. The church is perfect, but the people who make up the church are imperfect. There is not anyone walking the earth today that is perfect, especially preachers. So there will be difficulties, problems, trials in any work. Second, the elders, mission committee, and members of the sponsoring church need to be ready to encourage and help by giving spiritual guidance to the newly established congregation.

Every church of Christ is autonomous, self-governing, functioning independently without the control by others. The church looks to Christ Jesus and His Word for what they teach and practice in religion. “And

whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 3:17). Sponsoring congregations do not have the oversight of another congregation. That is not scriptural. They do oversee the missionary they sent out, but not another church of Christ. One of the most deadly problems that can arise in establishing a new congregation is having the sponsoring congregation take too much authority over the young church.

First, it would be wrong. There is no authority for it in the New Testament. Second, it paralyzes the newly established church and will keep it from growing. If a sponsoring congregation cannot trust the ones they send out to do mission work, they should not send them out lest they do harm in the name of the Lord. If error is taught by a missionary, that must be addressed. It must be corrected if possible, or his support must be stopped. However, the supporting church must never make decisions for the newly established church or try to override their autonomy.

### CAMPAIGNS

One of the great tools in any mission work is having a campaign. They have and will lead many souls to Christ. A campaign will strengthen the congregation who is coming to help and the newly established church of Christ. They encourage and add energy to both the one putting it on and the one being helped.

During the past few years, this writer has noticed that many churches, not all, have been using campaigns to entertain their young people. They turn a group of untrained, undisciplined, and ill-equipped young people loose on a mission work to keep them entertained for a week. Campaigns are an excellent method to use in training the young and old alike in doing the Lord’s work. The congregation that trains its young to be servants of the Lord will reap untold blessings from their efforts. It is **not** the responsibility of the missionary to entertain young people. He has his hands full in teaching the newly established congregation.

In planning for campaigns, the work needs to be started months before the event. There should be given time for training and prayer. It is tremendous work with great responsibility to try to teach the Gospel to the lost. Do your homework before going into the mission field.

The congregation sending out campaigners to help teach the lost must remember that they do **not** have the authority to overrule the

autonomy to the mission work! They should respect their wishes—as long as it is not unscriptural.

### THE COST OF EVANGELISM

Any effort worth doing has a sizeable cost! Preaching the Gospel of Christ is no exception. It cost Stephen his life:

And cast *him* out of the city, and stoned *him*: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon *God*, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep (Acts 7:58-60).

Paul, the servant of the Lord, suffered greatly for the cause of Christ:

I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also. Are they Hebrews? so *am* I. Are they Israelites? so *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so *am* I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I *am* more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; *In* journeyings often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils by *mine own* countrymen, *in* perils by the heathen, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches (2 Cor. 11:21-28).

It cost Paul physical and mental pain and death:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

The first century church had members who were put into prison and sent to death for the cause of Christ and His church. The cost was great, but the church of Christ grew as the blood of Christians was shed before the enemies of the Lord.

There is a cost to be paid today, and every elder, missionary, preacher, and member of the Lord's church must be ready to pay the price. The cost of evangelism is measured in more than money. It can

be measured in tears and pain in the heart. It is measured in sore feet that walk from door-to-door to teach any who are willing to open their Bibles. It is measured by time, the hours spent in home Bible studies, and seeking the lost.

The cost of evangelism should be measured by a careful and guarded approach to God's Words. Paul said, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). To be able to open the "Words of Life" to those in need of salvation, one must first put those Words in his heart and life. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psa. 119:11).

Yes, to some it may cost them their job, family, or life. Thank God there are a few who are willing to pay the price. Let us all pray that more Christians and congregations will be willing to pay the cost to evangelize the world.

### MOTIVATION

Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). The church of Christ is at a time in history when this command can be carried out to millions of people. Technology has enabled the Lord's church to reach the lost by printed page, radio, television, video, and computer. There are many churches that have campaigns locally and in foreign countries building world evangelism. What will keep Christians from doing evangelistic work? It can be summed up in three words—lack of motivation!

The motivational force that will influence Christians to do mission work is **love**. Jesus said, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14). Love for the Lord should be the motive that prompts building world evangelism.

Love for those lost in sin was the force behind God sending His Son to be the Savior of those who are obedient to Him. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). One cannot be a faithful follower of Christ without love. It is the force that motivates evangelism. It will motivate missionaries to leave their homes and go to where the Gospel is needed. It will motivate congregations to have a strong mission program, but when Christians desire to be self-indulgent, the love for the lost will vanish.

## PROCLAIMING THE WORD

The purpose of mission work is to be evangelistic—proclaiming the Word of God. Paul gave instruction to Timothy to proclaim the Word:

I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine (2 Tim. 4:1-2).

It is the preaching of God’s Word that can affect the heart of a sinner.

Evangelism promotes Christ and His doctrine. It is never appropriate to preach one’s opinion: “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5). Humor and opinions cannot save a soul from Hell. Sadly, there are too many seeking to effect the world by humor and opinions and not the Gospel.

There is no other plan to build world evangelism apart from preaching the Gospel. When the Gospel is preached, the power of God is glorified. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). The Gospel is what the early Christians used to turn the world upside down, it will do the same today.

Building world evangelism means someone is sowing the seed of God, His Word. The seed sown in the honest hearts will produce a Christian. There is a great harvest that can be reaped by those who diligently proclaim the Gospel.

## PLAN TO SUCCEED

In preaching and teaching the Word of God, one must have faith in God. It is written, “But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). In doing mission work it is imperative that the missionary and the sponsoring congregation trust God and plan to succeed. If the sponsoring congregation or the missionary have any questions about the success of the work they are about to embark upon, they should not go into the mission field.

This penman knows a congregation that established a mission point that did not plan to succeed. They had the idea, if it does not work out in a few years, they would just leave. Their thoughts were to rent ground and put a trailer on it for the meeting house. They could always

sell the trailer. It should not be a surprise that the work only lasted about five years. They did not start with the goal of succeeding.

It was about forty-five years ago that Bennie Blankenship moved into Prestonsburg, Kentucky, to establish a congregation. They started with about twenty-five in attendance. In a short period of time the congregation wanted to buy land and build a building. Brother Blankenship went to the local bank to borrow money to purchase land and build the building. The banker questioned that the church would be there within two or three years. Bennie, looked him in the eyes and said, "Sir, the church will be there long after we are dead." Today the congregation numbers about 185 in attendance. Brother Blankenship planned to succeed.

In building world evangelism preachers and congregations must stay the course. Plan to succeed, move in, unbox, and then burn the boxes. Success will come not because of personalities or whims, but the power of God. Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Mission work is not for those easily discouraged, but is for those who trust in God and plan to succeed.

### CONCLUSION

In a materialistic world that seeks fleshly pleasures at all cost, one can see the urgent need to build world evangelism. Today the world has about 1.3 billion adherents to Islam, about 1.1 billion nonreligious people, 900 million people who teach Hinduism, 394 million in Chinese traditional religion, and those the adhering to Buddhism number about 376 million. There are about 15 million people teaching Spiritualism, 14 million adhering to Judaism, Baha'i has about 7 million, Jainism 4.2 million, and Zoroastrianism has 2.6 million adherents ("Religions"). These numbers teach that there is an urgent need for God's people to build world evangelism.

The New Testament church had a terrific impact in the first century because they were evangelistic. After the death of Stephen, a great persecution came against the church, and Christians were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Those who "were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). Will it take persecution of the church for Christians once again to be concerned about building

world evangelism? Let us pray that our love will be the motivation that will be the impetus to preach the “Good News” and not persecution!

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# BUILDING PEACE AMONG BRETHREN

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## INTRODUCTION

That Christians are supposed to strive toward **unity and peace with one another** is just as much a part of the doctrine of Christ as is faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. All of us are familiar with Jesus' prayer that we might all be *one*. Not only did He pray for the unity of His immediate apostles, "that they may be one, as we *are*" (John 17:11), but farther down prayed:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (17:20-23).

Perceiving how **divided** those claiming to be Jesus' disciples have been in recent years, certain naive (perhaps well-meaning) but misguided souls have tried to characterize Christian unity as merely of **spirit** rather than of **doctrine**, citing Paul in Ephesians 4:3: "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." However, please note that this passage is not referring to the **human** spirit but to God's Holy Spirit. In fact, reading on, we see that the very unity under discussion is both **doctrinal** as well as organic and **spiritual**: "*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism*" (4:4-5).

## THE BEAUTY OF PEACE

Jesus is the Prince of Peace:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:27).

And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name *is* The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both (Zec. 6:12-13).

One of the benefits of becoming a Christian is to be the receipt of peace:

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Rom. 14:17).

For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace (Rom. 8:6).

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3).

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith (Gal. 5:22).

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

This author is, therefore, in favor of being at peace. It is the will of the Lord that His faithful followers be at peace among themselves.

## WITH WHOM MAY WE HAVE PEACE?

We may be at peace with the **Father and the Son**, for we read, “truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). We may be at peace with the **Holy Ghost**, for we read, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, *be* with you all. Amen” (2 Cor. 13:14). We may be at peace with the **apostles**, for we read, “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have

fellowship with us” (1 John 1:3). In this connection, we read again, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). We may be at peace with **faithful saints** of God, for we read, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). This would include those who having heard and believed the Gospel (Heb. 11:6), repented of sins (Luke 13:3), confessed Christ before men (Acts 8:37), and were immersed in water unto the remission of sins (Mat. 28:19; Acts 22:16). These are they who were added to the church (Acts 2:38-47), who “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship” (Acts 2:42), and whose works will follow them and be remembered by God (1 Cor. 15:58).

We are at peace with those who “abideth in the doctrine of Christ” (2 John 9). We are at peace with those who hold fast the faithful Word (Tit. 1:9). In the beautiful and rich 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm, we read, “*I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts*” (119:63). *Companion* means “one who agrees.” The Psalmist said that he was “in agreement” with those who fear God and keep His commandments (precepts). He was, then, at peace with those at peace with God. Such is a good rule of thumb for us to apply today. We, too, are in agreement (companions, partners, at peace with, and in fellowship with) them that fear God and keep His commandments. Thus, we are at peace with the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost, the apostles, and the faithful saints of God.

### WITH WHOM MAY WE NOT HAVE PEACE?

There are some in this world with whom we may not have peace—plain and simple.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us

cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1).

It should be noted that in verses 13-16 questions are put concerning the faithful Christian and an involvement with someone who is not a faithful Christian.

Various images are used, but the point of each rhetorical question is the same: the faithful Christian has no business entering into fellowship or being at peace with anyone or anything who is not a faithful Christian. What fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? None! In fact, the answer to each query posed by the inspired penman is and must be in the negative. The reason is given in verse 16 also that being the presence of God within us. How can we expect Him to dwell alongside of His opponents? How can He help us while we walk hand in hand with those who have set themselves to defeat His Will?

The injunctions of the remaining verses of our text give us the positive requirements of fellowship:

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (6:17-7:1).

With respect to being at peace, we would do well to learn a lesson from the brethren at Corinth.

It is reported commonly *that there is* fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.... Your glorying *is* not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us (1 Cor. 5:1-2, 6-7).

Their problem, like many of ours today, was that sin was in the camp, and they failed to act properly concerning it. To tolerate sin is to corrupt the church. They should have acted to correct the problem that the sinners involved might be saved and that the purity of the church might be maintained. Paul said that they should have been ashamed of themselves, but they, like many today, thought themselves to be taking the high road of tolerance.

Hear another case:

But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth (Rev. 2:14-16).

They had sin (false teaching) among them and they failed to act properly concerning it. Jesus demanded that they repent or lose Him as an ally and face Him as an enemy. How our people need this lesson today. It is our duty as Christians to oppose and no longer extend fellowship to all who have deviated from “the way,” whether in word or in deed.

Hear again another case:

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols (2:20).

Their sin was that of harboring and failing to discipline an unrepentant sinner. This unrepentant sinner, like those of our day, spread her sin to others, and so, by the neglect of discipline, the church allowed the sin to infect others who should have been protected by the proper practice of biblical discipline. Brethren, many of our day shall answer for the same offense.

As to where the idea that we may tolerate sin “in the interest of peace,” do nothing about it, and even glory in our liberality concerning it came from, this writer does not know. He does, however, know where it did not come from. These false concepts of fellowship will not help the church grow; they will pervert and corrupt it. Churches that fail to discipline may get more people, but they will not produce more Christians. A dead animal on the roadside will swell, but who would call this growth? So it is with churches: some will swell because they fail to get the rot of sin from their midst, but in eternal terms, they do not grow. Just as we are at peace with those listed above, we must not be at peace with any who fall outside those lines as drawn by God in Scripture.

One is as obligated to reject a brother whom God rejects as he is to receive a brother whom God receives. There is a point at which, according to the New Testament, peace may (and indeed must) be broken between brethren. God revealed this clearly for us. Paul spoke of one being “delivered to Satan” in 1 Corinthians 5:5. Paul, himself, feared

being overcome and rejected because of sin (1 Cor. 9:27). He spoke of some who had made “shipwreck of their faith” and were delivered to Satan (1 Tim. 1:19-20). Of the lazy man, Paul wrote that he “hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” (5:8). Paul speaks of one turning aside after Satan (5:15). Hebrews 6:1-6 speaks of one who fell away from the Truth and was never restored. James 5:19-20 speaks of one who erred from the faith being restored. Peter speaks of one becoming a Christian, apostatizing, and then being in a worse condition spiritually than he was in before becoming a Christian (2 Pet. 2:20-22). All of these verses point to the fact that there is the possibility of a Christian leaving the fellowship of God and His people. Such persons so living are still brethren, but brethren from whom the faithful have withdrawn their participation. The Bible tells us that those who teach things contrary to the doctrine of Christ are people from whom we must withdraw our fellowship. Jesus told of the awful aftermath of false teaching in Matthew 15:9: “But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.” Herein we see that those who teach error pervert or make vain (meaningless, to no avail) the worship of God.

May we with the approval of God extend fellowship to those who render vain the worship they offer to God (and the worship offered God by their followers)? Hear John:

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

Another passage which warrants consideration in this connection is found in Romans 16:17-18, wherein Paul wrote:

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

If a man is known to have taught error, should we invite him to teach, preach, or pray in our midst? When they are invited to preach, teach, or pray in a congregation, may it properly be said that the congregation has *avoided* him? It is incumbent upon us to withdraw our fellowship from the teachers of error.

There are many errors taught in our day, largely because we have failed to obey the commands of God concerning withdrawal of fellowship. Among them we see that we still have to fight the battle over the mechanical instrument of music. We have some *Johnny-come-latelies* in our midst that would have us relegate the mechanical instrument to the level of a matter of opinion. They speak of “instrumental brethren” and “non-instrumental brethren.” Based on the above-cited verses, we must withdraw our fellowship from these false teachers because they are “transgressing” the law of Christ. We are told plainly in the New Testament what kind of music to offer in worship to God, and they are guilty of going beyond that for which we have authority and adding another kind to the worship which God did not authorize. It is not possible for us to extend fellowship to those who teach that the mechanical instrument of music is acceptable in Christian worship with the approval of God. May we obey God’s Word with respect to this matter and withdraw fellowship from all who teach this error.

There are those among us who advocate the use of women teachers and preachers in the presence of men. The Bible is plain concerning this subject. We read, “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim. 2:11-12). Again Paul wrote, “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law” (1 Cor. 14:34). Those who use and advocate the use of women teachers/preachers must be opposed, and we must withdraw our fellowship from them to maintain the approval of God.

There are still those among us who advocate the tired old error known as “unity in diversity.” They *contend* that it is all right to agree to disagree in matters of obligation. Their argument bases itself on the contention that we can never say that we have an absolute knowledge of the truth on any given subject; therefore, if we see it differently, we see it differently—there is no reason to divide. Obviously, Paul did not know this when he withstood Peter to the face. Jesus must not have realized it in dealing with the Pharisees. If one retorts that Paul was inspired and Jesus was God on earth, remember that Peter was not inspired in his error, and the Pharisees were not “gods,” and yet, both Paul and Jesus expected them to know what to do and to do it! When one decides to “agree to disagree” over the plan of salvation, the proper items of worship, the work of the church, or any other matter about

which God (in His Word) has spoken, we must withdraw our fellowship from him until such time as he repents of his heresy.

There are many in our midst who need to be withdrawn from—based on their perversion of the work of the church. To see some congregations, it seems that they are going about to do everything except what they should be doing. We now have gymnasiums and sports complex buildings (usually called “office complexes” or “family life centers”), which house our “church league” ball teams. To begin with, there is no authority in the Bible for the church to engage in recreational activities. We are authorized to preach to the lost (Mat. 28:19), edify the saved (Rom. 14:19), and help the needy (Jam. 1:27). We are not given the responsibility of providing for the physical fitness or psychological happiness of the world or our members. Such things are not works of the church and should not be engaged in. With respect to churches of Christ having *teams* in “church leagues,” the very subject we are studying precludes us from doing so. To enter into an agreement, a partnership, a league with denominationalists for the purpose of playing ball games is to enter into fellowship (which means joint-participation) with them and is sin. It is time that we mark and avoid, withdraw from, and reject those who pervert the work of the church by dragging us into every evil alliance that comes along. We need to be reminded that the church is not God’s little country club; it is a working institution. May our erring brethren give up these unscriptural practices and be restored to faithfulness, and may the faithful refuse to fellowship them until such time as they do.

We are told in the New Testament that open sin breaks fellowship between brethren. Remember the case in 1 Corinthians 5, wherein fornication was the sin? Paul commanded that the fornicators be put away from among them that the sinners might be saved and the church purified. Churches today must learn this lesson: If you have open sin committed by your members, you are obligated to either restore them to repentance or withdraw fellowship from them. God did not leave this to the discretion of the individual congregation any more than He left baptism to our discretion. Those who practice public sin are not in fellowship with God, and we will not be either if we maintain fellowship with them.

On the matter of adultery the Bible teaches:

But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and who-

soever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery (Mat. 5:32).

The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made *them* at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except *it be* for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery (Mat. 19:3-9).

The church was intended to be a haven **from** sin. Due to the compromise and error of so many, that masquerading in many places as the Lord's church has become a haven **for** sin.

Personal offences threaten peace between brethren, as Jesus said:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican (Mat. 18:15-17).

Let us seek a true and lasting peace—founded upon the principles of God. When we respect the will of the Lord, then and only then may we be at peace among ourselves.

### WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

# BUILDING UNITY IN THE CHURCH

*Dennis Sargent*

It amazes me what man can build. A cable suspension bridge is being built across the Ohio River at Pomeroy, and it has been fascinating to watch the various stages of excavation and construction. Maybe you have watched the television program, "Building The Ultimate," and have been made to wonder at the amazing things man is capable of building (e.g. ships, buildings, tunnels, and super high speed trains). These things remind us of man's interest, ingenuity, and capacity to build.

The people of God are to be busy building. The church is continually in the spiritual building business (Eph. 4:11-16). We are to be building by studying (2 Tim. 2:15) and growing in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior (2 Pet. 3:18). We are to be building by evangelizing and adding to our number such as are saved (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:47). In this lesson we are emphasizing "Building Unity In The Church." We, the people of God, desire the unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17:21). We desire to comply with that which is commanded of us regarding unity (1 Cor. 1:10). We are mindful of Psalm 133:1: "Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Biblical unity is indeed a lofty goal, and yet it is a goal that we can achieve for God has not commanded of us that which we are not able to accomplish (1 John 5:3).

Through the years our brethren have continually preached "unity," and the basis for it, as we have challenged our denominational friends and their doctrines. The archives of brotherhood publications are filled with articles about "unity." Yet, despite all the writing and preaching that has been done on unity, there is perhaps no other Bible doctrine with which the church has struggled more. Numerous are the examples each of us could cite of how unity in the church has been disrupted over the years. Numerous erring individuals and false doctrines could be named which have caused division among those who were once united. Brother N. B. Hardeman rightly noted:

The greatest hindrance to the cause of Christ is denominational rivalry.  
The greatest handicap and the greatest discouragement unto faithful,

godly men is the fact that people who claim to be members of the body of Christ are torn asunder, riven, by human opinions, popular preference, rather than submit to God's will, all speak the same thing, and be of one mind and one judgment, as the Lord prayed and for which the apostles pleaded (178).

Like 1906, when a great number were rightly identified by the United States Census for having divided themselves from the Lord and His church, 2006 was also a year for demarcation. That is, it was a year through which we found it necessary to remind our brethren of God's law of fellowship, the foundation of biblical unity. Through the year warnings of a coming rupture in the unity of the church because of brethren were sounded. It was a year when compromising brethren helped to blur biblical unity by seeking to create union with the Independent Christian Church and the Disciples of Christ denominations. Thus, while unity is commanded and attainable, we realize that there are many brethren who do not desire biblical unity. Rather, they have adopted the dogma of our denominational friends—Unity-In-Diversity. This is the environment in which the faithful recognize it is "A Time To Build."

Truly, it is a time for building unity in the church. In John 17:20-21, Jesus prayed for the unity of all the saved. "Was the Lord's prayer for unity answered? Indeed it was! The Lord's faithful children are united—and have been ever since the church was established in Acts 2" (Cates 40). Based upon that fact, brother Cates rightly identified certain erroneous statements regarding unity, such as, "Let us pray that God will answer His Son's prayer for unity" (41). We agree with brother Cates on this point, causing us to be perplexed by his compromise of this Divinely-authorized and established ancient unity that resulted when he conceded to Dave Miller of Apologetics Press—a marked false teacher.

Building unity "in the church" is in contrast to any attempt to build a union with those who are not "in the church." Those in the Independent Christian Church, the Disciples of Christ, or any other denomination or inter-denomination, are not in the Lord's church. All such religious bodies are parts of the ecumenical religious movement, comprised of those who merely profess Christianity (Mat. 7:21-23), who pervert what the Scriptures teach concerning the one body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13ff). Concerning what the church of Christ is, they do not teach the truth and/or they misapply the truth, teaching that the church

is comprised of various denominations with conflicting and competing doctrines. Therefore, though they may teach some truth, they are not our “erring brethren” as some erroneously suppose. Building unity “in the church” is in contrast to a summit conference. The unity summits between our erring brethren and the denominations are attempts to establish a union, not biblical unity.

Building unity in the church is also in contrast to establishing a union with compromising brethren. Compromising brethren want to view union as if it were unity, and at the same time reject the fact that they are merely practicing “unity-in-diversity.” *Union* is “an act or instance of uniting or joining two or more things into one” (Webster 1288). *Unity* is “the quality or state of not being multiple” (Webster 1288). If a thing is not multiple, then it is one, as is the body or church of Christ (Eph. 4:4; 1 Cor. 12:12-13). Compromising brethren would have the faithful establish union with them while they continue to take liberty with God’s law on a host of issues. However, those who are “one in Christ” (Gal. 3:28) have obeyed, and continue to obey, the demands of the Gospel (Rom. 6:17-18; 1 John 1:7). They are not in *union* with those of diverging doctrines (2 John 9), rather they mark and avoid such (Rom. 16:17). Recognizing that the Lord’s prayer for unity has already been answered, and that mere union is not biblical unity, how can we build unity in the church?

We can build unity in the church through **exalting** Christ. The psalmist recognized: “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it” (Psa. 127:1). When man builds, he applies his own inventive skills. Having the God-given ability to reason and make choices (Isa. 1:18), man’s creative ability has clearly manifested itself throughout history, even in modern technology. To be competitive in today’s market economy, man is attentive to acceptable social, business, and industrial standards. However, unlike building temporal things, spiritual building does not require ingenuity. That is to say, that building spiritually does not require man’s genius, his ingenuity, imagination, nor creative power. Brethren if we are to learn anything from our aforementioned failures, it ought to be that whenever we decide to dilute God’s will with man’s clever design, the project is unrighteous and doomed to fail (Gal. 1:6-9). In his final comments to the elders of the church at Ephesus, the apostle Paul stated: “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them

which are sanctified” (Act 20:32). Indeed the Word of God is all-sufficient for building spiritually (2 Tim. 3:16-17). To build unity in the church, we must acknowledge that Christ has all authority (Mat. 28:18). God has given Jesus Christ the preeminence (Col. 1:18). Seated at the right hand of the heavenly Father, the rule of Jesus Christ exceeds “all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Eph. 1:20-21). God hath made Jesus “both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). All things are under His feet, and He is the head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22). His New Testament will is God’s binding law for man today (Heb. 9:15). Therefore, regarding obligatory matters, we must not go beyond that which is “written” (1 Cor. 4:6; Heb. 3:12; Rev. 22:18-19). Functioning by the authority of Christ, we exalt Christ and build unity in the church (Col. 3:17; John 17:21; 14:23).

However, we cannot exalt Christ and at the same time exalt men. We must not exalt self (Mat. 23:12). Proverbs 16:18 tells us, “Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” The apostle Paul recorded:

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith (Rom. 12:3).

The example seen in Diotrophes serves to emphasize the error of exalting self (3 John 9-10). Guy N. Woods noted, “All self-serving and personal aggrandizement must be eschewed and avoided if we would measure to the standard of primitive Christianity” (363). Exalting mere men, rather than Christ, caused the factious spirit in the church at Corinth, obviously contrary to the will of Christ and apostolic authority (1 Cor. 1:10-13). James recorded: “My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with respect of persons” (Jam. 2:1). “But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors” (Jam. 2:9). Brother Lester Kamp rightly noted:

Please keep in mind that showing preference, partiality, respect of persons may be popular, but the inspired James clearly and emphatically stated, “if ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin” (2).

Despite these admonitions the exaltation of mere men is like a cancer in the Lord’s church.

Our politically correct environment has influenced the thinking and behavior of too many in the church today. Many are more concerned about not “rocking the boat” than they are about steadying the course of the “ship of Zion” along the strait and narrow way of God’s Word. Many are more concerned about maintaining friendships than they are about doing what God has commanded in His Word (2).

Certainly the church is plagued by the career-minded preacher who will not oppose nor expose those whom he deems beneficial to his personal aspirations.

Preachers may, for example, choose to overlook sin in the lives of some in order to “keep his job,” to be invited more to speak on lectureships and Gospel Meetings, to be given opportunities to address large audiences (perhaps in programming over television networks), to be accepted by highly regarded schools of preaching, to be involved in major “brotherhood” projects and programs, or to be associated with works which heretofore have been deemed as essential to the brotherhood. Others may choose to ignore sin, because of their desire for peace (the absence of conflict) (2).

We can build unity in the church if we will get back to the business of exalting Christ—not men—by honoring Him as both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36) thus functioning by His authority. We can build unity in the church through **enforcing** the Master’s will. Several years ago brother George Topping wrote about “unity” in the *Coal Valley News*. Commenting on Psalm 133:1 he rightly noted, “There are many things that are good, but not pleasant; there are many things that are pleasant, but not good. But, unity is, among brethren, both good and pleasant.” Unfortunately, in that same article (“The Church in Jerusalem”) he began to spew his venom, writing that “we may have our differences on certain things, and have differences on certain matters taught in the Bible. These differences will not keep you and I from being one in Christ.” He concluded that article by writing:

As long as one teaches the Gospel which is so vital to our salvation and will practice the Seven Ones and teach the Seven Ones mentioned above [Eph. 4:1-6—djs] and will teach the Gospel conditions of salvation, there is no reason for division among brethren and sisters in the church.

In another article published in that same paper (*Coal Valley News*) brother Topping wrote:

Not one time is division in the Family of God ever recommended as a means of resolving differences or doctrinal disagreements. Every time division of God’s children is mentioned it is condemned. Division

is the work of the unspiritual and not of those who are led by the Holy spirit.

His articles are replete with false assertions: “No honest opinion, no sincerely held doctrinal view, can ever be made the ground for rejection of one of God’s Children.” He wrote, “It is ridiculous to quote the scriptures to justify factionalism when they were given to forbid it.” George concluded an article on “Unity In Christ,” noting:

There may be differences in interpretation of Scripture, but the “Unity of the Spirit” as taught by Paul in the “Sevenfold Ones” are simple. Therefore, we can have Unity in Christ founded upon the “Unity of the Spirit.” Those in Christ Jesus and in the Father are one, and also one in the Sevenfold Unity. Unity in Christ comes about because of a mutual sonship and fatherhood (Gal. 3:26-29). We are all one in Christ. You and I may differ on certain, “Apostolic Doctrine,” but if we have obeyed the Gospel of Christ, we are one in Christ, the only unity that is attainable for us in the family of God.

Brethren, the doctrine and speech of the faithful is not filled with such false assertions and ambiguity (1 Pet. 4:11a). The doctrine of Christ (2 John 9), the Gospel (Rom. 1:16), the New Testament will of Christ (Heb. 9:17), and the Holy Spirit are in full agreement. The faithful abide in such, and are therefore in agreement doctrinally and unified by that Spirit-given Word (1 Cor. 2:9-13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Sadly, over the past several years, the host of brethren whose vocabulary and doctrine are filled with ambiguity and error has only increased.

If we are going to build unity, we must enforce the Master’s will, and this involves expelling that which is unlawful. In his article “Dealing With Apostasy,” brother W. Terry Varner rightly noted:

False teachers and false teaching will not go away because we choose to ignore them. Elders, preachers and members of the body of Christ must “convict the gainsayers” (Titus 1:9), warn the brethren against false teaching (Acts 20:26-31) and preach the Word of God which is able to build up our souls (Acts 20:32; II Tim. 4:2-5). If, and when, we find error, let us do something about it. Each is responsible to help correct and reject it. We all have a responsibility to keep true to the faith and to see that it is handed down unaltered (II Tim. 2:2; Jude 3) (22).

We fully agree with brother Varner on this point. Too, we believe this is the exact approach needed and demanded of the faithful with regard to the erroneous doctrine advocated by brother Varner and his cohorts (Paul M. Deaver, Charles C. Pugh III, and others) that the Holy Spirit works separate and apart from, but in conjunction with, the Word

of God in the life of a Christian. Truly, enforcing the Master's will involves expelling that which is unlawful. Jesus said of the erring Christians at Laodicea: "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev 3:16). Certainly God's Word commands the faithful to withdraw ourselves (i.e., divide ourselves), "from every brother that walketh disorderly" (2 The. 3:6). Therefore, it is ridiculous to conclude, as George Topping and so many others have erroneously done, that compromise is a righteous way to achieve unity among brethren. Compromise, regarding obligatory matters, is never sanctioned by God. However, God's Word clearly commands the faithful: "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*" (Eph. 5:11). The faithful are not even to eat with a brother in Christ who persists in error regarding obligatory matters (1 Cor. 5:11).

As for false teachers, the faithful are to mark and avoid them (Rom. 16:17). Contrary to George Topping, and others of like mind, the aforementioned passages are indeed Divine sanction for division from unfaithful brethren on the basis of obligatory matters. One who truly believes in the seven ones of Ephesians 4 will trust and obey all of these aforementioned particulars set forth and commanded by the one: Spirit, Lord, faith, and Father. Bobby Duncan noted, "I care not how many passages on unity one might quote, not one of them encourages cooperation with false teachers and false teaching" (271). Further, he noted, "While we should be kind and courteous in dealing with everyone, we should never act in such a way as to suggest to those in error that we believe their error is not very serious." Brethren, we can build unity in the church by **enforcing** the Master's will and expelling that which is erroneous.

Third, we can build unity in the church by **encouraging** the faithful. To *encourage* is "to give help" (Webster). The brethren at Philippi gave help to the apostle Paul. To the church at Philippi Paul wrote:

Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account (4:14-17).

The Philippian brethren were encouraging Paul by fellowshiping (i.e. participating with) him through financial contributions, enabling his continued labor in the Gospel.

We must not financially support error. To financially support error is a clear violation of God's law on fellowship, as Philippians 4:15 teaches that to communicate "concerning giving and receiving" is to be a partaker of that which we are financing. From this passage we learn that the "receiving" of funds from erring brethren is just as unlawful as "giving" funds to erring brethren. Yet, some will insist: "Well the devil has had their money long enough." Brethren, man's reasoning is never superior to God's law (Jer. 10:23; Isa. 55:9). Faithful brethren honor God's law and are unwilling to receive dirty money by participating with the erring.

To insure that we participate with only the faithful, we must investigate that in which we intend to invest the Lord's money. A man may preach the truth on what he will preach on, who is erring in what he does not preach on, and therein lies a problem and a need for investigation (Acts 20:26-27). A man may preach the truth but willingly accept funding from unfaithful sources. A work may in fact be a para-church organization, existing without Bible authority, thus unworthy of support (e.g., Churches Of Christ Disaster Relief Effort, INC.). A work may have a reputation for success in evangelistic training and outreach but be tainted with various avenues of error. Numerous are the works brethren support who will receive funds from seemingly anyone, whether or not they are sound in the faith (Tit. 1:13; Jude 3). The evidence shows that such is the case with at least the following:

1. the SEARCH program, brother Mack Lyon, and the church at Edmond, Oklahoma
2. the Gospel Broadcast Network (GBN), the Highland church in Dalton, Georgia, and their host of participants
3. many schools of preaching who continue to participate with the aforementioned as well as other erring brethren, and who also accept funding from unsound sources. Brethren, we can build unity in the church by encouraging the faithful. May we thoroughly investigate that in which we intend to invest the Lord's money, so as to insure just that.

Fourth, we can build unity in the church through **exemplifying** the Savior. In 1994, nationally syndicated columnist William Murchison

observed: “The condition of American culture, by any measurement, is demonstrably more disturbing than was the case barely thirty years ago” (7). Murchison reminds us:

Civilization and immorality are fundamentally incompatible. We deceive ourselves if we imagine a commonwealth in which the rules are made up daily on an ad hoc basis—acknowledged when convenient, yet thrown out when they pinch and restrain. This is no commonwealth at all, we come to realize, but rather a moral (or amoral) jungle (6).

Due to the detrimental but successful effects of the European Enlightenment movement on the American colonies, “that pivotal intellectual movement of the past two centuries” (23), “the vertical view of humanity and its place in the universe began yielding to a horizontal view” (24). Murchison makes the point that Americans, as early as the eighteenth century, began to look sideways to family, friends, colleagues, and others for their moral compass and guidance, rather than looking upward to God. Speaking of our current American society, Murchison noted:

Today, generally speaking, we are horizontalists—in practice, if not in theory. Authority cuts little ice with us. I see my neighbor’s judgment as no better on philosophical grounds than my own, and I expect he regards his own judgment in just the same way (25).

Clearly we can see that our American society is continuing down this decline. As the public continues to relegate the Holy Bible to a mere good book and general guide for living, on a par with the great works of mere men, the religious landscape of our society continues to change as well. Inspirational speaking is much preferred over preaching. The people much prefer to have their ears tickled with a “positive gospel” by the likes of Joel Osteen. Oprah Winfrey, Dr. Phil, Montel Williams, and other mere television celebrities and psychologists are now hailed as sorts of spiritual guides, whose counsel is viewed as just as authentic and authoritative as anything found in the Bible. While these amoral counselors grow more and more popular, and richer, obviously our American society is morally not for the better. Truly Americans seem not to be able to shut up about that which was not proper to speak of just fifty years ago. Little of today’s *humor* is void of filthy language and sexual content.

Television news recently reported that 90% of Americans are involved in fornication, including 80-90% of teenagers. The divorce rate continues to soar. Crime rates are staggering and the lack of respect

for human life continues to be manifest in the killing of the unborn, some 40 million in America since 1973.

Well, brethren, what has all this to do with the church, and with “unity in the church”? It has much to do with the church, in that the mentality of the society in which we live has unfortunately manipulated, to no minuscule degree, the thinking of many Christians. Though the Bible is professed to be all-sufficient and authoritative (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Col. 3:17), such is no longer manifest in the practice of most congregations. Recognizing the fancy of the people for fluff presentations has enticed a number of brethren to err, in various degrees, but none-the-less to err (2 Tim. 4:3-4), “teaching things which they ought not” (Tit. 1:11) and/or avoiding “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Numerous are the innovations and devices employed by brethren these days in their attempt to make the New Testament, Christianity, the Lord, and His church more appealing to those in the world. All of this sort of thing is due to the pull of the world (1 John 2:15-17). We must get back to the business of insuring that we are appealing to God rather than man (Acts 4:19; Gal. 1:10).

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).

As we think about building unity in the church through exemplifying the Savior, we must give attention to His subservient will. This is perhaps where the world has had its greatest influence on the church. In fact, this may be the root of many of our problems. Brethren, we must put Christ back on His throne in our lives, thus in the life and work of the local church (Acts 2:29-36). Commenting on the idea of being an “enemy of God” (Jam. 4:4), brother Ronnie Hayes wrote, “No one likes to think of themselves as the enemy of God, but when he puts something in front of God, he becomes the enemy of God” (429). Brethren whenever this author puts his own will, or the will of other men, before God’s will, he has indeed become an enemy of God (2 John 9-11).

Jesus Christ was subservient to His heavenly Father. Jesus said:

For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak (John 12:49-50).

Jesus prayed, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). Subservient to the Father’s will, Jesus died on the cross to afford man salvation (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9). To know Him as Savior, we must continue to know Jesus Christ as Lord, thereby exemplifying His subservient will. Brethren, as we do, all politics in the church will cease (1 Cor. 2:1-2), all jockeying for fame will fade (Mat. 20:27), and all that will remain will be those souls which seek nothing more than to live and die in subjection to the Master’s will (Luke 16:13; Heb. 5:8-9). The church will then be filled not with all manner of worldliness but with souls which are seeking those things which are above (Col. 3:1). As we exemplify the subservient will of Christ, church discipline will again be employed (2 Cor. 2:6-11), and the purity of the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:27) will again be perceptible, restoring our ability to produce a righteous influence among ourselves as well as the world in which we live (Mat. 5:13-16).

The inspired apostle Paul exhorted the church at Philippi to **exemplify** Christ (Phi. 2:1-16). Paul encouraged unity at Philippi by exhorting the brethren to be of one mind, that being the mind of the Christ (1:27; 2:2, 5). That one mind was to involve the proper estimate of self. Brethren, selfless saints have a servant mentality (2:3). Their primary concern is not their own affairs but that which is best for all (2:4). This “lowliness of mind” (2:3) was characteristic of Christ (2:5), and is so of those who faithfully follow Him (2:2-5). Sadly, this is a contrast to much of what is seen and experienced in the Lord’s church today among preachers, elders, and members generally. Despite the fact that we preaching brethren preach on this very subject, it may be the predominant problem among preachers today—that being, an elevated view of self. As such, a preacher may see his preaching work as a career—thus he will do whatever he deems necessary to protect his career rather than protecting the Gospel, Christ, and His church. This can cause him to hesitate to preach the Word “in season, out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2), on certain select issues. This will result in a failure to adequately warn the brethren (Acts 20:31), either orally or in his writings, a practice that will likely go unnoticed as he continues to preach the Truth and just avoiding subjects or issues which are likely to threaten his career. Paul personally dealt with this same problem as he wrote, “For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus

Christ's" (Phi. 2:20-21). In contrast to being *career* minded and seeking our own, we who preach need to be like Paul. Rather than preaching to protect a *career*, Paul preached because he was constrained by the love of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14). It was the love of Christ that caused Paul to compress forcibly all his energies into living the selfless Christian life (5:15). Thus he could write, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (4:5). A disrupted unity always involves one or more parties who seek to elevate themselves and their own agendas. But we can build unity in the church by having the mind of Christ thus a proper estimate of self.

Seeking to build unity in the church by exhorting one another to Christ-likeness requires the **humility** exemplified by Christ (Phi. 2:6-8). Though He was equal with God (2:6) He emptied Himself and became a servant "and was made in the likeness of men." His humility was demonstrated as Deity died, when Jesus Christ "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." He "gave himself for us" (Tit. 2:14). The humility exemplified by Christ resulted in His being exalted (Phi. 2:2, 5-9). His exaltation was realized after His complete submission and sacrifice which culminated in His death on the cross (Phi. 2:8; Acts 2:36). Brethren if we follow the example of Christ, we too will be exalted (Phi. 2:9-11). Peter recorded, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (1 Pet. 5:6). True exaltation, not by mere man's estimate but God's, can be experienced by each of us if we will but humbly submit ourselves in obedient faith to the will of Almighty God. Therefore, let us exhort one another, as Paul did the brethren at Philippi: "*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves*" (Phi. 2:3). Brethren, this will require significant personal effort, especially if we have not done so well with this in the past (2:12-16).

The fact that those Christians were exhorted to "work out your own salvation" makes it apparent that the will that was free before their conversion continued to be free thereafter. They continued to have their own choice whether or not to continue to trust and obey God. This is the reason it is possible for the saved individual (i.e., Christian) to turn from the saved state and return to the sinful state. The Christian is God's chosen vessel through which He wills to work His good pleasure. But God's working in and through our lives is contingent upon

our continued surrender to His will. This salvation, brethren, we must continue to work out. Will we be exemplary of the mind of Christ, showing ourselves to be selfless individuals who live in full surrender to the Master's will? Rather than murmuring and disputing, will we seek to be the blameless and harmless sons of God without rebuke (Phi. 2:13-14)? Will we, with life and lips, hold forth the word of life among ourselves and before this crooked and perverse nation, so as to be able to rejoice in the day of Christ (2:15-16)? Brethren, we can build unity in the church by exhorting one another to Christ-likeness (2:1-16).

Finally brethren, we can build unity in the church through **earnestly** contending for the faith once delivered unto the saints. Jude is addressed "to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, *and called*" (v. 1). The content of this epistle is certainly still relevant today. Guy N. Woods observed:

Being thus without geographical detail, it is not possible to know certainly to whom it was originally sent. In a secondary sense we may be sure that it was the design of the writer to prepare a treatise which would have universal appeal, and be utilized by Christians in all ages and places, though it obviously was written to meet a local need (376).

Foy E. Wallace noted, "The text of Jude 3 leads us to regard the faith as a treasure committed to our custody" (1). Brethren just as there were those who had "crept in unawares" in Jude's day, we today continue to struggle against those from within who seek to have their way with the bride of Christ.

Concerning such, brother Wallace further noted:

This is a word of warning to the church against heresy. It is not so much a call for defense of the faith against paganism without, or heathenism as such, but a particular appeal for a firm adherence to the truth against error which had crept into the church. Jude 3 is, therefore, a battle cry of the church. It summons every member of the church for loyalty to the conflict between truth and error. The battle between truth and error was raging then and it is raging now (11).

Perschbacher informs us that *earnestly contend for* (Jude 3) comes from a Greek word meaning "to contend strenuously in defense of" (153). To *contend* is to strive in opposition. Christians are to contend strenuously, to strive in opposition against those who oppose "the faith." The faith "once delivered" has already been given in final form (2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). We are commanded to oppose any and all who would dare alter the contents of the faith—that is, the Christian

faith (i.e., the New Testament will of Christ). This is the same idea Paul penned in the Philippian epistle, writing:

Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel (1:27).

Brethren, there are those among us who will not speak publically and address violations of obligatory matters; neither will they do so in writing. Such is not characteristic of those who are in compliance with the command to “earnestly contend for the faith.” Too, there are those who seem to think that the only threat, and perhaps the greatest threat to the faith, is the Change Agent movement. However, brethren, the Change Agent is not our only threat—and certainly not our most serious threat. Our most serious threat is the neo-liberal, who professes soundness and perhaps even has a name for being sound, yet he will also take liberties with the faith. These neo-liberals are normally not as flagrant as the Shellys or Wallings and will, as Jude wrote about, creep in unaware and work their error among us making them the more difficult to recognize. Indeed it would be naive to think that a congregation is healthy just because there is an absence of the Change Agent movement.

Brethren, let us be faithful stewards of that which has been entrusted to us (1 Cor. 4:1-2). Let us be responsible to indeed regard “the faith” as “a treasure committed to our custody,” as brother Wallace noted, and be the courageous soldiers of the cross the Savior would have us be as we speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Let us earnestly contending for the faith (Jude 3).

The appetite of apostasy is never filled. The devastation caused by Satan’s devouring is never-ending (1 Pet. 5:8). As decency, values, ethics, and Christian principles continue to crumble within the American society in which we live, the church will not go unscathed (Rom. 12:1-2). Likely, as this trend continues, people will become more and more emboldened in their outright rejection of righteousness. One good brother well stated: “Satan is pulling from every direction, and the church as a whole has not sufficiently prepared itself for this time.” We may even find ourselves, more and more, feeling fortunate even to hang on to what we have—that is, the souls which comprise local congregations already. Truly, as in the days of righteous Noah, unlike the evangelistic success of the 1950s, we may continue to

experience an ever-increasing difficulty to produce a yield for the Master (Gen. 6:5-8; Mat. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 3:7). Therefore, we must be all the more diligent in our building up the church of Christ. Truly, it is a time for building unity in the church. We can build unity in the church through **exalting** Christ, **enforcing** the Master's will, by **encouraging** the faithful, **exemplifying** the Savior, and **earnestly** contending for the faith once delivered unto the saints.

The unity existing among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as acknowledged in Christ's prayer (John 17:21), is enjoyed by every faithful child of God as we follow the example of our Lord. Jesus did always those things that pleased the Father (John 8:29). As we walk according to the light of His Word (Psa. 119:105; Mat. 5:16), we too will be pleasing to the Father and to His Son Jesus Christ; we will thus participate with them in the Divinely authorized and established ancient unity (John 14:23; 1 John 1:3, 7).

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# BUILDING BETTER BIBLE SCHOOLS

*Gary W. Summers and Geoffrey Rowe*

## INTRODUCTION

“Everyone ready to eat?” All the young heads nodded. Appetizer pretzels were passed around, followed by popcorn, accompanied by Mountain Dew. Samples of different types of fudge were next circulated, followed by potato chips. Pecan, pumpkin, and cherry pies were served next, followed by cheese curls. Chocolate cake and caramel fudge ice cream came next. Finally, cashews, pecans, and almonds were passed around. Dessert would come about an hour later. It would consist of an assortment of fresh Krispy Kreme donuts. This diet consists of just about all the major yummy food groups.

Very few would consider it very healthy, however. A consistent diet of junk food, pastries, and desserts would not leave a person very physically fit or very strong. This crazy method of eating may not be exactly parallel to the way much of the Bible school literature we have in the church is, but it is not that far away. First of all, much of the *literature* that brethren use is warmed over denominational leftovers. Few series are actually produced by brethren. Many of the lessons concentrate on the *sweet* portions of the Scriptures, while ignoring other large sections of God’s revelation. How many times do children study Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, and the apostles while bypassing important information and principles taught in the Scriptures? Furthermore, by switching back and forth between the Old and New Testaments, some students wind up thinking that Moses, David, and Jesus hung out together.

Perhaps we should, in consideration of this topic, approach it by asking a few questions: What is the purpose of a Bible school? What are the qualifications for teachers? What kind of material ought to be used? How can we educate today’s children in a world replete with numerous worldly distractions, such as handheld video games, cell phones, iPods, and other things? It can be done, but leaders in the

church and in the home must work together to produce a quality education program.

### THE PURPOSE OF A BIBLE SCHOOL

This may seem as though it has an obvious answer, but two indisputable facts may help us see the need for answering this question again. First, the church is losing a large percentage of its young people (estimates vary between 70% and 90%). Apostates, such as Rick “Abihu” Atchley attribute these losses to the church’s failure to use instruments of music, but the attraction some have for that addition to singing is a symptom of the problem—not the problem itself.<sup>1</sup> A lengthy analysis could and probably should be given of this matter, but it falls outside the parameters of this study. One key point in this regard is that children need to see their parents living by faith and not just “attending church.”

The second factor pertaining to the issue is that both adults and children do not know the Bible as well as previous generations. Anyone who doubts this allegation should give a quiz to church members, asking general questions that all should know, such as the ones below.

1. Where are the Ten Commandments found in the Scriptures?
2. Where is the Sermon on the Mount located in the Bible?
3. Name the twelve tribes of Israel.
4. Name the twelve apostles of the Lord.
5. List two passages that talk about love.
6. List two passages that talk about the need for repentance.
7. List two passages that show the essentiality of baptism.
8. Approximately when do the events of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther occur?
9. Give two passages that demonstrate that Christ is Deity, the Son of God?
10. Give two passages that show that the Law of Moses is no longer in effect.
11. State the “authority” principle as found in the New Testament.
12. Give two verses that show that Christ is the only way to come to God.

These are not difficult questions to answer, whereas the following would be: “List all of the judges and the nineteen kings of Israel and Judah” or “Quote James 2:14-26.” They are bits of information, most

of which we may be called upon to use in discussions with religious people. But only the brave would ask them of any adult class *and grade the answers!* A preacher might first want to pack before implementing such an aggressive plan.

What is the purpose of a Bible school? One wonders how many education directors know. We do not believe in tradition, but we risk falling into various grooves that those before us established. We eventually do what we do now because we have grown accustomed to doing it. The reader has probably heard of the woman who used two pans to bake a ham in the oven. Her husband asked her why, and she said that was the way her mother did it. “Well, why did she do it that way?” The daughter replied that she did not know. When she asked her, she answered that her old oven was not big enough to contain the ham; so she divided it up and put it into two pans.

Likewise, everybody knows that we have Bible classes, but why do we have them? Are they baby-sitting efforts so the adults can learn? Why do we have them week in and week out? Have we lost sight of our goals? Of course, we have classes to teach everyone the Scriptures, but are we doing it effectively, and what specifically do we want them to learn? Do we just go through our classes perfunctorily, or do we seek real accomplishment and growth?

In large congregations, one man may serve as a full time education director, but in churches that have from 50 to 150 members, one man will handle the selection of teachers and material, but unless he is a full-time person, he can only devote so much time to this area of work. He may not have the time to evaluate the material that is being used. Frequently, the one in charge spends most of his time making sure the right amount of material is available for each class on Sundays and Wednesdays and that there are enough teachers to cover the classes.

Therefore, our “education programs” frequently devolve into minimal efforts of: “We’re doing the best we can to get by and are teaching our children some facts.” The purpose of a Bible school, however, should not be to limp through each week, wishing that something better would come along. It should be to **educate** young people, which includes providing them with facts, but it also involves showing them how these facts relate to each other and building up their faith to live in a hostile world.

## THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR A TEACHER

Those who are entrusted to teach young people must themselves be students of the Word. Many years ago this writer knew a young man who joined a denomination, which was disheartening since he had been presented the truth concerning those matters. Challenged about it being a manmade denomination, he responded by saying, "I know, but they have four thousand members, and they should be able to help me find a job." A few weeks later, he said, "Guess what? I'm teaching the high school class." It was pointed out: "But you don't know the Bible yourself!" He acknowledged that fact but did not see it as an obstacle. "I told the kids when I went into the classroom, 'Hey, I don't want to be here any more than you do, but let's make the best of it.' They thought it was cool." Hopefully, those who teach in the churches of Christ are a cut above such an attitude, but are we as good as we could be?

Besides being students of the Word, teachers must set a good example that our young people can safely follow. Not only should they be steadfast in their attendance at worship, Gospel meetings, or lectureships, they should also engage in good works. Morally, they should be above reproach. Best of all, however, would be to have teachers who make it their aim to live by faith and are evangelistic in their approach to others.

The church which meets at Forest Park, Georgia, put together a Teacher Questionnaire, which the Education Committee at the South Seminole Church in Winter Park, Florida, revised somewhat to make it more precise. That form (found in Appendix B) is given to everyone who wants to teach. If any questions are answered incorrectly, someone on the committee discusses them with the individual for the purpose of clarification. If someone argues in favor of the use of alcoholic beverages, smoking cigarettes, or immodest dress, he will be asked if he is willing to study the matter, the goal of which is to obtain agreement. Those who cannot agree with what the Scriptures teach on those matters are not allowed to be teachers in the classroom. Children deserve to see unity in the preaching and teaching of the leaders and teachers in the church. They should not grow up receiving mixed messages and being confused about what to believe.

## BIBLE SCHOOL MATERIALS

For decades many brethren have been lamenting the lack of decent education literature. In the 90s, Darrell and Ruth Hanson of Stephen-

ville, Texas, spent a great deal of time researching materials by various publishing houses, including the Gospel Advocate, and discovered that the majority of them were using materials produced by Baptists and Presbyterians. The cover of each quarterly book would be different than the ones the denominations used, but the contents were essentially the same. Those listed as editors actually just went through the denominational books and substituted a word or phrase here and there; except for those few changes, churches of Christ were teaching the same lessons that those in denominations were teaching their children!

About two years ago, this writer attended an education workshop taught by Neal Pollard, who presented material that the congregation he was working with at the time (the Cold Harbor Road Church of Christ in Mechanicsville, Virginia) had available (and probably still does) free of charge. On one disk was a five-year program, which covers the entire Bible. A proposal was made and accepted to implement this program at the South Seminole Church, with which this writer works, and it was begun the Sunday after Labor Day, 2005. This writer has made numerous changes to the original content. Some of these were necessary due to the formatting, the inclusion of too much material in a few of the lessons, and an occasional inaccuracy. Scriptures were added to each section so the student can find the pertinent passages as he studies.

Each lesson begins with a Scripture reading that all students are encouraged to memorize. Some of the key points of the lesson are provided, followed by an outline. Then the facts are summarized, and questions are included for review. A sample lesson is provided in Appendix A.

Since this is the congregation's first time through the material, we have not had the luxury of having the entire body of material published in a bound volume (which will eventually be done). The system works in this manner. Every few weeks we hand out to the teachers six or seven lessons. The teachers' lessons also include suggested age-appropriate activities for the students, songs to accompany the lesson, and visual aids that the teacher might make. These are all quite helpful, but it brings us to the one drawback of this series. We do not have visual aids to go with the lessons. To compensate for this deficiency, we have a Teachers' Resource Room with various books and pictures that can be used for most Bible lessons. If a congregation does not have one of these, it should begin gathering possible visual aids immediately. The

teachers, since they are all teaching the same lesson, can pool their resources, discuss, and develop how to approach the subject matter in monthly or quarterly meetings. A sharing of good ideas is encouraging and invaluable.

All students, from 2s and 3s on up, study the same lesson every Sunday. All of these, except college age, young adults, or the adult class will study the same lesson for Wednesday evening. Part of this time can be used for review, but frequently each lesson contains so much information that teachers have plenty to teach in both time slots. The teacher selects the material appropriate for the level of the students. Those from 5<sup>th</sup> grade to adult all study what is presented in Appendix A.

One of the great advantages is that the entire family can discuss and review the material with the assistance of Fact Cards. Twice a quarter these are made available to all the families in the congregation. Questions from each lesson, along with the memory verse, are placed upon note cards, which in turn are placed on large key rings. All that needs to be done is to review each evening—either at the evening meal or during the family devotional period. Each Sunday the student should have a good recollection of what has occurred, making it easier to continue. The Bible lessons are presented chronologically (rather than skipping back and forth).

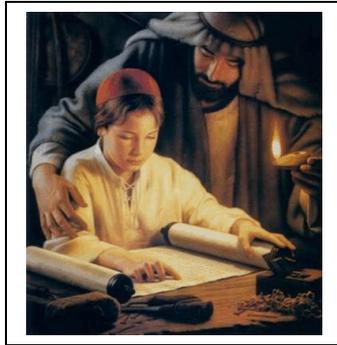
Other advantages of this system include that the teachers know, basically, what they will be doing for the next five years. They know that the material will be ready on time, and nothing will be back-ordered. It is easier to keep in mind where the class has been and where it is going than in thematic studies that skip around. The student will have a better, overall idea of the chronology of the Bible and how things fit together. Although the congregation will not be paying for educational literature, they will be spending money to make the copies for each student. One other advantage is that elders and leaders can know the Bible is actually being taught, and it can be taught from an apologetic perspective. It is exciting to have this material available!<sup>2</sup>

### **HOW CAN TRUE EDUCATION OCCUR?<sup>3</sup>**

We all know that repetition works. We know that what we call experience includes the fact that we are using the information we remember and putting it into practice. Before we get into the methods available for making repetition effective, let us remind ourselves of

what God’s Word says about repetition. When Jesus was asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” He quoted from Deuteronomy 6:4-5, but notice the context and how often they were to teach their children:

Now this *is* the commandment, *and these are* the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe *them* in the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe *it*, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the LORD God of your fathers has promised you—“a land flowing with milk and honey” Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! You shall **love** the LORD your God with all your **heart**, with all your **soul**, and with all your **strength**. “And these words which I command you today shall be **in your heart**. You shall teach them **diligently to your children**, and shall **talk of them** when you **sit** in your house, when you **walk** by the way, when you **lie down**, and when you **rise up**. You shall **bind them** as a sign on your hand, and they **shall be as frontlets** between your eyes. You shall **write them** on the **doorposts** of your house and on your **gates** (Deu. 6:1-9).



Notice how God told the Israelites to get their children to love God. Count all the places and times each Israelite was supposed to remember and meditate on God’s Word (6:6-9). This context obviously includes many repetitions, which drive the information into their children’s hearts, surround their families (“doorposts of your house”), and incorporate God’s Word in their social laws (“and on your gates”). Yet today we often try to get members of the body of Christ to read through their Bibles once per year. Remember what Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:

**Remind them** of these things, **charging them** before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be **diligent** to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth**. But shun profane *and* idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer (2:14-17).

The context is about division and errors getting into the church (2:16-17). Yet the remedy was repetition (“remind”) and **diligently studying** God’s Word, which goes beyond just reading and remembering. Rightly dividing requires studying, not just reading. There are many more verses on studying, pondering, meditating, etc., on God’s Word (see Jos. 1:8; Psa. 1:2; 119:15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 97, 148; Pro. 4:26; Ecc. 12:9; Mal. 3:16; Luke 2:19; Phi. 4:8; and 1 Tim. 4:15). **But how can you meditate on what you do not remember?** You first have to remember God’s Word, and then you can meditate on it wherever you are.

Many Americans think reading their Bible and knowing the answers to Bible trivia proves they are good students of the Bible. Yet the context of Jesus’ statement about the greatest commandment (and what the Holy Spirit revealed for Paul to write to Timothy) shows that unless God’s Word is driven into our hearts and seen in its application to our lives, we are like the Pharisees and will be condemned. Even Acts 2:37 says God’s Word stabbed them in their hearts.

As our children grow up, how do we plant God’s Word into their minds so they will accept the responsibility of controlling their lives by using God’s Word? It should be because it has become deeply rooted into their brains. However, parents often give up the education of their children to the public school system, but it has its own set of priorities and philosophy.

This teacher often asks his students: “What is the definition of an atheist?” They now remember that *atheist* comes from two different Greek words, *a* and *theos*. *Theos* is usually translated “God,” and the Greek word *a* is a modifier meaning “without.” Therefore, an atheist is one who lives his life without God. An atheist wants laws that are without God, history that is without God, philosophy without God, marriage without God, science without God, sex without God, government without God, etc.

Say, “**Isn’t this a perfect description of our public schools?**”<sup>4</sup> They want our children taught science without God, history without God, English without God, psychology without God, government without God, etc. Even a Christian employed by the public schools is instructed to teach all these subjects without God. Then we wonder why society has morally decayed, and we are losing (spiritually) somewhere between 70% and 90% of our children after they leave home!

Our children do not remember enough of God’s Word to immunize them from the onslaught of atheist philosophies entrenched in our institutions of “higher learning.” They have been taught all their courses without God. They are even bombarded with philosophies of sex without God. A Christian cannot talk about sex without talking about God’s laws for marriage, yet society portrays sex without God’s marriage laws, over and over again. These godless repetitions work. How can our children stand against such great peer pressure, trying to knock their faith right out of their hearts? How do we immunize our children?

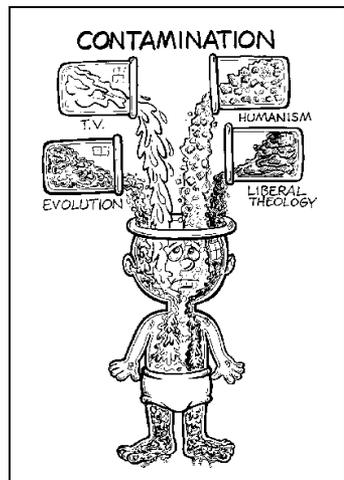
Obviously, before we can get them to apply (“rightly divide”) God’s Word, stand up for God’s Word (be the “salt of the earth”), and survive using God’s Word (put on their “shield of faith”—Eph. 6:16, and “faith comes...by hearing God’s Word”—Rom. 10:17), we have to get them to **remember** God’s Word and its applications.

In addition to what Moses taught in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 about repetition, Paul wrote the following about the concept:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the **renewing of your mind**, that you may **prove** what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

Christians are to be able to **prove** what is good, and we do this by **renewing** our minds. The Holy Spirit is a better teacher of history, a better teacher of law, a better teacher of science, a better teacher of psychology, a better teacher of morality, a better teacher about sex and marriage, etc.

Yet, many Christians do not teach their children these subjects from God’s Word, and, even worse, they let their children learn from America’s atheistic public school system, atheistic television, liberal theology books, atheistic museums, magazines, etc. Atheistic philosophy and *supposed facts* get poured into their brains. These parents



think **three hours** per week of Bible study will somehow **erase** all this **contamination**. Remember, the repetitions of the devil work. For that reason God's Word says to renew our minds, meditate on His Word, and not be conformed to this world.

So how can we help children remember God's Word? Parents must constantly reinforce at home the good Bible study lessons that faithful brethren produce; then it can go a long way toward helping your children survive the onslaught of the world. Do children see their parents meditating on God's Word? Do they see them joyfully giving God the praise for everything good in their lives? Actions always speak louder than words.

Yet, some congregations use Bible study material that most denominations would be glad to use. How is a child going to survive the lies of denominationalism, if they are not taught over and over how to use God's Word to detect those errors?

It is one thing to remember the Bible stories about David and Goliath, Daniel and the lion's den, Sodom and Gomorrah, etc. It is another thing to remember how to prove the creation days were 24-hour, literal days, by remembering that God said He created the plants on day three, the sun, moon, and stars on day four, and the flying insects on day five. Then **students can reason** that if each creation day was millions of years, then the flowering plants (that rely on insects for pollination) would have to have survived for millions of years without getting pollinated! To this information should be added the significance of the fourth commandment in Exodus 20:11: "For **in six days** the **LORD made the heavens and the earth**, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day." Liberal theology would have a difficult time convincing children that God created everything over billions of years, if they just remember Genesis 1 and Exodus 20:11 ("for in six days").

Parents should consider the areas of their children's life **where the devil is attacking** their belief in God. **Where is their faith being undermined?** Where will they be **attacked** when they go off to college? What peer pressure will tempt them? What areas of their lives are weak in discipline?

To protect them, key stories and passages from God's Word should be repeated to them until they remember them and can apply them. Parents should prepare them to be **soldiers** for Christ, not lukewarm Christians or isolated "monks for Christ."

### Memory and Repetition

Repetition can lead to remembering. Remembering can lead to applying. Applying can lead to defending. And defending can lead to teaching others (being a soldier for Christ). However, **without repetition** (Rom 12:2), your children can **never be soldiers for Christ**.

So how often does a story from God's Word need to be repeated before a child will remember it? It depends on many factors, of which many are beyond anyone's control. Perhaps that is the reason God told the Israelites to teach their children from the time they got up until the time they went to bed. There is no such thing as too much repetition.

We all know from experience that, if we do not review the math we learned in high school or college, we will not remember it 10 years later (**using** the knowledge is also a form of reviewing). It does not matter if we were an expert in math. If we do not use it, we eventually forget it. Even simple formulas that we used over and over for four years of college are forgotten in less than ten years, if not used or reviewed. Yet we once had these formulas in what is called "long term memory."

**Long term memory** is knowing something well enough to remember it a year or two later, even without reviewing the material. How do we move new Bible study material into this long term memory? The answer is repetition, but what kind of repetition?

We intuitively understand that repeating something once a day for ten days is a whole lot better than repeating it ten times in the same day, but even that does not put new information into our long term memory. How many repetitions, and over what intervals of time, would it take to move new Bible material into our long term memory?

There is actually a computerized flash card system (remember those flash cards we were supposed to use for quick reviews?) that would automatically compute when a student needed to review the new material. After seven to eight reviews, the new information would be in the long term memory, which means that anyone could put up to **one hundred pieces of new information** into the long term memory every year, and it would only *cost* one minute per day! This system also makes it possible to remember **90%** of the new information **any** time someone asks for it. Adults might be interested in knowing that there is **no correlation** between a person's ability to memorize new knowledge and his **age** or **academic level** of education! In other words, even those with a high school education do just as well as those with a

college degree. And those who are older do just as well as those who are younger (“SuperMemo”).

The progression from short term memory to long term memory goes something like this: Repeat the information every class until the student remembers it three days later. Then do not ask him again for about a week. When the new material has made it into his one-week memory, then do not ask him again for two more weeks. If he remembers it two weeks later, do not ask again for about a month. If he remembers it a month later, do not review again for three more months. If he remembers it three months later, he now does not need to review the material for a year. He has moved the new material into long term memory.

**It usually takes seven to ten reviews to move new information into long term memory.** When the student forgets, the computer recalculates the next review time for that student and for that question. Nothing falls through the cracks! The 10% of the questions the student forgets will get adjusted down (reviewed more often until remembered). So at any time the student has about 90% recall. This system eliminates cramming the night before a test: there is no staying up all night to do well in a “Bible Bowl” and no studying the Bible study material just before getting to church.

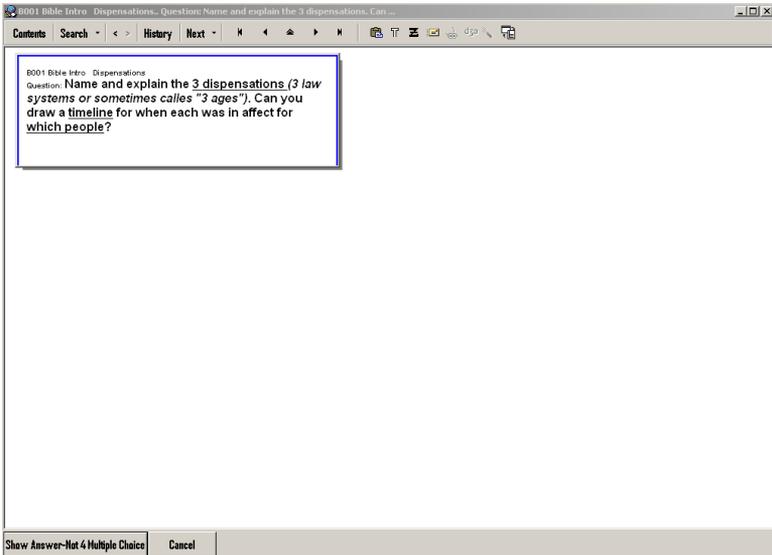
The South Seminole Church of Christ in Winter Park, Florida, has been implementing this repetition system for students from the fifth grade through college. The computerized flash card system is customized for each student. Every student learns at his own pace. The computer figures out when each question needs to be repeated for each student. For example, suppose a child is sick and misses his Bible study and his memory review. The computer will automatically adjust when he needs to review the new material versus material that is already in his one-month memory.

Each student goes into the Bible Memory Lab for ten minutes during Sunday morning Bible study and for ten minutes during Wednesday night Bible study. This is the absolute minimum time required for moving two to three questions per Bible study into the long term memory. This computerized flash card system is meant to be used a minimum of three times per week, but most congregations only have two Bible studies per week. A few students have taken their questions and installed the system on their home computers. They are really doing great, and they only spend five minutes per day at their review (and only five days per week).

The biggest challenges are:

1. Getting the weaker families to show up regularly for Bible study at least twice per week.
2. Getting the students to press the correct response buttons on the computer so the computer can calculate the optimum date to review the questions again. We were able to change the labels on the buttons, which really helped the students in this area. Do not use the default answer button labels.
3. Making sure the students know that the reviews are **not** a test.
4. Wording each question in such a way that those students who missed the Bible study (when the material was presented) can understand it.
5. Stopping the students from feeling pressured to do as well as the best student.
6. Making it for three months. Once they have enough material in their memory (after three months), they will be encouraged when they realize how much they now have learned.

Only about half of the students press the right buttons and show up regularly. However even students who are far behind (absent, press the wrong buttons, do not care, do not really read the questions or answers, etc.) catch up in about two months doing only five minutes per day. This happened when we installed the system on their home computers, and their parents pressed the buttons as the student answered the questions (for a few weeks). Thus the students learned to press the correct buttons on their own and are now proud of how well they are doing. Following is a typical question and the screens that each student will see.



**Figure 1: The student must answer the question BEFORE seeing the answer.**

The student sees the screen shown in Figure 1. He is supposed to name the three law systems or ages covered in the Bible. Then he must name the people who were under each law system. He should remember that the “Mosaic” law system was only for the Jews and was only in effect from about 1450 B.C. until Christ’s death on the cross. Notice how the student remembers the picture shown in Figure 2. The picture reinforces that all people today are under the Christian system, which helps protect him from those who think God’s law for marriage is only for Christians. This fact can also help when some denominationalist tries to say that we are still to keep the Sabbath day (they claim the ten commandments were instituted by God from creation through today). This picture reminds the students that God’s Mosaic system did not start until about 1450 B.C. and was nailed to the cross.

The screenshot shows a software window titled "B001 Bible Intro Dispensations. Question: Name and explain the 3 dispensations. Can you draw a timeline for when each was in affect for which people?". The main content is a vertical timeline with a central cross. The timeline is divided into three colored sections: a purple section for the "Patriarchial AGE" (4081-1951), a green section for the "MOSAIC AGE" (1446-430), and a yellow section for the "Christian AGE" (96-1517). Key events are marked with dates and descriptions, such as "CREATION", "FLOOD starts", "ABRAHAM born", "EXODUS from Egypt", "the KINGS", "ASSYRIAN CAPTIVITY", "BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY", "LAST BOOK OF OLD TESTAMENT", "NEW TESTAMENT begins", "LAST BOOK OF NEW TESTAMENT", "Start of CATHOLIC CHRUCH", "CRUSADES", and "Start of PROTESTANT CHURCHES". A large cross is positioned to the right of the timeline. The software interface includes a menu bar with "Contents", "Search", "History", and "Next", and a status bar at the bottom with "100%", "100% After 5m", "Mostly OK", "Missed", "Never Seen", and "Cancel".

Figure 2: This picture shows that the whole world was under the law system until the cross. Only the Jews were given a different law system starting in 1446 B.C. and ending at the cross.

Notice how this one question has many parts and that they all tie together, which should teach the student to reason from the parts they are learning. Some questions simply ask the student to name all the books of the New Testament. Others ask about evidences for God and His creation. Each student currently has about 160 questions in his personal account. Each of these questions typically has four or more parts. Therefore, each student has over 600 pieces of information moved into his long term memory (or it is getting moved into his memory). It is possible to even add cartoons for difficult words like *exegesis*:

The screenshot shows a software window titled "B004 What does exegesis mean? How is it different from ...". The main content is a question: "What does **exegesis** mean? How is it different from eisegesis?". The software interface includes a menu bar with "Contents", "Search", "History", and "Next", and a status bar at the bottom.

Figure 3: Exegesis vs. Eisegesis

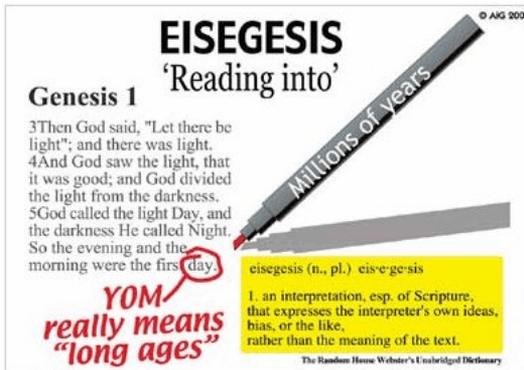


Figure 4: Eisegesis is NOT correct

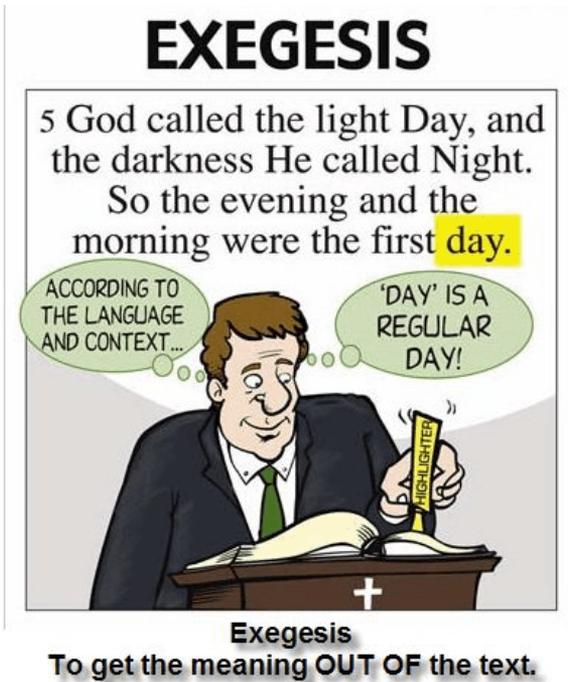


Figure 5: Exegesis—Correct

The questions and answers can also include behaviors. One question asks, "Have you read your Bible or listened to a message from the Bible every day this past week?" This question keeps coming up until

the students get into this habit. Parents can even add questions like: “Did you take out the garbage Monday and Wednesday this past week?” Children may actually like the computer reminding them instead of their parents (Did you take out the trash, did you clean your room, did you feed the fish, did you do your homework?). Or at least they will not think they can argue with the computer.

Each student can type additional information into each question and answer at any time, and it will automatically be saved in the correct question-answer box. Therefore, the parents and children can improve each question as they learn.

Some might wonder about the cost for such a system. We purchased the empty (no Biblical questions) computerized flash card system for up to 50 students for only \$200, which is less than \$4 per student. (This price for a “site-license,” \$200 per 50 students, is not on the aforementioned web site; they only say site licenses are available. The price for one student is \$39. Therefore, the site license is a lot cheaper.) Then we acquired 10 inexpensive computers. These are typically 700 MHz, Windows 2000 PCs, with Ethernet. They are plenty fast enough for this memory system. We paid less than \$100 per computer, including the Windows 2000 Pro operating system. We then found a local eBay seller who had monitors. We purchased 5 monitors that were at least 19 inches for \$80. Since we picked them up locally, we saved the \$40 per monitor shipping cost.

The computers are connected by an inexpensive (\$30) network hub (a router is not needed) and Ethernet cables. One of the PCs is the file server to all the others (Windows 2000 Pro has a limit of 10 PCs for file sharing).

Students come into the Bible Memory Lab (maximum 10 regular students at a time), sit at any computer, and call up their accounts. There are shortcuts on each computer’s screen for every student. If there are more than 10 students at a time, it is possible to make two sets of 10 computers each. Each set will have its own network, or a network server could be used.

The flash card system does not come with any Bible questions. The Bible Memory Lab teacher has to make up a set of questions for all the students (or a set for each class). Then each set of questions must to be copied to each student. Once the questions are made, it takes less than 20 minutes to transfer them to every student (we have about 25 students). We even have guest accounts for visitors.

However, just being able to remember the Bible answers is not the goal. We want adults and children to remember, meditate (1 Tim. 4:15; Psa. 1:2), apply properly (rightly divide—1 Tim. 2:15), be stabbed in their hearts (Acts 2:37), defend the truth (salt of the earth), and teach others (Mat. 28:20). **Before we can teach others, we need to remember** what God said. Let us use our minds to glorify our Father.

If the South Seminole church can be of any assistance in helping a congregation set up such a system for their children, we will do what we can in that regard. Imagine what value it would be to get more than 500 families using and improving this system over the next five years and sharing information! We can build better Bible schools when congregations can insure their children are better immunized against the devil and his angels. Let us give God the glory and stand up for Christ. **Let us train up ourselves and our children to be soldiers, not wimps.**

### CONCLUSION

Brethren already have an idea of the importance of the Bible school. We occasionally schedule teachers' appreciation dinners or maybe an annual Bible School drive, but frequently in the course of doing the things that are necessary for the ongoing operation of the congregation, the emphasis that is needed for a successful education program gets set aside as one of those things we will get to—someday.

Now we have an opportunity to make improvements. With the computer flash card system, Bible school material that actually studies the Bible chronologically, and a questionnaire that discovers the beliefs of the teachers, we have specific tools to move ahead. Some congregations may already be fully satisfied with what they have and are using, but in discussions with many preachers, this writer has discovered that most are lamenting the way things have been over the past thirty years. All are encouraged to devote the time necessary to make crucial improvements.

It lies within the realm of possibility to **save** 70% to 90% of our children—instead of losing that many. Of course, other factors have a bearing on this outcome, such as the faithfulness of the parents, the friends of the student (Pro. 1), and their own inclinations, but the knowledge needed to fight against Satan is fundamental and critical. Let not our children be destroyed for a lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6).

**APPENDIX A**  
**LESSON 79**  
**DAVID AND GOLIATH**

Memory Verse: 1 Samuel 16:7

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For *the* LORD does not *see* as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

Key Points

- We can begin to serve God while we are still young and be faithful to Him all our lives.
- God always listens and answers our prayers.

*Outline:*

7. David is anointed king (16:1-13).
8. David plays for Saul (16:14-23).
9. David and Goliath (17:1-58).

*Facts:*

1. God told Samuel to stop mourning for Saul and go with a horn full of olive oil to Bethlehem. There, he would find a man named Jesse. One of his sons Samuel would anoint as king. Samuel told God Saul would kill him if he found out, and He told Samuel to take a heifer with him and tell Saul he must go to offer a sacrifice to God. Upon his arrival in Bethlehem, the elders came to Samuel, concerned that he had come to punish them for some offense (7:16). He assured them he had come in peace to sacrifice. He told them to sanctify themselves. Jesse and his sons were included in this consecration (16:1-5).

2. As they assembled together, Samuel assumed that Eliab, the oldest son of Jesse, was the one whom God had chosen because he was so tall. God tells Samuel He does not judge a man by outward appear-

ance, but by what is within his thoughts and his heart. Jesse called his sons before Samuel one by one, but none of them were chosen. Samuel asked if he had any more sons. Jesse told Samuel his youngest son was out in the fields watching the sheep. Samuel had Jesse send for him immediately. David was described as *ruddy*, which usually denoted red hair and a fair complexion. David and Esau were the only two referred to by this term. God told Samuel David was His choice, and Samuel anointed him. The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day on. Samuel returned to Ramah (16:6-13).

3. The Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and God allowed an evil spirit to plague Saul. His wise men advised him to find a good musician to play for him and relieve him of his mental stresses. The powerful influence of music upon one's state of mind was known even in these early times. One of Saul's servants suggested David; so Saul sent for him to come. Jesse sent David to King Saul along with a gift. Saul liked David so much that he had David become his armor bearer. When Saul was distressed, David played the lyre, which had a soothing effect on the troubled king (16:14-23).

4. The Philistine army gathered fourteen miles west of Bethlehem to battle the Israelites. Saul gathered his army at the valley of Elah (Oaks). When they prepared for the battle, both armies stood on a mountain with the valley in between. The Philistines' champion warrior was Goliath, a giant living in Gath (perhaps over nine feet tall) (Jos. 11:21-22). All of Goliath's defensive warfare attire was made of bronze. His spear head was of iron, weighing 20-25 pounds, and the spear itself was like a weaver's beam. His armor bearer walked ahead of him carrying a huge shield to protect his body (1 Sam. 17:1-7).

5. Goliath taunted Israel to send a warrior to fight him. Each man would represent the two nations. If Goliath won, Israel would be their slaves, or if Israel's warrior won, the Philistines would become Israel's slaves. Saul and his army were frightened. For forty days, twice a day, Goliath would issue his challenge to Israel. He plainly insulted them: "I defy the armies of Israel." No one accepted the challenge; all were greatly afraid (17:8-11, 16).

6. Three of David's seven older brothers (Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah) were in Saul's army. David served in Saul's palace on a part-time basis. He also was a shepherd to his father's sheep; so he traveled back and forth from Bethlehem to the encampment (17:12-15). On one of these returns to the camp, Jesse asked David to take about a

half a bushel of parched grain (roasted in a pan or on an iron plate) and ten loaves of bread to his brothers, along with ten cheeses to their captain. David was to bring back word from them (17:17-18).

7. As David arrived at the camp early the next morning, the soldiers were leaving for the battlefield. He left his baggage with an officer and ran to find his brothers. As they were talking, David witnessed Goliath's morning challenge. Israel's troops retreated in fear. The men talked of the king's rewards to anyone who could kill Goliath. David was surprised that the king would grant such favors because their enemy was uncircumcised. (In other words, Israel belonged to God and was under the covenant God had made with Abraham, ratified by circumcision, and the Philistines were not. Therefore, God would be with Israel—not their enemies.) Nevertheless, the king had promised to give to the one who slew Goliath wealth, along with his daughter in marriage. Furthermore, his father's house would become exempt from taxes and other requirements (17:19-27).

8. Eliab overheard his little brother's questions and comments. He reprimanded David for being there and asked him who was watching the sheep while he was away. He accused David of possessing pride and insolence and just wanting to be there to see the battle. David replied, "Is there not a cause?" and continued to talk with the soldiers. He did not understand how they could allow this bully to insult Jehovah, the living God (17:28-30).

9. David's words were reported to Saul; David volunteered to fight Goliath. Saul protested that he was too young, while Goliath was an experienced warrior. David persisted, telling the king how he had fought both a lion and a bear to protect his father's sheep. He assured Saul that the God who protected him from ferocious animals would protect him against the giant. His faith in past events had given him courage to trust Jehovah's power in this crisis. Saul acquiesced, saying, "Go, and the Lord be with you" (17:31-37).

10. Saul gave David his own armor to wear. When he tried it on, it was awkward to him (unproved); so he took it off. David took his shepherd's staff, his sling, and five smooth stones from a stream. Then he walked out to face Goliath (17:38-40).

11. Goliath was insulted that Israel would send a handsome youth out to fight a great warrior. "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" He cursed David in the name of his gods and told him he would feed him to the birds and the wild beasts. David answered

Goliath that he had come armed with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but David came in the name of Jehovah God, whom Goliath had defied. That day God's power would conquer Goliath, and David would cut off his head and feed the birds and beasts the bodies of Goliath and the Philistine army. Then everyone would know that there is a God in Israel. Even the Israelites would be reminded that the battle is the Lord's (17:41-47).

12. Goliath approached. David ran to meet him. He reached into his shepherd's bag and pulled out a stone. He hurled it in his sling, hitting Goliath in the forehead. The giant fell on his face. David ran over to him, and with Goliath's own sword he slew him and cut his head off. Seeing their champion dead, the Philistine army ran away in defeat. Israel's army chased after them as far as Gath and Ekron; many of the wounded died in this retreat. Israel returned and plundered the Philistine camp. David kept Goliath's armor but brought his head to Jerusalem (17:48-54).

13. Saul asked Abner whose son David was—not that he did not at one time know; probably the question is asked to keep the promise not to tax his family. Abner could not recall; so they asked David when he returned. David told Saul he was Jesse's son, from the city of Bethlehem (17:55-58).

### *Discussion Questions:*

1. Why did Samuel go to Bethlehem? What concern did the elders have with his coming?
2. What wrong assumption did Samuel make with Jesse's sons? What did God tell Samuel?
3. Describe David. Why did God choose him?
4. How did David help King Saul?
5. What was Goliath's challenge to the Israelites? How often did he make this challenge?
6. What three rewards were promised to the one who killed Goliath?
7. David was incensed at Goliath's defiance because he was \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Why did David not use Saul's armor? How did God reward David's faith and trust in Him?
9. With God's help, what two animals had he killed?

10. When Goliath saw David, he protested that he was being treated as a \_\_\_\_\_.
11. With whose sword did David kill Goliath?
12. Where did Goliath's head end up?

## APPENDIX B

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name of the person completing this form

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date given

### INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ALL BIBLE SCHOOL TEACHERS South Seminole Church of Christ

It is our intent to have sound, faithful teachers whose lives will be a good example to the church and the community, and whose conduct will be above reproach. We therefore ask that all teachers, as well as prospective teachers, provide the requested information as clearly and concisely as possible to set forth your conscientious views. It is not comprehensive but it covers many major points. We feel a responsibility, in protecting the flock, to know the convictions of teachers in these matters.

### DOCTRINAL QUESTIONS:

Check one box per statement

Yes   No   Not  
          Sure

1. I understand 2 Timothy 3:16 and Hebrews 1:1-2 to mean that the 66 books of the Bible are inspired words from God and are the only authoritative source of religious direction.

Yes    No    Not  
             Sure

- 2. I understand Exodus 20:11 to mean that God created everything in the known universe in six literal 24 hour days.
- 3. I understand Genesis 7:21 to mean that God destroyed every human and land animal on the earth by a flood, except Noah and his family and what was saved by the ark.
- 4. I understand Isaiah 59:2 and Romans 3:23 to mean that all who can “comprehend” right and wrong are separated from God because of their own sins.
- 5. I understand Mark 16:16 to mean that all those who believe must be immersed in water to be saved.
- 6. I understand Acts 2:47, 20:28, and Colossians 1:13-14 to mean that the church of Christ is the blood-purchased body of the saved.
- 7. I understand that there is only one church (Eph. 4:4, 5:23) and one acceptable pattern of worship for members of that one body (John 4:23-24, Ps. 34:12-16, 1 Pet. 3:12).
- 8. I understand that denominationalism is not authorized in the N.T. and therefore sinful (1 Cor. 1:10).
- 9. I understand singing is authorized in N.T. worship (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16) and that instrumental music lacks Scriptural authority.

- | Yes                      | No                       | Not<br>Sure              |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 10. I understand Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 11:26 to mean that Christians are to take the Lord's Supper every Sunday, excluding other days of the week.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 11. I understand 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 does not prohibit eating in the church building.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 12. I understand 1 Timothy 2:8-15 to mean that women are not permitted to lead prayer or Bible classes in the presence of Christian men or to be in positions of authority over men in the church.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 13. I understand Acts 8:18 and 1 Corinthians 13:8 to mean that miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit have not been given to Christians since the death of the apostles.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 14. I understand that Matthew 18:15-17, Titus 3:10, 1 Timothy 6:3-5, and Proverbs 6:16, 19 to mean that we are to withdraw from any Christian (including one who sows discord among brethren or is a false teacher) who continues to live in sin, refusing to repent after being spoken to according to the Scriptures. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 15. I understand 2 John 9-11 to mean that false teachers and those who receive and fellowship false teachers and any works which they promote, such as lectureships and workshops, should be avoided by Christians.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 16. I understand Matthew 19:9 to mean that fornication is the only Scripturally accepted reason for divorce and remarriage, and if the guilty party remarries he/she commits adultery.  |

Yes No Not  
Sure

- 17. I understand John 14:15 to mean that all who love Jesus Christ are to keep all His commandments.
- 18. I understand James 1:19-20, 26, Matthew 12:36-37, Colossians 4:6, and Ephesians 4:25-26, 29, 31 to mean that a Christian is to keep control of his/her speech and his/her anger.
- 19. I understand Galatians 5:13 to mean that we are expected to demonstrate our love for others through service and kindness.
- 20. I understand 1 Corinthians 16:2 and 2 Corinthians 9:7 to mean that a Christian should give cheerfully as he has purposed in his heart and as he has been prospered.

**MORAL QUESTIONS:**

Check one box per statement

Yes No Not  
Sure

- 1. Do you believe Christians should pay their debts? If no, explain.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Do you believe Christians should avoid using profane words or any words that are not in keeping with Christian character?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Yes No Not  
Sure

3. Do you believe it is all right for a Christian to dance in public? If yes, please explain.

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4. Do you think Christians can engage in mixed swimming? If yes, please explain.

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5. Do you believe in wearing of (short) shorts, swimsuits, and other similar attire (by men or women) in public, is in keeping with Christian modesty? If yes, please explain.

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6. Do you believe a Christian can drink an alcoholic beverage without sinning? If yes, please explain.

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7. Do you believe that a Christian can smoke? If yes, explain.

---

---

8. Do you believe that a Christian should oppose abortion? If no, please explain.

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If you do not agree with some of these statements or you are uncertain whether you agree, please indicate by the statement number and provide a brief explanation for your different opinion or a comment about your uncertainty. If you need more room, use the area below or attach a separate page. If you wish to discuss any of these matters with us privately, please let us know. This information will be held in confidence.

Thank you for your cooperation.

In Christian Love,  
The Education Committee

Any further comments

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Current date \_\_\_\_\_ Signed \_\_\_\_\_

### WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“SuperMemo user survey.” Apr 2, 2007.

<<http://www.supermemo.com/articles/survey.htm>>.

### END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See the series of articles about Rick Atchley and the Richland Hills Church at <http://www.spiritualperspectives.org/cgi-bin/articles.pl> (look under January 14, 21, 28, and February 4, 11, 2007 for the entire series).

<sup>2</sup>To find out more about this Chronological Bible Study, contact Gary Summers.

<sup>3</sup>This section was written by Geoffrey Rowe, the Education Director of the South Seminole Church of Christ, in Winter Park, Florida. All Scripture quotations in this section are from the New King James Version.

<sup>4</sup>See the chapter by Gary W. Summers. “Liberalism and Public Education” *The Blight of Liberalism*. Ed. Michael Hatcher. Pensacola, FL: Bellview Church of Christ, 2005. 618-61.

# BUILDING BETTER STUDENTS

*Daniel Denham*

Daniel Denham was born in Pensacola, Florida. He is married to the former Barbara Kay Stancliff, and they have three children: Shawn, Trevor, and Megan. He graduated from the Bellview Preacher Training School under the direction of William S. Cline in 1977. Daniel has served as an evangelist for congregations in Florida, Tennessee, and Texas, and has done mission work in Taiwan. He currently serves as evangelist with the church of Christ in Newport News, Virginia. He has authored numerous articles for the *Defender* and other brotherhood publications and appears on several lectureships each year. He has authored two tracts published by the Bellview Church of Christ in Pensacola.

## INTRODUCTION

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6). With these words the prophet Hosea summarized the spiritual condition of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The people were ignorant of the Word of God. In fact, God said of Ephraim through Hosea, “I have written to him the great things of my law, *but* they were counted as a strange thing” (Hos. 8:12). Much of the ignorance was willful. The failures of their leadership to guide in keeping with that law also were also contributory to the condition. Isaiah, a contemporary of Hosea, described a similar condition in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. He wrote: “O my people, they which lead thee cause *thee* to err, and destroy the way of thy paths” (Isa. 3:12).

In New Testament times similar conditions were found on occasion among the churches of the Lord. Hymenaeus and Alexander had made shipwreck of the faith (1 Tim. 1:19-20). The New Testament writers warned of departures from the faith (Acts 20:28-32; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; Jude 3-4). Paul wrote of those who would “consent not to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness,” but would be “proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness.” Paul admonishes further “from such withdraw thyself” (2 Tim. 6:3-5). Peter warned of some who would even be

willfully ignorant of certain matters in God’s dealings with man (2 Pet. 3:5). Other warnings abound.

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ (Col. 2:8).

Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind (v. 18).

O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane *and* vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: Which some professing have erred concerning the faith (1 Tim. 6:20-21).

In our own day, we have seen the same things occur—open departures from the faith, brethren enraptured with vain speculations and new theories, philosophies, and psychologies! Some years ago, at the old Chattanooga Firm Foundation Lectureship directed then by William S. Cline, the question was asked, “What is the greatest need in the church today?” This question was asked of all the preachers involved in the lectures. Almost to the man the answer was “greater love and knowledge of the Word of God.” Others answered in similar fashion “greater faith,” et al., which amounts, practically speaking to the same thing, forasmuch as faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Greater love and knowledge of the Word will produce greater faith.

Education in the Word of God is an essential aspect of the work of both evangelism and edification. In evangelism the preaching and teaching of the Gospel is primary. In edification the building up of the church, consisting of those who have obeyed the Gospel, is primary. It is the keeping of the saved saved! The early church was provided in the wisdom of God with miraculous gifts and, subsequently, with men endowed with said gifts to reveal and confirm the Word of God (Mark 16:17-20; Heb. 2:2-4) and thus carry out the work of evangelism and edification through that Word. Paul wrote:

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:11-16).

Clearly, Paul has in mind, relative to the offices and functions listed, their role during and under the principles governing the use and operation of the miraculous gifts. Due to the fact that it is the case the miraculous gifts have been superseded by their intended product—"the faith," i.e., "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3), or, more precisely, the completed revelation of the New Testament of Jesus Christ (Jam. 1:25—"the perfect law of liberty"), then these gifts and the offices totally contingent upon them for the exercise of their function have ceased. The latter would contemplate specifically the offices of the apostles and prophets, the very nature of which required miraculous endowment. The former would see the removal of the gifts themselves once the revelation was completed and the product thus available to supplant the oral Word in inspired men with the written Word inspired of God! Other offices or works, though originally dependent upon the same gifts for their own efficacy, would not of necessity cease as in the case of that of the apostles and prophets, but would continue on in the teaching of that which has now been completely revealed. Hence we have evangelists (preachers), pastors (elders), and teachers who still function in the role of educators aiding the building up of the local congregations and the members thereof but utilizing the revealed and confirmed Word as the textbook.

The thrust, therefore, of our current study in keeping with the great theme of this lectureship to examine the subject, "Building Bible Students," for the purpose of aiding us not only to perceive the pressing need for this most important work, but to encourage us to greater effort in doing a better job, which is made all the more important for both personal and congregational strength by the present apostasy. While the ultimate future and preservation of the Lord's church resides safely in the providential care of God, there is a very real and practical sense in the immediate future of the church being dependent on what we say and do in this generation and even this very day!

## FOUNDATIONAL PREREQUISITES FOR BUILDING BIBLE STUDENTS

The foundation is the most important aspect in building any structure. This is not only true of the constructing of physical buildings. It is also true of the development of Bible students. Congregations—especially the elders, deacons, preachers, and Bible class teachers in building Bible students—must understand the importance of the foundational principles that must under-gird the effort. They must provide encouragement, admonition, and exhortation in the development of these attitudes. They should seek to provide an atmosphere where these things are constantly stressed and consistently promoted both by teaching and example.

1. The very first prerequisite for building Bible students, whether in our own person and from among our brethren, is appreciation, love, and respect for the Bible itself. The Bible is the verbally, plenary inspired, inerrant, and all-sufficient Word of the living God. Through it God has revealed His mind to mortal man (1 Cor. 2:10-13). He has invested it with the sufficient power to save men from sin (cf. Rom. 1:16-17; Jam. 1:21). It serves as man's roadmap to Heaven, which fact makes the knowledge of it not only important but also absolutely essential to the welfare of the soul of man.

God through the prophet Isaiah declared of old: "To this *man* will I look, *even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word*" (66:2). The image of the whole assembly in Nehemiah 8 rising as one to hear the Word of God read from the lips of Ezra, "the ready scribe," strikes the imagination with a vivid picture of sublime reverence for the Word (8:5)! Paul warned of those who would be destroyed because they "received not the love of the truth" (2 The. 2:10), which is, according to John 17:17, the Word of God. A proper understanding and appreciation of just what the Bible is all about and its authority is essential for the motivation that is needed to help potential students put in the time and effort involved in its study.

2. The second prerequisite is the realization of the personal responsibility that each possesses in growing in the knowledge of the Word, but also in helping others to do so. All accountable human beings are obligated to "grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18).

It must be kept in mind that learning is a two-way street. It involves the action of both those who teach and those who are taught. Teaching

can be done orally, visibly, and by written word. There is an obligation for the teacher to do his best to communicate, but also, just as equally, there is an obligation for the learner to learn. When each succeeds at doing his part, learning transpires. Thus, this requires a determination of all parties involved to desire earnestly to carry out their respective functions in the process.

Often we hear brethren complain about the level of development and even the study habits of others, while they are self-satisfied with their own level and habits! When living in Central Florida, this author heard an interview with then American League batting champion Wade Boggs as to his philosophy on being a good hitter. He stated that regardless of how well he did, he had determined never to be satisfied with where he was in his own development as a hitter. This is why he had a batting cage made as part of his house even in the architectural plans—so year round he could take daily batting practice. Similarly, Don Mattingly made the practice of taking over one hundred ground balls a day, when he was playing, to perfect his fielding technique. It paid off in nine gold gloves for fielding by a first baseman, a major league record. Now if men of the world will devote such time and effort into honing and perfecting their abilities in such relatively unimportant matters, then surely children of God, knowing the importance of the Word, ought to see the value in working at the study of the Bible!

3. The third prerequisite that is foundational to building Bible students is the determination to apply what is learned. Often we quote Paul's admonition: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15), and apply it to the study of the Word. *Study*, however, properly means, "be diligent" or "give diligence." It covers far more than Bible study. The servant of God is to give diligence in demonstrating that he is indeed a workman of the Lord, and most certainly the right handling of that Word—"cutting it out straight"—is essential to that very end! However, this relates to all of the applications where that Word can and ought to be made in life. It would therefore also include Bible study itself, a diligent and fervent attentiveness to the task of learning as a true *disciple* of the Lord. The Christian is a follower of Christ, which is the essence of discipleship (Mat. 16:24-27). To be so, he must learn the Word in such a fashion that it fashions his thoughts, guides his actions, and fills his life. He ought to be a professional student when it comes to the Bible!

Further, one must also actually apply the Scriptures to his life. He must put into practice what he knows to be true (John 8:31-32). It will be recalled that the Lord said the wise man is one who both “heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them” (Mat. 7:21-27). True blessedness (i.e. happiness, from *makarios*) comes through one’s obedience to God’s Word (Mat. 5:1-12; John 13:17; Heb. 5:8-9; Rev. 1:3; 22:14). Application must attend exposition and education. The student must have the attitude: “Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth” (1 Sam. 3:9).

### **THE FRAMEWORK PREPARATIONS FOR BUILDING BIBLE STUDENTS**

The framework (including flooring, walls, ceiling, and roof) for building Bible students consists of the tools necessary to do the job. There are, at the very least, three key areas where these come into play, though they somewhat overlap.

1. The first area is in the books and other materials that are aids to the work of Bible study. The development of a personal library, as well as a congregational one, is of great advantage to the diligent Bible student.

The basic building blocks for such should consist of a faithful and reliable translation. In fact, this really is a must, but for simplicity it is placed here in our own study. This preacher recommends only the King James Version, American Standard Version, and New King James Version. My personal preference is for the King James Version for its stunning combination of accuracy of translation, beauty of speech, and familiarity in phrasing. It stands alone in this respect. A good, readable print is needed.

The next things that one needs are: a good concordance (Strong’s, Young’s, or Cruden’s); a solid, conservative Bible dictionary; an equally good Bible atlas; an English dictionary, especially one that contains archaic terms, which would be helpful for the King James Version and American Standard Version texts; etc. From here other works could be added that are helpful, including commentaries (preferably from faithful brethren when possible), Bible encyclopedias, special studies on key subjects (again, by faithful brethren especially), and so on. More advanced materials in Hebrew and Greek studies can be made use of, like word studies, grammars, lexicons, and critical textual works, but it would be best to get some solid, well-grounded training in these before doing so.

Other materials are helpful, such as: periodicals, tracts, and other publications by faithful brethren; computers and Bible software, which is now abundant and becoming more specialized in certain areas and comprehensive in others; quality note-taking materials, papers, pads, and pens or pencils. Unless one has been blessed with a photographic memory (and even then it may not work all the time), the making of notes will always be an essential to learning.

These tools are most helpful, but aside from a faithful copy of the Scriptures themselves, not absolutely essential. They are aids to one's study. They are also sometimes quite expensive, and this poses a problem for many. Churches and individuals, however, need to recognize the long-range value of investing in good study materials and other aids in teaching the Word. It is sad when people will put more money into their personal recreation in their lifetime than in feeding their soul from God's Word and in materials designed to help come to a greater knowledge of the Word!

G. K. Wallace once stated to this writer that he had had many mechanical tools for working on things in the house, on his car, or in his yard, which tools he had used but only once, and even some that he had never used. Then he said he knew that when at any time he might need a specific given tool, he had it ready for use! He then made his point thus: "Such is the nature of a preacher's library. He may have books that he rarely or may have never even used, but they are his tools. He should always have them when the need arises." The same is true for any Bible student. Gus Nichols maintained that any book, which aided one to better understand a single passage or thought from the Bible, was worth owning. A myriad of other great Bible students have said similar things to this preacher over the years, among them: William S. Cline, Roy C. Deaver, E. R. Harper, Foy E. Wallace, Jr., Rex A. Turner, Sr., George E. Darling, Sr., B. C. Carr, Franklin Camp, Winfred Clark, and Guy N. Woods.

2. A second key area is in the development of specific study skills. Every accountable person has both the obligation and the ability to learn, and one of the first things to learn is how best to learn! Some students learn best by rote, while others tend to be kinesthetic learners. Some do better audibly than by reading. For those who tend to be auditory there are many sets available of the Bible in the King James Version on tape and CD. The voices of James Earl Jones, Charlton Heston, and Alexander Scourby are available. In our area in Virginia

there are a couple of dollar-type stores that carry individual books of the Bible at a dollar per disc. These should not replace reading the Bible, but can be used to augment one's study in a way that may help things better to stick.

Taking advantage of training provided by online studies on the internet, including one that is about to be launched from the Lenoir City congregation in Tennessee, schools of preaching—where sound—and lectureships of this kind will provide more training and instruction than one regularly gets in local Bible classes as a rule.

The use of charts, maps, and other materials to impress upon the mind certain Bible facts and data that help provide historical, social, and geographical frameworks for specific texts are also useful. Developing such by way of notes or the drawing of diagrams is also helpful. Visual aids of differing sorts can be found or even made with a bit of imagination that helps the text stick in the mind. Especially the use of visual aids, like the overhead projector, Power Point presentations, and video presentations, have a powerful affect on the mind: for what is heard is reinforced by what is seen.

3. The combining of such physical tools must be done with the two tools with which each child of God comes already equipped. (A) The first tool here is one's own mind. There must not only be the desire to reason properly, there must be the preparation to learn how to reason properly. It is the biblical "heart," the center of intellect, volition (will), emotion, and purpose. Developing our minds is a priority. The ability to think and to reason properly—to be sober in our judgment—this is a truth that the Scriptures themselves stress. Paul commanded the Philippian brethren:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things (Phi. 4:8).

The faithful child of God is one in whom "the word of Christ" dwells "richly in all wisdom" (Col. 3:16). The Christian is "not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3).

The Bible student must be aware of the stewardship he holds relative not only to his earthly, material possessions but also to those

intrinsically valuable items of both mind and soul (1 Cor. 4:2). We also must not only be concerned about the proper use of our own minds, we must realize that we are in a war for the minds of people, and the weapons of our warfare, being mighty, are designed for that conflict (cf. 2 Cor. 10:2-4). The mind is a focal point of the devil's attack plan, because the mind has such determining force in the behavior of the individual (Pro. 4:23; 16:9; 23:7).

It is not enough to know the Word of God as to **what** it says. We must also know the **meaning** of what it says. This is necessary even to be able to obey it properly. Those in Nehemiah 8:8, from the law of Moses to Israel, did the work that is also at the heart of Bible study. The Record states: "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused *them* to understand the reading." (A) They reasoned properly about what the Scriptures said, (B) understood the meaning themselves, and thus (C) were able to convey it to others. On the basis of the information thus disseminated, the people then proceeded to obey the law and to keep the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles properly for the first time since the days of Joshua the son of Nun (Neh. 8:9-18). We must put into actual practice the Word of God (Jam. 1:21-22).

There have been and are atheists who can quote the Scriptures as though they knew them "like the back of their hands." Col. Ingersoll was especially knowledgeable of the moral teachings of the Bible and even sought to have his children trained in them, because he believed many of them to be quite beneficial and consistent with his own moral scruples. Even the devil could quote the Scriptures, though he invariably would try to twist them to his own purposes (Mat. 4:6). The twisting of the Scriptures has always been a problem (2 Pet. 3:16). Thus, one must not only know the Scriptures, he must also know how to reason properly concerning them. He must "rightly divide" them. The American Standard Version reads "handling aright the Word of God" in 2 Timothy 2:15. He must ascribe diligently to and properly employ the basic laws of thought and the principles of valid reasoning. He ought to justify his conclusions by adequate evidence, as the Law of Rationality holds and as 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 commands: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil."

This author firmly believes that brethren, especially those who will function as preachers of the Gospel, need to be trained in logic. Our

current educational system in the United States seems to be determined to undercut cognitive skills and teach people how **not** to think, rather than how to think. The self-appointed prophets and apologists for the dominant culture, multiculturalism, and political correctness would prefer simply to program what people must think into them, instead of teaching them how to reason properly so that they can make up their own minds on these issues. The study of the principles of valid reasoning is a great help in the study of God's Word, and it is a powerful panacea to the mindless drivel by which many minds have become bloated in our postmodern secular schools.

Prayer is the second tool relative to this point. The privilege of prayer, as a Christian, is a wonderful asset oft neglected in carrying out our daily functions in the service of the King of kings. It is a valuable implement in aiding our diligent efforts to learn more about God's will. Prayer helps move the mighty hand of God to intervene through His great providence to accomplish some of His ends and purposes that are concerned with our own concerns.

This does not mean that God will through some supra-literary way addressed directly to the mind of the agent the knowledge that he seeks to acquire through his study. The Mac Deaver doctrine is pure heresy, and ultimately denies free will, though brother Deaver would deny this. Mac claims that he gets special "wisdom" and thus insight on texts directly and immediately through the impulsion of the Spirit that otherwise one could not obtain. The claim implies that he is receiving information **essential** to his understanding of the information in the Word of God. His position implicitly involves the transmission of information without which it is otherwise impossible to know the meaning of the text. This would involve the process of inspiration, despite brother Deaver's claims to the contrary. This doctrine also implies that the Word of God is not even all-sufficient "informationally," as he has claimed to believe.

Brother Deaver's problem here, at least in part, is a failure (whether intended or not) to distinguish between primary and secondary causes. The former is essential to a thing occurring, while the latter relates to those that may attend or serve as additional influences directing the course of what happens or simply providing the appropriate or favorable conditions that promote its happening.

For this reason Christians are commanded, for example, that "first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be

made for all men; For kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Tim. 2:1-2). Paul explains the reason: “For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (2:3-4).

In prayer and the providence of God, relative to the study of the Word of God, the saint has tremendous recourse to sources of help that can bring about the moral condition of things better conducive to coming to the knowledge of God’s Word, not only for themselves but also on behalf of those in the world seeking the truth. The moral climate of a city, nation, or even the world at large can definitely affect people’s desire for, concentration upon, and determination to obey God’s Word. This is one reason why Paul besought the Thessalonians to pray that the Word might “have *free* course” (2 The. 3:1). The Greek literally says, “run.” The nature of the environment of things at Thessalonica and elsewhere could have some bearing on the influence of the Gospel in the lives of its hearers. Paul understood the role that prayer could play in the bringing about through God’s providence the conditions suited for the furtherance of that influence.

As a follow-up to this point, the brother who prays for “a ready recollection,” really needs to drop the phrase, because it does not properly reflect the cause and effect relationship of prayer and providence and lends to false notions as to just what God does or will do in response to prayer. The prayer thus offered expresses a notion that God will somehow wedge into the mind of man a spark or moral impulse that will compel him, against all other distractions, to bring to remembrance what he has studied. That this interferes with free will is but one of the problems of the notion. It is an entirely mistaken idea founded on a false view of human thought and subsequently on the moral nature of man entirely. Given this view of man’s moral nature, what would keep the devil from doing similarly, thus nullifying the prompt from on High? How would one determine between the differing prompts being sent to him, as to which was from God and which was from Satan?

The providence of God addresses those attendant matters that provide for a better study and a better understanding of God’s will. It may be done by providing the political climate that permits piety and honesty to reign in society, which then promotes a desire for truth, as Paul’s words indicate. It may provide for aids in enlightenment through other external agents to assist the student in his studies. This differs

from the view espoused by Mac Deaver in that the information gained does not come directly, immediately from God by way of a supernatural process, but instead through the means of the natural order of things by way of human agency. Further, it does not involve additionally authoritative information that actually adds to the body of inspired literature, as Mac's position involves. Finally, it consists of information that only elucidates or illustrates the principle(s) of the text, which information was obtainable through other natural means as well. It is simply a case where one agent has already done the research in the study of linguistics, etymology, history, geography, sociology, archaeology, geology, and such like to gain the information bearing on the text. How often has been the experience of prayer for help in understanding a text being answered with contact occurring with someone who had already done the deeper research and thus could provide the helpful information that sheds light on the text? Part of this aspect involves not only praying about it, but also knowing to whom to go to ask for help on it from among those of "like precious faith." Over the years this student has benefitted greatly from phone calls made to men of the Book who have studied these things before me. This does not even take into consideration their extant writings on such subjects or passages. Prayer is a great tool that needs to be utilized more and more in the study of God's Word. The faithful child of God ought to heed the apostle Paul's admonition: "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2; cf. 1 The. 5:17; Phi. 4:6).

### **THE FINISHING PROGRAMS FOR BUILDING BIBLE STUDENTS**

This refers to what congregations can do relative to developing Bible students. This provides the finishing work with all other things either in place or being put into place. Like completing the wiring, plumbing, the inner woodwork, decorating the walls, bringing the lighting and heating to a state of readiness, finishing the flooring, and bringing the structure generally to proper completion for dwelling. Congregations must be mindful of the educational focus that their work must have, as has already been stressed.

Some of the things that this author shall list here have already been alluded to in passing elsewhere. There are three key areas wherein congregations can carry out this great task, according to their financial and logistical abilities.

## Preaching

Every congregation can meet the demands through special emphasis in preaching that instructs. All congregations have the obligation to assemble to worship the living God (John 4:24; Acts 20:7-11; 1 Cor. 11:20ff; 16:1-2; Heb. 10:24-25). All too often what passes for preaching is feel-good pop psychology in the place of instruction in the Word of God.

Preachers are becoming more and more pep rally cheerleaders and feel-good philosophers. Their preaching models are no longer men like Paul, Peter, John the Baptist, Philip, or the Lord. They no longer hold up as examples men like B. C. Goodpasture, N. B. Hardeman, G. K. Wallace, Foy E. Wallace, Jr., J. D. Tant, Marshall Keeble, or Gus Nichols. These men were too plain spoken, too pointed, too “negative,” too “confrontational,” too “issue oriented,” and too “judgmental” for our professedly soft-hearted brethren today. Their models are taken most often from the denominational crowd: Warren Wiersbe, Rick Warren, Robert Schuller, Chuck Swindol, Adrian Rogers, and Charles Stanley.

Elderships ought to expect a preacher to do what the Word indicates—preach the Gospel of Christ! Weak-kneed, spineless, jelly-fished backbone preaching needs to be banished from our churches! Preachers are to be concerned about teaching and preaching the doctrine of Christ, every whit of it (cf. Acts 20:27; 1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Tim. 4:1-4; Tit. 2:1). Even the smallest of congregations that conduct but one service of week, can do, at the very least, that much to aid those in attendance in their study of the Word of God.

Preachers should vary their preaching subjects over the course of a year, avoid hobby riding, and adjust their style to reach and instruct the differing levels of development represented in the congregation. Simple lessons should be a part of their planned preaching for non-members, new converts, and those just weak in the faith. However, lessons that challenge the intellect and pique interest in deeper study of the Bible are also needed.

## Bible Classes

The next area is in the use of the Bible classes. These are expedients to carry out the study of God’s Word. These classes, like the preaching services, should be designed to stress development at all levels. It can also be done on graduated levels to reflect that development. We do so

quite commonly with children through the grades school system. A similar procedure could be followed for adults.

The Bellview congregation itself has done so effectively over the years. From its new converts and new members class taught by Bill Gallaher for many years, to the singles' classes, young-marrieds' classes, middle-agers' classes, and even to that of its senior citizens, the congregation has been a model in its educational program. This scribe had his start in brother Gallaher's class. It was challenging, informative, and edifying. William S. Cline's *Studies In Christian Doctrine and Practical Christian Living* served as the excellent study guide for that class. Yet, throughout it all, the Bible—and the Bible alone—was always stressed as the final authority in faith and practice.

The level of training in our classes, especially on the adult level, must be improved and upgraded in its demands and efficiency. Many have been turned into paddy-cake sessions. Others suffer from unprepared teachers or from heretics and crackpots having free reign.

### **Special Functions**

The final area is that of special programs, workshops, lectureships, and educational outings and resources that can be scripturally utilized to aid Bible study. These can be divided into four key groupings: (1) speaking programs, (2) training programs for teachers, as well as students, (3) special events, and (4) special tools. These again will somewhat overlap and recapitulate some things already broached.

### **Speaking Programs**

This has reference to programs, like lectureships and seminars that are conducted to teach the truth or train folks in the truth on a chosen series of subjects (or even one main subject consisting of a number of more specific parts). A lectureship, like the one for which this chapter has been prepared, is a great tool for both instruction and subsequent training of Bible students. Besides the good fellowship that is enjoyed by faithful brethren in such venues, there is the benefit of further education in the matters discussed. In some cases it provides information previously unknown; in others it reinforces knowledge already possessed. In them all there is a reminding of duty and responsibility, and an implicit call to repentance when we fall short on these matters. Illustrations are gathered, points clarified and better grasped, error exposed, and truth is upheld and defended.

### **Training Programs**

This refers to special classes established to train teachers as to how to teach. It may also include a workshop or seminar approach. Also classes that are designed to teach students how to study, take notes, and interpret the Scriptures by the use of proper hermeneutics (the science of interpretation).

Classes in logic, which can be adapted to the level of the students, would also be helpful to this latter end. Classes in specific subjects, texts, books of the Bible, or even books on the Bible written by faithful brethren, and such like, which classes would take the student to a deeper and more intense level of study than the regular Bible classes. The latter is limited in some ways by not only the time element, but also by the greater diversity of levels in the understanding of the students. Smaller classes can be geared more to specific levels. Ladies' classes during the week or bi-weekly are also effective to this end.

### **Special Events**

This refers to opportunities that present themselves for the members to live the history of the Bible, as it were. This is not to advocate that congregations corporately pick up the tab on the cost, because certain aspects of it would fall outside the work of the church. However, the members themselves can nonetheless organize and execute this plan together distinct from such corporate support from the treasury.

In the Dallas/Ft. Worth, Texas, and the Charlotte, North Carolina areas, there have been displays and exhibits of artifacts bearing on the biblical record at some of the local museums. One display currently making the rounds is that of many of the Dead Sea scrolls. Other exhibits have included papyrus documents, ancient copies of the New Testament Scriptures, and such like. Artifacts from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome also are shown from time to time. Excursions to see these materials and artifacts will often bring subjects into better focus. When preaching in the Ft. Worth area, we coordinated an outing to the Paluxy River at Glen Rose to see the dinosaur and human footprints. We visited the creation science museum there and even confronted an atheist who was seeking to debunk the human footprint claim. The excursion was paid by those participating in the outing instead of from the congregational treasury. There were others who, though they did not go, gave that the young people could do so.

## Special Tools

This was described this at some length previously, but here there is special emphasis on the role of the local congregation in the obtaining, maintaining, and use of these materials. This includes: well-stocked church libraries, the use of overhead and video projectors, DVD systems, video recording systems, the use of Power Point and other visual materials, tract racks filled with quality materials, faithful brotherhood publications, a teaching bulletin and/or paper, charts, maps, visual displays like bulletin boards dedicated to teaching, et al. Congregations need to invest in good educational materials and aids for the future of its membership, for generations yet unseen. Brethren are needed to use and maintain these tools for use. This requires both their training and their commitment to help. All too often such volunteers are forgotten about and not appreciated for their efforts until something goes lacking. The Bellview church over the years has been blessed with those who have been willing, ready, and able to get the job done! We have such folks also dedicated to do the same at Newport News.

## CONCLUSION

The development of Bible students is a pressing need, especially in an era of apostasy. However, they will not just happen; they are not grown miraculously as though by spreading the hydra's teeth. They must be trained, encouraged, edified, nurtured in the faith, protected from the wolves, and put to work in doing the same for others.

We have the greatest book in the world, as members of the greatest institution the world has ever seen, facing the greatest threats to our souls' welfare, and involved in the greatest mission ever given—the seeking and saving of that which is lost (Luke 19:10). It behooves us “be about our Father's business”!

## WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

# BUILDING YOUR PERSONAL LIBRARY

*Daniel Denham*

## **KEEPING COSTS DOWN**

The personal library is a valuable asset for the serious Bible student. Of course, as with so many things, the amount of money that one can put into it will have some bearing on just how far or to what extent one can build up his library. There are a variety of ways to do so and minimize expenses.

There are several options that can be helpful. Garage and yard sales sometimes provide great value at very little expense. Finding gems in this manner is hit and miss at best, but every now and then well worth the effort to utilize a Saturday morning for, especially if you pick up a few odds and ends for the wife and kids.

Flea markets, like garage and yard sales, offer a lower than usual cost for books. Oftentimes in the larger flea markets, a full used bookshop may be found that undercuts the prices of those having a higher overhead in shopping centers or strip malls.

Used bookshops are especially helpful in finding out of print books or cheaper copies of books still in print. There are online book services that combine the main inventories of hundreds of such shops along with the retailers. Some used book chains exist and are outstanding. One of the best is Half Price Books, which is based in Texas.

Discount clubs or cards also are available among many retailers, such as Barnes and Noble and Books -A-Million. Even some religious discount stores exist (e.g. Mardels). Christian Book Distributors, Scripture Truth (of Fincastle, VA), and other such operations offer great discounts on books—especially publisher overruns.

Some of the least appreciated places where books may be purchased often quite cheaply are the antique shops that dot the countryside. Some of my best and rarest purchases at a great price were made at antique stores, especially in Tennessee and Alabama. Often books are among the lower priced items in such stores, because of their relatively slow turnover rate. Sometimes one may find great books that have been on

the shelves of a store for many years, and the owners are more than happy to unload them for much less than otherwise. Group purchases often will bring even better prices as well in antique shops. Two of the best hauls of Restoration works this writer ever made actually came from antique stores. On one of these excursions he purchased: four out-of-print debates, a *Hurlbut's Bible Atlas*, four commentaries by Restoration preachers (including David Lipscomb's rare commentary on Acts), and six books of sermons (Gus Nichols, E. R. Harper, Fred Dennis, G. C. Brewer, and B. C. Goodpasture), along with a copy of Alexander Campbell's book *Christian Baptism*, with a few other odds and ends by other writers. This scribe paid a grand total of \$15 for the whole lot. The owner had them hidden in an old pie safe, which faced a wall. She had just been cleaning and came across them again and decided to get rid of them cheaply in one lot, if someone wanted them. This penman just happened to be the first to inquire about them.

Friends of the library book sales in many cities occur each year. Some are even monthly or quarterly. Some public and college libraries not only conduct special periodic sales, but they maintain a used bookstore on site. Currently, efforts are being made by more liberal accreditation boards to move education more to the left. Thus, older, more conservative works are being forced from library shelves. While this process does not bode well for the state of higher education (and for public libraries as sources of good information and research), it does offer opportunities for those interested in adding such materials to their own personal libraries to purchase them relatively cheaply.

This preacher has also long made it a practice to support the efforts of faithful brethren in publishing and selling good, sound books. This accomplishes two key things. (1) It helps keep such literature in circulation. There are future generations that will need good material to deal with some of the issues they will face, as well as the basic Bible study that will be needed for their own growth. These materials can enhance that growth and help produce the next leaders, teachers, et al. (2) It also, by virtue of volume, helps to keep prices a bit lower than they otherwise would be.

### RECOMMENDED BOOKS

When this penman first began preaching and studying under William S. Cline and other good men, he took special notice of the books in their personal libraries and also inquired often about those that

they would recommend most highly. He prepared a booklist that has served as a guide for purchasing such books for his own library. Among these men, including brother Cline, whose recommendations he has found quite helpful have been: Rex A. Turner, Sr.; Roy C. Deaver; Foy E. Wallace, Jr.; G. K. Wallace; Guy N. Woods; Franklin Camp; E. R. Harper; George E. Darling, Sr.; Winfred Clark; Thomas B. Warren; and Joe Gilmore, whose own library was built on recommendations from his instructors in the faith, including the scholarly C. R. Nichol. Over the years, other men have provided helpful recommendations that have aided in the development of this preacher's library.

Here is only a partial listing (due to space considerations) of recommended books [editor's note: many of the books following are the commonly known names of the books and not the actual title of the books].

### Commentaries

1. R. C. H. Lenski's New Testament set.
2. Albert Barnes' Complete OT and NT set.
3. *The Pulpit Commentary*.
4. Adam Clarke's Commentary.
5. J. W. McGarvey's Commentaries, including his Original and New Commentaries on Acts; Matthew-Mark; *The Fourfold Gospel*; Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans.
6. The Gospel Advocate set.
7. NT Commentaries by J. B. Lightfoot.
8. NT Commentaries by Moses Stuart.
9. NT Commentaries by John Eadie.
10. H. A. W. Meyer NT Commentary set.
11. C. J. Ellicott's Commentary set.
12. James MacKnight on the Epistles.
13. Charles John Vaughan on various Epistles.
14. The Gospel Advocate Teacher's Annual Lesson Commentaries, including Elam's Notes (from E. A. Elam), with multiple editors (including E. A. Elam; H. Leo Boles; Guy N. Woods; Roy H. Lanier, Sr.; Robertson L. Whiteside; Thomas B. Warren; Rex A. Turner, Sr.; Leslie G. Thomas; John T. Hinds).
15. New International OT and NT Commentaries.
16. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* edited by Gaebelein.

17. The original College Press set of commentaries—*Bible Study Textbook*.
18. *Cambridge Bible Handbooks for Schools and Colleges* (they also have a special set on the Greek text of the NT).
19. *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*.
20. *Word Biblical Commentary on OT and NT*.
21. There are many good commentaries on various books of the Bible that I would recommend: e.g. R. L. Whiteside on Romans; Rex Turner on Daniel; David Lipscomb on Acts; Moses Lard on Romans; J. Noel Meredith on Galatians; James W. Boyd on Romans; John Broadus on Matthew; E. J. Young on Isaiah, Daniel, and the Minor Prophets; J. A. Alexander on Isaiah, Mark, and Acts; Robert R. Taylor, Jr. on various NT books; Henry B. Swete on Revelation; E. W. Hengstenberg on Ezekiel; Foy E. Wallace, Jr. on Revelation; Homer Hailey on Revelation, Job, and Minor Prophets; and J. Armitage Robinson on Ephesians. But there are too many others to list here.

### **Encyclopedias, Bible Dictionaries, Introductions, Background Studies, Etc.**

1. Encyclopedias—*Zondervan Bible Encyclopedia*; *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (edited by James Orr); *The Popular and Critical Bible Encyclopedia*; *The Imperial Bible Encyclopedia* (edited by Patrick Fairbairn).
2. Bible Dictionaries—*Zondervan Pictorial*; Davis'; Unger's; Revell's; Hastings' (both one volume and multi-volume editions).
3. Introductions—
  - a. Bible—Bagster's *Bible Handbook*; Hendriksen's *Survey of the Bible*; Baxter's *Explore The Book*; Scroggie's *The Unfolding Drama Of Redemption*.
  - b. OT—R. H. Harrison; E. J. Young; Gleason Archer; C. H. H. Wright, C. H. Raven.
  - c. NT—George Salmon; H. C. Thiessen; Donald Guthrie; Carson, Moo, and Morris.
4. Background Studies—Frederic L. Godet's *Handbooks on the OT and NT*; Cunningham Geikie's *Hours With The Bible*; Horne's *Introduction*; E. H. Plumptre's *Bible Educator*;

- Homer Hailey's Comments*; Charles Pledge's *Getting Acquainted With The OT*; Martin Anstey's *Chronology of the OT*; Jack Finegan's *Handbook of Bible Chronology*; Beecher's *Dated Events of the OT*; Humphrey Prideaux's *Connexion* (on the OT and NT).
5. Bible Atlas—Hurlbut's; *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Atlas*; Cunningham Geikie's *Holy Land And The Bible*; Thomson's *Land And The Book*; J. W. McGarvey's *Lands of the Bible*.
  6. Concordances—*Strong's Exhaustive*; *Young's Analytical*; *Cruden's Complete*.
  7. Questions and Answers—Guy N. Woods' Open Forum (2 Vol.); David Lipscomb and E. G. Sewell; David Lipscomb; and J. W. Shepherd; Isaac Errett's *The Querist Drawer*; H. Leo Boles.

### Language Studies

1. Greek Grammars—
  - a. Beginning—J. Gresham Machen; Ray Summers; William Hersey Davis; William Mounce.
  - b. Intermediate—H. E. Dana & Julius Mantey; Richard A. Young; David Alan Black; A. K. M. Adam; Daniel B. Wallace; A. T. Robertson & Wm. Hersey Davis' Short Grammar; Moses Stuart.
  - c. Advanced—A. T. Robertson; Blass, DeBrunner, and Funk; W. F. Moulton with Howard and Turner (4 Vols.); J. B. Winer.
  - d. Specialties—Charles H. Kahn's *The Verb "Be" In Ancient Greek*; Middleton's *Doctrine of the Article*; Stanley Porter's *Idioms of the Greek NT*; Buist M. Fanning's *Verbal Aspect in NT Greek*; Moulton & Milligan's *Vocabulary of NT Greek*; R.C. Trench's *Synonyms of the NT*.
2. Greek Word Studies—
  - a. A. T. Robertson's *Word Pictures in the NT*.
  - b. M. R. Vincent's *Word Studies*.
  - c. Henry Alford's *The Greek Testament*.
  - d. W. Robertson Nicoll's *The Expositor's Greek Testament*.
  - e. S. T. Bloomfield's *Greek Testament With English Notes*.
  - f. W. E. Vine's *Complete Works*.

- g. Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies*.
- h. *Theological Dictionary of the NT* by Kittel and Friedrich.
- 3. Greek Lexicons and Dictionaries—Joseph Henry Thayer; Bauer, Arndt, & Gingrich; Edward Robinson, W. E. Vine; E. W. Bullinger; William Mounce; Sophocles; Pickering; John Parkhurst.
- 4. Special Greek Concordances—*Englishman's Greek Concordance*; J. B. Smith's *Greek-English Concordance*; various works on LXX text (e.g. Brenton; Morrish; and Bagster).
- 5. Classical Greek Grammars—Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve; Hardy Hansen & Gerald Quinn; William W. Goodwin; Herbert Weir Smyth; Alphaeus Crosby; Donald J. Mastronarde; Carl A. Ruck; James P. Hadley; Raphael Kuehner; E. A. Sophocles; Georg Curtius; Philip Buttman; Alexander Buttman.
- 6. Hebrew Studies—
  - a. Grammars—Ross; Davidson; Yates and Owens; Dobson; Harrison; Moses Stuart.
  - b. Word Studies, Lexicons, Etc.—Wilson; Gesenius; Holladay; Harris, Archer, and Waltke's *Theological Wordbook of the OT*.

### History

1. Charles Rollins' *Ancient History*.
2. Philip Smith's *History of the World*.
3. John Clark Ridpath's *History of the World*.
4. Rawlinson's *Seven Great Monarchies*.
5. F. F. Bruce's *Israel and the Nations*.
6. F. F. Bruce's *NT History*.
7. B. S. Dean's *Bible History*.
8. H. D. Kitto's *History of the Bible*.
9. R. H. Pfeiffer's *Bible History*.
10. *History of the Nations*.

### Restoration Works

1. Debates: Any debate is a good source of information. Some of the best: Hardeman-Bogard; Brents-Herod; Nichols-Weaver; Warren-Flew; Warren-Fuqua; Campbell-Rice; Cogdill-Woods; Clubb-Boles; Deaver-Hathaway; Wallace-Ketcherside; Neal-Wallace; Boll-Boles; Warren-Matson;

- Warren-Barnhart; Campbell-Skinner; Campbell-McCalla; Campbell-Walker; Manford-Sweeney; Oliphant-Rice; Oliphant-Smith; Porter-Bogard; Porter-Waters; Woods-Nunnery; Wallace-Hunt; Stark-Warlick; Harding-Nichols; Harding-Moody; Highers-Bingham; Colley-Ketcherside; Porter-Tingley; DeHoff-Garrett; Elkins-Ross; Sain-Batts; Bales-Teller; Bales-Deaver; Chism-Ring; Wallace-Barber; Nichol-Ballard; Russell-White; Evans-Barr; Nichols-King; Deaver-Hicks; Waldron-Hicks; Connally-Hicks; McClish-Billingsly; etc.
2. Sermons: J. W. McGarvey; G. C. Brewer; B. C. Goodpasture; Gus Nichols; Fred Dennis; Foy E. Wallace Jr.; G. K. Wallace; H. A. Dixon; N. B. Hardeman (*Tabernacle Sermons*); Rex A. Turner, Sr. (*Fundamentals Of The Faith*); A. G. Freed; T. B. Larimore; H. Leo Boles; Guy N. Woods; Benjamin Franklin (*The Gospel Preacher*, 2 Vols.); Robertson L. Whiteside (*Scripture Studies*); V. E. Howard; C. M. Pullias; M. C. Kurfees; E. A. Elam; E. G. Sewell; Jesse L. Sewell; Garland Elkins; Marshall Keeble; R. N. Hogan; Hall Laurie Calhoun; E. M. Borden; S. H. Hall; W. L. Totty; John T. Lewis; J. A. Kidwill; Walter Scott; John T. Johnson; etc.
  3. Special Studies: C. R. Nichol & Robertson L. Whiteside (*Sound Doctrine*, 5 Vols.); Alexander Campbell (*The Christian System*; *Christian Baptism*; *Lectures On The Pentateuch*; *The Living Oracles*; *Lectures And Addresses On Popular Themes*); Thomas B. Warren (*Jesus, The Lamb Who Is A Lion*; *Logic And The Bible*; *Sin, Suffering, And God*; *Have Atheists Proved There Is No God?*); Roy C. Deaver (*How To Ascertain Bible Authority*; *The Baptist Church*); J. S. Lamar (*The Organon Of Scripture*); G. K. Wallace (*Lectures On Denominationalism*); Foy E. Wallace, Jr. (*The Mission And Medium Of The Holy Spirit*; *Review Of The New Versions*; *God's Prophetic Word*); Rex A. Turner, Sr. (*Systematic Theology*); Robert R. Taylor, Jr. (*The New Versions*); M. C. Kurfees (*Instrumental Music In Worship*); V. E. Howard (*What Is The Church Of Christ?*; *The Holy Spirit*); Gus Nichols (*Sermons And Lectures On The Holy Spirit*); H. Leo Boles (*The Holy Spirit*); Robert Milligan (*Scheme Of Redemption*); T. W. Brents (*The Gospel Plan Of Salvation*);

- B. C. Goodpasture (*The Centennial Volume; Sermons And Lectures; The Christian Pulpit*); J. W. McGarvey (*Christian Evidences; The Authorship Of Deuteronomy; Biblical Criticism*); etc.
4. Periodicals: Alexander Campbell's *Millennial Harbinger; Christian Baptist*; Moses Lard's *Quarterly*; Barton Warren Stone's *The Christian Messenger*; etc.
  5. Lectureships: The Freed-Hardeman series from 1970 to about 1982 especially; Abilene Christian College Lectures (from 1919 to 1976); Harding College Lectures (up until about the mid-1970s); select volumes from the Florida College Lectures (especially the one on *Secular Humanism*); The Annual Denton Lectures, edited by Dub McClish; The Firm Foundation Lectures edited by William S. Cline; The Shenandoah Lectures (first few years edited by Jerry Moffitt and Terry Hightower respectively); The Spring Lectures edited by David P. Brown; The Florida School Of Preaching Lectures; The Missouri Lectures (from the 1880s); The Bellview Lectures edited by William S. Cline, Bobby Liddell, and Michael Hatcher respectively; Memphis School Of Preaching Lectures (especially up until just the last couple of years); Spiritual Sword Lectures edited by Thomas B. Warren and Garland Elkins and then by Jim Laws and later by Gary McDade respectively (especially until the last couple of years); the old Fort Worth Christian College Lectures; Fort Worth Lectures (Brown Trail) from the 1980s to the mid-1990s; Southhaven Lectures; etc.

### SEVERAL OTHER AREAS OF STUDY

Other great books on apologetics, biblical archaeology, hermeneutics, ethics and morality, systematic theology, church growth and work, and hundred more categories could be listed here. The preceding, however, are works that I believe are the cream of the cream and by themselves would provide a great library for the study of the Bible. These are books that I have been fortunate enough to utilize and have found most helpful in my own studies.

# BUILDING BETTER WORSHIP

*Michael Hatcher*

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Michael directed the North Texas Lectureship and currently is director of the Bellview Lectures. He has written articles for several brotherhood publications and a weekly newspaper (from 1987-1994). He was the associate editor of the *Shield Of Faith* and now is editor of *Defender*, the *Beacon*, and the Bellview Lectures book. He is co-author of a book, *Hatcher/Schweitzer Exchange*, an exchange of letters with a Lutheran minister on the subject of Total Hereditary Depravity and other subjects. He also had a debate on the subject of instrumental music in worship with Baptist, Bob L. Ross.

## INTRODUCTION

God has placed within man certain needs. While we generally think of air, fluids, and food, there are many other needs God has placed within man. One of the needs God placed within man is the need to worship. Thus, as one looks at the history of any society, he will find that the people worshiped something or someone. The Creator of the universe and man is the one who rightfully deserves our worship.

Jesus taught three great principles of worship when speaking to the woman at Jacob's well.

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

He taught us that worship is to be directed to God the Father. Then that worship to the Father is to be done "in spirit and in truth" involves doing it with the right attitude and doing it according as God instructs us to do it.

## WHAT IS WORSHIP

*Worship* is from the Middle English word which means "worthiness, respect" and is defined, "reverence offered a divine being or supernatural power, also an act of expressing such reverence." The main word

translated *worship* in the Old Testament carries the meaning “to bow down, prostrate oneself.” It was a posture which would indicate reverence toward one considered superior. The primary word in the New Testament is *proskuneo* and literally means “to kiss toward.” Arndt, Danker, and Bauer write that this word is:

used to designate the custom of prostrating oneself before persons and kissing their feet or the hem of their garment, the ground...**to express in attitude or gesture one’s complete dependence on or submission to a high authority figure, (fall down and) worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself before, do reverence to** (882).

Zodhiates explains a little more in detail when he writes:

To worship, do obeisance, show respect, fall or prostrate before. Literally, to kiss toward someone, to throw a kiss in token of respect or homage. The ancient oriental (especially Persian) mode of salutation between persons of equal ranks was to kiss each other on the lips; when the difference of rank was slight, they kissed each other on the cheek; when one was much inferior, he fell upon his knees and touched his forehead to the ground or prostrated himself, throwing kisses at the same time toward the superior. It is this latter mode of salutation that Gr. writers express by *proskuneo*. In the NT, generally, to do reverence or homage to someone, usually by kneeling or prostrating oneself before him. In the Sept. it means to bow down, to prostrate oneself in reverence, homage (G4352).

In all the definitions of worship we have the idea expressed of showing respect to one whom we consider Superior. In connection with what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, God desires for man to give Him respect, reverence, to give Him homage, or do obeisance to Him. This must be done in the proper way (“in truth”) and with the proper attitude (“in spirit”). In building better worship, all three aspects must be respected.

It is this author’s view that once one has a proper view of and attitude of God, he will worship Him in the proper way and attitude. The real problem with worship and why man does not worship God acceptably is man’s view of God.

## JEHOVAH IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP

### Creator

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). “For *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them *is*, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Exo. 20:11). God created the universe

in which we now live. On each day of the creation week God was preparing a place for the crowning glory of His creation—man. God created a beautiful garden in which he placed man. Even though man fell and lost access to the Garden of Eden, we can still see the beauties of God’s creation. It speaks to the glory of God and that He is worthy of our worship. The twenty-four elders fell down before God to worship Him and said, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev. 4:11). Later, John records that an angel flying in the midst of heaven was saying “with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (14:7). Jehovah is worthy to be worshiped because He created such a marvelous universe for our existence.

### **Sustainer**

God did not simply create the universe including man and then leave man to himself as the Deist holds. Instead not only did God create all things, He also sustains the existence of all things including man. Without God providing those things which are necessary, this world would cease to exist. The sweet singer of Israel wrote, “Thy righteousness *is* like the great mountains; thy judgments *are* a great deep: O LORD, thou preservest man and beast” (Psa. 36:6). David could have as easily said that our Lord preserves all things including man and beast. After the return from captivity, the people are gathered together:

Then the Levites, Jeshua, and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, *and* Pethahiah, said, Stand up *and* bless the LORD your God for ever and ever: and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. Thou, *even* thou, *art* LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all *things* that *are* therein, the seas, and all that *is* therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshipeth thee (Neh. 9:5-6).

They recognized that He was worthy to be worshiped because He preserves all things.

### **Omnipotent**

Another reason that Jehovah deserves worship is because of His omnipotence. Man is awed by power. Simply notice all the television shows that are clearly a demonstration of man’s power. The weight-lifting events in the Olympics are designed purely to see how strong a

person is. How many children and adults thrill as the historical accounts of Samson are told. Why? Because man is fascinated with power. Yet, if one was able to combine all the strength of all the people who have ever lived upon the earth, it would not come close to *touching* the great power of God. Isaiah would write, “Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these *things*, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that *he is* strong in power; not one faileth” (40:26).

There are at least three ways we see the great power of God: (1) creative power, (2) sustaining power, and (3) recreative power, i.e., creating in man a new life. God was able out of nothing to create that which we see. Simply by speaking, things came into existence. “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Heb. 11:3). Jeremiah was certainly correct when he writes, “Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, *and* there is nothing too hard for thee” (Jer. 32:17). What greater power could exist than to be able to simply say something and bring it into existence out of nothingness.

There is that aspect of God’s ability to sustain this universe which shows His great power also. This world which was created by the spoken Word of God must be sustained. That ability to sustain it takes as great a power as it would to create it.

We also observe God’s power in His ability to recreate or His ability to create in man a new life. Paul states: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:16-17). The Gospel is God’s power to save sinful man. It gives man the ability to live by faith, thus creating a new man in Christ. It was stated of Christ: “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” (Heb. 7:25). God is able to save all people and to create within them that new man. Paul would write to the Ephesians: “And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24) and repeated to the Colossians: “And have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col. 3:10). Through the power of the Gospel, God is able to recreate man

into a new man. Paul is a perfect example of this as he was a leading persecutor of the church and was recreated into that new man to where he became persecuted. God's spoken word brought about the creation of all things at the beginning, and God's spoken Word, the Gospel, is able to bring about creation spiritually.

### His Nature

Our God is a **holy** God. There are more passages which speak of His holiness than any other part of His character. The psalmist would write, "He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend *is* his name" (Psa. 111:9). In another psalm we have: "The LORD *is* righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works" (145:17). Peter adds: "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15-16). The basic application of *holy* when applied to God is separate from sin or free of sin. When speaking of God, there is no sin associated with Him. John puts it: "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). With God there is absolutely not any darkness or sin in Him whatsoever. James puts it: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jam. 1:17). No matter how one looks at God, He does not change and is only light. Man cannot look directly at the sun for long because of its brightness; it will burn our eyes doing permanent damage to them. Yet, there are dark spots on the sun; it is not pure and total light. God, however, is described as total light. The prophet writes of God: "*Thou art* of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, *and* holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth *the man that is* more righteous than he?" (Hab. 1:13). Our God is one who is worthy of being worshiped because of His holy nature.

Another aspect of God's nature is that of **righteousness**. Again, the psalmist writes, "The LORD *is* righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works" (Psa. 145:17). Early in the history of man, God had determined to destroy Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain. Abraham concerned with those who had not succumbed to the wickedness of the city asked God, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). The answer is that God **always** does that

which is right. At best man sometimes makes mistakes. Even though trying our very best, we will not always do right. What an amazing being that whatever He does, it is always right! In every way in which He acts, every decision He makes, everything about Him, it is always right.

One aspect of God's nature that we often hear about today is His **love**. The apostle John mentions that one aspect of God's nature is that of love: "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.... And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:8, 16). God is perfect in love. That love of God expresses itself in different ways.

1. God's love is **universal**. Jesus states to Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God loves all men everywhere. No one can reach a point in their life where God's love does not reach them.

2. God's love is **altruistic**. Webster defines *altruism* as: "unselfish regard for or devotion to the welfare of others." It deals with the putting of other's interest above one's own interest and is not influenced by others. One who loves altruistically does so because it is his nature to love. This one loves because he is within himself desirous of giving love, must give love, and does not give it on the basis of someone else deserving or warranting it (doing something for it)—not for which he will receive something in return. Paul states: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Man did not merit His love, but He expressed His love for us because it is His nature to love—it is not affected by man or circumstances.

3. God's love is **sacrificial**. God's love is a giving love. Consider again what Jesus stated to Nicodemus: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). There could be no greater sacrifice made than to give one's "only begotten Son."

4. God's love is **personal**. God loves each individual person. Paul realized the personal nature of God's love when he wrote:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who **loved me**, and **gave himself for me** (Gal. 2:20).

We are told, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9). Notice the individual nature of it as opposed to Jesus tasting death for the world. God takes a personal interest in every individual.

5. God’s love is **special**—for His children. While God has a love for all men, there is a special love that He has for His children. “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). Even though God loves the world (John 3:16), the Father loves those who keep the words of Christ. John writes, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not” (1 John 3:1). We do stand amazed at the special love He has for those who are His children.

6. God’s love is **unending**. Jeremiah writes, “The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, *saying*, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer. 31:3). While man’s love might come and go, God’s love remains constant—it never ends. God is worthy to be worshiped because of His perfect love.

Then our God is a **Savior**, which everyone needs: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Sin separates us from God: “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear” (Isa. 59:2). Man cannot on his own save himself: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). Thus, man is in need of a savior. God the Father provides His only begotten Son as man’s savior. John writes, “And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son *to be* the Saviour of the world.” (1 John 4:14). Paul stated: “Of this man’s seed hath God according to *his* promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus” (Acts 13:23). Since the Father provided a Savior for man, He is rightly described as being our Savior. In writing to Timothy Paul would state:

For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.... For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe (1 Tim. 2:3; 4:10).

What a marvelous Being Who would do such for sinful man. He is worthy of being worshiped for being our Savior.

### JEHOVAH'S GLORY

In building better worship, we not only need to realize that God is the only one worthy of worship, we actually need to get a proper view of God and His majesty.

#### Isaiah

The call of Isaiah is a perfect illustration. The prophet gets a view of God's majesty, kingship, holiness, and glory.

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, *is* the LORD of hosts: the whole earth *is* full of his glory (Isa. 6:1-3).

Upon seeing the awe-inspiring view of God, the prophet realizes his own unworthiness. "Then said I, Woe *is* me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (6:5). When one sees the greatness of God, as Isaiah did, and then considers his own unworthiness, then it brings him to worship that One Who is so high and lifted up.

#### John's Vision

John saw God sitting on a throne in heaven in Revelation 4. Consider how John describes the majesty of God to show that He reigns from the center of the universe, and He is in control.

And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and *one* sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and *there was* a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne *were* four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and *there were* seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. And before the throne *there was* a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, *were* four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast *was* like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast

was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about *him*; and *they were* full of eyes within (Rev. 4:2-8a).

John discusses these four living creatures (beasts—KJV) which are around the throne of God. He uses figures to show their strength, service, intelligence, and swiftness. Each of them having wings shows their mobility and being full of eyes shows their all-seeing nature. We are then told that these four living creatures “rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (4:8b). These living creatures get a view of the greatness and holiness of God and continue to proclaim that holiness. However, notice the result of seeing the majesty of God and His holiness.

And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created (4:9-11).

When those around the throne hear the creatures giving this praise, glory, and honor they fall down and worship God. They recognize the worthiness of God to be worshiped which led to their worship of Him.

### Israel

The children of Israel were in bondage in Egypt. They cried out to God for deliverance. God heard their cries and raised up Moses to deliver them from Egypt. God sends Moses to Pharaoh with the message: “Let my people go” (Exo. 5:1). However, God knows that Pharaoh will not acquiesce to His demands. “And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand” (3:19). The English Standard Version says, “unless compelled by a mighty hand” while the NASV has “except under compulsion.” As God *predicted*, Pharaoh refused to allow them to leave. Thus, God brought upon Pharaoh and Egypt ten plagues to “compel” him. God showed total power over the various gods of Egypt. Israel, living in the land, saw the plagues God brought upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians. After the first three plagues, God separated the Israelites from the Egyptians so the rest of the plagues only came upon the Egyptians. In instituting the Passover, God states: “And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What *is* this? that thou shalt say unto him, By

strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage” (13:14).

Upon bringing Israel out of Egypt, Pharaoh’s heart is hardened, and he follows after them. When Israel sees Pharaoh and his army getting close, “they were sore afraid” (14:10). God then prevented Pharaoh from coming near the Israelites.

And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness *to them*, but it gave light by night *to these*: so that the one came not near the other all the night (14:19-20).

God not only gave Israel protection from Pharaoh’s army, but also deliverance.

And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go *back* by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry *land*, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry *ground*: and the waters *were* a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left (14:21-22).

When the Egyptians tried to follow, the water swallowed them up and they were destroyed. God through all this is showing Israel His great power.

God then leads Israel to Mount Sinai. He calls Moses up to the mountain, where He tells him: “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and *how* I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself” (19:4). He has Moses go down to the people and prepare them for when He could come and speak to them.

And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that *was* in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice (19:16-19).

God was preparing the people in all these events to have a proper respect for Him, and to be able to see His great glory and power. As recorded in the next chapter, God speaks to them giving them the ten commandments (20:2-17). Notice how the people reacted:

And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw *it*, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God *was*. And the LORD said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold. An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee (20:18-24).

The Israelites got a glimpse of the greatness of God with the result that they had a proper fear (dread and respect) for God. However, notice how worship is connected with this. The first two of the ten commandments have to deal specifically with worship (not to make any graven image and not to bow down and serve them) as does the fourth (remember the sabbath). After giving the ten commandments and the people requesting Moses to speak to them instead of hearing God directly, God tells Moses to reemphasize the aspect of worship. Moses is to inform the people that they are not to make idols but to worship only Him: altars and all sacrifices shall be only to God.

While the majesty and glory of God made an immediate impression upon the Israelites, sadly that impression did not remain. They soon lost sight of the awesomeness of God and forsook Him when He brought them to the promised land. After hearing a negative report by ten of the spies who had been sent into the land to spy it out, they showed their lack of faith in Him. “So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief” (Heb. 3:19).

### WORSHIP TODAY

Our culture today has become one of selfishness and self-centeredness. This attitude has crept into our thinking regarding the *church* and worship. People have been taught to “join the church of your choice,” so when they start seeking a *church* they want one that meets **their** needs. The desires of God are ignored and one’s own desires become preeminent. This same attitude has come into the Lord’s church regarding our worship. They want to worship how they desire instead of

how God desires. Today many will be more concerned with what they get out of it instead of worshipping Him. They will often be heard saying, “I did not get anything out of that.” They want to be *entertained* by the *performers* (generally the preacher and song leader). With a proper view of God and His awesomeness, they would not think in such shallow ways. If they would get that vision of God, they would not come to worship for what they can get out of it, but they would come to worship God. Self would take an inferior position and their engaging in worshipping God would take priority.

With a proper view of God and His excellence, preachers, elders, and other members would not have to beg people to come worship God. Almost every congregation of the Lord’s people has members who have to be encouraged and almost forced to attend services (elders and preachers are almost like babysitters with them). Then we have a large group that will attend Sunday morning but will not return on Sunday evenings to worship God. These individuals do not have a view of God’s greatness. When we see Jehovah in His glory, we will have the desire to worship Him.

We also need to recognize that in worship to God, that we are the participants and God is the audience. Preachers often incorrectly speak of those listening to him preach as the audience, thus we preachers have contributed to a wrong conception of worship. We have those who lead us in our worship to God (which is what the preacher is doing in leading us in a study of the Word of God). Each person is to be an active worshiper to God. *Audience* refers to: (1) those who watch, not those who participate, (2) those who observe, not those who perform, (3) spectators, not participators, (4) those in the grandstand not to those on the playing field. Therefore, we are not the audience, God is. We should have the attitude of Cornelius when we come to worship: “Now therefore are we all here present before God” (Acts 10:33) for God to observe our worship to Him. When we have this type attitude and we come to actually worship God and not be entertained, then we will be receiving in return.

### **WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH**

Jesus told the Samaritan woman:

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

When we have the proper view of God, we will worship the Father. However, in worshipping the Father, we must do so in spirit and truth. *Truth* is in accordance with His Word, or as He instructs us to. *Spirit* has to do with our attitude in our worship.

### According to Truth

God has authorized five avenues through which we are to worship Him. Those five items are: singing, prayer, contribution, Lord's Supper, and preaching. Most of these are being discussed in other chapters in this book: thus this writer will not spend much time studying them.

We are given the command to sing praises to God. Every passage that speaks to this matter in the New Testament gives the specific type of music of singing. We also find that, in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, we have reciprocal action which means that we are doing it to each other and at the same time—thus congregational singing. There is no authority for choirs or choruses, even as there is no authority for mechanical instrumental music.

In worship to God we are to pray. Prayer is to be addressed to the Father through the name of Christ. While prayers are to be done in private (Mat. 6:6), they are also to be done in the worship assembly (1 Cor. 14:15).

As we worship, there is to be preaching. The preacher is leading us into a study of God's Word: thus he must "Preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2). A preacher is to keep back nothing that is profitable (Acts 20:20) and declare all the counsel of God (20:27).

Two avenues of worship are authorized to be done upon the first day of the week. The partaking of the Lord's Supper in remembrance of the death of our Lord and Savior upon the cross. The emblems used are unleavened bread and fruit of the vine (Mat. 26:26-29). This is done every Sunday (Acts 20:7).

God authorized the giving of our money into a common treasury—the contribution. This money is to be given cheerfully and from a liberal heart to meet the needs which might arise regarding the work of the church (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

When we have a proper view of God and His holiness, we would not dare tamper in any way with what He has designated for man to do in worship to Him. We would also observe the respect that He demands for His Word (see Nadab and Abihu; Lev. 10:1-2), but we would not dare alter anything which He authorizes.

### Proper Spirit

This deals with the attitude we are to possess as we participate in those avenues of worship. We might very well do the proper actions (those five avenues listed previously) and never worship. Unless we do it with the proper attitude, then simply going through the acts will be worthless. Again, when we have a proper view of God and His love for us, and His providing a Savior, our attitude in worship to God will change.

Remember that when the living creatures and the twenty-four elders saw the majesty of God, they fell down before Him to worship (Rev. 4). Likewise, when we see that awesome nature of God, we likewise will fall down and truly worship Him. Our minds will be centered upon what we are doing and saying. When we sing, it will not be just the saying of words, but it will be the pouring out of our praise to Him by centering our minds on the words which we sing. The prayers will be the emotions of our heart to our loving heavenly Father. When we partake of the bread and fruit of the vine, our minds will go back and be centered upon the great sacrifice Jesus made for us. We will look at our giving differently. Instead of feeling a compulsion to give, we will be seeing all that God has done for us and how He provides for us and sustains us and we will be giving cheerfully to further His cause (the greatest cause) here on earth. The preaching and studying of God's Word will not be simply spending time listening to someone "flap their jaws," but it will invoke within us the greatest respect, knowing that this is a study of God's message to us. There will not be the whispering, passing notes, sleeping, and so many of the things that go on during the study of God's Word in the preaching that takes place.

### CONCLUSION

To build better worship, we must get a view of the majesty and awesomeness of God. When we really *see* God, it will change our entire attitude about our worship and change our life as well. We will no longer simply go through the motions of coming and simply spending time at a building, but we will put our entire being into worshipping our God. Our worship of the Father will not only be in Truth but will truly be in spirit also (John 4:23-24).

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# BUILDING BETTER PRAYER LIFE

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Lester began preaching full time in 1973. He has worked with congregations in Indiana, Missouri, Louisiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Texas, Colorado, and North Carolina. He has written for numerous brotherhood publications, has spoken on numerous brotherhood lectureships, and has conducted meetings in eleven states. Has written a weekly newspaper column and has spoken on a weekly radio program for a number of years. Lester served as editor of *IN WORD AND DOCTRINE* for over three years and is founding editor of *Matters of THE Faith*. He was director of the School of the Bible and the College of the Bible in Madisonville, Kentucky for three years and served on the faculty of the Houston College (Spring, TX). He presently works with the Broad Street Church of Christ, Statesville, North Carolina.

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## INTRODUCTION

When it comes to the church which belongs to Jesus, it is always time to build. We should keep in mind that building requires the right foundation and the right blueprint (pattern). The foundation of the church is Christ (1 Cor. 3:11). “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:13). When it comes to spiritual things, we have the same responsibility that Moses had regarding the construction of the tabernacle; that is, “make all things according to the pattern” (Heb. 8:5).

The building up of the church should be our constant concern. For the church to be strengthened it requires effort and commitment from **every** member. The apostle Paul described it this way:

From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of **every part**, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:16).

For the edifying of the church, it is essential that every member works according to his capabilities and potential. If they do not, the church is weakened and is not what God desires it to be.

The building up of the church depends on the work of each member, but it also depends on the individual strength of its members. That

strength comes from several sources. First, the strength of individual Christians comes from a steady diet of God's Word. When a person becomes a Christian, there is a natural appetite for the Word of God. Peter states: "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). That desire for a knowledge of the Word is to continue for the remainder of the Christian's life with the promise: "Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Mat. 5:6). Imparting that knowledge to other Christians is involved in the two-fold teaching of the "Great Commission." Jesus said:

Go ye therefore, and **teach** all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: **Teaching them** to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen (Mat. 28:19-20).

Through private study (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15) and through the teaching of others (Heb. 5:12-14; Mat. 28:20), every Christian is to continue to "grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). The Word of God implanted in honest and good hearts will produce growth and fruit. At the close of the parable of the sower, Jesus stated: "But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep *it*, and bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15). Paul's remarks concerning the need for the Word of God to the Ephesian elders are worth considering here: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). The Word of God builds up and strengthens Christians. This is one of the reasons why Paul instructed the young evangelist Timothy to "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2). This is what elders have an obligation to "feed the church of God" (Acts 20:28)!

Second, the church needs to be built up by mutual encouragement and exhortation. According to Hebrews 10:24-25, one of the primary purposes of the assemblies of the church is to exhort and "provoke unto love and to good works"! Failure to assemble with the church weakens the absent member and weakens the church. We all need that encouragement and exhortation which occurs within the assemblies of the church. We live and work in a dangerous environment. The world is in many ways hostile to the Christian life. We dare not forsake (i.e., deli-

berately decide not to) “the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*,” because we need to be built up by that association with others of like precious faith (2 Pet. 1:1), and we need the encouragement from other Christians to live faithfully and to avoid sin.

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:12-13).

The building up of the church depends upon the regular assembling together of Christians that each might be exhorted by others to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Tit. 2:12).

Third, prayer builds up the church! J. Edgar Hoover was absolutely right many years ago when he described the power of prayer: “The force of prayer is greater than any combination of man-made or man-controlled powers, because prayer is man’s means of tapping the infinite resources of God.” No wonder we are told to “pray without ceasing” (1 The. 5:17)! There is real power in prayer.

### DEFINITIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS

A dictionary definition of *prayer* is “the offering of adoration, confession, supplication, thanksgiving, etc. to God.” This definition suggests that prayer is addressed to God. Prayers that are accepted by God are addressed not just to the Godhead, but to the Father. Biblically prayers are not addressed to the Son or to the Holy Spirit. If, therefore, prayer is to build up either the individual or the church, it must be addressed appropriately to the Father. Jesus taught us to pray: “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name” (Mat. 6:9).

A few quotations (authors now unknown to this writer) from clippings he has accumulated over the years on the subject of prayer may be helpful concerning the importance of prayer. Prayer is “the breath of the soul. As our bodies are surrounded by air that demands entrance, so our souls are surrounded by God whose presence in our hearts is so vital to our spiritual life. Our souls admit Him when they open the gates of prayer.” Another wrote, “Praying is to religion what thinking is to philosophy.” Another stated: “The devil fears nothing from prayerless Bible studies, work or religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, trembles when we pray.” Someone else observed, “Prayer moves the arm that moves the world and changes things and men.” “Prayer is the means by which the power of the universe is focused on our needs.” All of these statements suggest the power of prayer to the

individual and to the church. Prayer accesses the throne of God with all His power and providence.

The definition of prayer also suggests the constituent elements of acceptable, effective prayer. This acrostic is helpful:

- A – Adoration or praise.
- C – Confession of sins.
- T – Thanksgiving.
- S – Supplication or petitions.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

The importance of prayer is obvious to any Bible student. There are some 650 prayers in the Bible. God instructs us to pray. Our Lord stated: “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1). Paul told us to “pray without ceasing” (1 The. 5:17). Prayer is good and beneficial. According to James 4:17, the failure to pray would, in fact, be sinful! “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him it is sin” (Jam. 4:17). There is real truth in a statement that I have seen on bulletin boards and on signs in front of church buildings: “Seven days without prayer makes one weak.” Weakness comes from the lack of prayer; strength can come from praying.

Notice the prominence of prayer even in the sinless life of Jesus our Savior. Jesus was a man of prayer. He prayed at unusual times and in unusual places. Wendell Winkler well noted that the prayers of Jesus are “known for their (a) simplicity, (b) directness, (c) profound reverence for God’s Will, (d) fervency, and (e) spontaneity” (20). Approximately twenty-four prayers of Jesus are referenced in the New Testament.

The emphasis that Jesus gave to prayer in His own life led to His teaching on the subject on at least one occasion. “And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1). His disciples observed the importance of prayer in His own life and because of that were motivated to ask Him for instructions in praying. If Jesus needed to pray, we certainly need to pray. “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). We must follow Christ’s example in prayer.

Jesus taught on the subject of prayer numerous times. One of the greatest sermons recorded in the New Testament is the “Sermon on the

Mount” (Mat. 5-7). The space that Jesus gave to the subject of prayer in that sermon illustrates the importance of prayer to Jesus as He taught others. Eighteen verses of the one hundred eleven verses of the sermon deal directly with prayer. Many more verses deal indirectly with this same subject. Teaching others about prayer and the importance of prayer was an important part of our Lord’s earthly work. Prayer was important to Him and was emphasized in His teaching of others.

### **PRAYER AND THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH**

The New Testament church and New Testament Christians believed in and practiced prayer. When Luke told us of the first 3,000 converted on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41), he followed by listing the areas of commitment of these early converts. He states: “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). Notice the inclusion of prayers in this list. *Continued stedfastly* means “persevered in, or they adhered to” (Barnes).

Consider an example of the place of prayer among the early Christians. In Acts 12, two apostles had been arrested by king Herod. Herod “killed James the brother of John with the sword” (12:2). Since this pleased the Jews, he arrested Peter and imprisoned him. Herod’s intentions were to hold him until after Passover and then bring him out publicly for slaying. Meanwhile, “prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him” (12:5). Miraculously and unknown to the church, Peter was released from prison. The prayers of the church continued in “the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying” (12:12).

This author marvels at the brethren who were praying for Peter and his release in Acts 12 because they are so much like many brethren today. As the events following the release of Peter unfold, we discover that they are hesitant to believe that God has answered their prayers even when the answer to their prayers (in this case Peter himself) is standing at the door knocking and wanting to come in. When we pray, we must look for our prayers to be answered. Our prayers may not be answered the way we anticipate, nor on the timetable we have in mind, nor even according to our expressed desires (sometimes God simply says no); but our prayers will be answered. The God of the universe hears and answers the prayers of the faithful. We should look for the answers to prayer, or else we may not see prayer answered. Certainly,

if we do not believe that our prayers will be answered, they may not be answered. James stated, “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed” (1:6).

### **PRAYER BUILDS UP BECAUSE IT IS COMMUNION WITH GOD**

Prayer is **communication** with the Almighty. Prayer is not, however, informing God of what He does not know. God is omniscient! Jesus spoke on this subject at least a couple of times. Notice:

Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.... (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things (Mat. 6:8, 32).

For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things (Luke 12:30).

God knows everything! If this is the case (and it is), then why pray? The answer has to do with the one who prays. When we pray, we express our recognition of our need for God and our dependence upon Him. A poverty of spirit (Mat. 5:3) cries out for help from the Supreme Being, the Creator and Sustainer of life. When a person prays, he must look inwardly and see the insignificance of himself and look outward (beyond himself) and see the greatness of Almighty God. Prayer is prostrating oneself before God in recognition of our own weakness and His strength. The process of prayer enables us to evaluate ourselves and turn to the One in Whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). There are things which we cannot accomplish in life alone, in fact, many more than we sometimes realize. “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (Jam. 4:10).

There is a **deliberateness** in prayer. To pray requires some contemplation of what is involved in prayer, a consideration of the One to Whom the prayer is addressed, the one who is praying, and the decision to pray realizing the potential of prayer. The instructions of James are informative: “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (4:8). The whole process of prayer strengthens the one who prays. The individual who prays grows spiritually. The praying person is built up by a close relationship with the Sustainer and Giver of Life and the giver of “every good gift and every perfect gift” (1:17).

Every person faces various problems in life that have the potential of destroying him. Jesus spoke of this: “In the world ye shall have

tribulation” (John 16:33). Tribulation comes in different forms. There is the death of a loved one, the harsh words of others, the cruel and mean manner of others, physical illness, great temptations, and such like. In all of this, we need help from God to overcome these difficult situations. God is available and willing to help. That help is accessed through prayer. “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). Think of what is indicated here. We have the ability through Christ to come **boldly** before the throne of God, the Almighty, omnipotent ruler of the universe, with the assurance of His help “in time of need.” Let me first emphasize that this ability to come to God in this fashion is **through Christ**. Notice again Jesus’ words in John 16:33: “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” Jesus suggests here that He has overcome the world and, therefore, through Him we might also overcome! Those who are outside of Christ do not have hope in doing so unless they come to God in Christ (John 14:6). The only way our prayers will be answered is to be in Christ (John 9:31).

This approach to God in prayer is described as being with **boldness**. *Boldness* means here “with courage and confidence.” Boldness should not be interpreted as rudeness or speaking with disrespect and irreverence. Some have suggested that this word allows one to approach God attempting to treat Him as if He were just one of our companions or friends and use casual, irreverent terminology. Such terminology is blasphemy. For example, this preacher heard of one who addressed God in public prayer as “Big Daddy in the sky.” Such ought not to be. It would be bad enough to address God in this or similar ways in private prayer, but to address God in such fashion as one leads the assembly of God’s people in prayer is the height of ignorance and crudeness. The writer of Hebrews is telling us that we fearlessly and respectfully approach our heavenly Father in prayer as we with confidence can approach our earthly Father with our requests for we know of His love for us and His ability and willingness to help.

Notice further the place of grace in this passage. God’s throne is “the throne of grace.” Our desire in our approach to God is to “obtain mercy” and “find grace.” In prayer (or otherwise) we are not as a master giving orders or demands to our slave. We are seeking God’s grace and mercy. In essence, *grace* means gift. In prayer we desire the loving-kindness of God. We do not make demands, but plead for His

grace. Especially in the act of prayer we realize that there is the power to prevail in the One before Whom we bow. “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us” (1 John 5:14). Specifically in Hebrews 4:16, we appeal to His mercy and grace “to help in time of need.”

An example of how prayer builds up and strengthens pertains to the presence of worry (anxiety) in our lives. Anxiety usually occurs when we place more confidence in ourselves rather than God. Worry (anxiety) can destroy our own lives and others who are dear to us. The biblical solution to these is found in prayer. Paul wrote, “Be careful [anxious—ASV] for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phi. 4:6). There is no reason to be anxious when we can take it to God in prayer. In prayer we have “the ear” of the One Who is in control. There is nothing which should be considered too small to take it to God in prayer. If it troubles us, carry it to God in prayer. If the obstacles seem to be overwhelming, take this to God in prayer. *Supplication* is the kind of prayer in which we ask God for help. Paul in this verse encouraged brethren to let their “requests be made known unto God.” Prayer is the means of expressing our cares and needs to God. Peter also teaches us this truth and explains in part why. “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). God care about each of us! He cares enough to number the hairs on our heads (Mat. 10:30). My wife cares about me, and my parents always cared about me, but none of these ever to my knowledge even attempted to number those hairs; but God always knows because He cares that much. My dad offered his strength to me by always being there for me. I knew that I could always “cry on his shoulder” if ever I needed to. His shoulders were broad and strong, and I knew he cared. In a real, spiritual sense our heavenly Father offers His strength and consolation to us simply because He cares for us. Prayer is the prescribed way to cast our care upon Him (i.e., to cry on His shoulder).

Notice further that Paul here instructs us to make our supplications to the Father “with thanksgiving.” When we pray we should keep our needs in perspective by comparing them to our blessings. Prayer enables us to constantly (“without ceasing”—1 The. 5:17) count our blessings. When we forget our blessings, we become discouraged and depressed. Acknowledging our blessings lifts up our spirits so we can deal with our difficulties instead of allowing those difficulties to defeat

or destroy us. Prayer with thanksgiving builds up the person praying, and prayer with thanksgiving, therefore, builds up the church.

### THE POWER IN PRAYER BUILDS UP

Prayer is access to power because God hears and answers prayer. God is able to answer prayer, and He is willing to do so. Paul illustrates the power of God in prayer: “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph. 3:20). God is able “exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.” This statement of Paul describes the phenomenal power of God; that power is available to man through prayer. There are some important facts relative to this that must be understood. First, man’s prayers are no longer answered miraculously. We are not living in an age in which miracles will be performed. This does not mean, however, that God is unable to work miracles, but rather that He has chosen not to and has clearly indicated in His Word that once the written Word was completed miracles would no longer be needed and would cease (1 Cor. 13:8-10). Once the Word was confirmed through the miracles, the need for them ceased. Once the last apostle died, the means of their bestowal ceased (i.e., the laying on of the apostles’ hands—Acts 8:18). Miracles no longer occur in our world!

Second, God has promised to hear (i.e., answer) the prayers of those who are righteous. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (Jam. 5:16b). Under consideration here is the prayer of the righteous man; the prayer of the unrighteous does not avail much. Notice also here that the prayer of the righteous man that avails much is fervent. His prayer is earnest and persistent. Jesus made this promise:

And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened (Luke 11:9-10).

To obtain the desired results, the righteous person must keep on “asking,” keep on “seeking” and keep on “knocking.” Persistence is not the only factor in receiving the answer to our prayers, but it is surely one factor. Peter observed, “For the eyes of the Lord *are* over the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord *is* against them that do evil” (1 Pet. 3:12). This is the prayer that accesses the power of God and has the ability to build up the individual and the church.

Third, certain conditions set forth by God in His Word must be met for man to have the answer to his prayers. John tells us:

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him (1 John 5:14-15).

God answers prayer “according to His will.” His revealed Will is that which is stated in the New Testament. We must follow Divine Will as it is revealed to pray to God acceptably, but also inherent in these words (“according to His will”) is the idea that we sometimes ask for things—without realizing it—which are contrary to His Will. If God answered prayers the way we ask, sometimes harm would come to us and/or others. God assures us: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose” (Rom. 8:28). God knows what is best for us and for those around us. Prayer is answered when it is “according to His will.”

### **EXAMPLES OF PRAYERS THAT BUILD UP**

Think of the prayers of Paul for the salvation of others. He prayed for the salvation of the Jews. “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” (Rom. 10:1). The souls of others meant much to the apostle Paul: he not only prayed for the lost, but he also spent his life preaching and teaching the Gospel to them so they might have the opportunity to be saved. His prayers and his work went hand in hand. He knew that no one would be saved without human agency (1 Cor. 1:21). No one would be saved by a direct operation of God. He prayed for the salvation of others and busied himself with working toward that end.

“Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy” (Phi. 1:4). Prayers for others who are serving God faithfully builds up God’s people. Knowing that others are praying for me certainly builds me up. Surely it has the same effect on others. Without doubt the brethren at Philippi were strengthened and built up because of the prayers of Paul and because they knew he was praying for them. We preachers benefit greatly from the prayers of brethren and from knowing that others are praying for us. Knowing that others are praying for me helps me work harder and hopefully accomplish more. We need to pray for one another. We should pray for preachers, for Bible class

teachers, for elders, for deacons, for the sick, for every member of the church.

Paul prayed for Christians to grow and become fruitful in the kingdom.

For this cause we also, since the day we heard *it*, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God (Col. 1:9-10).

First, observe that Paul is telling his brethren that he is praying for them. Then observe that his prayers for them were persistent (i.e., without ceasing).

Paul not only prayed for their growth and fruitfulness, he also worked toward that end. Prayer without working is akin to faith without works (Jam. 2:17). Paul prayed for their knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual understanding, which is how a person is built up spiritually. He wrote this letter to them to help them in these areas. He prayed for their good works. One's knowledge of "good works" comes from an understanding of God's Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17). All are to be encouraged in these "good works" (Heb. 10:24-25). Paul encouraged them in this by his inspired words. Remember the words of Jesus, "Herein is my Father glorified, **that ye bear much fruit**; so shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:8). It is obvious that this kind of prayer builds up.

Prayers should also be offered for more opportunities to preach and teach the Gospel and to do so boldly. As Paul completes the list of those things making up the Christian armor, he mentions the need to pray. The battle with evil is oftentimes fierce. The well-equipped soldier of Christ will avail himself of the power of prayer. We are under the marching orders of Christ to evangelize the world (Mat. 28:19-20). The soldier of Christ will pray for more opportunities to engage the enemy and preach the Gospel. Paul stated:

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak (Eph. 6:18-20).

Paul wanted to preach with boldness; he never wanted to preach timidly or with embarrassment; "the power of God" to save (Rom. 1:16). Boldness characterized the preaching done by the apostles in the

first century. When the Peter and John were threatened, they went “to their own company” (Acts 4:23) and prayed for boldness in their declaration of the Gospel (4:29). What a marvelous attitude! The church then was built up by that kind of fearless preaching; the same kind of preaching today will build up the church. Let us pray for boldness!

Sin is the ever-present danger we face. Sin destroys! When we realize the danger of sin, we will pray: “and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Mat. 6:13). We certainly need to realize that temptations are the doors through which sin enters. We ought, therefore, to want to “abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 The. 5:22). We must desire for God us to lead us providentially away from as many temptations as possible. While we are in the flesh, we cannot avoid all temptations, but temptations always have a way out (1 Cor. 10:13). We must look for that way out and avoid the sin. Jesus also advised His disciples while He was praying in the garden: “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak” (Mat. 26:41). Be watchful (i.e., alert and careful), but also pray. Prayer regarding these matters builds up.

When sin occurs, prayer is the means through which we can be reconciled to God again—forgiven. Sin destroys; prayer can build up again. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). When we sin, the only solution is through repentance **and prayer** (see Acts 8:22).

### CONCLUSION

One of the greatest blessings to the child of God through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:3) is the knowledge that God hears and answers prayer. God is our heavenly Father Who desires our ultimate good. Consider the words of Jesus: “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Mat. 7:11).

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# BUILDING BETTER SINGING

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## INTRODUCTION

Many characteristics distinguish mankind from all the lower forms of animal life. Among the most notable of these peculiarities are the size and capability of the human brain (which makes us superior to all other life forms) and the human voice. These two faculties, working in tandem, enable us to think, reason, and arrive at conclusions and then convert these thoughts and ideas into words, respectively. Our voices, in concert with our tongues and lips, articulate these words, with which we can intelligently communicate with others.

One of the unique functions of the human voice is not only that of talking, but of producing the beautiful sounds called *music*—singing, to be specific. Our voices are by no means the only source of musical sounds. Beginning with Jubal (Gen. 4:21), almost from the dawn of history men have continued to invent a plethora of instruments upon which to produce a wide variety of musical tones and sounds. However, as pleasing as the utterances from such instruments may be, many judge none of these mechanical/electronic devices, even when played by

musical geniuses, equal to the loveliness of sounds of which our God-created instruments are capable.

God created men to serve and glorify Him. Isaiah declared of God's people that He formed them "that they might set forth my praise" (Isa. 43:20-21). Paul wrote that the Father summed up all things in Christ, "to the end that we should be unto the praise of his glory, we who had before hoped in Christ" (Eph. 1:10-12). The very life-purpose of right-thinking persons is to "fear God, and keep his commandments" (Ecc. 12:13). Would we not be greatly surprised if God had given us the faculty of speech and song and not expected us to employ these in offering up "a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which make confession to his name" (Heb. 13:15)?

## **WORSHIPING GOD IN SONG**

### **Singing in the Old Testament**

The practice of praising God in song goes back at least to Israel's singing "the song of Moses" following the miraculous escape from Egypt through the parted waters of the Red Sea:

Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto Jehovah, and spake, saying, I will sing unto Jehovah, for he hath triumphed gloriously: The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. Jehovah is my strength and song, And he is become my salvation: This is my God, and I will praise him; My father's God, and I will exalt him (Exo. 15:1-2).

Bible students are well aware that the vast book of Psalms, most of which the inspired David wrote a millennium before Christ, is the hymn book of the Hebrews. One does not read many of the Psalms without understanding why the Bible describes him as "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Sam. 23:1). Upon the completion of the first temple, Solomon appointed musicians for the temple service, among whom were "singers" (2 Chr. 5:12).

### **Singing in the New Testament**

The Lord lived and died under the law of Moses. His custom was to attend synagogue worship on the sabbath (Luke 4:16). According to Alfred Edersheim, "There was no service of 'praise' in the synagogues" (2), which implies that they did not sing hymns in synagogue worship. However, singing hymns of praise was not something with which the Lord and the apostles were unfamiliar. They engaged in such at least once—before departing from the upper room in Jerusalem, immediately

after the Lord instituted His memorial supper and before they crossed Kidron to the Garden of Gethsemane (Mat. 26:30).

The authority of the Old Testament, with all of its trappings of sacrifices, feast days, worship, and other elements peculiar to it—including the Ten Commandments—was “taken...out [of the] way” when Jesus was nailed to His cross (Col. 2:14). The Lord promised to build His church (Mat. 16:18), which He accomplished through the preaching of the Gospel on the Pentecost following His ascension (Acts 2:37-47). We soon learn that these earliest Christians met on the first, rather than the seventh, day of the week for worship (20:7). When we begin reading the epistles written to various congregations, we discover that one of the acts of worship in which they engaged when they assembled—under the direct tutelage of the apostles—was singing. The Corinthians were reminded to sing “with the spirit” and “with the understanding also” (1 Cor. 14:15), and this directive related specifically to their worship assembly (14:23).

Paul commanded the saints in Ephesus to speak “one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). He addressed a similar instruction to the Colossian Christians: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God” (Col. 3:16). The apostle immediately followed this instruction with the admonition: “And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (3:17). The force of this statement, relative to the singing of verse 16, is as follows: Just as engaging in singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in their worship assemblies was by the authority of Christ, so all of their words and deeds were to be by His authority.

What do Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 teach us about singing in Christian worship?

- The only music authorized by the Lord for His church is singing. Neither of these passages (nor any others in the New Testament) refer in any way to playing, but to singing only. It matters not that various instruments were employed under the inferior Old Testament system of worship, because Jesus took “away the first, that he may establish the second” (Heb. 10:9). A wide variety of instruments was available when our Lord established His church, but He intentionally left every one of them out of its

worship. Just as there is no scriptural authority for worshipping with instruments, there is no authority for mimicking the sounds of instruments with the human voice. Though one does such with only the voice, it is mere *sound-making* and does not constitute singing by any measure. Regardless of any claims to the contrary, any music besides authorized singing will not build up the church of the Lord.

- Our singing in worship involves “speaking,” “teaching,” and “admonishing” others. It is immediately obvious that no instrument of music fashioned by the hands of men is capable of *speaking* in any sense other than making sounds. Paul manifestly had more in mind by using this term than mere noise—or sound-making. No devised musical instrument can teach any spiritual lesson or admonish anyone to live righteously. No mere musical sounds such as humming or elongating a syllable such as “Ahhhhhh” can fulfill what God requires. Only by employing the voices and tongues the Lord has given us in singing “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” can we obey these commands. In these words we see that our worship in song has the dual purpose of glorifying and praising God and His Son and edifying the church. Regardless of claims to the contrary, any music besides singing that does not speak, teach, or admonish, will not build up the Lord’s church.
- Our singing in worship involves congregational participation. The pronouns, *one to another (to yourselves, KJV)* (Eph. 5:19) and *one another* (Col. 3:16) so indicate. The pronouns in both of these passages are reflexive in their force. Wayne Jackson’s comment on Ephesians 5:19 is incisive when he says:

the grammar of the verse indicates that the entire congregation is to participate in the singing. The pronoun *heautois* (“one to another”) is a reciprocal, reflexive term, representing an interchange of action on the part of the singers. Congregational singing is clearly authorized in the New Testament; authority for choirs and solos is conspicuously absent from the divine record.

What Jackson said concerning *heautois* is no less true concerning *heautos* in Colossians 3:16. Jesus sternly warned against “performance-oriented” practices in the name of worship (Mat. 6:1-18), and one, a few, or a large choir’s singing to the remainder of an assemblage tends heavily to that concept. The singing

God authorizes in our worship assemblies involves everyone's singing simultaneously to one another. Regardless of claims to the contrary, any music besides singing in which every congregant participates simultaneously—congregational singing—will not build up the Lord's church.

- Our singing in worship involves the heart. In the Ephesian passage, we are to sing and make melody "with the heart." Paul instructed the Colossian saints to sing "with grace in your hearts to God." These statements indicate that our singing must be more than merely "going through the motions" or mouthing memorized verses while our thoughts run elsewhere. If we do not take care, we can be guilty of "vain repetition" when we sing as well as when we pray (Mat. 6:7). Many a brother or sister who loudly sings "I Want To Be a Worker for the Lord" in a worship assembly is found to be a shirker instead of a worker when it comes time for a door-knocking campaign, teaching in the Bible school program, grading, and mailing correspondence courses, publicizing a Gospel meeting, or any number of other things. Some who sing this song with verve choose not even to return for worship on Sunday night, casting doubt on whether or not they sang "with the heart" earlier in the day. When we sing songs of praise to God and to the Christ, let us think seriously of their wondrous power, majesty, and greatness that transcends our ability to comprehend fully. When we sing of grace and mercy, we should be reminded of our own unworthiness and of the marvelous love and pity our Creator had and has for mankind. We should soberly sing the songs about the Lord's return in Judgment, reflecting on the fact that we must "all be made manifest" before His judgment seat (2 Cor. 5:10). We may safely conclude that heartless singing constitutes vain worship. When saints sing from and with the heart, truly entering into the thoughts of the songs, the church is edified. Regardless of claims to the contrary, singing that is not heartfelt—regardless of how beautiful it may sound to human ears—will not build up the Lord's church.

In summary, regardless of how pleased men are with the additions, substitutions, and alterations made relative to music in worship, God is not glorified, and the church is not edified unless we offer him in song only what He has authorized.

## PRINCIPLES GOVERNING OUR SINGING

The New Testament enunciates certain principles that must govern all of our avenues of worship, including singing, if they are to be acceptable. Jesus' words to the woman at Jacob's well provide a pivotal statement in this regard: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Besides including the only correct and allowable object of worship—Deity, God Almighty, the Creator—the Lord includes two governing rules: Worship of God must be (1) "in spirit" and (2) "in truth."

### Worshiping "in Spirit"

What does it mean to "worship in spirit"? To answer this question we must determine the meaning of *spirit* in this passage. Todd Deaver (son of Mac Deaver) proposed that Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit. He said, in part:

John 4:24 refers to worshiping in the spirit. I believe that's the Holy Spirit there. He is in the Christian (1 Cor. 6:19-20), helping us in our worship. He is interceding for us within our hearts (Romans, chapter 8). And so, possibly, how that's supposed to be looked at in the New Testament is that the Holy Spirit is not in Heaven receiving our worship, but is in our hearts helping us to offer the worship (transcribed tape).

This interpretation evinces two immediate responses: (1) This is such an unusual exegesis among seasoned Bible students as to earn the rank of "exceptional"; (2) Did Todd Deaver hold this view before his father began touting his direct-operation-of-the-Holy Spirit doctrine in 1994? This unorthodox view certainly fits well with what has come to be known as the "Deaver doctrine": by virtue of the Holy Spirit's dwelling in the Christian, He gives special **direct** help and strength to us in our daily lives in addition to what He provides through His Word. Todd Deaver's position applies the same **direct**-help assertion to our worship.

The almost unanimous view of brethren (and that of numerous denominational commentators as well: Reynolds, 17.169; Barnes, Luke-John, 218; Hendriksen, John, 1.167; Bruce, 1.728; Vincent, 2.121; et al.) is that *spirit* here refers to the engagement of the human spirit and mind in rational, sincere devotion to God. The reference is to the heartfelt attitude we are to possess as we approach God in worship. In an excellent article in response to Deaver's offbeat exegesis, Gary

Summers addressed the assertion that the Holy Spirit “helps us to offer the worship”:

Do we sing better because the Spirit is with us? If He is helping us, we all ought to be Anthony Kearnes [of Irish Tenors fame] or Pavarotti. Is the brother who sings off-key a false teacher? Are our prayers of a higher quality with the Spirit’s help? They ought to be. Can those proclaiming the Gospel preach better? Do members give more money? Does Jesus’ death for our sins become more vivid during the Lord’s Supper with the Spirit’s help? (1).

God has provided the information in His Word (“the Truth”) by which we learn what pleases Him in worship and in every other area of our lives. We are able to understand what He has revealed, else the *revelation* is no revelation at all (Acts 17:11; Eph 3:3-4; 2 Tim. 2:2; et al.). God has always required His people to enter into His service and/or worship with the whole heart (Deu. 6:5; Jos. 24:14; 1 Sam. 12:24; Isa. 29:13; Mat. 15:8; 22:37; Rom. 6:17; 1 Cor. 5:8; et al.). Such is the meaning of worshiping “in spirit” in John 4:24.

### Meaning What We Sing

When we apply this principle to our singing, it implies that we sincerely mean what we sing. This puts all of us to the test. Do we sing “I Love To Tell the Story” and then rarely or never tell it? Do we sing “O How I Love Jesus” on Sunday morning and then forget we so sang when it is time to assemble for worship Sunday night? Do the words, “I will work, I will pray, I will labor every day,” make hypocrites of us when we sing them? Can I sincerely sing “I Surrender All”? Am I really “satisfied with just a cottage below, A little silver and a little gold,” or am I so busy pursuing a greater abundance of things that I have no time or energy to lay up eternal treasures? Can I sing “More About Jesus” and never open my Bible between Lord’s days? How many are presently compromising the Truth of God’s Word, while they loudly sing, “I’ll Never Forsake My Lord”? To sing “in spirit” implies that we sincerely synchronize our hearts with the words we are singing—that we genuinely mean those words.

### Understanding What We Sing

Obviously, we cannot sincerely **mean** what we sing if we do not **understand** the words of the songs.<sup>1</sup> This author is convinced that many brethren regularly sing words which they do not understand. Such misunderstandings are caused by several factors, including (1) figures of speech, (2) archaic terms, (3) seldom used words,

(4) failure to read words correctly, and (5) ignorance of the Bible teaching or fact that may be alluded to in the song.

Many people through the years have asked this writer questions about the words of various songs with which we worship God and teach and admonish each other. In the interest of helping us to sing with more meaning and understanding (thus more “in spirit”), the following comments on the terminology in some of our songs are offered.

- In “Higher Ground” we sing of “heaven’s table-land,” but to what does this refer? A table-land is a broad, level area, such as a plateau. “Heaven’s table-land” is a poetic way of describing the bliss of Heaven where we will be on a plateau above all of the temptations, cares, and trials of this world.
- We sing of the “sweetest note in seraph song” in “The Great Physician.” “Seraph” is an abbreviated term for *seraphim*, a word describing angels of high rank (Isa. 6:2, 6). Thus the name of Jesus is the most precious name even the highest ranking angels can sing.
- The “rose of Sharon” does not refer to a thorny-stemmed flower that belongs to a girl named Sharon. Rather, *Sharon* is from a Hebrew word (*saron*), which means “level place” or “plain.” It is the name of the fertile plain along the Mediterranean Seacoast of old Canaan (modern Israel), generally described as stretching southward from Mt. Carmel to Joppa. The “rose of Sharon” is a reference to a beautiful wild flower that still grows there. “Jesus, Rose of Sharon,” is based on the poetic language found in Song of Solomon 2:1: “I am a rose of Sharon, A lily of the valleys.” It is intended figuratively to convey the beauty and attractiveness of our Lord.
- “Did You Think To Pray?” asks a question in verse 4: “When your soul was bowed in sorrow, Balm of Gilead did you borrow?” *Balm of Gilead* is from Jeremiah’s lament over the religious and moral corruption of Judah, not long before God gave the nation up to Babylonian captivity: “Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?” (Jer. 8:22). Gilead, the territory on the east side of the Jordan River from Canaan, was famous for producing a balm that was greatly valued as a medicine. The prophet, by his question, is admitting that there is no remedy left for the apostasy of his people—not even the

celebrated balm of Gilead could heal them. The song uses *balm of Gilead* as a figurative expression for comfort and healing of the burdened heart, which is a fit subject of our prayers.

- If one shouts and sings glad “hosannas” to Christ (“Just Over in the Gloryland”), just what will he or she be shouting and singing? *Hosanna* is actually a Greek word spelled in English letters (transliterated), meaning, “Save, we pray!” While originally a plea for help, it evolved into an exclamation of praise. This cry of acclamation went up from the multitudes that thronged the Lord upon His “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem shortly before His arrest, trials, and death (Mat. 21:9). That shouting of “hosannas” was only typical of the extent of the glory and praise in which we will be privileged to participate in “gloryland.”
- A prophet whose pillow was a stone is mentioned in “Mansion Over the Hilltop.” This “prophet” was actually Jacob, who, when fleeing from the wrath of his twin brother, Esau, pillowed his head on a stone at Luz/Bethel, on his way to another land (Gen. 28:10-19). Jacob *prophesied* when, on his deathbed, he called his sons to him, saying: “that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the latter days” (49:1). The point of mentioning Jacob’s stone pillow in the song is to remind us that the discomforts of this life should not matter because we are here only a short while before we arrive at our permanent dwelling of comfort and rest.
- We sing a song entitled, “In Vain in High and Holy Lays” (more commonly called, “Wonderful Love of Jesus”). What is meant by the “lays” we raise to the wonderful love of Jesus? *Lay* is an archaic term for *song*; thus, this hymn speaks of our feeble attempts to praise adequately and worthily the Christ in spiritual songs.
- When we sing “Ivory Palaces,” we say in the second verse that “aloes had a part” in Jesus’ life. This statement is a reference to the aloes provided by Nicodemus to prepare the body of Jesus for burial (John 19:39). An expensive ingredient used in first-century embalming was extracted from the pulp of the aloe leaf, a member of the lily family. Thus, *aloes* was directly related to death. The poetic language of the song reminds us that Jesus’ coming to earth not only meant that he gave up his “ivory

palace” of Heaven, but that He gave up His life as well—“aloes had a part.”

- If someone told you to raise your “Ebenezer,” what would you raise? Do we sing, “Here I raise my Ebenezer” (“O Thou Fount of Every Blessing”) without knowing what it means? *Ebenezer* means “the stone of help,” and it refers to a stone the prophet/priest/judge Samuel erected as a memorial to God’s miraculous help for Israel in routing the Philistines (1 Sam. 7:10-12). When I “raise my Ebenezer” I am figuratively saying that I acknowledge God’s blessing and care.
- In “Give Me the Bible,” we sing of “the glory gilding Jordan’s wave” (some have misread it as “the glory gliding Jordan’s wave”). That which is gilded (gilt) is overlaid with gold. “Jordan’s wave” is a figurative expression for death. As Israel of old had to cross the Jordan River literally to enter the Promised Land, so all of God’s spiritual Israel (the church) must cross the figurative “Jordan River” of death to gain Heaven. Death generally holds men in fear, but the promises and comforts of God’s Word make even this attractive (as though gilded) for the faithful saint.
- If you won a “guerdon” (“Beautiful Isle of Somewhere”), would you know what you had won? A guerdon is a reward, and it refers to the promise of God to reward His children with Heaven, that poetic “beautiful isle of somewhere.”
- “’Tis Midnight, and on Olive’s Brow” has two expressions that some may miss. “Olive’s brow” does not refer to the forehead of Popeye’s sweetheart. Just east of Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley, is the Mount of Olives (“Olivet”), upon whose side (“brow”) is the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus often went there (Luke 22:39; John 18:2), and He retired there with the eleven and prayed His prayers of agony on the eve of the crucifixion (Mat. 26:36). This song is about the events that transpired in Gethsemane before the Judas-led mob arrested Jesus. The second expression that some may not understand is in the last verse of the song. It speaks of the “ether [not “either”] plains,” a figurative reference to the vast regions of space or of Heaven (*ether* refers to upper regions, as opposed to *nether*, lower regions). This figure calls attention to the comfort and strength the Lord

found in His thrice-repeated prayer to His Father as He faced the cross.

- What (or who) is “Ebon Pinion” in “Night, With Ebon Pinion”? *Ebon* refers to black (as related to ebony). A “pinion” is a bird’s wing. The setting of this song, as in the one above, is the Lord’s great agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. This series of events was so dark and somber that it was as though a great black bird, bearing doom, had cast its shadow over the Lord as He knelt to pray in the garden.
- To what does *rapture* refer in various songs (e.g., “Face to Face,” “A Wonderful Savior,” “Blessed Assurance,” “At Calvary,” et al.)? Some are reluctant to sing any song in which *rapture* appears because of its identity with the “rapture” heresy of dispensational premillennial theology. However, this writer has not found a single song in the books we commonly use in which *rapture* is so used. Likely, all of the songs in which it appears were written before the “rapture” doctrine was ever invented, certainly before it attained its current widespread acceptance. The *rapture* in our songs is a reference to the great joy and ecstasy that await the faithful when we at last realize the glory of Heaven.
- The “cloven skies” of “It Came upon the Midnight Clear” do not refer to skies with a spicy aroma. *Cloven* is an archaic term related to *cleave*, meaning to split or divide (thus the heavy-duty kitchen knife is a “meat cleaver”). Under the law of Moses, clean animals were those which not only “cheweth the cud,” but that also “parteth the hoof, and hath the hoof cloven in two” (Deu. 14:6). The “cloven skies” poetically describes the “opening” or “dividing” of the skies through which the angels descended and ascended at the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:13-15).
- “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” mentions “Lord Sabaoth” in verse 2. *Sabaoth* is frequently misread (and mis-sung) as “Sabbath,” but these words have no relation to each other (although somewhat surprisingly, such classical authors as Spencer, Bacon, Johnson, and Scott have thus confused them in some of their works). *Lord of Sabaoth* is found twice in the Bible (Rom. 9:29; Jam. 5:4). *Sabaoth* is an anglicized Greek word (i.e., a Greek word converted directly to an English word) which means “armies” or “hosts.” Its Old Testament equivalent is “Jehovah

[LORD, KJV] of hosts,” which occurs 260 times, mostly in connection with the armies of God’s people. However, it came eventually, even in the prophets, to be another reverent title for God. Hence, to attribute *Lord Sabaoth* to Christ (as Martin Luther did in his hymn) is to attribute to Him Deity.

- If you needed to locate “The Syrian Sea” on a map, could you find it? The beautiful prayer/hymn, “Dear Lord and Father of Mankind,” refers to this sea. We have a clue in *Syrian*, but even so, Syria is a large area (with sometimes-indistinct borders) on the biblical map. As far as this scribe knows, there is no body of water actually named “The Syrian Sea.” Rather, this is a poetic/figurative name for the Sea of Galilee, which even today is very near the modern nation of Syria. The song verse simply retells the Lord’s call of the Galileean fishermen to be His disciples. As an interesting sidelight, the Sea of Galilee is also known in the Old Testament as “the sea of Chinnereth” (Num. 34:11) and “Chinneroth” (Jos. 12:3) and in the New Testament as “the lake of Genneserat” (Luke 5:1) and “the sea of Tiberias” (John 21:1).
- “Beneath the Cross of Jesus” contains at least two words that we do not use every day, plus reference to an Old Testament character and occurrence that some may not understand. The first verse has, “I fain would take my stand.” My computer’s Microsoft Word spell-checker does not recognize *fain*, which indicates that it is either extremely uncommon or archaic—or both. The latter is true of *fain*. This archaic (and thus uncommon) word means to do something willingly or happily. Therefore, as we sing this song we are saying in effect that we willingly, gladly, place ourselves under the benefits of that which the Lord accomplished in His death. The second verse refers to the cross with the compound word, “trysting-place.” *Tryst* originally meant an agreement to meet and then came to mean a meeting place—its meaning in this song: The cross is the place where God’s love and justice meet.
- Another song about the cross, “In the Cross of Christ I Glory,” has *bane* in verse 4. This word is pregnant with ideas of harm and hurt. In its history it has variously meant “poison,” “death,” and “destruction.” However, its more recent usage relates to a source of harm or ruin or a curse, which is its meaning in the song. Thus, “bane and blessing” means something like “bad

times and good times,” answering to the song’s immediately following phrase, *pain and pleasure*—the cross sanctifies both.

- Have you ever puzzled over the meaning of “sometimes where Eden’s bowers bloom” in verse 2 of the familiar song, “He Leadeth Me”? The *Eden* part is an obvious reference to the primitive Garden of Eden, which was the paradise home God made for Adam and Eve. However, what are the “blooming bowers”? One of the meanings of *bower* is a garden shelter made of intertwined tree limbs or vines, what we might call an *arbor*. The song phrase poetically places such an arbor in Eden, and it is a living structure, indicated by the fact that it is blooming. The blooming bowers of Eden are contrasted in the verse with “scenes of deepest gloom.” Hence “where Eden’s bowers bloom” is a figurative, poetic way of referring to experiences that are blissful, happy, and joyous as though we were in a dwelling in paradise surrounded by life. The idea in the verse is that we must trust and follow God’s leadership at all times, both in the bad and the good times.<sup>2</sup>
- Although “Break Thou the Bread of Life” is listed as a “communion song” in the Topical Index of some of the hymn books, the song does not relate to the Lord’s supper at all. Probably, because it begins with a reference to “breaking bread,” many assume without warrant that it relates to Jesus’ breaking the bread as He instituted His supper (Mat. 26:26). Even a casual attention to the words indicates otherwise. The setting alluded to in the song is not the upper room in Jerusalem, but “beside the sea” (verse 1) and “by Galilee” (verse 2). The bread to be broken is not the unleavened bread of the supper, but the “bread of life,” a figurative reference to “the Sacred page”—God’s Word. This is a song of exaltation of the Word of God and its power when properly applied.

By no means does this list exhaust all of the words or phrases in our songs that bear some commentary and explanation. Some of these “song mysteries” can be easily solved by consulting a standard English dictionary, which this penman encourages readers to do when they encounter an unfamiliar word.

### Worshiping “in Truth”

To worship “in truth” is equivalent to worshiping **according to** truth. There is no source or standard of truth apart from the revelation God has given mankind in the Bible. As Jesus prayed to His Father, He declared, “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17). He had promised the apostles shortly before, speaking of the Holy Spirit Whom He would send to them: “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth: for he shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear, *these* shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come” (16:13). The Son of God promised that, before the last apostle died, the Holy Spirit would reveal to them not a little, some, or much, but “**all** the truth.” The New Testament contains all that any human being knows or can know about what pleases God in worship. There is no other source because there has been and there will be no further revelation from God.

Earlier this author set forth the pattern for worship in the New Testament as it relates to music. Scripturally authorized music in the church consists of singing various kinds of songs on spiritual and scriptural themes that glorify God and that teach and admonish us as we all sing together from the heart. This statement summarizes the teaching of the Truth relative to the only music God authorizes and allows as an avenue of worship for His church.

However, not only must we observe the aforementioned pattern relating to our worship in song. To sing “in truth” requires that the thoughts, words, and messages of the songs we sing must convey only the Truth and/or be in complete harmony with the Truth. Singing “in truth” does not allow us to sing whatever words will please us or others, nor does it allow us to ignore words that teach error because we are so enamored with the tune or rhythm of the song. As previously noted (Col. 3:16), besides hymns of praise to God, we are to sing spiritual songs whereby we teach one another. The teaching in the Bible classroom and the preaching from the pulpit must be only the Truth with no intermingled error. The scriptural urgings to abide in the Truth and in the sound doctrine and the warnings against error and those who teach it are so replete in the New Testament as to need no documentation. We are obligated to take as much care to teach **only the Truth** in the words we sing as we are in the words we utter in preaching and teaching.

Some song leaders (and even elders) seem to operate on the assumption that if a song is in one of the song books that the Lord's congregations commonly use, we can assume that it is safe to sing. However, such is far from the truth. Many seem unaware or to have forgotten that denominational people wrote most of the songs in our books, and the words of their songs often reflect their theology. Many of us have come to superimpose somewhat *automatically* scriptural concepts over what originally were erroneous theological tenets imbedded in various songs. Without attempting an exhaustive list, perhaps a few illustrations will spur us to be more aware of the words of the songs we sing in worship.

**Calvinistic theology:** Many of the songwriters were Calvinists or other products of the sixteenth-century Reformation. In "Amazing Grace," God's grace is said to appear "the hour I first believed." If one understands that *belief* in the New Testament includes the entire plan of salvation, whereupon God bestows His grace, these words are not a problem. However, the songwriter, John Newton, very likely believed and preached salvation by faith only. There is a similar theme in the chorus of "Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed," in which at the cross one is said to "see the light," have his burdens "rolled away," and there "by faith" to have received his "sight." Isaac Watts was almost certainly preaching the doctrine of faith-only salvation in these words, but, again, as long as we override them with scriptural concepts in our minds, we can sing them truthfully.

"Just a Little Talk with Jesus" has so many Calvinistic and denominational concepts in it that its errors are insuperable. According to its words, if one will just "have a little talk with Jesus," he will be filled with light from Heaven, have his heart bathed in love, and have his name written above—all figurative references to salvation. The final verse of "The Solid Rock" (aka "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less" in some books) states of the saved at the Lord's coming: "Dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne." Of course, no one can be saved without being washed in the perfect, pure, righteous blood of Christ, but we must also be found to have lived "soberly and righteously and godly in this present world" to receive His grace (Tit. 2:11-12). The song's author, Edward Mote, appears to be expressing in these words the Calvinistic dogma of "imputed righteousness" or "transferred righteousness." According to this doctrine, God "transfers the **personal perfection of the righteous life** of Christ to

sinner when they believe so that **His righteousness becomes theirs**" (McClish 486). Of course, transference of personal righteousness and innocence from one person to another is as impossible as transference of personal sin and guilt (Eze. 18:20b). If one sings these words, he should have in mind the Scriptural concept that apart from the sinless life and pure blood of Christ none could not stand before His throne justified.

**Premillennial theology:** The Song, "Jesus Is Coming Soon," is notorious for its second verse, especially: "Love of so many cold, losing their home of gold, This in God's Word is told, evils abound. When these signs come to pass, nearing the end at last, it will come very fast, trumpets will sound." It is objectionable enough to predict that "Jesus is coming soon," when He repeatedly stated that no one can determine the time of His coming, whether soon or late (Mat. 24:36, 39, 42, 44) and Paul and Peter add that His coming will be as "a thief in the night" (1 The. 5:1-3; 2 Pet. 3:9-10). R. E. Winsett promulgates egregious error in mistaking the "signs" of the destruction of Jerusalem for "signs" of the Lord's return (Mat. 24), as his second verse does. This error is standard in all premillennialists. It is beyond me how some continue leading and singing such heresy and give no more than a wave of the hand to those who call attention to its gross error. My strong suspicion is that some are so carried away with the catchy rhythm and tune of this song, that their sensual pleasure in singing it outweighs their concern for the Truth it abuses.

Another song containing premillennial error is "Living by Faith." This scribe finds nothing erroneous in the first three verses of this song, and there is very much to praise in it. However, verse 4 states that "Our Lord will return to this earth some sweet day," which is contrary to Scripture. The nearest the New Testament has Jesus to being **on the earth** when He returns is **in the clouds**, from whence He will call the redeemed to meet Him and be with Him forever (1 The. 4:16-17). Premillennial theology demands that the Lord come back to the earth, per the words of verse 4, to establish His alleged earthly millennial kingdom. An interesting fact about this song is that James Wells, author of verses 1-3, did not write verse 4. None other than R. E. Winsett, author of "Jesus Is Coming Soon," wrote this verse, obviously for the purpose of injecting his premillennial dogma into an otherwise worthy Gospel song.

**Praying to Jesus:** With some songs, there is somewhat of a fine line between songs that praise Jesus and songs that explicitly or implicitly teach that we should directly address Jesus in prayer. In some cases, the individual conscience will have to determine whether one can sing a given song. Some of the more obviously objectionable “praying-to-Jesus” songs are “Tell It to Jesus,” “I Must Tell Jesus,” “’Tis the Blessed Hour of Prayer,” “Jesus, Hold My Hand,” and “Just a Little Talk with Jesus.” There are several others relating to prayer in which a degree of “poetic license” must be applied for them to be scriptural.

**Holy Spirit errors:** The second verse of “Come Thou Almighty King” includes a petition for special and direct operation by the Holy Spirit: “Spirit of holiness, On us descend.” The Holy Spirit “descended” on the apostles on Pentecost and then on the household of Cornelius in Caesarea (Acts 2:1-4; 11:15). Jesus sent Him to the apostles to reveal through them all of the Truth (John 16:13). The Lord sent Him to Cornelius to convince the Jewish Christians that God included the Gentiles in His scheme of redemption (Acts 11:17-18). In the first century He did not fall upon any of those named above in response to their prayers. Those who pray for such today pray in vain, and we should not encourage such vain and erroneous concepts as we sing. None would deny that we all need to pray more and that it is good to sing about that need. “Did You Think To Pray?” helps remind us of the power of prayer. However, in verse 2, the song suggests an erroneous idea concerning the Holy Spirit: “By His [Christ’s] dying love and merit, Did you claim the Holy Spirit As your guide and stay?” The author apparently has in mind praying for direct guidance of the Holy Spirit, which is an unscriptural concept. If we *translate* these words into a reminder to study the Spirit’s Word more diligently and then employ His Word to make Him our “guide and stay,” this writer supposes that will work. It might be better just to omit verse 2.

Some of the verses of invitation songs we commonly sing contain very questionable verbiage at best. The first verse of “Almost Persuaded” is at least suspect in this regard: “Seems now some soul to say, ‘Go, Spirit, go Thy way’.” The implication is that the Holy Spirit is within this person who is “almost persuaded” to believe and to “receive Christ.” Verse 4 of “Prepare To Meet Thy God” contains words with a similar idea: “If you spurn the invitation Till the Spirit shall depart, Then you’ll see your sad condition, Unprepared to meet thy God.” Verse 3 of “Why Do You Wait?” conveys the same concept: “Do you

not feel, dear brother, His Spirit now striving within?" The Holy Spirit dwells in none but those who have already believed and obeyed the Gospel (Acts 5:32; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:19; et al.). One of the books used by many congregations contains the song, "Every Time I Feel the Spirit," the title of which says all that needs to be said about its Pentecostal flavor. Some of the newer song books include the song, "Sweet, Sweet Spirit," which is blatantly Pentecostal in its implications. Brethren who lead it (or sing it) and similar songs are grossly ignorant, utterly undiscerning, have a "change agent" agenda, or perhaps all three.

**Uncategorized errors:** The song, "He Lives," advocates raw subjectivism. This is a wonderful song, in both its words and its music—until one reaches the final words of the chorus: "You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart." The Bible teaches no such thing. This claim is no better than that made by the Mormon "elders" for the "prophetic" credentials of Joseph Smith. Their silly and subjective *heartburn evidence* says nothing about what sort of man Joe Smith was. To claim that one "knows" that Jesus lives because He lives in one's heart is no proof at all. This claim dilutes the meaning of "knowing" anything about Jesus. We **know** that Jesus lives all right, but such knowledge rests upon the incontrovertible evidence presented in the revelation of God and all of the mighty miracles and signs that confirm that revelation (John 20:30-31; Heb. 2:3-4). Let us think about the words and ideas we are singing.

"Faith of Our Fathers" generally does a good job of reminding us of the sacrifices of those who have gone before, and we should be ever thankful for those who have paid such a high price for the faith and for their faith. However, Frederick W. Faber apparently got "carried away" as he wrote verse 2: "Our fathers chained, chained in prisons dark, were still in heart and conscience free; How sweet would be their children's fate, If they, like them, could die for thee!" These words state a sentiment never found in Scripture. While our Savior unabashedly calls upon His disciples not only to go to prison, but to die for Him, if necessary (Rev. 2:10), He never suggests that we should **desire** or **seek** martyrdom. This sentiment is closely akin to asceticism, which attributes virtue to suffering for suffering's sake. The Qur'an may contain such erroneous thinking, as Islamic terrorist tactics of recent years seem to demonstrate, but it is nowhere found in the Bible.

“What a Savior” is a beautiful song that exalts the Christ, but one must go beyond the excuse of “poetic license” to accept the latter part of the first verse: “They searched through heaven and found a Savior.” Those words imply that the choice of our Lord to become our Redeemer was almost accidental and unforeseen. No searching had to occur in Heaven before the Father sent the eternal Word to become God in the flesh. God’s plan of redemption through His Son and through the church was according to His “eternal purpose,” not the result of scouting for a volunteer to come below (Eph. 3:8-12). The suggestion that God had to play heavenly hide and seek to find our Savior is brazenly irreverent and sacrilegious. It suggests that God was not sure if He could find one who was capable of being the Savior of mankind or if He could, who that one would be. It further implies that the eternal Word did not know He was to be that One. Scripture says, however: “but when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son” (Gal. 4:4). He knew exactly Whom He was going to send—without any sacred search parties. The Bible also says that our Savior “who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant” (Phi. 2:5-7). He knew He was to be the Savior, and He willingly came when the time was right. Away with the idea that a search party had to be commissioned before a Redeemer could be dispatched.

Occasionally a songwriter makes a simple factual mistake. J. M. Black did so in verse 2 of his familiar song, “When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder.” He wrote: “On that bright and cloudless morning when the dead in Christ shall rise.” However, when the Lord ascended from Olivet, Luke records that “a cloud received him out of their sight,” and the heavenly messengers revealed that He “shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven” (Acts 1:9-11). Paul declared that at the Lord’s descent from Heaven He will raise the dead and then catch the redeemed “up in the clouds” to meet Him in the air (1 The. 4:16-17). John added the following testimony concerning the condition of the skies at the Lord’s return: “Behold, he cometh with the clouds” (Rev. 1:7). Note the following: (1) The Bible connects the Lord’s return and the resurrection as events immediate to each other in their occurrence; (2) The Lord will return through/with the clouds; (3) Therefore, it is scripturally inaccurate to describe resurrection day as a “bright and cloudless morning.” While the statement is inaccurate (and we should always be concerned even with “jot” and “tittle” accuracy), it is a

simple factual mistake that poses no threat to the soul, as many of the aforementioned errors potentially pose. The song may be easily corrected by substituting *glorious* for *cloudless*.

We should remember that the Bible specifies “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” for our worship assemblies. Most of the commonly-used song books include some songs that do not fit any of these specified types. For example, the well-known “Precious Memories.” As originally written (and as it appears in all but one of the song books this scribe has seen), its three verses are one a completely secular theme, having to do with cherished memories of one’s father, mother, and childhood home. These are all noble thoughts, but this is not a spiritual song in any sense. Ellis J. Crum, publisher of *Sacred Selections* (and notorious for changing the words of numerous songs), rewrote the original second verse and added a third verse to give it some religious flavor. Another interesting song that is totally deficient as a song for worship is “There’s a Church in the Valley.” This song lauds “the little brown church in the vale” and the writer’s pleasant memories connected therewith. One wonders if William S. Pitts may have been commissioned by the little brown church’s homecoming committee to write this song. It has little more merit than for some such purpose.

Some songs blend patriotism and religion. Katherine Lee Bates’s “America the Beautiful,” is such a song, which is in most of the books from which we sing. While all believers desire God’s blessings upon our nation and mourn that she is no longer worthy in so many ways of His blessings, this song tends heavily toward patriotism more than toward praise and edification.

Two or three of the more recent hymn books published by our brethren contain numerous songs of rather recent vintage. Some of these are worthy and beautiful songs, but many of them are of the “contemporary” genre, and their use is somewhat disquieting and worrisome. Considerable musical knowledge and ability nearing performance level is required to sing some of them, which disenfranchises most members of most congregations. Several such songs are of the “Kumbaya” variety that seem better suited for adolescents singing around a campfire than for an orderly worship assembly. Many of the newer songs seem geared far more to a *touchy-feely* approach to worship than we find in most of the grand old hymns and time-tested spiritual songs.

This author will not judge the motives of the writers or compilers of these songs, but the effect of publishing them has been to create a separation between the younger generation (who generally favor these songs) and the older generation (who generally are unable and/or unwilling to sing them) in various congregations. Just by the selection of such songs in these newer books, a congregation can almost be divided along the lines of those who might favor, given their choice, “contemporary” worship approaches over “traditional” worship approaches. A few years ago, liberal churches began actually offering two Sunday morning worship assemblies, labeling one “contemporary” (read “liberal”) and the other “traditional” (read “conservative”). This tactic has become one of the hallmarks of the change agents in their revolutionary efforts to overturn and replace almost everything long-practiced among the saints. These “contemporary” worship assemblies thrive on such “contemporary” songs as led by the “praise team” performers that choreograph and lead them. Some of the newer songs contain blatant false doctrine (e.g., “Sweet, Sweet Spirit,” referenced above).

Having said all of the above, one can go to an extreme in analyzing and excluding songs. One brother has written an entire book on this subject that, if followed, would greatly shrink our hymn books. Several years ago, one of the elders where this writer was preaching was a song leader and was responsible for selecting others to lead singing in our worship assemblies. He and his wife took it upon themselves to study the words of every one of the 700 plus songs in the book we were using. They came up with 120 plus songs they believed we should not sing. This preacher knows of congregations that have divided relative to such severe song editing. Brethren who go to such extremes seem to make no allowances at all for figurative language or poetic license. While it is incumbent upon us to study carefully the words we sing and to avoid the verses of the songs that teach error (which will require exclusion of entire songs in some cases), we should also avoid irrationally editing our song books.

### CONCLUSION

As in all things, the Lord knew exactly what He was doing when He authorized and commanded us to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in our worship assemblies. The teaching and admonishing we do

through our songs, if done “in spirit and in truth,” will exalt the Father and His Son and build up the church.

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### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Paul instructed the Corinthians to “sing with the spirit” and “sing with the understanding also” (1 Cor. 14:15). This passage is frequently interpreted to mean that we must understand what we sing. While none can gainsay this dictum, as argued above (how can one sincerely sing words he does not understand?), this is not the apostle’s point here. While we deny that Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit’s involvement in worship in some direct fashion in John 4:24, this passage indicates the occurrence of that very phenomenon in this Corinthian assembly. The setting of this statement pertains to a gathering in which brethren were exercising miraculous spiritual gifts (i.e., prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues) (1 Cor. 14:1-5). He warned them not to speak in tongues unless an interpreter was present, for a message in a tongue known only to the speaker would be profitless to the hearers, and they should be concerned with doing only such things as would edify the church (14:6-13). Apparently, the Spirit inspired the prayers and the songs of some of these brethren, which some of them were leading in tongues. But Paul warned that those thus endowed should not only be concerned with praying and singing “with the spirit” (i.e., by inspiration), but “with the

understanding also” (so as to be understood by those assembled) (vv. 14-15). Context indicates that pray/sing “with the spirit” refers to the one **leading** the inspired prayer or song. Therefore, pray/sing “with the understanding” must likewise refer to the inspired prayer or song **leader**, rather than the hearers. Thus, he continues: “Else if thou bless [pray, DM] with the spirit, how shall he that filleth the place of the unlearned [ASV fn.: Or, him that is without gifts] say the Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he knoweth not what thou sayest” (14:16). David Lipscomb’s paraphrase captures the essence of Paul’s thought regarding singing “with the understanding also”: “I will sing as the Spirit directs or inspires, and I will sing in a language that those who hear can understand” (208). Burton Coffman adds: “The quotation of these verses in the sense of people singing and praying in the public services ‘with the spirit and the understanding’ is based upon an incorrect discernment of their meaning. It is not the subjective understanding of the participant that is meant, but the objective purpose of conveying understanding to others” (231). In effect, Paul is telling them not to pray or sing in a tongue that conveys no meaning (i.e., “understanding”) to the others assembled. His statement in verse 16 appears to confirm this exegesis.

Does the aforementioned interpretation lend any weight to Deaver’s assertion that the Holy Spirit directly helps us in our worship? Can he say with any credence, “The fact that the Spirit directly helped the Corinthians in their worship indicates that the Lord had in mind the Spirit’s help for **our** worship in John 4:24”? Not at all, unless he wants to affirm that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit are still available to us (which his direct-operation-of-the-Holy Spirit doctrine in effect does affirm). Furthermore, Paul’s description shows us what occurred in the infantile church when Christians were receiving direct, Holy Spirit help in their worship: They produced inspired messages, prayers, and songs. If the Spirit were directly helping us in our worship today, some among us would surely be uttering inspired messages and prayers and producing infallibly correct psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

<sup>2</sup> I originally wrote this commentary on the terminology of various songs in a slightly different and abbreviated form and published it in two issues of *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL* (April, June 2002), of which I was Editor at the time.

# BUILDING BETTER GIVERS

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## INTRODUCTION

A cartoon once showed the disciples hard at work distributing the food that Jesus had blessed and multiplied to feed the thousands. The character representing Peter heard a voice behind him and turned to see the boy who had given Jesus the little meal that was now feeding so many. The little boy said: “About my loaves and fishes—could I get a receipt for tax purposes?” In a humorous way, this illustrates for us that there may be secondary motives involved in human actions, along with (or in opposition to) the primary, God-ordained motivation as found in the Scriptures. What motivates you, dear brother or sister, to give of your time, talent, and (especially for our present study) money to the Lord’s cause? Is it for tax purposes or some other equally secondary (i.e., so far as God is concerned) cause? A member of the church once requested that the preacher publicly pray for his “floating kidneys,” but when the preacher protested, the man said: “Why not? You prayed last Sunday all the ‘loose livers’!” This writer is now of the view that we ought to start openly praying instead for all the *tight givers* in the congregation. Such pointed prayers and a detailed study of biblical giving just might start a revolution in the church of our Lord!

## A TWO-WINGED EAGLE: MOTIVES AND ACTIONS

Men act out of a complex variety of motives and sanctions. Sometimes these motives and sanctions are basically immoral, as when an outwardly “good” life is cultivated because it enables the man to perpetuate secret evils (Henry 528).

When Treasurer Judas spoke up allegedly on behalf of the needy after Mary quite extravagantly *wasted* money in anointing the Lord's feet, the Holy Spirit informs us: "Now this he said, not because he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and having the bag took away what was put therein" (John 12:6). Today, the banker who is prominent in church life and has a place of leadership in the Rotary Club or Boy Scouts, while at the same time he is embezzling funds to gamble at Las Vegas, is an example of such secret immoral motivation. The Bible describes such persons as hypocrites who suppose "that godliness is a way of gain" (1 Tim. 6:5). Peter even warns elders about working "for filthy lucre" instead of from godly reasons (1 Pet. 5:2). One's motivation or *heart* behind overt actions counts as much or more than the action itself (Phi. 1:15-17). "For *Jehovah seeth* not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but *Jehovah* looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

As Warren correctly pointed out:

We do not hold to a deontology which says *only motive* count, that it does not matter about *results*. We do not hold to a teleology which says that *only the consequences* count. The *Bible* takes *both* into account. You *must* have the *right motive*. "If any man loves not the Lord, let him be anathema" (1 Cor. 16:22), and it is only the man who *does* the will of God out of that *good motive*, that will be saved (Matt. 7:21-23) (243).

In regard to most Christians, Carl Henry is surely correct when he alleges: "In the sincere Christian life conflict arises not so much between proper and improper motives and sanctions as it does out of trying to decide which of the acceptable ones have priority" (528). While some motives are true and biblical, they simply do not measure up to more fundamental, bedrock ones set out by the Lord for us to possess deep within our very being. V. P. Black once explained it this way:

Suppose a husband has been away from home for some time and returning, brings his wife a gift. He enters the house, throws the gift at her, and says, "There is your gift. I did not want to bring it, but I knew there would be a fuss if I did not." She would not appreciate it. I have known some members of the church who gave so reluctantly, so grudgingly, and so snarlingly, that one feels...that they insult God and his cause every time they give (64).<sup>1</sup>

Should a man want to "not cause a fuss" with his spouse? Yes! But should he not much rather, from love, genuinely desire to show her

how much he appreciates and adores her by way of said present? Yes! (Eph. 5:25, 28-29). She wishes him to bestow it “as a matter of bounty [i.e., blessing], and not of extortion” (2 Cor. 9:5) just as Paul and the Lord desired the early Christians to donate into the weekly collection. “*Let each man do according as he hath purposed in his heart: not grudgingly [Greek—of sorrow], or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver*” (9:7). Could it be that some of us never get past the immature and selfish whine of “Aw, do we have to?” or “Just how much do we have to give?” This self-absorbed disposition sometimes comes out regarding our time and talent, but especially evidences itself in our financial contributions to Christ’s blood-bought church.

### SPECIOUS, LEGALISTIC REASONING

This preacher has sometimes heard Christians attempt to answer the question of “How much must we give?” by first quoting Jesus as follows: “For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mat. 5:20). Then they (quite mistakenly as it turns out from Scripture) allege that these Jews gave 10% to (allegedly) *prove* a somewhat minimalist contribution of usually 11% for the Christian today. This is an almost entirely **wrong** approach! Given the premises involved, many will surely opt for the proffered 11% or maybe even 10.001% (and why not, since, after all, that does in their mind literally *exceed* the aforementioned Jews?). Brethren, **think**: Given the repeated and harsh criticisms that Jesus leveled against these people (21:28-31), do you really think He is promoting emulation of their contributions—especially when such giving involves a necessary attitude of heart? While He did affirm them in whatever they taught accurately from Moses’ law (“these do and observe”) He concluded by declaring, “but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not” (23:3).

### A PRACTICAL EYE-OPENER: BUT SECONDARY IN PRIORITY

Since, according to Paul, a little friendly competition between brethren is not intrinsically wrong (2 Cor. 8:1-8; 9:2-3), as a matter of practicality it is wise to sometimes have the church treasurer list all contributions from a penny up through the largest currency bills and checks. This ought then to be run occasionally in the church bulletin so everyone is allowed a *private* eye-opening look at where they person-

ally rank among local Christians without revealing anything to others in the group. Yet, we surely must realize that this procedure ought not be a prime incentive toward giving to the Lord's church. Similarly, though it is not wrong *per se* to desire to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, it surely ought not to be very high on our priority list. Who could possibly believe that this is to be the principal or prime reason which God furnishes us with an incentive or inducement to lay by in store upon the first day of the week (cf. 1 Cor. 16:2)? Whoever thinks so needs to grow up (cf. Heb. 5:12-14)! One old immature brother was not even among the *Eleven Percenters*. He loved money so much that he converted it all into gold and kept it in the attic so he could get it when he died as his spirit went up. The day after he died, his wife went up into the attic and found all the gold. She said he ought to have put it in the basement so he could have gotten it as he went by! This spiritually underdeveloped old codger apparently never studied the apostle Paul's statement:

for we brought nothing into the world, for neither can we carry anything out; but having food and covering we shall be therewith content. But they that are minded to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition (1 Tim. 6:7-9).

If you should be so unfortunate as to miss heaven, be sure to ask him about it!

### **WHAT OUR AVERSION TO TEACHING ON GIVING OR EMPHASIS ON SECONDARY MOTIVES CAUSES**

Have we possibly raised up a generation or three who primarily regard their Sunday contribution to a congregation's treasury as only or primarily the performance of a *religious duty* dictated by fear of God's wrath and perhaps aimed at winning God's favor meritoriously? "Where then is the glorying? It is excluded" (Rom. 3:27). Even when I decide to "bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*," if I am not motivated by proper godly love, "it profiteth me nothing" (1 Cor. 13:3). Though some secondary motivations are not necessarily wrong or sinful in and of themselves, should not God's people strive for the God-ordained highest reasons for obedience? Though it is not intrinsically wrong to desire physical food to eat, our Lord stressed that such was inferior motivation to follow Him as compared to spiritual food leading to eternal life (John 6:26-27). What drives your Christian life, friend?

It is not enough to be opposed to unscriptural church car washes, pie suppers, cakewalks, carnivals, and bazaars. We must also expound positively what the Bible teaches about freewill offerings. Are we as preachers and elders disinclined to educate folks for fear we will be accused of teaching on giving for personal gain? Do we in classes and sermons inadvertently stress secondary purposes in lieu of more significant ones? What price are we paying in lost souls (including the miserly givers and those who could have possibly been reached with the Gospel through the availability of more funds) in our failure here? Giving was an Old Testament ordinance just as it is now, and one of the worst sins a man can commit is to “rob God” financially—despite the fact that others among God’s people do not literally see it (cf. Mal. 3:7-10). By our aversion to properly instructing on this subject are we not *enablers* to those in error? Let us awaken to the task of building good givers throughout the land!

One minister said: “When I look at this well-dressed congregation, I ask, ‘Where are the poor?’ When I look at the offering plate, I ask, ‘Where are the rich?’” It would seem some Christians would have no idea as to what David described as the highest motive in his own life: “One thing have I asked of Jehovah, that will I seek after; That I may dwell in the house of Jehovah all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of Jehovah, And to inquire in his temple” (Psa. 27:4). Do brothers and sisters in Christ really understand and relate to Paul’s comparison to his prior existence out of Christ and his description of what caused his Christian devotion?

Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, *even* that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and **the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed unto his death**; if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also **I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus** (Phi. 3:7-12).

It would seem that some have never truly been “laid hold on by Jesus Christ” through His suffering and death on the cross! This writer

fears some are like the brother who many years ago was finally asked just why he only gave a dollar per week to Christ's cause despite obvious wealth. He replied: "My Bible says that I must not give grudgingly and if I gave more I would be violating that verse." The preacher looked at him and said: "Since you are going to hell anyway for not giving as you've prospered, why don't you go ahead and up your contribution to \$30 per week, since at least that will help a lot more folks be saved and have food to eat?"

Brethren, let us face it, some of us are Ebenezer Scrooge when it comes to the Sunday collection! Why, before this scribe learned better, he was so stingy that, when he found a package of cough drops one day, he made his wife sleep without a blanket so she would catch a cold! He even punished his kids for buying an all-day sucker at 4:00 p.m.! My friends, when are **you** going to *come clean* and confess the sin no one has the courage to really mention: **covetousness regarding one's money**? Make no mistake—"covetousness, which is idolatry"—is categorized right along with things like fornication for which "sake cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience" (Col. 3:5-6)! Jesus knew that nothing clogs your spiritual arteries more than the problem of money! He pointed out that it can become a life-goal opposed to God: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Mat. 6:24; Luke 16:13)! No wonder He reiterated the grave danger here: "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:23; cf. 10:24-25; Luke 12:15; 1 Tim. 6:9-10, 17-19; Jam. 5:1-3). He knew that if there is anything God uses in our lifetime to test our hearts, it is **money**!

### WHY SUCH DIFFERENT ATTITUDES?

Why do we read regarding the freewill offerings given by the Israelites for the tabernacle that Moses was told: "The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work which Jehovah commanded to make" (Exo. 36:5)? For some reason we tend to be shocked that Moses then actually had to issue a proclamation saying:

Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much (36:6-7)!

When was the last time an eldership had to tell Christians to cease and desist from giving **too much** to God's church? Later on, during

David's day, in reference to their big-hearted gifts of gold, silver, brass, and precious stones for the temple, it was reported: "Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with a perfect heart they offered willingly to Jehovah" (1 Chr. 29:9). Why such joyful and generous giving? Their hearts were right, and their pocketbook followed! A tremendous sermon can be derived from David's subsequent explanation (29:10-17) as to **why** God's people gave so selflessly and liberally, and he urges Jehovah to keep such first-rank motivating facts "for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee" (29:18). David stresses: (1) who God is as to His eternality, greatness, power, glory, victory, and majesty; (2) His ownership by right of creation of the cosmos; (3) His being the ultimate source of riches and honor; (4) man's gratitude for His providential care and blessings; (5) man's finiteness and physical death; (6) His final judgment of man's heart and moral uprightness before Him. In view of these magnificent truths, how could anyone in their right mind respond in a perfunctory (i.e., done merely for the sake of getting rid of the duty; done from force of habit; mechanical; indifferent) way in their freewill offering under any dispensation? Such truths will surely *lay hold* on a person's heart as to motivation in comparison to our stressing such secondary motives as: (1) give to our building fund; (2) it is a Christian duty; (3) without a raise the preacher may leave; (4) a pew will be engraved with your name on it; (5) it is a great IRS tax break; (6) our sister church needs help with Program X; (7) it will all come back to you and then some; (8) we will name the church library after you; (9) it will help others.

### **WHY DO WE NOT RESTORE NEW TESTAMENT GIVING?**

Though the total context of the Bible shows it to be a temporary situation, Luke describes the early Christians in Jerusalem as possessing a similar disposition as those Old Testament Jews: "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, according as any man had need" (Acts 2:44-45). But why in the world would they do this?

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul: and not one *of them* said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.... For neither was there among them any that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were

sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto each, according as any one had need (Acts 4:32, 34-35).

If we had a temporary emergency situation today, would we demonstrate a similar attitude?

Since the Bible upholds the private ownership of property, why would these early disciples of Christ refuse to say anything was **theirs**? Why such sacrificial, cheerful giving? What were they so much of "one heart and soul" about that they could lovingly part with personal material treasure? Did they somehow agree by means of a commonly shared Gospel that someone else was the true owner of all things? We know that (at least for most of them) it was not brought about merely because God had demanded it, as is proved by Peter's statement to Ananias (Acts 5:4). Were their minds fundamentally affected by the knowledge that God ultimately owns everything? Did Jesus really mean to say during His ministry that there would be a change in disposition (i.e., born anew) involved when someone obeyed the Gospel (cf. John 3:3)? Did He imply that His followers would voluntarily respond by going **beyond** strict law or compulsion: "And if any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile, go with him two" (Mat. 5:40-41)? Why did Paul also go against the usual way of the world by declaring to early saints: "But if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head" (Rom. 12:20)? Do you not see that such loving and out of the ordinary actions automatically draw attention to the fact that Christianity has an extraordinary Lord and Savior with the power to draw all men unto Himself (cf. John 12:32)?

Paul described the churches of Macedonia as literally begging him to allow them to give from their deep poverty into the collection for Jerusalem which "abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For according to their power, I bear witness, yea and beyond their power, *they gave* of their own accord" (2 Cor. 8:2-3; cf. the brethren at Antioch in Acts 11:29-30). What would stimulate such strong motivation? What are we *missing* in our modern attempts to meet our church budgets that they possessed so abundantly? The Holy Spirit through Paul helps us here by reporting on a prior, crucial step which enabled them to happily part with their Roman coins which in turn allowed the church to grow across the world. Paul informs us: "but first they gave **their own selves to the Lord**, and [then] to us through the will of God" (2 Cor. 8:5).

Folks, have we as elders and preachers tried to grow good givers without this critical antecedent component? Furthermore, have we then examined Scripture to determine just what induced them to give **themselves** to Christ?

### USING HUMOR TO CAUSE INTROSPECTION

The late V. P. Black, who probably taught more people about scriptural giving than anyone else in the last fifty years, provided us with a poem (*Teacher's Manual* 11-12) which describes the Christian who is not motivated properly to give as the Lord has prospered him.

#### A Dollar A Week

Oh, Happy Day, I'm paying my way  
To heaven, the home of the meek:  
It takes a price, but I sacrifice  
In fact . . . . . a dollar a week.

In prosperous days the Lord I praise;  
I have no stingy streak.  
To show my love for Him above,  
I give . . . . . a dollar a week.

The church to me will always be  
A towering mighty peak;  
To help her live I always give  
In fact . . . . . a dollar a week.

There's an urgent need the poor to feed,  
And orphans our help do seek.  
Their helpless cry I never deny,  
In fact . . . . . a dollar a week.

With the greatest of ease the Lord I please  
How sweet my actions speak;  
I'm paying my way, and cheap, I'd say.  
It's just . . . . . a dollar a week.

Brethren, for a person to live in such ignorance and with such low motives is surely just as bad as those who live in ignorance of what the Bible teaches about baptism, the Lord's Supper, or any other Bible subject. All one has to do is to adjust this poem for inflation by inserting "25 dollars" in place of "dollar," and you have got a fresh illustration regarding many present-day members! If it were not unscriptural, this writer would recommend that some congregations sing a mournful funeral dirge while they are taking up the weekly offering. As they *low-ball* God when dropping their miserly cash or check into the

plate, many should warble: “When we asunder part, it gives us inward pain!”

It has been pointed out that the Jews living under the Old Law were told:

And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleaning of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather the fallen fruit of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am Jehovah your God (Lev. 19:9-10).

Brother Black *tells it like it is* by commenting:

From this verse we learn that the farmer had to leave the corners of his field for the poor and the stranger. It was said that you could pass by the farm of a Jew during harvest time and observe the corners of his field and tell whether he was a stingy Jew or a liberal one. If he left just as little in the corner as possible, he was a stingy Jew. If he left large corners unharvested, he was a liberal Jew. *If some of our brethren had been farming back in that age, there would not have been left enough grain to make a bowl of broth* (11-12).

Our brother would pray: “Oh God, forgive us for going so many years without teaching thy truth on this great subject” (Black 12). He would frequently cite the story (Acts 5:1-11) of Ananias and Sapphira wherein they lied about their giving in hope of receiving the praise given to Barnabas, and then he would say: “Brother, if God was still striking people dead for lying about their giving, there would not be enough [people] left in some congregations to serve the Lord’s Supper!” (Black 55). Each one of us needs to ask ourselves if we are lying to ourselves about our giving? One man told brother Black that, after studying the matter, he realized that he had been lying for 25 years about his giving (Black 55)! But what could explain such a widespread stinginess among God’s people?

### THE PRIMARY MOTIVE

“Motives for ethical obedience may include fear of punishment or of God, or desire for future or present reward, or love of the good for its own sake, or the proddings of conscience, or love for God, or imitation of Christ, or gratitude for God’s mercies.... Sanctions for ethical conduct include such considerations as the nature of God, the Divine promise of reward, the Divine threat of punishment or the coming judgment, the love of God, and gratitude for the provision of redemption.... It is obvious that the biblical sanctions for moral living are unique. Ethical codes based on majority opinion, or upon the wise prescriptions of a philosophical minority, or upon considerations

merely of prudence or utility, do not command the will absolutely.... Such motivations as gratitude for the mercies of redemption, the pursuit of the personal example of Christ, obedience to the injunctions of Scripture, and the eschatological [heaven or hell] orientation of conduct are obviously peculiar to biblical ethics and set it off from secular views.... The primary motive for Christian obedience is gratitude for the grace of God in Jesus Christ. All other motives are secondary to this. Of all the newly acquired feelings of the new convert to Christ, none is so natural as that of gratitude. Whoever does not venture the Christian life primarily out of grateful recollection misunderstands the price of his redemption. In relation to other motives, it is the one, in all its implications, which is most distinctive in revealed [i.e., Bible—TMH] ethics” (Henry 528-29).

Weidner makes a crucial point when he says:

In Christian life, grateful love to the redeeming God is the deepest ground of virtue, to which all other motives may be referred. But the love produced by gratitude does not exclude, but includes, adoring love, which loves God for his own sake (79).

The words *grace* and *gratitude* are at the root one (*charis*). They are two sides of the same Greek word. Because God’s *charis* (grace) is poured out on unmeriting men, man’s *charis* (gratitude) springs up in thankful devotion to God and in dedication to his service. The writer of Hebrews graphically expresses this thought: “Wherefore, receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have gratitude whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe” (12:28) (Henry 530).

Both love and gratitude were the primary motives for obedience to God for the Israelite in Old Testament days. Even under the Old Law, God’s covenant with Israel anticipates an obedience to be rendered gladly from the motive of gratitude (Deu. 26:1-11, 16-19; Jer. 11:3-4; Eze. 16:6-14). The psalmist speaks of the glad joy of the returning exiles when God rescued and brought them back to Zion:

Then was our mouth filled with laughter, And our tongue with singing:  
Then said they among the nations, Jehovah hath done great things for them. Jehovah hath done great things for us, *Whereof* we are glad (Psa. 126:2-3).

Just before setting forth the Ten Commandments, God reminds Israel of His gracious deliverance of them from Egypt as the primary inducement for them to obey (Exo. 20:2).

Without doubt, after one first learns the brute facts concerning God and Christ, Christian character and actions also spring from gratitude.

Referring to the story about the ten lepers in Luke 17:11-19, this preacher once wrote:

The inspired Luke...goes on to exclusively cite an episode from Christ's life which (even by itself) is enough not only to prove the need for, but the absolute cruciality of the positive, God-oriented trait of Biblical gratitude (the *emotion*) and thanksgiving (the *action*) (108).

Only one lowly Samaritan "returned to give glory to God" (17:18) by turning back "with a loud voice glorifying God; and he fell upon his face at his feet, giving him thanks" (17:15-16). The point was made that all accountable persons have something *worse* than leprosy: **Sin**.

Sin is to the soul what leprosy is to the body. It separates from God and the sacred society of the saints, and terminates in the horrors of a guilty death. Worse than leprosy, sin ends not with the grave, but exposes its victim to the everlasting misery of an unending death (Hightower 111).

For the wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.... For while we were yet weak, in due season Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: for peradventure for the good man some one would even dare to die. But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 6:23; 5:6-8).

No wonder Paul responded in joy and gratitude: "Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (7:24-25).

For us to appreciate the good news of the Gospel, we must first truly and accurately know the *bad news* about ourselves! When one truly realizes that he lost it all because of his personal sin, that Christ alone did what He did for us to come back to God, and that we gain our salvation because of His horrible death on the cross, we will then have the motivation to give first ourselves over to Him, and we quite naturally consider that everything we own is not ours, but His! This fact of being "the firstborn from the dead" goes beyond the fact that He created all things (Col. 1:16-18; cf. John 1:1-3) and should (i.e., **must**) be the strongest motivating power on earth. Though Paul and others seriously meditated upon the Divine goodness shown by God to all humans (Rom. 1:20-21; Acts 14:15-17; cf. Psalms 104:10-15), he particularly and repeatedly spoke of the marvelous blessings to believers in Christ Jesus. This is the reason Paul says: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, **by the mercies of God**, that ye present your bodies a living

sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable [belonging to the reason—ASV footnote] service” (Rom. 12:1—KJV).

Thus, the biblically literate, faithful Christian realizes that he is a servant of the King of kings, that he has been bought by the blood of Christ so he is no longer his own (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Rev. 5:4-14). When you truly realize your previous condition of “being in time past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and unproveable before him” (Col. 1:21-22), you love Jesus and not riches. How in the world could such a person treat the Lord like they treat their dog—by giving Him mere scraps? Christian friend, if you knew that you were to soon face death, and that the only one who could bear you safely over the tide was the Lord, would not your heart be so full of gratitude to Him that you would give bountifully? If you are still stubborn, watch Mel Gibson’s *The Passion Of Christ!*

### CONCLUSION

It may seem to many a Christian-in-the-pew that debate over the legitimate priority of motives for conduct is pedantic and void of practicality. But this is really far from the case. God uses the motive of gratitude to mature the believer in the fulfillment of his divinely-assigned vocation in personal and social relationships (Henry 532).

Every Lord’s day (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2) each Christian should ask: “What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?” (Psa. 116:12—KJV). In urging the Corinthians to abound in the grace of giving, Paul uses the best incentive by saying:

I speak not by way of commandment, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity also of your love. For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich.... Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift (2 Cor. 8:8-9; 9:15).

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and he died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who for their sakes died and rose again (5:14-15).

If we truly honor Him, we will “remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Do you not suppose that the Lord knew exactly what He was doing when He prescribed the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-29) each

week for fifty-two times in a year, along with our offering (1 Cor. 16:1-2)?

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### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup>His earlier work on giving titled *My God And My Money* truly paved the way for brethren to openly study such a controversial topic, demonstrating that a pious Old Testament Jew gave about 30%, not just 10%, to God. This writer once heard him deliver a short series on money and noticed that he was shrewdly adept at repeatedly using humor to *slide* pertinent Bible facts down even the hostile listener's throat and by appealing to one's better nature. **Preachers:** take note! Elders might be interested in using the well-written four-message folders with two (adaptable) letters "from the elders" available from Pathway Publishing House (6701 Aberdeen, Suite 5; Lubbock, TX 79424; 806-794-1996).

# BUILDING BETTER ELDERS

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## INTRODUCTION

The Bible opens with these words: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). In Genesis 1 and 2, one reads of the account of the creation. The description of the creation begins with the separation of the light from darkness on day one (1:3-5), and concludes with the creation of man, the institution of marriage, and the establishment of the home on day six (1:27; 2:21-25). However, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting” (Psa. 90:2). God had a purpose and a plan. That plan and eternal purpose included the church of Jesus the Christ (Eph. 3:8-11). There has never been a time when the church of the Christ was not in the mind of God. The eternal purpose of God included the purchase price of the church, as well as the pattern for worship and organization of the church. In summary, it can be said that the church was purposed/planned by God (Eph. 3:11), purchased by the blood of Jesus (Acts 20:28), and in relation to its organization the church is to be protected from all forms of corruption by men who meet the qualifications and serve as elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9; et al.).

In every age the church has been, and will continue to be, under attack by the devil. The church was persecuted in the first century (Acts 8:1-3), and persecution in some form will continue until Jesus returns, at which time God will bring this world to an end (2 Tim. 3:12; 2 Pet. 3:10). God desires and expects men in every congregation to strive to develop men capable of serving as elders to protect the church from every danger that may threaten her existence. The charge God has given to elders is no little matter. When Paul addressed the Ephesian

elders, the inspired apostle gave a summary of the basic duty of those who serve as elders. The first charge given to the eldership is to take heed to themselves, and the second charge is to take heed to the flock of God (Acts 20:28). Other responsibilities of the eldership include overseeing, feeding, and protecting from wolves and watching (20:28-31). When an eldership does the work God has given them to do, the congregation they serve will rest securely, knowing their shepherds are watching for their souls (Heb. 13:17).

Realizing the seriousness of the responsibilities placed upon elders, this chapter will be devoted to the discussion of “Building Better Elders.” The purpose of this lesson is not to discuss the qualifications of elders in detail. The purpose of this chapter is to deal with some basic applications of the qualifications. Building better elders can become a reality when those who serve in that capacity realize that as elders they are stewards of God’s purchased possession (the church), shepherds of God’s flock, servants of God and His people, and (when they are supported by the flock) overseers.

### ELDERS ARE STEWARDS

Titus described an elder as a “steward of God” (Tit. 1:7). A steward is one who is, “primarily denoted the manager of a household or estate” (Vine 74). The principal responsibility of a *steward*, is perhaps best demonstrated in the biblical text where one reads of the work in which a steward is engaged. The first time *steward* appears in the Bible is in Genesis 15. Abram said to God that, “the steward of my house *is* this Eliezer of Damascus?” (15:2).

Eliezer was Abraham’s slave and trusted steward. He seems to have had the oversight of all his affairs and was entrusted with the important duty of getting a wife for Isaac. He apparently had charge over the family of his master as well as his property (Orr).

The reader of this chapter is encouraged to read Genesis 24 where Abraham sends “his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had” (24:2) to seek a wife for Isaac. This gives a good description of the weighty responsibility often placed upon a steward. It also demonstrates the conscientiousness and devout loyalty of a good steward in performing the assigned task given by his master.

Jesus taught a lesson in a parable about a slothful, careless, wasteful, prideful, unjust steward (Luke 16:1-8). If one is not careful when reading about the unfaithful steward, he may draw the conclusion that Jesus was commending him as being faithful. Such is not the case. Jesus

identifies this steward as being wasteful (16:1). Jesus also alludes to the fact that, because of the wastefulness of this steward, he would be removed from his stewardship of which he had been entrusted (16:2-4). If a steward was found to be unfaithful he was usually discharged at once (Orr). Through implication, Jesus exposes this steward's laziness and pride (16:3). Why can he not dig (work)? Is the reason that he is too lazy? He is too proud to beg (cf. Pro. 6:16-17; Psa. 34:17-18), but he is not too proud to squander his master's goods to try and save his own hide (Luke 16:4-7). Jesus leaves no doubt as to the state of this unjust steward. "And the lord commended the **unjust steward**, because he had done wisely: for the **children of this world** are in their generation wiser than **the children of light**" (16:8). In this parable Jesus is simply showing that many who profess to be "children of light" are not as wise as this lost steward. In "Building Better Elders," it is good to study the man in this parable, because he is everything that an elder, as a steward of God, should not be. An observation and an application this writer will make from this parable is that, when a Christian (especially an elder or Gospel preacher) cares for self more than he cares for God, truth, the church, and his fellow soldier in the kingdom of God, he is prideful, self-serving, and does not care whom he hurts or destroys. He is a poor steward of God and just the opposite of what Jesus the Christ who died for him is (Phi. 2:6-8).

In "Building Better Elders," those who occupy that office must never forget that they are stewards of God's most precious, purchased possession—the church for which He gave His only begotten Son to purchase (Mat. 16:18; John 3:16; Acts 20:28). Therefore, elders must use patience and wisdom, when dealing with dangerous and delicate situations that have the potential of bringing harm to the congregation where they serve. At the same time elders must realize that they cannot compromise God's truth. If elders turn either to the right hand or to the left hand of God's Word, they are not faithful stewards of God's heritage, the church (1 Pet. 5:3; Acts 20:28).

This writer has a friend that he has known since his early elementary school days, whose name is Robert. None of his friends call him by the name Robert; they call him *Cob*. The name fits him well because he has always been as tough and as rough as a corncob. It was rumored that when Cob was a child, he took a hammer and demolished his daddy's chicken coop. When Cob's daddy was asked why he allowed Cob to demolish a perfectly good chicken coop, his daddy replied by saying,

“At least he is busy.” Cob is to this day a dear friend of this family and is still as rough as a corncob. If men who serve in elderships are not wise stewards, they can be as destructive as this writer’s friend. There are some analogies between some elderships and Cob; there are also some differences. Elderships have the potential of being as destructive as Cob. The great difference is that elders are not stewards over a chicken coupe, they are stewards over God’s heritage, the church. Faithful men of God cannot be as Cob’s daddy and just let them alone, because elderships are busy as they demolish the Lord’s church. Figuratively speaking, it is time that faithful men of God “take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17) and protect the hen house.

For a good example of how an eldership can make havoc of the Lord’s Church, consider what the elders of the Highland Church of Christ in Dalton, Georgia have done to the entire brotherhood. Brethren who have fought side by side in the battle for truth and righteousness are now at war with one another because faithful brethren refuse to compromise and prostitute the Lord’s Church. Remember, anyone can destroy a chicken coop. When Jesus said, “Blessed are the peace makers” (Mat. 5:9), he was not excluding elders. Peter condemned the attitude of the present presiding eldership at the Highland Church of Christ in Dalton, Georgia when he wrote that elders are not to be “lords over God’s heritage.” Guy N. Woods said regarding this statement:

The words “lording it over” (from *katakuriou*, to rule over others highhandedly and autocratically) suggest an arrogant, domineering spirit, and is here positively forbidden to those who serve acceptably as elders or bishops (125).

He also suggests regarding this passage of Scripture, “That such a spirit early manifested itself in the church may be seen from 3 John 9” (125).

In “Building Better Elders” the reader of this chapter is encouraged to carefully study Acts 15 and Galatians 2. These two chapters deal with a situation that was potentially explosive. When those “certain men which came down from Judaea” (Acts 15:1) to Antioch and began to bind where God had not bound, the identity or purity of the church was under attack. The church of the first century was constantly fighting the battle of those who would desire to synchronize Judaism with Christianity—and even human philosophy with Christianity (study Colossians 2). The church at Antioch is faced with a choice, are they (the church and the apostles) going to address the sin, or are they going

to say “Well, I don’t think it is a matter worth splitting the church over,” or “We shouldn’t be too radical,” or “We shouldn’t be bickering about it.” Paul and Barnabas thought it was worth “no small dissension and disputation” (Acts 15:2). No, they went to the root/source of the problem, and the “apostles and elders” (15:2, 4, 6, 22-23) defused the situation; they did so based upon the authority of God’s Truth. Please study the two chapters just mentioned for a better understanding of this problem. Much more could be said regarding “Elders are Stewards,” but now attention will be turned to the discussion of “Elders as Shepherds.”

### ELDERS AS SHEPHERDS

The task of “Building Better Elders” will be greatly enhanced when elders understand their work as **shepherds**. Although elders are not specifically called *shepherds* in the King James Version of the New Testament, *poimen* that is translated “shepherd” (John 10:2, 11-12, 14, 16), or “shepherds” (Luke 2:8, 15, 18, 20), is the same word translated “pastors” in (Eph. 4:11). This fact should be sufficient in demonstrating how the words *pastors*, *shepherds*, and *shepherd* derive from the same Greek word and can be used interchangeably. Also, there are terms used in describing the work and responsibilities of elders that warrant the use of *shepherd* to describe elders. When the apostle Paul met with the elders of Ephesus at Miletus, he told them: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the **flock**, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to **feed** the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). Paul also stated that there would be “grievous wolves” that would enter in, “not sparing the flock” (20:29). Notice, Peter said that elders are to “**feed the flock** of God which is among you” (1 Pet. 5:2). These expressions describe the work of shepherds. Peter also goes on to say that Jesus is the “chief Shepherd” (5:4). Regarding this verse, brother Woods wrote:

The words “chief Shepherd” occur nowhere else in the New Testament, and were, therefore, coined by Peter, perhaps in memory of the Lord’s allusion to himself as the Good Shepherd in the parable of the sheepfold. (John 10:14.) The Hebrew writer in similar fashion referred to “the great shepherd of the sheep.” (Heb. 13:20.) Elders are thus to regard themselves as under-shepherds, deriving their powers and exercising their functions by the will of the “Chief Shepherd,” Christ (126-27).

Another interesting thought to be observed is the use of *feed* in describing the responsibility(s) of a shepherd. *Feed* in the King James Version is translated “tend” in the American Standard Version. *Feed* or *tend* is from the same Greek word, *poimaino*, which means “to feed, to tend a flock, keep sheep 1a) to rule, govern 1a1) of rulers” (Thayer). (You will find it very noteworthy to make a careful study of *poimaino*—feed—and *poimen*—shepherd/pastor; compare the striking similarities between those words). *Feed* (*poimaino*) is the same word translated “rule,” where it is said of Jesus, “And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall **rule** my people Israel” (Mat. 2:6). Now, what does that say for those who assert that elders are to rule as examples only? It is not being denied here that elders/shepherds are to be “ensamples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:3). It is unreservedly denied that shepherds rule by example **only**. It is as erroneous to say that shepherds rule as examples only as it is to suggest that salvation is by faith only. Being an example is the responsibility of every child of God, male and female, and to advocate that an elder rules by example only is to say that an elder has no more authority than a woman in her God-given role—how absurd!

The work of a shepherd of God’s flock will be understood and appreciated significantly by observing and assimilating the comments of J. W. McGarvey.

The Jewish shepherd was at once the ruler, the guide, the protector, and the companion of the flock. Often, like the shepherds to whom the angel announced the glad tidings of great joy, he slept upon the ground beside his sheep at night. Sometimes, when prowling wolves came near to rend and scatter the flock, his courage was put to the test: (Jno. x: 12); and even the lion and the bear in the early ages rose up against the brave defender or the sheep. 1 Sam.xvii:34-36. He did not *drive* them to the water and to pasturage; but he called his own sheep by name, so familiar was he with every one of them, and he *led* them out, and went *before* them, and the sheep *followed* him, for they knew his voice. Jno. x 3, 4 (21-22).

Is there anything more disgraceful, appalling, and any more loathsome than a hiring shepherd who would flee and leave the flock of God to be devoured by bloodthirsty wolves (John 10:12-13)? When a shepherd has freely and joyfully, without constraint, committed himself to the God-given work entrusted to him as God’s shepherd, and then flees his responsibility when the wolves attack, he is fleeing from God

and the flock that Jesus purchased with His own precious blood (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 1:18-19) into the arms of the devil and his angels (Mat. 25:41), whose arms are always opened wide to receive the despicable defector. Take a lesson from Jonah: When one flees from God, there is no peace in that direction, but rather a storm that awaits and a monster ever ready to swallow the runaway with overmuch sorrow (Jon. 1:1-17; 2 Cor. 2:7). The reader of this chapter is strongly encouraged to examine Ezekiel 34. There one will observe Inspiration's description of the shepherds who abused the work entrusted to them and witness God's abhorrence for their actions.

The following is a description of the shepherd/sheep relationship taken from class notes taught by Richard Lee Curry. Brother Curry was an elder, under whom this writer and his family served while members of the Oak Acres Church of Christ. The description is taken from Psalm 23, where David describes his relationship with God as his shepherd. In the challenge to build better elders, let the shepherds of God's flock strive to build the relationship between shepherd and sheep as David had with God as his shepherd, as exemplified below.

The Lord is my shepherd; indicates faith in the shepherd. I shall not want; is the assurance resulting from that faith. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; is a word picture of contentment. He leadeth me beside the still waters implies peace. He restoreth my soul is typical of preserving life. He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name sake entails leadership. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me depicts confidence, companionship, and courage. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies signifies providence. Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over, demonstrates joy. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever, indicative of blessings to follow and after this life immortality (Class Notes from Psalms).

### **ELDERS AS SERVANTS**

In "Building Better Elders," it is essential that the men who serve in this capacity realize the importance of being better servants. The apostle Peter, in writing to the "strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:1-2), identified himself as an elder. Peter also identified himself as a "ser-

vant” as well as an apostle and elder (2 Pet. 1:1). Peter realized that he was a shepherd/elder, and a servant who served under the Chief Shepherd and servant Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 5:1-4; Phi. 2:5-7). Peter was among the twelve apostles whom Jesus sent out on the limited commission. It was at that time that Jesus told the twelve:

The disciple is not above *his* master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more *shall they call* them of his household? (Mat. 10:24-25).

It is very unlikely that Peter forgot that principle, especially in the light of Jesus’ promise to him: “But the Comforter, *which is* the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

One of the greatest abuses of the work of a shepherd is recorded in the book of Ezekiel. While teaching Ezekiel for the Southeast School of Biblical Studies, this writer was amazed when he studied and taught Ezekiel 34, which describes the abuses God’s flock suffered at the hand of God’s shepherds as they neglected and ill-treated God’s sheep. This chapter begins by describing the failure of God’s shepherds in properly caring for His sheep. It ends with a promise to send God’s shepherd, “my servant David,” the “good shepherd,” Jesus Christ. If the shepherds, who were the recipients of Ezekiel’s inspired rebuke, had sought to be servants instead of serving themselves, then they would not have been self-serving shepherds who scattered instead of seeking God’s sheep (34:1-6). Because they were self-serving God said He would stop the selfish shepherds from shepherding His sheep (34:7-10). God promised to search, seek, and supply His sheep, and they would be satisfied (34:11-19). God said He would set a shepherd, His servant David (the Christ), and His sheep would dwell safely (34:20-31). The principles that can be learned from the study of Ezekiel 34 are valuable indeed for the elder who desires to be a better servant of God in his work as an elder.

When one realizes that as an elder he is a servant, he will have less difficulty with the problem of “being lifted up with pride” (1 Tim. 3:6), or “as being lords over *God’s* heritage” (1 Pet. 5:3). He will also be less likely to cause needless division as a servant. Let every man who desires to be a better elder remember the counsel the ancients gave to Rehoboam when he sought their advice: “And they spake unto him,

saying, If thou wilt be a **servant** unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy **servants** for ever” (1 Kin. 12:7). Because Rehoboam forsook the counsel of the old men and took the advice of the young men (which was the opposite of the old men), the kingdom divided. Could this be an indication of why God does not select young men to serve as elders? The very term *elder* implies one of mature years. Elders, if you desire to be better elders, be a better servant (Mat. 20:27-28).

### **FAITHFUL ELDERS DESERVE THE SUPPORT OF THE FLOCK**

God has made it clear that faithful elders are worthy of the support of the flock. Paul, in writing to Timothy said, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine” (1 Tim. 5:17). They are to be respected, first, because the office of an elder is ordained of God, and, second, because the elders who “rule well” work to protect the ones they oversee. It would be the height of ingratitude for the flock to slander, criticize, undermine, and seek to remove faithful elders who devote their lives to protecting the flock they serve. It is beyond comprehension to **all** fair-minded brethren how a preacher of God’s Gospel could suggest that, because some disgruntled members did not perceive elders to be leaders, the congregation could take a pole and remove them! God forbid! Furthermore, the paragraph under consideration (1 Tim. 5:17-25) demands that faithful elders be protected from slander from those they serve: “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear” (1 Tim. 5:19-20). This section leaves no ambiguity as to how an **unqualified elder** is to be removed. If the elder is qualified, God says he “is worthy of double honor.”

This elder, along with his two fellow elders, met with five elders from a neighboring congregation on October 4, 2005 and heard one of the five elders say, “Nowhere in the Bible do we have an example of how to remove an unqualified elder.” When 1 Timothy 5:17-20 was read to him, the look on his face indicated that he had never realized the implications of this passage. It appears that there are others who have never realized the implications of this passage.

The congregation that is blessed to have faithful men who serve as elders is admonished “to know them which labour among you, and are

over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. *And* be at peace among yourselves" (1 The. 5:12-13).

Perhaps one of the most familiar verses concerning the support of the eldership by the flock is found in Hebrews. Here the command is given:

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

There are times when elders find it necessary to go into the "den of lions" to guard and protect the flock they oversee. Faithful elders realize they must do so, regardless if they receive the appreciation, honor, and respect they deserve or not. But, oh, how much more joyful and rewarding it is when the congregation will let their elders know they love and appreciate them for watching for their souls. There is a great sense of security in a congregation of God's people where the congregation loves and trusts their shepherds, and the shepherds love the congregation and are willing to lay down their lives if the occasion arises to protect God's most precious possession—the church of His dear Son.

### CONCLUSION

This chapter has been prepared to offer some practical suggestions on "Building Better Elders." With what the Lord's church is facing today, serving in the office of an elder is no easy task. There are forces at work in this generation that is endangering the autonomy of the church on the local level. In many congregations elders serve as puppets under the all-seeing eyes of some dictatorial eldership, school, or institution. There are congregations today that have preachers hired and fired because of men who "seem to be somewhat" in certain locations across the nation. It is time for faithful men to arise to the challenge of the Goliaths who defy the army of the living God. Who will answer as Isaiah did: "Hear am I send me" (Isa. 6:8)?

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# BUILDING BETTER DEACONS

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## INTRODUCTION

God has a marvelous plan for building His church and organizing it according to His great wisdom. Philippians 1:1 says: “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.”

Many sermons have been preached and numerous lessons have been taught on the subject of elders, but we may have not placed as much emphasis, nor preached as many sermons, nor taught as many classes on deacons. There are a number of divinely ordained structures mentioned in the Bible, and God has given the pattern and organizational structure for each one. When God gave instructions for Noah to build the ark, He gave the specifics (Gen. 6). When God gave instructions to Moses to build the tabernacle, God was specific as to how it was to be done (instructions for the furniture, et al.) (Exo. 25-40). God gave instructions for the family (Eph. 5:21-6:4). God has also given instructions to the church and how it is to be organized. Christ is the head (Col. 1:18). God planned the church according to His eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:11). Moreover, He also gave the pattern for the organization of the local church. Deacons are an important part of that pattern and workings of the New Testament church, yet relatively little information in the Scriptures is given with regard to them. Nonetheless, sufficient and adequate information is given concerning their qualifications, duties, and performance of their duties. Tom Holland attributed the following statement to Bobby Duncan:

There is no way to measure the value of an efficient and effective corps of deacons. Often however, deacons are selected and appointed, but never given the opportunity or made to feel the responsibility to

function as deacons should. Perhaps one of the reasons many congregations see little activity on the part of their deacons is that we have failed to teach as we should on the work of deacons (Holland).

It would be possible to give a great deal of attention to the selection of elders but give little consideration to the selection of deacons, yet deacons are to have an active and vital role in the work of the church. Their special position is referred to as the office of deacon: “For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 3:13).

As we consider the office of deacons, there are extremes to be avoided: the notion that deacons have the same authority or are on equal footing with the elders, or, on the other hand, letting them be deacons in name but with little or no work to do.

In this study we will consider deacons from an Old Testament perspective and from a New Testament perspective. Then we will discuss what a deacon is, his qualifications, and his role in the work of the church.

### AN OLD TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE

Elders are bishops and shepherds who are charged with the responsibility of watching over souls.

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

Dacons are special servants who can relieve elders of many tasks so more time can be devoted to the spiritual welfare of people.

In Numbers 11, the people were murmuring because they had become tired of eating the same food again and again. Moses grew weary of their complaining and said, “wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me?” (Num. 11:11). Moses was a great man and a great leader, but he had his limitations. God instructed Moses to select seventy men who could help bear the burdens of the people. “And they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear *it* not thyself alone” (11:17).

Elders are limited in the amount work they can do; either qualified men, deacons, must be selected, or the work of God will not get done. The work that these special servants do is vital to the well-being of the

church. We need to appreciate them; we need to cooperate with them, and if they ask our help, we ought to be willing to lend a helping hand.

Another example is found in Exodus 18:13-26. If there ever was a time when a man was glad to see his father-in-law, it is recorded here. "And Moses went out to meet his father in law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and they asked each other of *their* welfare; and they came into the tent" (18:7). Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, was indeed a God-fearing man. After a good night's sleep, Jethro arose in the morning to take note of the great host of people Moses was leading. What a tremendous group camped out there in the wilderness. Suddenly, Jethro saw Moses in the midst of a group of people with others waiting in line to see him. Moses was a legislator and arbiter in disputes. With so many people, he had his hands full. Jethro stood watching Moses doing his work and then asked two questions: "What *is* this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even?" (18:14). Moses responded, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God" (18:15). Moses must have been at least mildly surprised when his father-in-law said, "The thing that thou doest *is* not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that *is* with thee: for this thing *is* too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone" (18:17-18).

Folks, that is the heart of the matter! Elders in the church are not able to bear all of the work alone. The responsibilities of elders are not matters of conjecture; they are clearly set forth in the Scriptures. They are to watch over the flock (Heb. 13:17); they are overseers (Acts 20:28); they are to feed the flock of God (1 Pet. 5:2). Although the works of deacons are not as clearly defined, they are, however, to assist in the work. Just as Jethro gave instructions to Moses, he set men over the people. Moses selected men who had ability. He also selected men who had a reverence and respect for the Word of God. Parenthetically, deacons are to hold "the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience" (1 Tim. 3:9). They are to know the book and be able to defend the Truth.

Moreover, Moses selected these men to function. It is one thing to be selected—indeed an honor—but the real value of deacons is in the service they render.

### A NEW TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE

In Matthew 20, laborers were hired to work in the vineyard. In the parable, some laborers were hired early in the morning, some at 9:00 A.M., some at noon, others at 3:00 P.M., and even some were hired at the eleventh hour. When the time came for payment, those who were hired at the eleventh hour received the same payment as those workers who were hired early in the morning. In essence, Jesus is saying: All labor in the Lord's vineyard will be honored with proper payment; therefore, their labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58). However, we are particularly concerned about a question in the parable: "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" (Mat. 20:6). In the vineyard, the people in the parable were idle until someone said: "Go ye also into the vineyard" (20:7). God's people have always needed leadership. Moses led God's people out of Egypt. Joshua led them into Canaan. Following Joshua's death, judges ruled over His people. They were later led by kings and prophets.

Sometimes people stand idle because they do not have the proper direction. When elders have the vision they ought to have for the Lord's church, there would be little room for lazy deacons. *Deacon* literally means "servant." It is defined as "one who executes the commands of another, esp. of a master, a servant, attendant, minister" (Crosswalk 1249). Thus, *deacon* means "servant, a willing servant, one who does freely what he is assigned to do." Deacons enhance the growth of the church. In a Bible class, this writer made these notes (possibly the author is James Bales):

There are some things that go unattended if they are everybody's business, because they are viewed as nobody's business. If the work of the church is to progress, there are certain things that continually need to be attended to. Some of these will be of such a nature that people will not feel it really their business voluntarily to do these things. For example, it would not be their business voluntarily to write checks on the account which the church has at the bank. Therefore, specific works should be assigned. Deacons, having been assigned to specific works by the elders, will be responsible to the elders for the works.

Many believe the first deacons of the church are recorded in Acts 6:1-6. Reading the qualifications of deacons and in connection with Acts 6 gives one the impression is that deacons are under consideration.

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because

their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples *unto them*, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid *their* hands on them.

The apostles were going to keep themselves wholly to the ministry of the Word. They gave instructions to the multitude to choose seven men who could handle the crises. Pharaoh appointed Joseph to be over all the land (Gen. 41:41). Pharaoh was in charge, but he gave much responsibility to Joseph. With all due respect to the work that deacons are often appointed to do, here was a New Testament example of deacons shouldering a tremendous responsibility. Men who are appointed over a work are to oversee it. Do you think for one moment that Joseph handled every task of storing up the grain? Did he personally build the storage bins? He was an overseer working under the oversight of Pharaoh. These men were well qualified to handle the task. They were honest men, men who were blameless from within and from without, and full of the Holy Spirit. They were men of good judgment or common sense. This was a very sensitive issue in the beginning of the Jerusalem church, and if the task was not handled properly, the church may well have split. These special servants handled the situation.

It is interesting to note that at least two of these men were evangelists. Some may have the notion that deacons are only to serve over physical matters—that is in correct. In all of this, the emphasis is on work or service rather than *position*. The reference to these seven men who were appointed to serve tables in the Jerusalem church is sometimes used as a basis for limiting the work of deacons, but as we have noted, this is a misconception of the true worth of these men. These special servants should have a full understanding of their work and labor in assisting the elders. While fulfilling this role, deacons are an inestimable value to the elders, congregation, and the Lord.

It indeed would be advantageous for the deacon and congregation to have these special servants appointed to specific tasks. There would be no value in appointing a man to serve as a deacon if there was no

work or area for him to serve. Surely there is great joy and a sense of pride and accomplishment when you have deacons functioning under the oversight of the elders, who are genuinely concerned about their business. The fact that a congregation has deacons indicates there are activities going on because deacons are workers; deacons are servants. The fact that a congregation has deacons and they are busy about their jobs is a sign of a healthy congregation working for the Lord. Churches that are dead do not need deacons.

### WHAT IS A DEACON?

Again, *deacon* literally means “a servant,” and it is used to refer to lots of different people in the Bible. As we have previously noted, *deacon* was originally defined as “one who executes the commands of another, a servant, attendant or minister” (Crosswalk 1249) Paul uses this term several times in Romans. It is translated *minister* in referring to the civil authorities being the minister of God (13:4). This means the government is a minister or a servant of God to carry out its duties. Our Lord Jesus Christ is also referred to as a servant or minister (15:8). Again it is the same word *deacon*. Phoebe our sister is called a servant (16:1). Again, this is the same word. In 1 Corinthians 3:5 Paul and Apollos are referred to as servants, which may be confusing. How could Jesus, a woman, or a government be called a *deacon*? Here is the solution. “Servant” (*diokinos*) is used in the New Testament in two different ways. It is used in an official sense (1 Tim. 3:10), as an office of a deacon, and it is used in a generic sense, just meaning a servant authorized by God in some way.

Deacons are not co-elders or joint-elders. Decision making belongs to the elders: “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*” (1 Pet. 5:2). This was said to elders—not deacons. The elders are described as those who rule well in the church, but not so with the deacons, because the deacons are not the overseers of the church. Sometimes, in various religions, churches will set up a board of deacons, and the deacons are the overseers of that church, but that concept is without biblical authority. *Deacon* is a different word from the one translated “overseer.” However, there is great value in elders and deacons discussing the work together. The ideas and suggestions of deacons often prove to be very valuable to the elders. The elders and deacons meet for the purpose of assimilating ideas. Also, this time can be used for the elders to communicate to the deacons concerning

current affairs or programs of work. These meetings are not for making final decisions for the church; caution and discernment should be used so the authority of the elders is not usurped.

Deacons are not elders, neither are they *junior elders*. Some people may view it this way. A man becomes a deacon; then, by and by, he will step on up to being an elder. Even though that is sometimes the thought of man, that is not the way it is in God's Word. The fact of the matter is, there are two different sets of qualifications, and a man may serve as a deacon until he is old—maybe even until he dies. Furthermore, a man may become an elder, having never served as a deacon. These are two different roles. There is no more correlation between deacon and elder than between preacher and elder. Just because a man is a deacon does not mean he will be an elder. A deacon has an important role to play in the church, but it is separate and apart from the elder's role. He is not a junior elder or an elder-in-waiting.

Furthermore, a deacon cannot be a woman. This did not used to be a problem among the Lord's people, but it has become a problem over the past few years. In the past thirty or so years the Women's Liberation Movement took place, and it made its inroads into the Lord's church. Thus, in some places the role of women has become a pressing matter. Can a woman be an elder? Can a woman be a deacon? The answer is of course **no**. In both lists of qualifications in 1 Timothy 3, the elders and deacons both must be husbands of one wife (3:2, 11). Occasionally, someone will come upon *diakonos* and find that Phoebe is called *diakonos*; so there you have it—a woman is a deacon! However, in 1 Timothy 3:10, Paul is talking about the office of a deacon, and in the office of a deacon the person who is qualified is the husband of one wife. That should forever settle the matter. Moreover, in a lecture on the work of deacons, Terry Joe Kee cited a quote from G. C. Brewer that seems appropriate.

The duties of the bishops and deacons were, no doubt, different; but the degrees of rank and importance of work is just the estimation of men. Some things God has said to us may appear to be more important than some other commands, but we do not have the right to pronounce them so. However, much the function of the deacons differs from those of the elders, it is impossible for them to please God and not perform their functions. Hence, it is just as necessary that they serve faithfully as deacons as that the elders serve as elders (212).

## WHO IS QUALIFIED TO SERVE AS A DEACON?

The scriptural qualifications for deacons are set forth in 1 Timothy 3:7-13.

Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Likewise *must* the deacons *be* grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being *found* blameless. Even so *must their wives be* grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

There are three negative and four or five positive qualifications. We will consider the positive ones first. A deacon is to be grave (3:8). He is to have a serious outlook. W. E. Vine says, “Seriousness of purpose and to self-respect in conduct” (513). That is so important. This does not mean that a deacon does not have a sense of humor. In fact, it is good for deacons or anyone to have a sense of humor. Being grave does not prohibit that, but what it means to be *grave* is that they are serious about serious things. It means that he really loves the church, he loves the souls of men, and he knows how to be serious about that. We ought to be very serious about the value and the importance of the church. One positive quality of a deacon is a man who is grave.

Another is holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. *Mystery* does not mean mysterious; it means that which was unrevealed and now it has been revealed to us through the Scriptures. A deacon is to hold the truth in a pure conscience. In other words, he is to be a man who is a sincere Christian. If he is not a sincere Christian he is not qualified to be a deacon. He has a child-like faith before God; he wants to go to heaven. He wants to please God, and he is serious about these matters.

Third, he cannot be double-tongued—saying one thing to one person and something else to another (Vine 336). After the presentation of a sermon one Sunday morning, a lady spoke to the preacher in a complimentary way about his sermon. Then, in the foyer the same lady was talking to someone else and low-rating the sermon. James says a double minded man is unstable in all of his ways (1:8). A deacon is a person that you can count on. He does not say one thing to the elders

and then speak against them. He holds the faith with a pure conscience. In other words, a man who is qualified to be a deacon has to be someone who always tells the truth.

Fourth, deacons are to be first proved being found blameless. *Blameless* is also found in the qualifications of the elders. *Blameless* means not open to censure, irreproachable. “It implies not merely acquittal, but the absence of even a charge or accusation against a person” (Vine 133). There is no sin in his life by which he is distinguished. He is not known for any continuing sin, and furthermore any time he realizes there is sin in his life, he corrects it. One who possesses this quality cannot live in sin. If he finds out that he has done something to hurt somebody, then he goes to the person and makes it right. If he has made some mistake and is able to correct it, then he goes back and corrects it as quickly as he can. Otherwise, his past would reflect poorly on his present; he cannot be known for living in some sin. He is someone who is known to be a faithful man, being found blameless.

Also, there are three qualifications that we will identify as negative. The first is that a deacon is not to be given to much wine. This is not a license for one to be a little drunk. There are those who will say, “It says they are not to be given to much wine; therefore, it’s okay to drink a little wine.” It does not imply anything of the sort. Romans 12:2 teaches us that we are not to be conformed to this world. That it is a sweeping prohibition, but does that mean if you want to be conformed a little bit to this world or sin a little bit it would be all right? No. The prohibition that is given to wine here is not a license to have a little wine. A deacon is not a man who is known for drinking. There is no provision for the use of wine in any form (cf. Pro. 20:1).

A deacon is not to be greedy of filthy lucre which is generally identified as is ill-gotten gain. The principle here is that he is not a covetous man. He is not a man that is so consumed with his business that he cannot focus on the things of God. He is somebody who is honest about his money; he is a man of integrity. He would not cheat a man (or the government) if he had a chance no matter how much money he could make by so doing. Jesus teaches us that the Lord’s service must come first (Mat. 6:33). Moreover, the office of a deacon is not to be used for self-promotion. Someone might take the approach: “I am running for office. I also am a deacon in the Lord’s church. Therefore, vote for me.” This is the idea of base gain. A deacon is not greedy of filthy lucre.

In the midst of the qualifications of deacons we find: “Even so *must their wives be* grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things” (1 Tim. 3:11). Here is something in the qualification of deacons that is not found in the qualifications of the elders. Some have tried to dismiss this by saying that it does not have reference to the deacons’ wives—it only has reference to women in general. Here is the heart of the matter: it has to be in reference to deacons’ wives because it is sandwiched between two other verses which talk about the deacons, and he says their wives must be this.

Why would qualification of the wives be found in reference to the deacons and not in reference to the elders? The author thinks that perhaps the reason is that a man who is qualified to be an elder must “ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity” (3:4). In Titus 1 Paul says that he has faithful children. Perhaps those things would imply that the elder’s wife would possess all of these qualities. On the other hand, a deacon does not have to have all of the qualifications of an elder. He is not a shepherd of the flock, and one reason why an elder has to have a faithful family and rule well his own family is because if he does not do that, how does anyone know he is going to be able to take care of the family of God? A deacon does not rule in the church—he is a servant, but not a shepherd of the flock. Thus, here is a man who is to be a deacon, and we are to take note of his wife. You have to not only make sure he is faithful, but that his wife is faithful. Why is that? A man might say: “Well, you are not asking my wife to be a deacon; you are asking me, so why do you really care whether or not my wife is faithful?” Note:

Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 3:12-13).

This has to do with their influence in the community. The point here is that, when a man is put into the office of a deacon, immediately he becomes recognized in the community as a representative of the church in a way that is expanded from his Christian duty when he was not a deacon. When he becomes a deacon, he will now be viewed by members of the community as a representative of the church. For this reason he has to be exemplary in his Christian life. He needs to be someone who represents the Lord’s people well. So, the instruction given to deacon’s wives points to that. She cannot be someone who is known as

a slanderer. A *slanderer* goes around saying things about people that are not true. Someone who tears others down. She cannot be do those type of things. A deacon's wife could disqualify him from that office. She has to be faithful, and she has to have a good reputation because his family is going to be looked at as representatives of the church. This principle should hold true to all Christians, but it is specifically mentioned for deacons' wives.

### THE ROLE OF DEACONS

The work of the entire congregation, including deacons, is overseen by the elders (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17). However, the deacons may be assigned some specific areas where they can serve. In fact, deacons may assist the elders in almost every avenue of their work.

In Acts 6, we read of those who were to "serve tables" or to care for those who had a need. Most congregations must regularly deal with benevolence. In Luke 10, we read of the man who was beaten and left on the side of the road for dead, and the benevolent Samaritan came along to help. The beaten man was not a freeloader knocking on the door of the good Samaritan with some kind of hard luck story. If it was one of these hard luck stories, it would go something along this line: "Now, my mother, down in Jericho, is very, very sick, and I left two or three days ago. I live up in Dan, and I was coming down through the country and my chariot broke down and I really need some help because I am trying to get to see my sick mother." *Freeloaders* have perfected their stories, and sometimes it takes a "Solomon" to know how to decipher their stories. This is a great area of work for deacons to function. Allowing deacons to take care of this work will allow elders more time for the spiritual oversight of the church.

There are numerous tasks around the building and grounds that must be attended: opening and locking doors of the building for services, checking on the heating and cooling system, cleaning and maintaining the building and grounds, or checking attendance at worship services so the elders can be abreast of those who may become negligent in attendance. Deacons can give assistance to those preparing for baptism and the cleaning of the baptistry. There is the weekly privilege of making sure the emblems of the Lord's Supper are in order. They can help with the paying of the bills. The tasks for deacons are almost endless.

These men are also well-qualified to handle more serious responsibilities. These men are heads of their families, and often run their own businesses. They indeed are capable of shouldering more than just the elementary task. They should visit and encourage, right along with the elders, those who have become discouraged.

It may be that sometimes elders want to micro-manage every area of activity. While elders are over every area of work, more often than not, deacons can be a tremendous asset in assisting the elders bear some heavy loads. May the deacons use their God-given talents to serve. May they not use this office as a stepping stone to the eldership. What a joy and a privilege to serve as a deacon: may each deacon recognize the value of his service, and whatever good comes from their service in the kingdom, may they give God the glory.

### CONCLUSION

*Deacon* means “a servant, a minister,” and he is a special servant who represents the church in an official way. The work of deacons is a very important work. God knew that all need encouragement from time to time. That is why Peter wrote: “The elders which are among you I exhort” (1 Pet. 5:1). Just as elders need encouragement, deacons need to hear words of commendation. Serving as a deacon can sometimes be a thankless job. However, expressing appreciation will give them a sense of satisfaction and inspire them to not grow weary in well-doing. Good deacons are a blessing to any congregation. Just as churches need competent, qualified elders to lead, it also needs competent, qualified deacons to serve.

Are you not thankful for deacons? Let us encourage young men in the Lord’s church to grow up and aspire to be deacons.

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# BUILDING BETTER PREACHERS

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## INTRODUCTION

Great preachers are not born, they are made. Becoming a preacher is hard work, and continuing in the work of preaching is even harder work. Preachers who will be effective in their work are literally a work in progress. Notice that *effective* was used in the previous sentence, not *efficient*. Efficient preachers are good office managers, who do what they need to do to get by, which is not the same as being an effective preacher. Effective preachers are great preachers because their work impacts the spiritual lives of others in a positive way. Most importantly, effective preachers are great preachers because they strive to do their work in harmony with the will and mind of King Jesus. Effective preachers continue to ask themselves: “How can I do a better job of communicating God’s Word to people so they will acknowledge its authority and make needed changes in their lives?” How are better preachers built? While there is a multiplicity of answers to this question, a few of them will be answered in the following pages.

## JOURNEY OF THE HEART

There are three stages in which preachers can be classified: the fairytale stage, the treading water stage, and the stage of effective preaching. Becoming a better preacher is a journey of the heart, as the preacher travels from the fairytale stage to the effective stage of

preaching. Most men who decide to become preachers have an idea in their mind about what it must be like to be a preacher. Some men enter the work of preaching assuming that everyone they come into contact with will be as excited about the Truth as they are. Some men enter preaching with the misconception that there are only a few major doctrines that are controversial by nature. Some believe that having *Christians* in control of their wages and job security is much more secure than what is afforded to people in the secular world. Some men think that within a few years of preaching they will be in great demand for Gospel meetings and lectureships. Some men think that they have the argument to end all religious arguments. Preachers in this stage are full of enthusiasm and believe that they can reach everyone. Most preachers begin their work in the fairytale stage. It does not take long for a preacher to realize that what he thought preaching was all about, and what preaching actually is, are two different things all together. At this end of the fairytale stage, if a preacher decides to stay in preaching, he will generally move into the “treading water” stage.

Things happen—things that send a wake-up call to the preacher living in fairytale land and plunge him into the cold icy water of reality. The treading water stage is where a preacher generally finds himself after he realizes that all of his dreams about what preaching is all about were just dreams. It takes some preachers longer than others to get to this stage, but sooner or later most preachers find themselves in the “treading water” stage. A swimmer treads water when he wishes to remain in the water without allowing his head to be submerged, yet he does not wish to move in any specific direction. Treading water allows him to remain in a relatively fixed position, while using the arms and legs to remain afloat. This maneuver aptly describes what a preacher goes through when he simply tries to survive. Maybe he wants to be able to enjoy job security, but he knows that the congregation is divided, and both sides expect his support. Maybe he has been told for the first time: “You need to tone it down some: we have to live here; you don’t.” Maybe he learns that his circle of “preaching friends” is supporting error, and if he chooses to stand against them, it will hurt his *standing* among the brethren. There are many forces that work on a preacher to push him to “tread water.”

Many great preachers have admitted finding themselves in this stage. Jeremiah was excited when he undertook his prophetic office. Notice Jeremiah 15:16: “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and

thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts.” As these words are read in the overall context of Jeremiah, it is evident that Jeremiah was reminiscing about his fairytale stage. As the years moved on and Jeremiah realized that the people hated his message, and the people were willing to kill him to get him to stop preaching God’s Word, Jeremiah said to God, “O LORD, thou hast deceived” (Jer. 20:7). When Jeremiah actually did what the Lord expected him to do, he realized that fairytales are never reality; he was deceived!

Jeremiah even found himself “treading water” for a time. This great man of God was in pain because of the sin of his people and what was in store for them. The problem was that the people of Judah, including Jeremiah’s colleagues, family, and friends, would not repent of their evil ways. Anyone who has preached for any length of time ought to be able to sympathize with Jeremiah’s pain. What did Jeremiah do? He began praying for the people, and his prayer was not what it should have been. God told Jeremiah three times to stop praying for those people (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). While the exact contents of Jeremiah’s prayers are uncertain, it is obvious that Jeremiah wanted to find a way for his people to be spared without their immediate repentance and rededication to the Lord. He tried to find some middle ground the Lord was not offering. When Jeremiah received his commission, God told him, “be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them” (Jer. 1:17). Jeremiah almost crossed the line and found himself destroyed (Jer. 15:19), but he repented and became an effective preacher of God’s Word.

Not all existence in the “treading water” stage of preaching is characterized by compromise. However, compromise will eventually result if a preacher does not do something to get out of this stage. There are some preachers who stay in the “treading water” stage their entire careers, thereby serving as “tenured” preachers who are nothing more than efficient office managers and people pleasers. Preachers who do not have a deep sense of debt toward Jesus and what He did on the cross for humanity, will either cease preaching, or they will become efficient preachers, whose desire is just to keep on getting by. The church has too many “efficient” preachers; what it needs is more “effective” preachers, whose altruism motivates them to move through the stages of preaching and make an impact in the lives of others.

When a preacher finally realizes that his work is not simply to preach the truth, but to preach all of the truth (regardless of its reception), then he can really begin to make a difference in the lives of others. In the effective stage of preaching, the preacher is more concerned about what Jesus thinks of his preaching than what the brethren think of his preaching. He is more concerned about what Jesus thinks of his work and associations than what men think about them. When a preacher is in the effective stage of preaching, he will actually preach a message that is out of season with men (cf. 2 Tim. 4:2), because he knows that Jesus expects him to do so even if it means having to move, again! When Jeremiah finally moved into the effective stage of his work he said, “But *his word* was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not *stay*” (Jer. 20:9). Effective preachers are men who cannot hold back the message Divine. Like Paul, they will not fail to preach and teach “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). The effective stage of preaching is also a growing process. There are things that preachers can and should do to help them become “better” or even more “effective” preachers, a few of which follow.

### NEVER CEASE TO LEARN

Learning should be a life-long process. The more knowledge a preacher has, the better he will be at communicating to diverse people. Effective preachers are life-long students of the Book. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) termed 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus as the Pastorals. Because of the confusion surrounding *pastor*, and because of the nature of the aforementioned epistles, this writer prefers to refer to “Pastorals” as the “Management Epistles.” The Management epistles are for the management of the church. In these epistles, instruction was given to Timothy and Titus about the appointment of elders and deacons, the work of preachers, and leadership positions in general—“that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).

Notice some of the problems addressed by Paul in the Management Epistles. Some were teaching different or unauthorized doctrines (1 Tim. 1:3). There was an obsession with myths and endless genealogies (1 Tim. 1:4; Tit. 3:9), which was related to Judaism. Hymenaeus and Philetus taught that the resurrection had already taken place (2 Tim.

2:17-18). Some false teachers were concerned with teaching the Mosaic Law (1 Tim. 1:7; Tit. 1:10, 14; 3:9). From 1 Timothy 4:1ff, it appears that it (the abstaining from marriage and certain foods) was being taught. There was a problem with some teaching false knowledge (1 Tim. 6:20). Some were arguing about matters that are not part of the faith (1 Tim. 6:4, 20; 2 Tim. 2:14; Tit. 1:10). There was a desire to make a profit off of this heresy (1 Tim. 6:5; Tit. 1:11). Some were self pleasing, arrogant—foolish boasters, without family love, breakers of covenants, betrayers, and they were corrupting women—which may have been the problem of taking advantage of house church hosts (2 Tim. 3:1-7). To charge some “that they teach no other doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:3), the preacher was going to have to stand committed to the learning process. Paul told Timothy, “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Tim. 4:16). In another place he said, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

After noting the context of the false teaching addressed in the Management Epistles, the comments of Barnes (1798-1870), and Gill (1690-1771) regarding 2 Timothy 2:15 are of interest. Barnes wrote:

Give diligence 2 Pet. 2:10, or make an effort so to discharge the duties of the ministerial office as to meet the divine approbation. The object of the ministry is not to please men. Such doctrines should be preached, and such plans formed, and such a manner of life pursued, as God will approve. To do this demands study or care—for there are many temptations to the opposite course; there are many things the tendency of which is to lead a minister to seek popular favor rather than the divine approval. If any man please God, it will be as the result of deliberate intention and a careful life.

Gill wrote:

Not unto men, as pleasing them; for such who study to please men, are not the servants of Christ; and sometimes those that are approved to and by men, are disapproved of by God and Christ: but unto God, showing all fidelity and uprightness; speaking out the Gospel openly, and freely, with all sincerity, as in the sight of God; commending themselves to him, and to every man’s conscience, by manifestation of the truth; and such will hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant” another day.

The general idea is that to please God as ministers of Jesus Christ, preachers must be students and practitioners of the Book (cf. 1 Tim.

4:16), seeking to please God and not men. The study and application of God's Word needs to be a daily routine for effective preaching.

Every day in which a preacher fails to dig deeply into the Scriptures is a wasted day. Preachers can only move forward with certainty upon the firm footing of the truth of God's Holy Word. Error never rests and will wait on no man. If preachers do not learn the message divine and apply it, the results, as noted by Paul, are certain:

I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

Effective preachers spend several hours each day digging deeper into God's Word to deliver it to people as God intended it to be delivered.

### **BETTER TEACHERS MAKE BETTER PREACHERS**

While preachers must be men of the Book, preachers who want to become better preachers will also become students of how people learn. Two years in preacher training school is just about enough time to become acquainted with the Scriptures. It hardly affords one the opportunity to learn so many important lessons about the work of teaching itself. While this writer was a student at the Memphis School of Preaching, he remembers hearing one of his instructors repeatedly comment about how brethren do not listen to preachers. When having to repeat himself, this instructor would say to his students: "Even some of you don't listen!" This preacher graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching and two universities before really understanding why some brethren do not listen. A man can know the Book and quote it all day long and still not be an effective preacher. A few classes in homiletics are important to sermon design and delivery, but good teaching skills require a much broader understanding about the learning process in general!

Understanding multiple intelligences allows a preacher to present his material so it will be better suited to a larger audience. Usually a teacher teaches the way he likes to be taught, and he usually teaches the material with which he is most comfortable. When this happens,

consistently over time, there are deficiencies in congregational learning. A congregation consists of many different learning styles and of brothers and sisters with differing levels of understanding. Effective teaching and preaching will be aimed at different learning styles and will be differentiated to cover as many different levels of understanding as possible. The theory of multiple intelligences was developed by Howard Gardner and explained in his work, *Frames of Mind*. Gardner's multiple intelligence theory suggests that teachers need to expand their repertoire of techniques, tools, and strategies beyond the typical linguistic and logical ones predominantly used. While the theory of multiple intelligences is attributed to Gardner, who takes the position that the alleged evolutionary process shaped multiple intelligences, students of the Bible acknowledge that Jesus, the master teacher, understood what is in man (John 2:25), and adapted His teaching to multiple intelligences that were actually created within man.

The following quotations are Gardner's definitions of each of the eight intelligences in his own words. Gardner describes **linguistic intelligence** as follows:

The capacity to use language, your native language, and perhaps other languages, to express what's on your mind and to understand other people. Poets really specialize in linguistic intelligence, but any kind of writer, orator, speaker, lawyer, or a person for whom language is an important stock in trade highlights linguistic intelligence.

The second intelligence that Gardner explains is **logical-mathematical intelligence**:

People with a highly developed logical-mathematical intelligence understand the underlying principles of some kind of a causal system, the way a scientist or a logician does; or can manipulate numbers, quantities, and operations, the way a mathematician does.

**Spatial intelligence** is the third intelligence upon which Gardner focuses:

Spatial intelligence refers to the ability to represent the spatial world internally in your mind—the way a sailor or airplane pilot navigates the large spatial world, or the way a chess player or sculptor represents a more circumscribed spatial world. Spatial intelligence can be used in the arts or in the sciences.

The fourth intelligence that Gardner elucidates is **bodily kinesthetic intelligence**.

Bodily kinesthetic intelligence is the capacity to use your whole body or parts of your body—your hand, your fingers, your arms—to solve

a problem, make something, or put on some kind of a production. The most evident examples are people in athletics or the performing arts, particularly dance or acting.

The fifth intelligence Gardner examines is **musical intelligence**:

Musical intelligence is the capacity to think in music, to be able to hear patterns, recognize them, remember them, and perhaps manipulate them. People who have a strong musical intelligence don't just remember music easily—they can't get it out of their minds.

**Interpersonal intelligence** is Gardner's sixth intelligence:

Interpersonal intelligence is understanding other people. It's an ability we all need, but is at a premium if you are a teacher, clinician, salesperson, or politician. Anybody who deals with other people has to be skilled in the interpersonal sphere.

The seventh intelligence that Gardner defines is **intrapersonal intelligence**:

Interpersonal intelligences refers to having an understanding of yourself, of knowing who you are, what you can do, what you want to do, how you react to things, which things to avoid, and which things to gravitate toward.

The eighth intelligence noted by Gardner is the **naturalist intelligence**:

Naturalist intelligence designates the human ability to discriminate among living things (plants, animals) as well as sensitivity to other features of the natural world (clouds, rock configurations) (Checkley 8-13).

Gardner's work suggests that learners learn in a variety of ways, and preachers who fail to acknowledge this and adapt to different learning styles will continue to wonder why brethren do not listen. One of the blessings of modern technology is that a preacher can make use of many different tools that allow him to contact a number of different learning styles without becoming a showman or turning his preaching and teaching into an entertainment session. Space limitations will not afford an opportunity to discuss different ways to adapt the expository text to differing styles of learning. This writer recommends the book *Classroom Instruction That Works* to all preachers and Bible class teachers. Naturally, not all of the material in this book is adaptable to the public teaching and preaching sessions of the church, but much of it is. Additionally, while some of the articles in the book refer to evolution, the teaching strategies and concepts taught in the book are excellent and they are important tools in any preacher's/teacher's toolbox.

One teaching tool that is worthy of some discussion herein is the graphic organizer. Graphic organizers can be used in bulletins, PowerPoint presentations, and sermon handouts. Originally called a structured overview, graphic organizers were developed to make practical application of Ausubel's cognitive theory of meaningful reception learning (Griffin and Malone). Ausubel noted that learning is enhanced by relating it to prior knowledge, and by providing structured overviews of new material. Ausubel stated that structured overviews "provide ideational scaffolding for the stable incorporation of the more differentiated material in the learning passage" (148). Thus learners are enabled to actually encode more new information within the schematic of graphic organization (Hall and Hall). Most learners, to varying degrees, learn visually (Jonassen and Cole); therefore, graphic organizers are tools that generally aid most learners.

Graphic organizers are effective tools to aid learning. Mapping cause and effect, comparing and contrasting concepts, note taking, organizing problems and solutions, and relating information to main ideas or themes can be beneficial to learners. Graphic organizers can be used to create new ideas, brainstorm, structure material, aid learning new material by integrating it with previously learned material (Green). Graphic organizers are powerful learning tools that preachers should use to help communicate the Word of truth.

Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock identified nine teaching strategies that have a research-based track record for improving learning. Those strategies are identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, reinforcing effort and providing recognition, homework and practice, nonlinguistic representations, cooperative learning, setting objectives and providing feedback, generating and testing hypotheses and questions, cues, and advance organizers. The strategy referred to as "nonlinguistic representations" mainly deals with the proper and effective use of graphic organizers. An interesting facet of Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock's research is that they looked at a multiplicity of studies and based their research on the median percentile point gains (6-8). In regard to nonlinguistic representations the median range of the research examined reveals an average student percentile point gain between 19 and 40 points (74). These findings are significant. Of further interest is the fact that graphic organizers fit nicely into most of the other instructional categories discussed in *Classroom Instruction that Works*.

Preachers who want to become better preachers, more effective preachers, will learn how to reach their audiences. At the end of the day the effective preacher also understands that not every person wants to learn the Truth. Regardless of what *methods* are employed, there are four types of soil, only one of which is fertile ground for the seed of the kingdom. While this writer would love to write on about how to employ different instructional strategies that preachers can use to become better preachers, it is hoped that the aforementioned paragraphs were enough to create a thirst for preachers to want to become better by learning how men learn.

### **CHALLENGE THE BRETHREN TO DIG DEEPER INTO THE WORD**

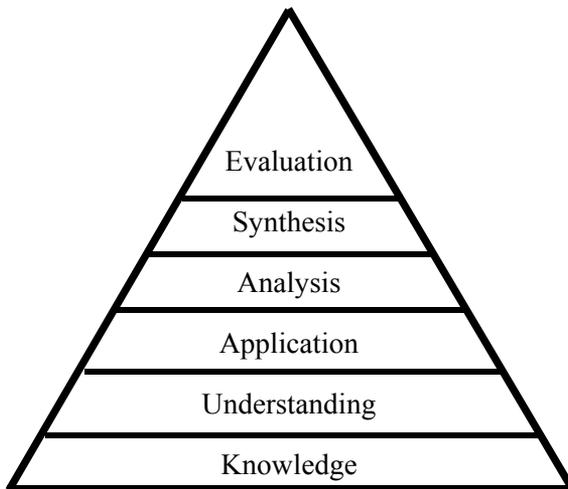
Effective preachers will use their Bible classes to challenge the brethren to grow in the faith according to their abilities. As a rule of thumb, about 80% of the material taught the learner will not remember the first time it is taught. Effective teaching involves allowing the brethren to have many opportunities to contact the material being studied. Some brethren seem to murmur about a study taking too long, but the majority of the brethren need time to allow the material to soak in their memories. There are many methods that can be utilized to help teachers get the message across. One of the most important methods is that of asking questions.

When brethren know that they will be called upon to answer a question, they will think at a deeper level. Many adults are shy and timid and do not like to be called upon to answer questions, but through patient persistence those problems can be overcome. A list of the brethren can easily be kept at the lectern so the teacher can be sure that he is calling on all of the brethren, and not just a select few. As a preacher prepares his lesson, he can write a list of questions, and after he really knows his audience, he can even assign a brother or sister's name to that question as he prepares for his class.

When asking questions, there are a few things that need to happen to help learners learn at their full potential. First of all, it is a good idea to say the person's name before asking the question, or ask the question and wait about 3 seconds before assigning it to someone. After the question is asked and assigned, allow 2 or 3 seconds to elapse before probing the learner for the answer, or redirecting the question to another person. The tendency is to want to help a person struggling to

answer the question, but allowing the learner to struggle activates the thinking process at a deeper level, and as a result he or she is more likely to learn in a meaningful way.

A problem that hinders the church from maturing is that too much teaching that in Bible classes and in the pulpit is what is called lower level teaching. Benjamin Bloom identified six levels within the cognitive domain (Bloom), from the simple recall or recognition of facts, as the lowest level, through increasingly more complex and abstract mental levels, to the highest order, which is classified as evaluation. If a preacher/teacher focuses a majority of his preaching and teaching at the knowledge, comprehension, and application levels of learning, then the congregation will not mature and develop as our Lord intended. Brethren need to be challenged to think at higher levels of thinking. Descriptions of the six levels of cognitive domain and verbal cues that probe intellectual activity follow.



**Knowledge** is defined as remembering previously learned material. This may involve the recall of a wide range of material, from specific facts to complete theories, but all that is required is the bringing to mind of the appropriate information. Knowledge represents the lowest level of learning outcomes in the cognitive domain. It is impossible to move to higher order thinking without having a solid base of knowledge, but if all of one's teaching stays at this level, he will never help

others learn how to make proper application of the Scriptures. Verbal cues that are used to ask knowledge based questions are arrange, define, duplicate, label, list, memorize, name, order, recognize, relate, recall, repeat, reproduce, state, et al.

**Comprehension** is defined as the ability to grasp the meaning of material. Comprehension may be shown by translating material from one form to another (symbols to words), by interpreting material (explaining or summarizing), and by estimating future trends (predicting consequences or effects). These learning outcomes go one step beyond the simple remembering of material, and represent the lowest level of understanding. Verbal cues used to ask questions that this level include classify, describe, discuss, explain, express, identify, indicate, locate, recognize, report, restate, review, select, translate, et al.

**Application** refers to the ability to use learned material in new and concrete situations. This may include the application of such things as rules, methods, concepts, principles, laws, and theories. Learning outcomes in this area require a higher level of understanding than those under comprehension. Christians may comprehend the meaning of the signs in Revelation 12:13, and acknowledge that Satan wants to persecute the church, but by going a little deeper and applying the truth of Revelation 12:13, Christians know that it is not a strange thing to find Satan attacking congregations and seeking their demise. Verbal cues used to activate this cognitive domain include apply, choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, practice, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write, et al.

**Analysis** refers to the ability to break down material into its component parts so its organizational structure may be understood. This may include the identification of the parts, analysis of the relationships between parts, and recognition of the organizational principles involved. Learning outcomes here represent a higher intellectual level than comprehension and application, because they require an understanding of both the content and the structural form of the material. Verbal cues used to help students analyze material include: analyze, appraise, calculate, categorize, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test, et al.

**Synthesis** refers to the ability to put parts together to form a new whole. Learning outcomes in this area stress creative behaviors, with major emphasis on the formulation of new patterns or structures. The Psalmist said, “The sum of thy word is truth” (Psa. 119:160—ASV),

and Paul wrote, “Now of the things which we have spoken *this is* the sum” (Heb. 8:1), both of which focus on what is called the synthesis cognitive domain. Many in the denominational world look at John 3:16 as the exclusive pattern for salvation. With deeper study they might learn that several verses needed to be applied before the plan of salvation is realized (Rom. 10:17, 10; Acts 2:28; 1 Cor. 15:58; et al). While members of the church understand this principle, many of our brethren have yet to arrange the Lord’s pattern for New Testament fellowship in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord. Not enough teaching and preaching takes place in the higher order cognitive domains. Verbal cues used to activate this domain include: arrange, assemble, collect, compose, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, manage, organize, plan, prepare, propose, set up, write, et al.

**Evaluation** is concerned with the ability to judge the value of material for a given purpose. Judgments are to be based on definite criteria, which is the righteous standard of Truth (John 7:24). These may be internal criteria (organization) or external criteria (relevance to the purpose). Learning outcomes in this area are highest in the cognitive hierarchy because they contain elements of all the other categories, and they are conscious value judgments based on clearly defined criteria. Notice some of the verbal cues used to activate this domain include the words: debate, appraise, argue, assess, attach, choose, compare, defend, estimate, judge, predict, rate, core, select, support, value, evaluate. Effective preachers and teaches will actually work their classes into polemic discussions, which are the spiritual exercises that are essential to healthy congregations of our Lord’s people (cf. 1 Tim. 4:8). Brethren who are taught to think at this level are not likely to argue about whether or not Adam had a belly button!

Effective preachers learn how to study materials to condense from them what is beneficial. Benjamin Bloom advocated the false idea that there are no absolute truths. Accordingly, some preachers would immediately discard all of Bloom’s material because of his Godless approach to learning. However, as can be easily demonstrated, Bloom’s understanding of the cognitive process is solid and effective; preachers will use it to their benefit, as well as Gardner’s theory of multi-intelligence, and a number of other effective teaching approaches that are available for brethren who want to effectively communicate the Truth.

## THE COUNSELING PREACHER

Stressed in some preacher training schools is the idea that preachers need to stay out of the counseling business. The reason for this advice is that preachers, unless trained, are not professional counselors, and untrained counselors can cause needless problems for themselves and the congregations with which they labor. However, there is one area in the field of counseling in which all preachers should be trained, and that is the field of pre-marital counseling. Is it not incredible that the person who cuts your hair needs to know more to get a license to cut your hair than a couple needs to know to obtain a marriage license? A teenager needs to know some things before he or she obtains a driver's license, so safety issues and concerns are addressed before needless problems arise, but a couple entering marriage does not need to know much of anything about marriage to obtain a marriage license. After all, divorce is a billion-dollar industry in America, so "Don't rock the boat!"

Most people going into marriage want their marriage to work. This new couple is going to build something when they unite their lives. What is the blueprint for the home? God's Word! Who is better prepared to help this new couple learn what God expects from them than a faithful Gospel preacher? When a man and a woman come together in marriage, they need to come together with the knowledge that God expects them to make their marriage work. In marriage, a home is built. That home needs to be built according to the blueprint of New Testament Christianity and by using all of the *tools* God gave mankind to succeed in marriage! When God fashioned the woman from man's side, he brought her to the man, and intended the two to be one for the rest of their days on earth. To whom would Eve have been remarried, if she decided to sever her marriage to Adam? To whom would Adam have been remarried, if he decided to sever his marriage with Eve? To the first couple, divorce was not an option. To those who love God, divorce is not an option!

Premarital counseling differs from all other kinds of counseling because it is preventive in nature, which is one of many reasons why preachers need to be involved in pre-marital counseling. It is designed to offer help in advance of problems. Premarital counseling is the process of educating people about the obstacles that often destroy marriages. Preachers will certainly be effective, better preachers, when they refuse to join a couple together in marriage without first taking

that couple through six to eight weeks of serious and intensive premarital counseling, which address at least the following issues with them:

- Financial issues that effect marriage.
- Family laws that married people need to know.
- How well do you know the person you are going to marry?
- Prenuptial, antenuptial, and postnuptial contracts; who needs them and who does not?
- How to resolve conflicts in the home.
- The different stages of marital life and problems that people normally face during those stages.
- How to measure the strengths and weaknesses of your relationship.
- How to recognize and deal with the expectations that others sometimes place on newlyweds.
- How to communicate and understand the expectations that each person in the relationship has in regard to the other person.
- Your preparedness for marriage.
- The likelihood of your marriage being successful and what to do if the potential for failure exists in your relationship.
- How to strengthen the areas in your relationship that need to be strengthened.
- Parenting issues that need to be addressed before children are brought into the marriage.
- In cases of Scriptural remarriage, how to integrate homes with children from other marriages
- What the expected roles of husband and wife in the eyes of the couple are.

Preachers who prepare themselves to do this work can take advantage of university courses, or, at the very least, they can read several books on this subject and learn how to effectively meet the need of premarital counseling. Additionally, it is not too difficult to learn how to administer various assessments and inventories that can help open a couple's eyes to the reality of their marriage in the weeks, months, and years to come.

## VISITING MAKES BETTER PREACHERS

Preachers have varying ideas about visitation. Some preachers take the position that visitation is not really part of the work of an evangelist. Some congregations hire a preacher and expect him to do the visiting for the congregation. Both of the aforementioned views do little to help the church grow as it needs to grow. Much could be written about both of the ideas previously noted, but the task at hand is to discuss building better preachers. The fact is that too many preachers are efficient office managers, but efficiency is not the goal. The effective preacher is going to get away from his office or study and be involved in preaching and teaching outside of the church building (cf. Acts 20:20), and he will visit the brethren (Mat. 25:40; Jam. 2:14).

By visiting it is understood that the preacher is looking into the needs of the brethren—especially their spiritual needs. The idea of visiting is not making a social call and being entertained by the brethren. When visiting, an effective preacher will ask the person being visited if he or she has any spiritual needs or concerns with which the preacher can be of assistance. Preachers are ultimately concerned with helping people enjoy the fruit of eternal life. Life is too short to beat around the bush and try to sneak up on whatever it is that needs to be discussed. It is better just to lovingly ask brethren what problems exist or ask about certain exhibited behaviors that are contrary to the Scriptures than to hope that those issues will somehow enter into the discussion.

The benefits of visiting are many. Visiting the brethren affords preachers opportunities to show the brethren that they love them and want the best for them. When brethren know that a preacher loves and cares for them, it makes it a little harder for gossip and ridicule to spread about the preacher. Preachers who visit find a wealth of knowledge about the brethren, which helps them prepare sermons and lessons that are beneficial to the brethren. Additionally, preachers who visit usually build an information network among the brethren that is critical to constructing an informative bulletin. All of the aforementioned areas are critical to a preacher's ability to stay located in a work as long as possible.

## CONCLUSION

Elders and men who oversee and steer congregations are wise to utilize preachers whose aim it is to preach to please Jesus. This

category of preacher is a dying breed, and effective preachers are few and far between. Nevertheless, there are men who preach to please Jesus, and that they will do regardless of how difficult some brethren and congregations make their lives. Effective preachers do what they do because they want to help men and women go to heaven—not because they seek the praise of men. Nevertheless, it is helpful when congregations provide their preachers with positive feedback from time to time. In too many cases, the only feedback faithful preachers receive is designed to tell them how to do a better job preaching, visiting, greeting visitors, et al. Congregations who are fortunate enough to find a faithful, effective preacher would do well to show that man how deeply he and his family are appreciated.

Preachers who want to do more than tread water will become lifelong learners. Special attention will be given to learning how to teach in manner that addresses all of the different learning styles and personalities that are present today. When preachers learn how to communicate effectively, then they can actually help a congregation grow in the Word and mature as God intended. An effective preacher will not join a man and a woman together in marriage until they demonstrate their readiness for marriage. Additionally, all Christians are to be actively involved in visitation, and preachers who visit are going to find themselves becoming better and better as preachers, every day. Building better preachers is a continual work in progress. The areas mentioned in this study are just a few of many that can help a man move into an effective ministry for the Christ.

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# BUILDING CHURCHES THAT ARE CONCERNED ABOUT PREACHERS

*Robin W. Haley*

## INTRODUCTION

The wise man said, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven” (Ecc. 3:1). One of those purposes was expressed in verse three: “a time to build up.” What a refreshing theme for a sound brotherhood lecture series. In light of the current fellowship *meltdown*, as this writer has come to call it, he was happy to accept brother Hatcher’s kind invitation to present a lecture and this manuscript dealing with the above-mentioned title.

Church building is the work of all Christians (Eph. 4:11-16), but much of that work falls to the preacher—at least to the degree of reminding the church of her work in building herself up. This scribe will approach this study from two directions. The first will be an admonition and reminder to preachers what kind of men we ought to be, and especially that we be diligent to obey what Paul told Timothy in his second epistle: “But be thou sober in all things, suffer hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil thy ministry” (2 Tim. 4:5).

This penman is convinced that much of the lack of appreciation for Gospel preachers and their work must be laid at the feet of the preachers themselves, although not all the lack of appreciation lies there. Much also is due to the lack of instruction given to congregations of what the work of an evangelist actually consists. This shall be the second direction: reminding leaders of congregations of the work of a preacher and what the Bible teaches are the reasons that brethren ought to appreciate that work.

## LET PREACHERS BE REMINDED

The work of a preacher is best defined by the Bible as found in the epistles of Paul to Timothy and Titus. It is rather eye-opening to many who take the time to see just what Paul commanded of these preachers. A look through Paul’s letters to Timothy finds:

charge certain men not to teach a different doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3)

war the good warfare (1:18)

[teach] how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God” (3:15)

put the brethren in mind of these things (4:6)

these things command and teach (4:11)

give heed to reading, to exhortation, to teaching (4:13)

them that sin reprove in the sight of all... Lay hands hastily (5:20, 22)

flee these things...follow after righteousness... Fight the good fight (6:11-12)

hold the pattern of sound words (2 Tim. 1:13)

the things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men (2:2)

of these things put them in remembrance...strive not about words, to no profit (2:14)

study to shew thyself approved (2:15—KJV)

must not strive, but be gentle towards all, apt to teach, forbearing, in meekness correcting (2:24-25)

preach the word...reprove, rebuke, exhort (4:2).

Some key words that leap out to us include the following: preachers are to *war*, *put in mind*, *command and teach*, *give heed*, *reprove*, *lay hands on*, *flee*, *follow*, *fight*, *be an example*, *hold to*, *commit*, *put in remembrance*, *strive not*, *study*, *be gentle*, *apt*, *forbear*, *correct*, *preach*, *reprove*, *rebuke*, and *exhort*! What we learn is that a preacher is a soldier, teacher, corrector, student, and example. It has been my observation that far too few preachers live up to this description. Many do, but too many do not. Rather, they seem more interested in politics, money, notoriety, or some other symptom of pride. Now, this author does not pretend to know the motives of men in their *work* of being “preachers,” but as Jesus said, “Therefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Mat. 7:20). A preacher is not to move to a place to retire, nor to run things. He is not called upon by God to be the church’s spokesman, a public relations man, nor gopher. He is to **work** (2 Tim. 4:5). Much of that work is to **study**. If he does not know the Book, how is he to instruct God’s elect? Some sermons that this writer has heard have so little Bible in them that, if you were to put it into your eye, you would not feel the need to blink. Thus, the people are not fed (Acts 20:28), and they go through life drinking milk and not solid food (Heb. 5:11-14).

From Paul’s epistle to Titus preachers observe and learn to:

reprove them [vain talkers and deceivers] sharply, that they may be sound in the faith (Tit. 1:13);

speak thou the things which befit the sound doctrine (2:1);

in all things showing thyself an ensample (2:7);

these things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority (2:15);

shun foolish questionings, and genealogies, and strifes, and fightings (3:9);

a factious man after a first and second admonition refuse (3:10);

let our *people* also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful (3:14).

Again, some keys to this instruction are: *reprove, speak, exhort and reprove, be an example, shun, refuse, and let learn*. It is apparent that a preacher is a teacher, an example, a corrector, and a watchman! A preacher needs to stay informed as a watchman! “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is an old but very true saying. “But, we don’t have that problem here!” is a foolish and faulty position to hold. We must know the enemy. Paul would remind us with reference to the devil that “we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor. 2:11). Every preacher should take to heart the instructions given to the prophet Ezekiel:

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, when a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thy hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning; and thou hast delivered thy soul (Eze. 3:17-21).

When brethren remain informed, they work better and will build a congregation that is concerned about preachers as well as the issues we all face.

If preachers were to teach the brethren these things, and remind them of the preacher’s work, then fewer congregations would take advantage of them and would likely have more appreciation for their

work. They in turn would be less likely tempted to take advantage of the churches that support them, and would indeed have a much greater appreciation for them. Sadly, however, pride and ego pollute the minds of some men who would fain become preachers. The result is a situation wherein both he and the congregations that he serves are seldom at peace with one another. Building a congregation where concern for preachers exists generally, and for the local preacher in particular, is going to be much more challenging in these circumstances since it is the case that churches are to have concern for those who labor among them (1 The. 5:12-13; 1 Cor. 16:15-18).

### **HOW *NOT* TO BUILD CHURCHES THAT ARE CONCERNED ABOUT PREACHERS**

Some men carry themselves with an air of superiority and project a *clergy* type attitude wherein the church tends to set them apart as different from other Christians. This makes it extremely difficult for humble men to be preachers and expect the brethren to listen to them. It seems some have forgotten that there is but One Who can have the preeminence among God's people, and that One is Jesus (Col. 1:18). In carrying out his work, a preacher needs to remember that he is admonished to do so while following after "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, **meekness**" (1 Tim. 6:11). He is "in **meekness** [to correct]...them that oppose themselves" (2 Tim. 2:25). The Lord's brother surely spoke to preachers also when he wrote "**humble yourselves** in the sight of the Lord, and he shall exalt you" (Jam. 4:10). Finally, he needs to take his own medicine when he teaches the brethren to "be gentle, showing **all meekness toward all men**" (Tit. 3:2). Preacher, you are no better than the lowliest member of the local congregation. Yes, you have an important job to do, but do not elevate yourself above others. Churches that care about preachers are built when all will work together and do not place anyone above nor below another.

This penman has observed that some men want to be men-pleasers in all they do (Eph. 6:6). Paul tells us that this is a mere means of "eye-service" or, in other words, putting on a show for others to observe. This is the man who wants to be everybody's best friend and pal—back-slapping, good-ole-boy politician. This hardly describes one who is striving to be meek and humble with a gentle spirit. Preacher, do not

play games and favorites with people. Most folks can spot a phony a mile off.

Perhaps some have falsely concluded that this is what it takes to be “all things to all men” (1 Cor. 9:22). While some men are extroverts (with which there is no fault), some are as transparent as glass in their attempts to play a role that will gain them some kind of favor or advantage. This is exactly how *politic* is defined! Just what did Paul mean by that statement in 1 Corinthians? The context reveals—**not** that Paul practiced unity in diversity, played politics, or “agreed to disagree” with those in error—nor did he compromise the truth of the Gospel (Gal. 2:5, 14). He was not “going along with their practice,” but was allowing himself to associate with them in mundane relationships. It is clear that he referred to those in different social or ethnic standings. A preacher should be just as comfortable visiting and studying with one who may have dropped out of high school as with one who has earned a Ph.D. A preacher ought never to have prejudices against one who is white, black, Hispanic, or Asian. This writer suggests this interpretation is at least part of what is in view in 1 Timothy 3:9 when Paul says that deacons are to hold “the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.” What is the mystery of the faith? That Jews and Gentiles are both acceptable to God (see Eph. 3:3, 4-9; Col. 1:27). Preachers ought never to practice any form of respect of persons!

Then there is the man who desires to be “reputed to be somewhat (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth not man’s person)” (Gal. 2:6). Recently there was a young *preacher* who told his friends that “a preacher needs to be somewhat arrogant.” This seems to militate against what was written by the apostle—“*doing* nothing through faction or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself” (Phi. 2:3). This young man needs a heaping helping of humble pie, and to be reminded “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think” (Rom. 12:3). By virtue of his attitude (which he believes makes him better because he is more highly educated) he indicates that he does not know as much as he thinks (1 Cor. 8:1-2).

Indeed, some men are “lovers of self, lovers of money” (2 Tim. 3:2), which introduces the next point. Some men are nothing more than hirelings. Whereas the warnings against the hunger for “filthy lucre” are addressed to elders and deacons, the warning can surely be applied

to all—including preachers. Jesus describes this fellow in John’s Gospel record:

He that is a hireling, and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, beholdeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth, and the wolf snatcheth them, and scattereth *them: he fleeth because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep* (John 10:12-13).

The silence of some *preachers* when error is being perpetrated among us is painful to the ears! Some preachers, it seems, are located with a congregation for only so long as they can get paid. They are fleeing the church and basically guilty of what Peter describes: “And in covetousness shall they with feigned words **make merchandise of you**” (2 Pet. 2:3). Preacher, if you are preaching because of the money, **do something else!**

When a man sets himself to be a preacher of the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8) and is thus recognized as one who ministers to the saints in a given location (1 Cor. 16:15), it is incumbent upon him to treat his work, the Word of God, and the confidence that the brethren have in him as precious! After all, what could be more important than the work of saving souls and preaching the Gospel (Mat. 16:26)? When he “[puts] the brethren in mind of these things” (1 Tim. 4:6), Paul calls him a “good minister of Christ Jesus.” In this, he will be more successful in building churches that are concerned about preachers. The church in general, and in her various locations will be more appreciative of those who “[preach] the kingdom of God, and [teach] the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, none forbidding him” (Acts 28:31). This will go a long way toward building churches that are concerned about preachers.

Preachers need to take seriously the admonition given to the apostles as recorded in Acts: “Go ye, and **stand and speak** in the temple to the people **all the words of this Life**” (5:20). Those who pattern their work after the likes of Peter and Paul will surely be successful in helping to build churches that are concerned about preachers. They will do as did Paul, who “shrank not from declaring unto you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly, and from house to house.... For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:20, 27). Preaching is not fun and games—it is serious business with eternal consequences! A preacher has no friends in the pulpit. He ought not to *side* with anyone save Jesus and His inspired men. Happily, he will find good company

among other preachers and churches who have the same attitude. When churches learn their preacher is this caliber of man, and also discover other congregations like them, there will be much more building of churches that are concerned about preachers.

Brother preacher, these things command and teach with all authority! Do so in humility and fear. Be patient (2 Tim. 2:24). Finally, allow this word from the preacher be your motto: “Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few” (Ecc. 5:2). This does not mean that you ought to preach short sermons, but rather tell the people thus saith the Lord and not what **you** think. Adopt this attitude: “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5). Teach the people what the Bible says about men, not what men think about the Bible! Let them see that you are a man of the Book. This will go far in building churches that are concerned about preachers.

### LET THE CHURCHES BE REMINDED

That the church needs to listen to preachers is inherent in such passages as the following:

Take heed to thyself, and to thy teaching. Continue in these things; for in doing this thou shalt save both thyself and **them that hear thee** (1 Tim. 4:16).

For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God’s good pleasure **through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe** (1 Cor. 1:21).

Do we not appreciate and have great concern for those preachers who preached the pure, simple Gospel of Christ to us? Brethren ought to thank God for a man who will speak as the oracles of God without fear or favor. Do not be surprised when the preacher takes seriously the admonition of Paul when he wrote: “Let no man despise thy youth” and “preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (1 Tim. 4:12; 2 Tim. 4:2). There may come times when he needs to remind you of his duty and yours. He may need to reprove and rebuke. The good man will also exhort with sound doctrine. Allow him to speak this way and help him to do his work. Pay attention, grow, and pray for him.

It is no accident that the Lord set evangelists in the church along with others who would present the message of Heaven to the people (Eph. 4:11). Today’s preachers are not “divinely called,” as was Paul

or other miraculously endowed men. The context does suggest a parallel between Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 13. This passage is telling us that God had set certain men, with certain authority, to do a certain work, for a certain people, until something came to pass. What was that something? Unity of the faith, full knowledge (that which is perfect—1 Cor. 13:10). We have that which will perfect the saints for the work of ministering, and the building up of the body of Christ. Nevertheless, we still have the influence of those spiritually empowered men of the first century (consider Heb. 11:4). Additionally, we have those today who will continue to perfect the saints, minister, and build the body. Some of those are preachers! Allow this preacher to paraphrase Paul who said: “Whether then *it be* I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed” (1 Cor. 15:11), even so, whether it be me or some other preacher, we preach, and brethren believe. If we fulfill our ministry as Paul taught Timothy, the brethren will have a greater appreciation for the preacher’s work. Preachers must do as did Timothy:

For this cause have I sent unto you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, who shall **put you in remembrance of my ways** which are in Christ, even as I teach everywhere in every church (1 Cor. 4:17).

Faithful brethren are delighted to listen to preachers who will do likewise! Faithful brethren love *hard* or solid preaching. They love to be reminded of Paul’s ways and Christ’s law that was intended for every church, everywhere!

The passage written by a preacher is especially appreciated:

And further, because the Preacher was wise, he still **taught the people** knowledge; yea, he pondered, and sought out, *and* set in order many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words, and that which was written uprightly, *even* words of truth (Ecc. 12:9-10).

Brethren, preachers have the job of teaching us. If he teaches by means of the words of truth (which he ought), we owe him our attention and respect.

Brethren, it is vital that we as members and hearers of those who would teach us and preach the Gospel to us, that we consent to “sound words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness” (1 Tim. 6:3). In so doing, our attitude as hearers needs to be as Jesus admonished: “And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear” (Mark 4:24), and again: “Take heed therefore how ye hear” (Luke 8:18). We not only need to listen to the Truth, the

whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth, but also listen with a proper attitude. Your preacher will be encouraged and will do a much better work if you show keen interest in what he has prepared and is preaching to you. Together, the congregation will grow into a church that is concerned for preachers.

### **SOME CHURCHES DO NOT HAVE CONCERN FOR PREACHERS**

As with the case of some preachers, so also with many brethren (leaders in the congregation or not), some fail to understand the proper, vital role of preachers. Preachers and their families are just people. They are not special, superior, nor different, though the preacher does have a special job to do. It seems to this preacher that some brethren fail to observe the golden rule. Jesus taught: “All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Mat. 7:12). Luke records Jesus’ words this way: “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” (Luke 6:31). How you want to be treated should impact how you treat the preacher. No one wants to be ignored, slighted, considered as not being worthy of the best we can offer. No one wants to be gossiped about, mistreated, nor told to “get out!”

What is for Sunday dinner? On far too many Sundays, the fare turns out to be roast preacher. His sermons are too long, too short; too much Bible, not enough Bible; he speaks too loudly, or not loud enough; he is too direct, or too vague; he is too strict or too loose. Sometimes he is all of these at the same time! We do not like his clothes, ties, wife, or children. After all, he said or did not say, he did or did not do, his wife said or did not say, did not do, and then there are his kids! A wise eldership/leadership will remind the church that the work a preacher does is vital, but he and his family are but members and brethren. Treat them accordingly!

Face it, preacher, you live in a glass house. Be sure that you have your children’s behavior under control and that they respect those who are older. As with every Christian, so ought you to teach your children proper respect for you, their mother, for all men, for authority, for people’s possessions, and for God—**not necessarily in that order!** As one who is to set an example (1 Tim. 4:12), you may be helping another family man to prepare himself (and his family) to be a good and godly elder or deacon.

One of the more cutting remarks directed toward this preacher many years ago went something like this: “Well, preachers just like to have the title and notoriety. They preach because they like to be seen. After all, those who can—do. Those who can’t—preach. Those who can’t preach, teach preachers!” While not knowing how true or false this latter statement may be, this author does know that if a man carries himself as though he was a cut above the rest, he will not be helping to build a church that has concern for preachers. Brethren, please understand: good, godly preachers preach because “there is in [his] heart as it were a burning fire shut up in [his] bones, and [he is] weary with forbearing, and [he] cannot *contain*” (Jer. 20:9). The faithful Gospel preacher can say with Paul, “for necessity is laid upon me; for woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16). The **true** Gospel preacher does not preach merely “to be seen!” His job is to preach and build you up. Show your appreciation: be concerned about him, his family, and his work!

A preacher once said, “Look in your Bibles; you don’t want to just hear me *blathering* up here.” Now there is a man who is ignorant of his work and is helping the church to whom he was speaking to fail to appreciate the preacher and his work! What he said was by definition: “foolish talk, foolishness, nonsense, gibberish.” Truly, if he believes that all he does is *blather* (speak foolishness), he ought to quit *preaching* (if that is what one may rightly call it)! With examples like this, no wonder some churches have very little concern for the Lord’s bond-servant (2 Tim. 2:24). If the preacher where you worship is “*speaking* as it were oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11), then pay attention and show your appreciation.

“More bang for the buck!” This is precisely how the preacher’s *services* were described to me by an elder some years ago. He wanted to “wring” as much work out of the local evangelist as he could. He did not want the preacher to even go visit other congregations, set up Gospel Meetings nor speak on Lecture programs. His reasoning: “Someone in the congregation might get sick or die while you’re away.” Talk about micro management! Preachers need to get away—and not just for a vacation. He needs to hear others preach. It charges his batteries. When he has a new or different audience to prepare for, it helps him flex his spiritual muscles. He will come home with a new and fresh perspective. He will do better, and you will be benefitted.

Together you will be building a church that is concerned about preachers.

Additionally, church leaders ought to remember that they are supplying a man a living; they are not “hiring” his wife and ought not to expect more of her than any of the sisters of the congregation. Preachers’ wives need to remember that they are being looked at closely. Sister, respect your husband and his work, and do your part in the local work. Fit in, do not try to be above any. This will help build a church concerned about preachers.

Congregations need to be concerned about the standard of living they offer to a man and his family. A wise starting point for the preacher’s income is the average income of the congregation, or perhaps the average income of the geographical area in which the church exists. This writer once went to “look at a work” where the front of the building that served as the preacher’s home was actually slanting at about a 10 to 15-degree angle when viewed from the street! The original house was but three small rooms that had been added to another two or three times (one of those additions was knocking a hole through one wall into the garage). There were at least three different floor levels (all on the first floor) due to poor workmanship. The kitchen lighting consisted of a coat-hanger suspended from the ceiling with a wire and bulb on the end. This shack did not really build up my hopes for a good working, caring relationship between the preacher and the congregation.

This congregation met in a fine, brick and stone building that was pretty well maintained. The members all arrived in pretty nice vehicles when we met (some far nicer than mine), and their clothes were easily more expensive than what I and my family were wearing. After viewing the “preacher’s house,” I was asked bluntly, “Well, do you want the job?” The job? **The job!** Absolutely **no one** can pay me to do the Lord’s work. Perhaps the most difficult lesson to get across to brethren is this: **preachers are not hired!** An agreement is reached to supply their living so that they in turn may devote their time to the Lord’s work. After a good deal of consideration (which lasted about four seconds), I declined.

Paul’s instructions to the churches of Galatia **did not** come to mind: “But let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things” (6:6) Provide for the preacher’s needs as he does his work. “Set them forward” is found five times in our New

Testaments, and refers to the financial support given to those who are doing the work of preaching. Taking his mind off the mundane concerns about his living (1 Cor. 9:14) will make him a better student, thus a better teacher and soldier who will be able to be “set for the defence of the gospel” (Phi. 1:16), to “contend earnestly for the faith” (Jude 3), to “war the good warfare... Fight the good fight” (1 Tim. 1:18; 6:12). After all, he is to “Suffer hardship with *me*, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier on service entangleth himself in the affairs of *this* life; that he may please him who enrolled him as a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:3-4).

So many brethren seem to have a “bought and sold commodity” mentality regarding preachers. To them preachers are nothing more than a service purchased for the church to use up, like propane or the electric bill. An elder once said to this preacher: “We want you to help us do our work—kinda like another elder.” When asked what he meant, he replied, “Well, we don’t have time to visit and take care of all the little problems that some of our members have. We want you to do that for us.” Another elder once stated: “Hey, you preach for us and don’t you ever forget it!” Not only did these two unrelated events illustrate that these men were not true, godly elders, but it also showed they were ignorant of their work **and** the preacher’s work. No wonder they “went through” so many men. Preachers are not employees, regardless of what Uncle Sam or the State may think. He is your brother, and you are doing God’s will to supply his living so he may do God’s will and help you to be what God desires of you.

How many times brethren said: “Well, preachers don’t mind moving; they’re used to it!” Happily, our family did not have to relocate as often as some preachers. Preachers ought to have the attitude that when they move to a new place, they are **members** and **belong** to that congregation. Churches likewise ought to consider the preacher and his family as members who belong. Longevity is the goal! A long-lasting relationship will result in a church that is concerned about preachers, and a preacher who is concerned for the local church. They belong to each other!

How do we **all** as brethren, elders, deacons, members, and preachers work together to build churches that are concerned about preachers? Let us take it from the top: we must all work together as members one of another (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:25). Preachers need to **work** at their chosen vocation (2 Tim. 4:5). He is not to rule, run, nor ruin, but to

teach, build, and defend. Remind the brethren of your job as well as theirs in accomplishing God's will together.

Church leaders and membership must **work** at our calling, election, and office if we hold one (2 Pet. 1:10; Phi. 2:12; 1 Tim. 3:1). Take advantage of no brother or sister regardless of their position or duty. Do not take one another for granted. Take seriously the lesson presented by your leaders, elders, and preachers.

Finally, remember the gold rule and take warning from Paul's word to the Galatian brethren: "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (5:15). Always obey what Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: "Take thought for things honorable in the sight of all men" (12:17).

### **WORK CITED**

All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

# BUILDING TOMORROW'S LEADERS

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With the winds of change sweeping through the church like Hurricane Katrina swept through the Gulf Coast, the assigned subject is one of the most important, if not the most important—"Building Tomorrow's Leaders." For the most part, the problems existing in and confronting the church today are the direct result of leaders who have failed to lead God's people in the paths of righteousness. Leaders are the ones who go before us to show us the way that leads to eternal life. Not only are they to lead us in paths of righteousness, they are to protect us from the pitfalls of false teachers and from error. A leader is one in whom we have the utmost confidence and for whom we have the greatest respect. Of course, the elders are the primary leaders of the congregation. They have the awesome responsibility of overseeing and leading the entire congregation. These are special men who must meet Holy Spirit-inspired qualifications. Under their leadership and oversight there are others who lead in the various areas of the Lord's work, such as preachers, deacons, and teachers.

The task of building tomorrow's leaders is staggering. We have allowed things to deteriorate to the point that we will have to work extra hard to train leaders who will lead God's people back to the first century to follow the New Testament pattern. We must begin by doing what Paul instructed Timothy to do. "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful

men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). It seems to this writer that this is one of the primary jobs of the preacher. Any preacher who is worth his salt will be diligent to train leaders. The time to begin teaching faithful men the Word of God and how to be leaders of righteousness is long past due. We need to begin teaching the Word of God and the principles of leadership to our children, just as Eunice and Lois taught young Timothy as recorded in 2 Timothy 3:15. If we do this, our young men will grow up to be faithful and effective leaders of God’s people. Therefore, it is not only the preacher’s job to train tomorrow’s leaders, more importantly it is the job of the parents.

First and foremost, we must teach our children to love God as God loves us. John says, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8). There is no possible way one can be a leader in the paths of righteousness without loving God with all of his heart, soul, and mind and his fellowman as he loves himself, which Jesus taught in Matthew 22:37-40. Without that depth of love, our teaching will be just so much noise, our knowledge of God’s Word will be ineffective, and our benevolent deeds will be nothing more than an exercise in futility. These are the points Paul is making in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. We can read all about the importance of love in God’s Word, we can understand the meaning of all of the Greek words translated *love* and we can quote every passage in the Bible that relates to love, but unless we love, it all is for naught. The way we teach others to love is by showing them, by loving them. We love God, not because He tells us to love Him, but because He shows us love. “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Paul informs us that “love never faileth” (1 Cor. 13:8—ASV). Genuine love is constant and unconditional. Love cares deeply for the souls of all people, even those who disagree with us and those who hate us. Jesus said, “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Mat. 5:44). Love always turns the other cheek and goes the second mile, just as Jesus teaches us in Matthew 5:38-42. No doubt this is one reason Peter instructs us to “above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8). Love has the ability to see the faults in man but continue

to love him because he has a precious soul that needs to be taught the Gospel of Christ that his soul might be saved.

Genuine love never agrees with error, nor does it ever compromise with false teachers. There are no situations in which love will condone error or false teachers. Love takes a firm stand against them. Paul is explicit in his instruction to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*” (Eph. 5:11). Jesus said, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Rev. 3:19). Genuine love stands unwaveringly for the truth and is always ready to defend it, as Jude admonished us to do.

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3).

If we are going to be leaders and train leaders for tomorrow’s church, we must be as Paul, “set for the defence of the gospel” (Phi. 1:17). In 1 Corinthians Paul says that love “rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth” (13:6). While love abhors error and false doctrine, it is never rude or boorish in its defense of the truth. When defending the Gospel we must follow the admonition of Paul to speak “the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). It is only when we defend the truth in love that we are able to inspire others to be leaders of God’s people. If we are hateful, caustic, and insulting, we are not the right kind of leaders and therefore cannot build leaders for tomorrow. When we are rude, caustic, and insulting, we are lacking in the most important ingredient—love.

Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil (1 Cor. 13:4-5).

We must show prospective leaders that we can be loving and defend the Gospel without being hostile. We must always keep in our hearts the fact that our mission in this life is teaching the truth of God to every creature under heaven. We must never lose sight of the fact that our job is to save souls, not drive them away from the Lord.

As we build leaders for tomorrow, not only must we be examples in love, we must also be examples in prayer, faithfulness, and enthusiasm for doing the Lord’s work. Peter instructs the elders: “neither as being lords over *God’s* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1 Pet.

5:3). In principle this would apply to all who lead God's people. Leaders are not people desiring to be in the limelight. They are not dictators, rulers, or bosses. They are servants who go before the flock and set an example for us to follow. Leaders cannot merely tell the followers what to do and expect them to do it—they must show them. They cannot, for example, tell the church that they want them to knock on doors on a certain day and expect all of them to come. As leaders, we must show them the way by showing up with our walking shoes on. A lot of the growth we have experienced at the Northridge congregation is the result of knocking on doors. At our last door knocking session at least fifty percent of the congregation participated, including almost all of the young people. The reason for this excellent participation is that the leaders were there, not just the elders, but all who have any type of leadership role in the congregation. One day our young men will be wonderful leaders in the Lord's church because they have seen their leaders participate in the various activities of the church. We train future leaders, not by telling them what they should do, but by showing them how to do it. Is this not the way Jesus did it? Luke said that he had written "of all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1).

Of course, as we build tomorrow's leaders, we must teach them how to pray and the importance of prayer. Jesus taught His disciples "that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). He taught them how to pray and even gave them a model prayer to follow in Matthew 6:9-15. He further prayed on many occasions in their presence. If we are going to follow the example of Jesus and of the New Testament church, we must be a praying people. Concerning the New Testament church, we are told that "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). No one can lead God's people in the path of righteousness without praying fervently and often. "Pray without ceasing" (1 The. 5:17). By teaching young people how to pray and the importance of prayer, we are teaching them that we are working together with God and that we are totally dependent upon Him. We must always stress that what we are doing is not our work but the Lord's work. Therefore, we need always to ask God for guidance, wisdom, and help. He has promised, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord *is* my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:5-6).

It should go without saying that to build tomorrow's leaders, it is imperative that we teach them how to rightly divide "the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). For too long we have taught our young people and others what we believe, yet have not taken the time to teach them how to properly study the Bible for themselves. We teach them conclusions we have already drawn or that others have drawn without teaching them how to arrive at these conclusions. Upon becoming a member of the Lord's church, this author asked a lady he had known all his life why we did not use a piano. Her answer was that the Bible does not teach us to use one. While that was a correct answer, it did not teach me a single thing. She really could not explain why we do not use an instrument of music in worship; she was just telling me what she had heard others say. The greatest favor we can do for any person is to teach him how to study the Bible for himself so he will not be dependent upon any man for the basis of his faith.

When asked if He was king of the Jews, Jesus asked Pilate, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?" (John 18:32-34). He was asking Pilate if this question came as the result of his own observation, or was he merely parroting what he had heard others say? As leaders, we cannot have a second-hand faith, and if we are going to train tomorrow's leaders, we must train them to make sure their faith is not second-hand but is based entirely upon what God teaches. We must teach them to do as Peter instructs—to "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). This cannot be done unless we train them how to study the Bible, rightly divide the Word of Truth, and to think for themselves. We must train them to be as noble as the Bereans who listened to Paul and Silas preach. They listened carefully, but "searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Some years ago this author was asked to teach a class at International Bible College in Florence, Alabama. The assignment was to teach the simple rules of Bible study and how to establish biblical authority to the graduating class who would soon be going out to preach. I asked them how we arrived at the conclusion that we are to eat the Lord's Supper only on Sunday and why we use only unleavened bread and fruit of the vine. Every man in the class believed that we could only eat the Lord's Supper on Sunday and that it would be a sin to have anything on the table other than unleavened bread and fruit of

the vine, but not a single one of them could tell me how they arrived at that conclusion! It is this writer's firm conviction that one really is not qualified to be a leader of God's people if he cannot these matters to others. It was during the teaching of this class that this penman came to the painful conclusion that every Christian in every congregation needs to be taught how to study the Bible for himself. It needs to be a part of the curriculum of every congregation in the world. Had such a class been taught in congregations in years past, much of the nonsense that goes on in the church today would never have begun. Elders would have had the knowledge, courage, and the ability to stand solidly on God's Word and would never have allowed error to be preached to the congregations they were watching over.

When I first met Michael Hatcher, he was fresh out of Harding College. Even then, some on the faculty were saying strange things. When I heard those things, I assumed that Michael might be teaching the same things. When I mentioned this to him, he told me what those professors taught did not affect him because he was not dependent upon them for his faith and knowledge of God's Word. He studied the Bible for himself. That is one of the reasons I respect him so much. This is also the reason why he is a strong and faithful Gospel preacher. That is what we all must do and what we must teach others to do if we are to have leaders tomorrow who will lead us, our children, and our grandchildren in the paths of righteousness.

We certainly do not want leaders who do not care about the truth and will lead us into error. We do not want leaders who will teach that we can fellowship denominations or participate in denominational meetings such as the Franklin Graham Festival. We do not want leaders who condone and promote baby dedications, who think singing a cappella is nothing more than a church of Christ tradition, and who allow women to speak in the worship assembly, or any other thing for which we do not have the slightest bit of authority from God. Recently, the elders of the North Richland Hills Church of Christ (denomination) concluded after three years of study that they would begin in February 2007 having a Saturday evening worship service with instrumental music and communion being served. Their contention is that this is in keeping with the Scriptures. There is absolutely no way anyone can handle aright the Word of Truth and draw these conclusions. The only way we can combat such nonsense is to teach men to rightly divide the

Word of Truth and teach them to be the kind of leaders who will lead us in the paths of righteousness.

Since “faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17), we must show prospective leaders the importance of Bible study by attending all Bible classes, all of the worship assemblies, lectureships, and Gospel meetings. We need to attend classes, lectures, and all preaching services with Bible and notebook in hand that we may take notes. We will want to be as noble as the Bereans, and we want to set an example for others to follow. We must continuously stress the fact that the Bible is the Word of God and that it is the absolute authority in all matters of faith and practice. If we cannot find a “thus saith the Lord” for all that we believe and practice, we need to abandon it immediately and shun it like the plague. Paul tells us to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 The. 5:21-22). It must be stamped indelibly upon our minds and upon the minds of prospective leaders that our job is to lead God’s people in the paths of righteousness and back to the pattern that is revealed in the Book of books. Recently, one wrote that the greatest challenge we face today is to have dynamic leaders who can lead the church in the twenty-first century—what we really need are leaders in this twenty-first century who will have the courage and ability to lead us back to the old paths of the first century.

If we are going to train leaders for God’s people, we must be happy, positive, and optimistic in the Lord’s work. Paul says that “the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 14:17). If we are always negative about everything, we will be unable to inspire others to be leaders. If we go around looking like we have been eating sour pickles and lemons, we will discourage those who may aspire to be leaders. We have every reason in the world to be happy, positive, and optimistic. We are God’s children. Our Father is the creator and owner of the universe, and He has promised to be with us every step of our journey through this life. We need to smile and be joyous. Paul simply says, “Rejoice evermore” (1 The. 5:16). When we have a strong faith in God, we will be positive, joyous, and optimistic in the Lord’s work. Indeed there are things in the church that are wrong and things that need to be corrected, but the truth is that a better church begins with me and my willingness to do all that I possibly can to be a leader and to train leaders for tomorrow. At all times we must show the “can do” attitude. We all must be able to say

with Paul: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phi. 4:13). It is a lack of faith that causes us to be sour, negative, and pessimistic. Too often, when something is suggested for us to do in the Lord's work, our first reaction is that it will not work, it cannot be done, we have tried it, and it failed, etc. Therefore, many doors that were opened for us are closed because we are too negative to take advantage of the opportunity that God has set before us. In an elders' meeting, the elders were discussing a request from a missionary to oversee his work, as well as supporting him financially. The first response from one elder was that we could not do it. We did not have enough money, and besides we were too small to take on such a responsibility. His argument was that we needed to keep the money we had in a contingency fund just in case something happened to the building. Another elder said, "God has given us an opportunity to do His work and we can do it." We were able to do that work, and the next year we added two more missionaries. We never had to spend any money on the building. We have to show our young people and prospective leaders that with God's help there is no limit to what we can do. We must show prospective leaders how to step out in faith and take advantage of the opportunities that God sets before us. We may not be able to see how it all is going to work out, but we must remember we are "walk[ing] by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7), and that God is our helper. With Him we cannot fail.

We also must teach future leaders of the Lord's church that all leaders are **servants**. This is a difficult lesson to learn and to teach because we live in a competitive society. We want our children to win at everything and be first in whatever they do. We are teaching them that winning and being first are the most important things in this life. Actually this is not a problem peculiar to the twenty-first century. It is a problem that is as old as man. Brother Nathan Hogan once said in a sermon: "The reason God created man last is because had he created him first he would be going around pointing at everything and saying look what I made." This scribe doubts this is the reason God created man last, but we all know that some men like to have the preeminence among the brethren. There are too many who have the attitude of Diotrephes. John "wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not" (3 John 9). Even the apostles of our Lord had a little ego problem. "And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the

greatest” (Luke 22:24). On another occasion the mother of James and John wanted Jesus to grant that her “two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom” (Mat. 20:21). Not only did this request show a gross misunderstanding of the nature of the kingdom, it showed a misunderstanding of man’s purpose in the kingdom. After explaining that the request was wrong because it was worldly, Jesus said:

But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mat. 20:26-28).

The greatest in the kingdom is the one who serves the most without trying to receive the accolades of men. To be a good leader and train others to be leaders of righteousness, we must “let [our] light so shine before men, that they may see [our] good works, and glorify [our] Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 5:16). We must not be concerned about standing in the limelight or getting credit for what we do for the Lord. In Matthew 6:1-6, Jesus makes it abundantly clear that when people do things simply to be seen and receive the praise of men they will have no reward in heaven. Their reward will be nothing more than the praise of men in this life. Even the elders in the Lord’s church are servants who “watch for [our] souls” (Heb. 13:17). A member once called this writer’s attention to an elder who thought he was more important than he really was. He said of him, “He is the only man I know who can strut sitting down.” Such a one cannot, nor was he, an effective leader of God’s people because he thought of himself as being the boss. That elder did not have the respect of the Lord’s people, and if one does not have the respect of the people of God, he cannot lead them. The truth is that there are no chiefs, bosses, or rulers in the Lord’s church except for Christ Himself. We all are servants.

Barnabas was one of the great leaders in New Testament times. He was given the name Barnabas, which means “son of encouragement” by the apostles because of his ability to encourage others (Acts 4:36). He did not seek the limelight or the accolades of others. He was content to stand in the background and do the job for which he was best suited. When word of the establishment of the church in Antioch came to the attention of the apostles, they sent Barnabas who encouraged the church greatly. As the church grew in number, he went to Tarsus and

brought Saul back to help him with the work (Acts 11:21-26). He looked at the Lord's work as a team effort—all working together for the glory of God. He did not care who got credit for the work. He went about quietly encouraging others to use their abilities to serve the Lord. A good leader is always there to help, encourage, and show others how to serve by serving.

The ultimate example of a leader being a servant is recorded in John 13:1-17. As they traveled to Jerusalem, the disciples of our Lord were arguing about “which of them should be accounted the greatest” (Luke 22:24). Obviously they were so preoccupied with this argument that they failed to exercise the common practice of washing one another's feet when they arrived in the upper room where they would observe the feast of the Passover with Jesus. Jesus Himself took a basin of water and a towel and washed the disciples' feet.

So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for *so* I am. If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you (John 13:12-15).

As we lead and train others to lead, we must always be serving others. Paul said:

*let nothing be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others (Phi. 2:3-4).

There is no question but what there is a lack of leaders today who love the Lord, His Word, and His people. Many of those wonderful leaders of the past have gone to be with the Lord, and others are getting closer to the end of life's way. Who will rise up and take their place? Where will our children and grandchildren worship if we fail to train leaders to lead the people of God in the paths of righteousness? Look around you. There are many people who claim to be Christians but who are allowing themselves to be led astray by foolish leaders. Do you want your children and grandchildren to be forced to worship with congregations that are being led by man-made elders with false teachers in the pulpit? It is imperative that we begin today to train leaders who will lead us back to the old paths. If we fail to train leaders for tomorrow's church, who will do it?

**WORK CITED**

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

# BUILDING BETTER ATTITUDES

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## INTRODUCTION

The theme *A Time to Build* is indeed an appropriate choice during this time in the history of the Lord's church. Over the last couple of years there has been much done by Satan to ruin and tear down the church, the close association between faithful brethren, and the work of the church—to “seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

As this author began to think on his specific topic, “Building Better Attitudes,” he searched for that phrase and then *attitude* in the Bible concordance on his computer. He found *building better attitudes* and *attitude* were used a grand total of zero times. Next he looked for the theme, *A Time To Build*, and found it was contained within the text of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. The Preacher Solomon presents “a poem of life” and then sets out to show a series of contrast of times (Sain 7).

To every *thing there is* a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up *that which is* planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace (Ecc. 3:1-8).

Solomon states: “There is a time to break down and a time to build up”; thus, we are provided with our theme. Although neither *building better attitudes* nor *attitude* is found in the Bible, the concept of proper attitudes is found numerous times in the Scriptures. Solomon, as we have recorded in Proverbs 23:7, says, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” In our modern terms we might say, “A man’s attitude determines who he is and how he acts.” As a counselor, this writer has become very aware that if our thinking is in error, our action may also be in error. Our actions are very much controlled by the way that we perceive things. In the New Testament, the beloved apostle John records Jesus as saying, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Those who worship God must do so with the correct attitude (spirit) and according to the will of God (in truth).

As a Marriage and Family Therapist Intern, couples or families come into my office and say, “My \_\_\_\_\_ is the problem (you can insert husband, wife, mother, father, son, daughter, boss, employee, or any other relationship in the blank). If \_\_\_\_\_ would only change, everything would be all right.” When I ask the person to explain what the problem is, he might begin to tell me what the other person is doing wrong. If one of the members of a troubled relationship admits to unbecoming behavior, many times he will justify the behavior in saying, “I do \_\_\_\_\_ because they do \_\_\_\_\_; or I would not do \_\_\_\_\_ if they were not doing \_\_\_\_\_.” My goal as a therapist is to help people “Build Better Attitudes” in how they look at the other person or group of people. When asked by my clients, how this is accomplished, I say, “The same way you eat an elephant, one bite at a time.” I have also found that how individuals react on a personal level is also how organizations (i.e., offices, companies, families, countries, yes, and even churches or brethren) react on a much broader scale. Therefore, as we examine the subject of “Building Better Attitudes,” we will divide it into the smaller bites of (1) building better attitudes toward the Word of God, (2) building better attitudes toward the church or worship to God, (3) building better attitudes toward the people of God, and (4) building better attitudes toward the lost.

## BUILDING BETTER ATTITUDES TOWARD THE WORD OF GOD

If our attitude toward the Word of God is not correct, in most cases, our attitude will **never** become better. However, how do we build a better attitude toward the Word of God? The answer to this question is a lot easier than most individuals might believe. When God instructed His people of the Old Testament on how to build a better attitude toward His Word, He did so by teaching them to develop a better attitude toward reverence for His Word. To this writer, reverence is built by instilling in ourselves and in others, an awe or deep respect that the Bible is in fact the verbally inspired message from God. In speaking through Moses, God taught the people how to build that reverence when He said:

Now these *are* the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do *them* in the land whither ye go to possess it: That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do *it*; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey (Deu. 6:1-3).

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates (6:6-9).

The people were to teach the Word to their children when they were sitting in the house, when they were walking on the road, when they laid down at night, and when they got up in the morning. They were to continue to teach it all times of the day or night. Thus, they built within themselves and their children a **reverence** for the Word of God. When the people of old taught their children to have this reverence for the Word of God, they helped them build a better **attitude** toward the Word of God. This continued as the people kept God's Word in the forefront of their minds. When their attitude toward the Word changed, so did their attitude toward the Giver of the Word. Sadly, God,

speaking through Hosea, had to say of the people (the priests especially):

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children (4:6).

There was a time when people of the Lord's church were considered to be a "People of the Book," but today there seems to be countless numbers of individuals who no longer are knowledgeable about God's Word. Many outside of the church have "never opened its precious pages, envisioned its mighty power, seen its absolute perfection, or experienced its peace and hope-producing product" (Cates 1). What is even sadder is that many within the Lord's church are also ignorant of His precious Book. They too, unless they change their ways, should fear being destroyed because of lack of knowledge.

Second, to build a better attitude toward the Word of God there must be a building of the attitude toward the Revealer of the Word. Pharaoh asked Moses, "Who *is* the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go" (Exo. 5:2). It was not that Pharaoh had never heard of God, for Egypt was accustomed to worshiping many gods, but Pharaoh was saying he had no respect for the God of the Israelites. It was not until Pharaoh gained a respect for the Revealer of the Word to the Israelites, by means of the terrible plagues, that he let them go. Pharaoh was not the only person who was guilty of not having respect for the Revealer of the Word of God. Just prior to Joshua bringing the people into the Promised Land, he ensured that they had a healthy respect for the Revealer of the Word (Jos. 23:2-21). Notice the closing words of the Joshua as recorded in Joshua 24:31 and the beginning words of the Judges:

And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that he had done for Israel (Jos. 24:31).

And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land. And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel (Jud. 2:6-7).

And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim: And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that *were* round about them, and bowed themselves

unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger. And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth (Jud. 2:11-13).

These verses show that, as long as the people had respect for God and His Word, they followed Him. Why did they lose respect for the Revealer? The preceding verse explains: “And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel” (2:10). As with Pharaoh, it was not that they had no knowledge of God, but because of their loss of reverence for His Word, they lost respect for His power and His person.

How did they originally have respect for the Revealer of the Word? It was done two ways: one was through seeing His miracles, and the other was through the continued reading of His Word. Notice again what God told Moses: “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart” (Deu. 6:6). The people forgot the true God only when they lost a reverence for His Word and a respect for Him.

The same has become true with the people of today both inside and outside of the Lord’s body. It may not be that the people of today are worshiping the gods of the Amorites or the Cannanites, but if you listen to the speech of those in this day, it is plain to see that there is no longer much respect for God. It is commonplace for people to take God’s name in vain. I recently was out at a local jail teaching a Bible class, and before the class was over, a question arose concerning whether we should be able to use the Lord’s name in vain. I answered no and that ended the discussion and the class for that night. When the class was over, one of the officers asked me if I would talk with a female inmate to try to calm her down. I spoke with the guard on duty, and he told me that the female inmate was very upset and needed to talk to someone. I went into the cell area and found a young lady of about 18 years of age. The words that were coming out of her mouth would have made a seasoned sailor blush. I would say that about every other word was some form of taking God’s name in vain or another expletive. I realize that some of this was for shock value, but if you listen to the speech of many individuals today, it will be the same; most have not sunk to the degree and depth of depravity in their speech as this young woman, but unfortunately many are heading in that direction.

The problem is that it is not only with those of the world, but also with those who claim to be a part of the Lord’s body, who say that Christ is their Lord. They fail to show respect to God the Father, Christ,

or the Holy Spirit. Euphemisms are spoken without thought to what is being said or to whom disrespect is being shown. Both Jesus and James cautioned that these types of things should not be happening. Matthew records Jesus as saying that these types of sins come from our heart:

Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are *the things* which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man (15:17-20).

James recorded a similar statement:

Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be (3:9-10).

Not only do Jesus and James say that it is wrong to use profanity, but also that it is wrong to speak slanderously of our brethren.

We also see in our society the desire to take all aspects of God out of our culture. Prayer can no longer be offered in the schools to the True God, but atheistic principles are heralded as honorable. Our society sees murder of the unborn as a choice, marriage of homosexuals as an alternate lifestyle, and other sins (such as drug and alcohol usage) as a sickness. These show a great disrespect for the God who made us in His own image (Gen. 1:27).

When building a better attitude toward the Word of God, we must realize that an acceptance of the Word of God as our final authority is of utmost importance. Jesus said, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). In our culture, authority is no longer prized in most circumstances. We are taught in schools, and therefore many practice it, that each person is his own standard, as long as we do not infringe on the rights of others. Whatever makes us happy is considered to be valid and right. This teaching is in conflict with God who teaches that His Word is the final standard for all things. To build a better attitude we must first build a better attitude toward the Word of God, but, second, we must build a better attitude toward the church of God.

## BUILDING BETTER ATTITUDES TOWARD THE CHURCH OF GOD

If you were to ask the average person if can we worship God any way that we want, there are many who would answer that it must be done according to God's will. However, in reality their practice is different from their answer. What is the problem? Sadly, many people have never developed within themselves or instilled in their children an awe or deep respect for the Bible and the fact that it is the verbally inspired message from God. When men are asked if man can worship any way that he wants, most people would answer no. If we ask others the question of whether or not we need authority for all that we do in religion, the answer in some cases would be yes. However, if we were to ask the average person what God authorizes in worship, many people would not have a clue.

An example of this lack of knowledge might be seen the recent split in a Richmond, Virginia, denomination, the "Episcopal Church." Nearly 75% of the members of the Episcopal group switched over to the "Anglican church." The division came about because the "differences over the role of gays and lesbians in church leadership and **the authority of the Bible** [emph. GKL] have prompted some congregations to pull out of the denomination" (Lindsey B1-2). One of those individuals interviewed said, "It's beyond belief when the Episcopal Church cannot confirm that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven" (Lindsey B1-2). To him it was surprising that those who left were not following the authority of the Bible, but what is heartbreaking is that, if he were consistent between his words and actions in following the authority of the Scriptures, he would not be a part of the "Episcopal Church."

If we are going to build reverence for the worship of God, we must know what God requires in worship. This preacher recently saw on the news where a denomination, to draw a bigger crowd, had a game show during their "worship service," at which they gave away a car. According to the news report, there was standing room only in the building.

We looked at John 4:24 previously, but this is a passage which we need to revisit. Jesus said, "God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth." As we noted before, *spirit* in this verse is dealing with the correct attitude, and *truth* is speaking of worship according to the will of God. Thus, we must have authority,

according to Jesus, in the worship that we give to God. Paul says the same thing to the Colossians: “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (3:17). Paul is saying that in whatever you say or do, including religiously, you must have the authority of Jesus Christ.

Since we have established that we must have authority for all that we say or do religiously, what does the Bible teach that we must do in worship? Some outside of the Lord’s body may say, “It does not matter which day one worships as long as he worships God.” God does give us a day, through apostolic example, on which to worship. The first day of the week is shown to be very important to the Christian. The first day of the week is the day on which Jesus was raised from the dead (Mat. 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). The first day of the week is the day on which the church had its beginning (Acts 2:1-2; cf. Lev. 23:15; Deu. 16:9). The first century Christians came together to worship on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7-ff; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Rev. 1:10).

We build a better attitude by involving ourselves in the correct items of worship. Luke says that they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teachings, in breaking of bread (the Lord’s Supper) and prayers (Acts 2:42). He further teaches that Christians worshiped by listening to the preaching of the Word (Acts 20:7). Paul teaches that Christians worshiped in a capella singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) and in giving of their means into a common treasury (1 Cor. 16:1-2). Thus, we find that we must limit our actions to the only items of worship that are authorized by God for the Christian.

Additionally, to build a better attitude toward the worship of the church, we must be organized according to the manner in which the Lord authorizes. According to His Word, the Lord has only authorized two offices in the organization of the church (Phi. 1:1): elders (Acts 14:23; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9) and deacons (1 Tim. 3:8-12). Many outside of the church and some in the Lord’s church have, without approval from God, placed women in positions which God never authorized. They are allowing them to serve as preachers, wait on the Lord’s Table, or serve in a number of other capacities which God has not approved (1 Tim. 2:11-15; 1 Cor. 14:34-35).

To build a better attitude toward the church, we must build respect for the work of the church. In our day and time many do not respect the work which God has authorized. If you go into any denomination and

ask about the work of the church, you might get varying responses, but if you asked for the Scripture which authorizes those works, you might get a blank stare. It is truly sad, but if you were to ask some members of the Lord's church, they too might look at you as if you were speaking another language. We need to understand what the work of the church is.

The world does not understand this concept and feels that the *church* may do anything which the members decide. This might include using the Lord's money for the entertainment of the members, feeding of the neighborhood, or building hospitals and community centers. All of these may be good works, but they are not necessarily the job or work of the church. These things are seen outside of the church, but many members do not understand the concept of the "Lord's Work." This preacher has attended a congregation in which some felt it was all right to use the Lord's money to fund a Halloween Party, as long as it was not called a Halloween Party. In another congregation there was a member who felt that it was the responsibility of the church to pay for his child to go to an amusement park or have a *church-sponsored* yard sale to raise money.

The work of the church is not whatever we want, but only that which God's Word authorizes. The first work is to evangelize the lost. Jesus said that His work was to "seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10), and He gave that mission to His disciples when He sent out the seventy in the limited commission (Luke 10:1ff); their job was to go to the lost House of Israel. He again gave the mission to seek and save the lost too when He instituted the great commission (Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:44-49). In the giving of that commission, He taught His apostles to pass that teaching on to those who would pass it on to others (Mat. 28:20). When the apostles met with Paul and Barnabas, they ensured that Paul and Barnabas were teaching the same Gospel to the lost (Acts 15). Paul gave this same commission to Timothy when he said: "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

The second work of the church is to edify the saints. When Paul finished his work of establishing churches (Acts 14:25-27), he and Silas went on another journey to edify or strengthen the churches which he had already established (Acts 15:41). Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul said that the purpose of prophesying was to edify the

church (1 Cor. 14:4) and that all worship should result in edification (1 Cor. 14:26; cf. Eph. 4:12).

The third and final work of the church is benevolence. Paul, through inspiration, commanded us: “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). Paul gave us the Words of Jesus that we must support the weak (Acts 20:35). This would include both those who are within the church (Rom. 12:13) and those who are outside of the church (Gal. 6:10). James charges us to “visit” the fatherless and widows in their affliction (Jam. 1:27). *Visit* literally means “to provide for their needs.”

### **BUILDING BETTER ATTITUDES TOWARD THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

To build a better attitude toward the people of God: we must (1) know what true biblical love is, (2) show a love for their souls, (3) show a common respect for them, and (4) show a love for being a servant. There is no way to separate the love of God’s Word and the love of God’s accepted worship from the love of God’s people. The apostle John says:

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also (1 John 4:20-21).

Paul, in that great chapter on love in 1 Corinthians 13, gives us the biblical definition of love. Some of the qualities of love are that it is long-suffering (in other words, it is very patient with the person for which love is shown), it looks for the best in the one it loves, it does not put itself above the person it loves, and it does not rejoice because of the problems in the life of the one whom we love.

If we are going to build a better attitude we must show a genuine love for the souls of our brethren. It is one thing to say that we love souls and another to show that we love their souls. Do we put rescuing the souls of our brethren in the forefront, or do we let other things such as pride and being right get in the way? One of the members where this one preaches asked a person who was having marital problems: “Do you want to be right or do you want to be married?” He was saying that a person can win the battle but lose the war, or he can listen to the other person and ultimately win the war. We should never compromise the truth, but notice Paul’s admonition to the brethren at Thessalonica for

dealing with someone who is caught up in sin: “Yet count *him* not as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother” (2 The. 3:15).

Dr. John Gottman wrote a book titled *Seven Principles for Making Marriages Work*, in which he gives six signs that show a marriage (or any other relationship) is in trouble. The first sign is a harsh start-up, beginning a conversation with sarcasm or criticism. The second is the four horsemen of: (1) criticism—blame and character assassination, (2) contempt—acting as if the person is beneath you, (3) defensiveness—going on the defense in all that is said, and (4) stonewalling—tuning the other person out. The third sign that a relationship is in trouble is flooding, where the heart rate goes up, blood pressure goes up, reacting goes up, and logical thinking goes down. The fourth sign is body language. The fifth sign of troubled relationships is failed repair attempts, “efforts to de-escalate the tension during a touchy discussion” (39). And the final sign is bad memories, where the person does not remember any good time in their relations, and he only dwells on the negative. The four horsemen of criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling are what this writer feels are most applicable to this subject.

As a counselor, one of the hardest things is to get disagreeing parties to realize that in almost all situations it is not only one person who is at fault, but that both parties have a part in the problem. In Matthew chapters 5 and 18, Jesus tells us how to deal with problems between brethren. He says that if a brother sins against another, the offended one should go to him (Mat. 18:15), and vice versa (Mat. 5:23). This allows the two individuals to meet in the middle and not on their own territory. Paul shows a similar thought when he tells us how we are to approach a brother who is in a sin: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). If a man is in sin, we should not go and bash him over his head with his sin, but approach him with love, remembering that he is our brother. In the language of a therapist, do not go with a harsh start-up and make sure you leave the four horsemen at home. The apostle John asks how can we say that we love God whom we have not seen and show no love for our brother whom we have seen? (1 John 4:20). The answer is that we cannot.

To build better attitudes toward God’s people, we must treat them with respect and approach them with love, according to our Lord, Paul,

and John. To build a better attitude toward the people of God we must be careful about how we speak about our brethren. Jesus in the “Sermon on the Mount” addresses the fact that we should not degrade our brethren with our words:

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire (Mat. 5:21-22).

The idea here is that we should not assassinate our brother’s character any more than we should take his physical life. As we have already briefly discussed, James voices this same sentiment about how we use our tongue:

Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be (3:9-10).

Finally, building a better attitude toward the people of God is found in our love for being a servant to our brethren. When we realize that the teaching of Jesus is that we must be a servant, it will not be hard for us to put others first. One of this writer’s fellow students in preaching school presented a message about one of the pioneer preachers who had learned a lesson from a slave of putting his master first. The one thing that this author still retains from that sermon, as it applies to this lesson, is that when we remember we are our brother’s servant, we will not be as quick to want our way. Somewhere else this scribe heard that *JOY* as a Christian stood for Jesus first, Others second, and Yourself last. Building a better attitude toward the Word, and toward the Worship, and toward the people of God is of utmost importance, but all of this is lost if we do not retain the mission of Jesus, for seeking and saving the lost.

### **BUILDING BETTER ATTITUDES TOWARD THE LOST**

Jesus’ last prayer that was recorded prior to His ascension dealt with (1) the mission of His disciples, (2) the unity of the believers, and (3) the reason for that unity. As we examine this last point, we must remember that to build a better attitude, we must have a better attitude toward the mission of seeking and saving the lost.

As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (John 17:18-23).

In a number of places Jesus shows that His primary mission for coming to this earth was to save souls. We can truly know the Word of God, worship in spirit and truth, have a love for our brethren, but if we do not take on His mission, all is for naught. The mission of Jesus is given to all Christians at the moment of baptism. This mission is not short-lived but one which we have from the day we are spiritually born unto the day that we lay aside our Christian armor. Paul says of that profession: “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses” (1 Tim. 6:12). Additionally he says, “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* profession” (Heb. 4:14). In these verses, *profession* is not just referring to our job but our chosen way of life. This writer remembers brother Ira Rice saying that he made a promise to God that he would go wherever He sent him. To the best of my knowledge, brother Rice spent the rest of his days on this earth fulfilling that promise.

The second part of Jesus’ prayer is that we are to have unity. This unity is not what some might call “unity in diversity”—but true unity. The kind of unity that builds better attitudes knows and respects the Word of God. This kind of unity remembers to build a loving attitude toward the people of God. It is found between God the Father and His Son. It was and is unity based on doctrine, on purpose, and on the mission to seek and save the lost.

Jesus gave the purpose for this kind of unity—“that the world may know that thou hast sent me” (John 17:23). When brethren are in the midst of division, many times they do not realize that they have forgotten the mission of the church, but even when they remember, many non-Christians or new Christians see the controversy and turn away. We may say, “Well, they should not be converted to a man,” and this

is true, but new Christians are babes and still learning. They have not learned to distinguish between the right and wrong way in the working of the church. They see the fighting and see no difference between the Lord's church and the denominations because both are involved in infighting. Building a better attitude requires a lot of work.

### CONCLUSION

As we build better attitudes, may we remember the words of our Lord, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35).

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# BUILDING BETTER MEMBERS

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## INTRODUCTION

**Key Question:** How can individual members **better themselves** in service to the Lord? **Answer:** We must adhere to God’s *exercise routine*. “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1). In this case, losing is the key to winning. Spiritual growth leads to greater service to God, the church, and those in need: “But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him *be* glory both now and for ever. Amen” (2 Pet. 3:18). Concerning the blessed man: “But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psa. 1:2). When the young rich ruler was challenged to think first of others, he stumbled (Mat. 19:16-22). In reality, he remained spiritually *overweight* and *out of shape*.

The intent of this lesson: We are made better if we accept and adhere to the instructions and illustrations revealed in Holy Writ.

## WE ARE MADE BETTER THROUGH MEMBERSHIP IN THE BODY

As a Gospel preacher, the author would readily admit that he has used the old “beat-them-over-the-head” method far too frequently at times, when it comes to discussing the blessings and duties of the mem-

bership in the local church. Positive reinforcement is oftentimes more effective, if used at the appropriate time.

**We should *rejoice* often over our distinct position—in Christ.** “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27). Membership in the Lord’s body is the greatest privilege ever extended to mankind.

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world (Tit. 2:11-12).

The Hebrew brethren were asked: “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” (Heb. 2:3). **Key:** If viewed correctly, salvation is the greatest joy one can experience.

Membership in the body of Christ is not parallel to membership in a man-made, pseudo-church. For the Lord authoritatively affirms:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Mat. 7:21-23).

**We must *respect* each member’s distinctiveness.** Assuredly, each member of the Lord’s church is unique. Each member should declare daily: “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made” (Psa. 139:14). However, individual uniqueness must never override the command to be united in doctrine (1 Cor. 1:10).

**We should/must *recognize* our distinct duties—suited to our abilities (Eph. 2:8-10).** Each member has a distinctive contribution to make to the church (1 Cor. 12). In addition, each member of the local church must be cognizant of how he must make a contribution to the body of Christ. Dear reader, do you fully understand your role at your home congregation, according to 1 Corinthians 12?

**We should/must *relish* our membership.** Membership in the Lord’s church is not analogous to a membership in a country club. There are those who relish their membership at so-called exclusive clubs. They cherish the opportunity to “rub elbows” with the “elite” members of society, they assume. Although the church is an exclusive organization, it has no room for those who are full of ungodly pride.

### **We must *revere* our distinct fellowship with the Godhead.**

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:3-7).

Tragically, many members—sometimes with much help from weak church leaders—treat membership in the beloved body of Christ as a *hobby*. Ironically, many Christians are “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:4). They would readily invest thousands of dollars in temporary entertainment rather than spend five dollars on material that can assist them better understand God’s Word.

With these thoughts firmly rooted in our minds, let us move on to the next point.

### **WE ARE MADE BETTER THROUGH GOD’S RECIPE FOR VICTORY**

Acts 2 provides the groundwork for this lesson. Other verses in various epistles elaborate or build upon Acts 2’s foundation. The glad tidings of Good News reveals:

1. Christ’s vicarious **crucifixion** and victorious **resurrection** over death (Acts 2:29-36).
2. He is our **propitiation** or atoning sacrifice or means of **reconciliation** to God (Rom. 4:24-25; Heb. 2:9, 17; 1 John 2:1-2). Both terms come from the same family of words.
3. He is the fully qualified source of **mediation** between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 4:14-16). Because of sin, man is not capable of having a direct dialogue with the Almighty.
4. Likewise, the Master of all men is solely responsible for our **redemption** (Acts 2:36; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). The price paid was the blood Christ shed—the key component in this entire process (John 19:34).
5. Upon hearing the Gospel, one should perform a sincere **self-examination** and make **personal application** (Acts 2:37), which leads to **conversion** (Acts 3:19). The honest hearts in the audience were

“pricked in their heart” and asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

6. The Gospel demands **cessation** of and **separation** from sin—**repentance** (2 Cor. 7:10). They were instructed to “repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38).

7. Because the inquirers needed **further instruction**, the Scriptures reveal: “And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40).

8. These penitent, precious souls demonstrated sincere **appreciation** for and **submission** to the Lord Jesus when they “gladly received his word [and] were baptized” (Acts 2:41).

9. As a result, they received **remission** of sins when they complied with the steps unto **salvation**, which is also described as **purification** of the soul—a most **delightful description** (Acts 2:37, 47; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:22).

10. **Justification** was the result of their obeying the Gospel (Rom. 4:25). God declared them not guilty because they had experienced the washing of **regeneration** via baptism, thus making contact with the precious, pure, powerful blood of Christ (Tit. 3:5).

11. **Sanctification**, living according to the guidelines of the Scriptures, was now the prescribed lifestyle (Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 2:9-10). They were at this point, vessels of honor fit for the Master’s use (2 Tim. 2:19-21), which involves a lifetime of methodical **transformation** (Rom. 12:1-2), continuous, acceptable **meditation** (Phi. 4:8), overcoming **temptations, tribulations, and persecutions** (1 Cor. 10:10-13; 2 Tim. 3:12; Jam. 1:1-8), and constant **participation** in the work of the church. It is clearly noted that these early members “continued steadfastly” in the ordained works of the church (Acts 2:42).

12. For their **protection** and **correction**, they were provided the Second Law of Pardon, which involves **contrition, cessation** of sin, **confession, and restoration** (Gal. 6:1-2; Jam. 5:16-20; 1 John 1:5-10).

13. The crowning jewel of walking faithfully with the Lord is **glorification**, shedding this earthly body for one fit for our promised heavenly **habitation** (Phi. 3:20-21).

14. Those who die in the Lord will avoid **eternal separation** from the Godhead (Mat. 25:41).

Certainly, the components of Heaven’s recipe for a successful life should make us better servants of the King of kings! “But thanks *be* to

God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57).

The apostle Paul stated that he was: “Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus” (2 Cor. 4:10). With this thought in mind, let us go on to the next point of the lesson.

### **WE ARE MADE BETTER THROUGH THE CROSS**

The Lord’s Supper is designed to remind us of the great price paid for our precious freedom. This author has attended services where the brethren were far too casual in respect to the Lord’s Supper. By no means is the author suggesting that the Lord’s Supper is more important than the other acts of worship. For the saint, there must be an emotional and educational connection to the cross. For the Savior definitively exclaimed: “This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). How can one who claims allegiance to the Christ have no, or very little, passion for the Savior’s suffering?

How powerful and moving is the image of the Savior’s struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane.

And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him. And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground (Luke 22:39-44).

Dear reader, when was the last time you considered the influence the cross of Christ has had on the world? Throughout the existence of mankind, it stands as the single most important occurrence ever. It is the event that literally changed the world. It is at the heart of Christianity.

The “Messianic Prophet” penned one of the greatest chapters in Holy Writ—Isaiah 53. This chapter provides insight into the **character**, **challenges**, and **conquests** of the Suffering Servant, the “Anointed One,” or “Messiah.” The reader must consider the words spoken by the Messiah:

Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?... Jesus answered,

My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence (Mat. 26:53-54; John 18:36).

Conclusively, He achieved His victory through suffering, not war (Rev. 5:4-14).

Isaiah 53 is actually the fourth of the “Servant Songs.” Isaiah 52:13-15 serves as the introduction to chapter 53. When studying these verses the Bible student should consider:

1. **The honorable title bestowed upon Him** (52:13). “My servant” is a term of honor (Job 1:8); it reveals a unique and proper relationship with God. It is a term of **description** and **distinction**.

2. **The honorable way in which He conducted Himself** (Isa. 52:13). He “shall deal prudently” or “wisely.” Because His actions always pleased the Father, the Almighty exclaimed: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Mat. 17:5). He often confounded His antagonists with superior logic and wisdom (John 8:1-9; Mat. 22:15-46). Were not the officers dispatched to arrest him on one occasion correct in their assessment when they declared: “Never man spake like this man” (John 7:46)? When the angry mob was about to unjustly seize Him, His benevolent nature was once again manifested (Luke 22:49-51).

3. **The honors bestowed upon Him** (Isa. 52:13). “He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high.” The Holy Spirit through the apostles confirmed this very fact: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36; Phi. 2:5-12).

4. **The astonishment He caused** (Isa. 52:14-15). Some believe that this is not a reference of what He did, but what was done to Him. His “visage” or “appearance” would be changed or **disfigured** at the hands of wicked men. *Sprinkle* carries the meaning of “startle.” Dear reader, have you ever seen portraits of how the Savior supposedly looked? Are not they of a man without a physical blemish, a man on par with a Hollywood leading man? Of course, these images are inaccurate. The Bible nowhere reveals how the Savior actually looked. In our stead, Jesus suffered emotionally and physically (Mat. 26:67; 27:26-31). When was the last time you actually thought about *scourge* or *scourging*? Such malicious treatment left the Lord’s bodily image a sight too graphic for civilized people.

5. **The rejections He endured** (Isa. 53:1-4). First, His Message was rejected by the hard-hearted (53:1; John 12:37-41; Rom. 10:16-21). Second, His Message reveals the sole Source of salvation. The “arm of the LORD” is a reference to the Lord’s ability to help, deliver, or save (Isa. 51:5; 52:10; Rom. 1:16). Similar language is employed in Isaiah 59:1-2.

Third, His person was refused (53:2). This verse reveals a contrast. It lets us see His progress as the God-man (Luke 2:52). Jesus had to learn what being a man entailed (Heb. 4:16; 5:8-9). Lovingly, God’s watchful eyes were ever upon Him (John 8:29). Next, it proclaims His kingly heritage (Isa. 11:1). He is a direct descendant of Jesse, the father of David. His kingship is supported by sacred testimony (Mat. 1). This undeniable fact the Jews vehemently denied (Mat. 26:63-68; 27:11). Then, it shows the unfavorable conditions He endured. The “dry ground” represents the political, moral, and religious climate under which Jesus lived. Corruption was rampant in all three areas. However, the Suffering Servant triumphed over them completely and convincingly.

Fourth, His mission was misunderstood (Isa. 53:3). The Savior lamented the city of David’s murderous rebellion against the many faithful prophets of God, including Himself (Mat. 23:37-39). His pseudo-disciples likewise rejected Him (John 6:31-66).

6. **The vicarious suffering He experienced** (Isa. 53:4-6). The personal plural pronouns *we*, *our*, and *us* refer to all men who ever lived—from Adam forward, because “the way of transgressors *is* hard” (Pro. 13:15). Sin is eternally connected to suffering (Gen. 3; Mat. 8:17; Luke 13:16; 16:19-31). Sin leads man **astray** and **away** from Jesus the Good Shepherd (Luke 15). Sin wounds the soul (Psa. 51). Isaiah 53:6 forever dispels the false doctrine of “inherited sin.” God places the blame directly on those who are responsible. Christ, through His severe suffering, makes it possible for us sinners to be healed. How piercing are the declarations: “And with his stripes we are healed” (53:5) and “And the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (53:6). The harlot, drug pusher and abuser, whoremonger, gambler, homosexual, adulterer, etc., all can be healed through the Suffering Servant.

7. **The superior submission He displayed** (53:7-9). With the advent of DNA testing, numerous individuals have been freed after having been wrongly convicted and imprisoned. What innocent man in his right mind would be willing to suffer as an evildoer? For this very

reason, the Lord suffered great emotional stress in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-44). This is one of the paradoxes of the cross: The innocent One suffered as one guilty to free those who were actually guilty. The greatest battle ever to take place is recorded in the accounts of Jesus' life. He was absolutely innocent and knew the torturous pain associated with the cross, thus the will of the **man** Christ Jesus was having a very difficult time dealing with what Immanuel knew had to take place. Thankfully, He submissively acknowledged, "nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). Paul stated: "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phi. 2:8).

As this author was penning these words, a news report revealed that singer and actress Brandy Norwood (who starred in the television show *Moesha* and whose whole family were once members of the Lord's church) was being charged with vehicular manslaughter. Similarly, a young man was arrested in the Atlanta area for vehicular homicide. While fleeing from the scene of a hit-and-run accident, he crossed the median killing an elderly couple and their teenage granddaughter. Because these two individuals transgressed the laws of God and man, innocent lives were forever tragically changed. In contrast, the Suffering Servant actions never harmed a soul.

Isaiah 53:8-9 foretells the injustice and type of death the Servant would experience. Isaiah 53:9 also offers another paradox; Christ was put to death as a convicted criminal. As such, He should have been buried with the guilty; however, the righteous man, Joseph of Arimethaea, buried Him with dignity (Mat. 27:57-60). Homer Hailey offers these sentiments: "Christ's life was ever above reproach, His speech always sincere and true. He had done no criminal act and had not failed in His work and mission; therefore, His Father saw to it that the faithful Servant received an honorable burial" (440-41).

8. **The victories and rewards He enjoyed** (53:10-12). First, He made a way for fallen man to remove his sins once and for all (Rom. 4:24-25). Jehovah's delight was not the Savior's personal suffering, but Christ's offering Himself as the only qualified sacrifice capable of removing the sin of the world (John 1:29; Heb. 12:2). Tom Bright summed it up best: "From the fall, man had to provide his own sacrifice for sin. Now, God the Father would provide His own sacrifice for man—the sinless suffering Savior" (186). The Savior's unswerving devotion, illustrated in Philippians 2:1-11, was a source of pleasure for

the Father. Second, He is the Source of salvation for whosoever will. “His seed” are those who will obey the Gospel (John 17:20; Acts 4:12). According to the prophecy, man’s salvation is sure and secured. Likewise, “His seed” will be justified of their sins.

Third, He conquered man’s greatest fear and foe. “He shall prolong his days” is a reference to His resurrection. Death’s dominance experienced a decisive defeat (Acts 2:22-28; Rev. 1:17-18).

O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

Fourth, He is the strong King of kings. As foretold in Genesis 3:15, Jesus dealt Satan a crushing blow. Luke 11:21-22 gives further insight into the matter. Christ reveals that Satan is strong (22:31); in contrast, the Lord is stronger. As noted, the devil tried everything imaginable to prevent the salvation of man. Through God’s providence the Scheme of Redemption prevailed (to the chagrin of Satan).

Dear reader, this portion of Scripture closes with some sobering thoughts we should ever keep fresh in our minds. Our Lord “poured out his soul [body] unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12). He endured the shame and humiliation of the cross for you and me. Christ was treated as a convicted, common criminal for our sakes. Last, He intercedes with the Almighty in our behalf to keep our salvation (Heb. 7:25). Having a deeper insight into what the Suffering Servant experienced for our benefit should inspire us to be more dedicated members.

### **WE ARE MADE BETTER THROUGH SERVICE AND SACRIFICE**

“Jesus is King of Kings” is the theme of Matthew’s account of Christ’s life. “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (4:17) is the premise of the Sermon On The Mount (5-7). This scribe refers to these salient chapters as “The King’s Code of Conduct.” They speak to both Jew and Gentile, bond-servant and freedman, city dweller and suburbanite, rich and poor, etc. Those who would become citizens of Christ’s kingdom need to know what the New Covenant requires of the subjects of the King (5:13-16).

It is important to note that even a heathen can benefit from applying these tried and proven principles to his life. This penman remembers vividly the words a philanthropist exclaimed during an interview.

When asked if he were a Christian, and was it faith in the Christ that motivated him to help others, the gentleman stated: “I do not believe in God. I live by the Golden Rule. I simply do unto others as I would have them do unto to me.” Ignorance notwithstanding, the man benefitted from the very God Whose existence he denied!

In supreme, superior fashion, the Lord accurately and perfectly reveals the types of “soil” or hearts of men (Mat. 13). Those deemed “good ground” represent the honest, humble hearts that accept the invitation to become citizens of the kingdom of Christ. The submissive, honorable spirits of the Ethiopian eunuch and the Philippian jailer are noteworthy (Acts 8, 16). They had upright hearts dedicated to improving themselves, according to Matthew 13:23.

When the great day of Pentecost arrived (as perfectly foretold by the prophets), the Gospel was purely preached. It revealed Christ as the suffering, selfless, regal, confirmed Savior and King of Kings. In response to the Good News, about three thousand devout souls heeded the Message and were added to the church of Christ (Acts 2:47). These brave souls began a journey that would require much change and many new challenges in their lives.

From the outset, the infant church demonstrated the key ingredient that is the bond of the church—selflessness. These early Christians exemplified the Lord’s declaration: “Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Mat. 5:8). Their growth individually and collectively is noted in one of this preacher’s favorite block of verses—Acts 2:42-47. These verses teach: (1) They were knitted together **doctrinally**—they believed the same thing; (2) They were knitted together **emotionally**—they possessed a genuine love for one another. (3) They were knitted together **spiritually**—their faith led them to be concerned about one another’s well being.

This cherished mind-set permeated most of the churches. The Gentile brethren of the first century of the church’s existence were eager to help their Jewish brethren overcome difficulties they were experiencing (Acts 11:28-29). These former mortal enemies were now brethren, fellow heirs, comrades, and citizens of the same kingdom (Eph. 2). The Prince of Peace was successful in changing their disgust and mistrust into *agape*, sacrificial love. Paul details the Macedonians’ benevolent spirit (2 Cor. 8:1-7). (1) They overcame great obstacles or trials. (2) They made no excuses though they were deeply impoverished, physically speaking. (3) They were eager to assist; they were

sold on serving others. (4) They saw themselves as ministers or servants. (5) Their priorities were in the proper place. No greater compliment can be made than what is recorded in 2 Corinthians 8:5—that they “first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.”

Every day is an opportunity for the saint to be a “Good Samaritan.” It is vital to remember that dedication to serving others is one of the most important attributes of Christianity, according to Jesus (Mat. 25:31-40). Philippians 2 provides us with Divine and human examples of selfless service. Of course, Christ is our supreme example. The church at Philippi fostered a spirit of caring and sharing. Timothy and Epaphroditus were two brethren who sincerely cared for the state of others. Let us never forget to do good unto all men, especially those who are our dear brethren in Christ (Gal. 6:9-11).

### WE ARE MADE BETTER THROUGH TRIALS

A godly education **prepares** the saint for every challenge that may occur in his life. Regarding the Precious Book Divine:

1. God’s Word is **pure** to those who are pure in heart (Psa. 19:8).
2. God’s Word is **pleasant** to those who cherish it (Psa. 1:2).
3. God’s Word is **precious** to those who love it (Psa. 119:97).
4. God’s Word is a **protector** (Psa. 1:1; 119:11, 101).
5. God’s Word is a **provider** of wisdom (Psa. 119:98), joy (John 15:11), comfort (1 The. 4:13-18), instruction for holy living (2 Tim. 3:16-17), insight into the mystery (Eph. 3:1-4), and faith which is the key ingredient (Rom. 10:17; Heb. 11:6).
6. God’s Word is **penetrating** (Acts 2:37; Heb. 4:11-12). It will reach its intended target.
7. God’s Word is **pre-eminent** (Gal. 1:6-10). It has no equal.
8. God’s Word is **powerful** enough to help one overcome trials or tests (Mat. 4).

As noted, God’s Word is a provider. It supplies us **illustrations** and **insight** for overcoming difficult times in our lives. Joseph’s intimate knowledge of God’s Word enabled him to overcome the death of his dear mother at an early age (Gen. 35), the hatred of his brothers (37), the loss of his physical freedom (37:20-36), being separated from his family, staying out of the bed of devilish degradation (39), being unjustly imprisoned (39:20), and retaliating against those who offended

him (50:14-20). Surely, Joseph endured much heartache because of the ungodly actions of others (Gen. 39:14-15); however, he did not let his challenges turn him away from his God. Through his faithful perseverance, the seed line of the Christ was providentially preserved which was the most important element (45:1-5).

Joseph's perseverance serves as a source of strength for the saint today who struggles and suffers because of the ungodly actions of others. He did not consume himself with himself.

One of the most inspiring illustrations of courage in Holy Writ is the valor displayed by the Hebrew midwives (Exo. 1:15-21). Faced with an evil edict from the king of Egypt, the most powerful man in the world at that time, the Scriptures declare: "But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive" (1:17) which is the crux of the story.

Please note that the text reveals both the faithfulness and frailties of man. It is true that a man of great faith can sometimes stumble when faced with enormous odds. It is implied in the narrative that these brave souls repented of their deceptive behavior. Because it is perfectly fair and balanced, the Holy Book did not leave out the midwives' transgression. The Almighty would never endorse anything that is contrary to His will. Likewise, this is not an endorsement of "situation ethics."

The book of Job answers the questions: (1) Why do men suffer? (2) Why do good men suffer? (3) Who is sometimes behind the suffering man experiences? (4) What is the benefit of suffering? (5) What effect can suffering have on our faith?

After multiple days of decline, beginning on Thursday, October 24, 1929, also known as "Black Thursday," the Stock Market crashed. Scores of investors lost all their accumulated wealth. As a result, many who were once rich were now "dirt poor." In response, because their riches were their *god*, some of the investors, refusing to deal with their newfound poverty, committed suicide. The decline of the Stock Market was one of the major reasons for the Great Depression. In similar fashion, Job experienced the same fate, losing all of his wealth without notice. However, he responded differently (Job 1).

During the time of war, the military dispatches a representative to the home of sometimes unsuspecting family members for the purpose of disclosing the grave news—your loved one has died in combat. How would a family respond when receiving the news that multiple loved ones all perished at the same time? This author remembers a case that

made national news not long ago. A family (reportedly members of the Lord's church) was traveling in a van that was struck by a tractor-trailer. Multiple deaths occurred as a result. It was also reported that upon receiving the news, the grandfather suffered a heart attack and subsequently died. As the author was writing this lesson, a television station located in Atlanta, Georgia, was reporting on a fatal hit-and-run incident. An eleven-year-old girl was struck and killed in her front yard. Imagine how her family felt when they found out that the perpetrator, though previously charged with several felonies, was allowed to bond out solely by his signature. Apparently the courts deemed him a "low risk" felon.

Similarly, Job, a godly and loving father, lost all of his children at once! In response, though grieving and heavy-hearted, he did not curse the Almighty. His saga took another turn for the worse when his body was struck with a dreaded disease. To add to his misery, his once devoted wife lost her dignity when she petitioned him to curse God and die. Additionally, his friends were not much help. They insisted he had sinned which they claimed was the root cause of all his suffering. This author cannot comprehend the level of anguish and suffering this great man of God experienced. In reality, after all the losses he suffered, all Job possessed was his faith—his most vital asset.

Dear reader, maybe you know of someone who has, or maybe you have been beset with trial after trial in your life. Is not the old cliché true which states: "The sun is still shining behind the dark, gloomy, gray clouds"?

After being knocked down, Job began to recover with vigor. He exclaimed victoriously: "For I know *that* my redeemer liveth, and *that* he shall stand at the latter *day* upon the earth: And *though* after my skin *worms* destroy this *body*, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (19:25-26). His *Goel* or Kinsman Redeemer would champion his cause. It was this confidence which enabled him to rise above the pitfalls he encountered.

Because of his strong faith, Job made it through his multiple trials. As a result, the Lord blessed him with more than he had prior to his ordeal. This scribe is convinced that Job's most cherished blessing was his increased faith. In the same way, 1 Peter 4:12-16 encourages us Christians to stay the course in view of the blessings ahead, in spite of the difficulties.

## WE ARE MADE BETTER THROUGH FELLOWSHIP/EXHORTATION

One of the most important words in the Christian vocabulary is *fellowship*. Acts 2 and 4 reveal the sweet and precious jewel—**fellowship**. Acts 3 and 4 reveal attacks on the church from without. In contrast, chapter 5 reveals an attack on the body from within, which could have destroyed or distorted the precious fellowship of the saints. A key question is: which of the two types of attacks causes greater harm to the church?

It is vital that when teaching a prospect about salvation, the Bible teacher should teach that:

1. Fellowship has a **Standard** (Rom. 6:17-18). The Pattern is our guide.
2. Fellowship is **spiritual** in nature (Acts 2:42; 16:25; Gal. 2:9; Phi. 1:5; 2:1; 3:10; 4:3, 15-18; 1 John 1:3). It **serves** a need that only faithful Christians can provide (Heb. 10:24-25).
3. God is **selective** regarding fellowship (Mat. 7:21-23; Eph. 5:11; 2 John 9-11).
4. Fellowship must be **started** (Acts 2:37-41, 47).
5. Fellowship must be **sustained** (1 John 1:5-10). It is key to our **survival**.
6. Fellowship can be **severed** (2 The. 3:6).

### Psalm 133

Psalm 133 is one of the greatest expressions revealed in Holy Writ concerning unity or fellowship. This wonderful psalm illustrates from both the sacred and secular realm the importance of God-ordained unity. From the sacred realm, fellowship is pictured as:

1. **Praiseworthy** or good and pleasant (v. 1).
2. To dwell together in a godly manner is likewise **powerful**, how true is the song, “Bless Be the Tie That Binds.”
3. It is **pure** like the oil used to anoint Aaron (Exo. 30:22-23; Psa. 133:2). God is the One Who created the formula or recipe; the same applies to the church (1 Cor. 1:10-13). It is vital to remember that previously each item apart from the others could be used for many purposes, but when mixed together, they all had the same purpose.
4. It **provides** an escape; it sets apart the righteous from counterfeit versions of unity. Yes, fellowship is **purposeful**; the **holy**

anointing oil used on Aaron and his sons signified that the priesthood was ordained of God.

5. It **possesses** the highest quality of fellowship. Aaron, the high priest, held the highest office; true unity is togetherness of the highest class.

6. It **presents** undeniable evidence to outsiders and inquirers. Christ teaches that the results of unfeigned unity are belief and knowledge (John 17:21, 23).

7. It is **precious** like the pure, anointing oil, because it originates with God.

The illustration from the secular realm imparts to us:

1. **Unity is vital to life.** It is like the dew is for plant life survival (Psa. 133:3).

2. **Unity removes disruptions.** Dew cannot occur during a storm or when strife is present; all must be calm if dew is going to be manufactured.

### The Crux of the Psalm

“For there the LORD commanded the blessing, *even* life for evermore” (133:3). *There* refers to approved unity. Satan’s strategy is to divide and conquer. Corinth’s disunity was the root of many of its problems (1 Cor. 1:10-12). Biblical unity contains a wonderful blessing. Matthew 12:22-25 succinctly illustrates this key component for us.

## CONCLUSION

Members of the Lord’s precious body are made more Christ-like by applying the principles contained in this lesson. Building better members only strengthens the beloved bride of the Christ. May we all work fervently for the expressed purpose of pleasing our Father, the Almighty. Let it be our steadfast goal to hear the most cherished words imaginable: “Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Mat. 25:23).

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# BUILDING BETTER LOVE ONE FOR ANOTHER

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## INTRODUCTION

This topic is of vital importance to all of us who are children of God. The Scriptures teach the building up of the Lord's church through the avenue of love. The brethren at Bellview, through the years, have demonstrated Christian love one for another and for the lost of the world. The subject title alone reminds us of how important building better love one for another is and how it is a lifelong work. *Building* is a verb, indicating continuous action, which means Christians must always be building a better or greater love one for another. This means the Christian will never get to the point where they no longer have to work at building better love one for another.

But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more (1 The. 4:9-10).

It was not that the Macedonians were negligent in their love one for another, but Paul wanted them to increase even more and they were able to do this (2 The. 1:3). Likewise, we need to increase more and more in our love one for another.

Unfortunately, many today and not a few in the church do not know the biblical meaning of *love*. To build better love one for another, Christians must first understand the correct definition of *love*.

## WRONG DEFINITION OF *LOVE*

Many times, in trying to understand the definition of a word, it is helpful to understand what the word does not mean. There are many misunderstandings of what *love* means. When this writer was a young

teenager, he would refer to a favorite song, movie, or his mother's cooking as things that he loved. His father would correct him by stating those were things one liked but could not love. Liking something and loving someone are two different things. At other times, people use *love* incorrectly by saying they love someone when in reality they are lusting after the individual. While the Scriptures promote love, they warn about lust. Christians should "abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Pet. 2:11). The young Timothy was encouraged to "flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22).

We live in a world that teaches we are to love everybody. The way the world defines *love* is different than the way the Bible defines it. The world defines *love*—never pointing out someone is wrong. Some brethren in the church have this same erroneous concept of *love*. Preach the truth—just not all of it. Stay away from topics that will condemn brethren of the sin in which they are living. Stand for the truth—just not all of it—especially, if the truth is contrary to what some brethren are practicing or some pet project of theirs. Liberal brethren can be the most loving of all as long as no one stands in their way with the truth. When that happens, they can be meaner than a junkyard dog. In 1972, brother George Darling wrote:

Let us remember in these days of **love everybody** (even the Devil, if he smiles sweetly and publicizes his humility) that God's Word is still our standard; and if it means that we lose every friend we ever had on God's green earth for the sake of Christ and His church, then so be it.... These **love everybody** advocates who are so merciful with the deliberate and well known wrong doers are so quick to draw the trigger on any person, preacher, elder, deacon, teacher or whatever, who says, "No, I am going to take my stand on the Bible, taking its truth, refusing to become a partaker in their evil ways." There is no **mercy or love** for that man. He is to be cast out from that time on. He is accused of being evil spirited, narrow minded, egotistical, overbearing, unkind, hard to get along with, having a "fat lip" and a "quick pen," and anything else that will do him injury to the one with whom they speak (1, 4).

Love does not stand in opposition to the truth. Obedience and love go hand in hand. Actually, obedience is proof of loving the brethren and loving God: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). We must keep

all of His commandments, even the ones that might be difficult. God has never asked man to do something he could not do. Therefore, we must: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2), even when it is not popular or not in season. Paul said, “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all *men*” (Acts 20:26). How was Paul *pure* or *free* of the blood of all men? Paul explained, “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Brethren need to hear the whole Word of God taught so they can know everything God expects of them. It is better to hurt people’s feelings or step on their toes in this life than for them to be lost in the fires of Hell for all eternity.

Some would say that any form of church discipline, especially withdrawal of fellowship, is not showing love. Actually, what that demonstrates is an unloving, mean spirited characteristic toward others and an attitude of disobedience to God’s Word. Bob Cruse correctly stated:

The apostle Paul was clearly angry when he knew that a “fornicator” was being harbored in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 5:1). His instruction to “deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh...” (v. 5a) was manifestly unforgiving. But Christian love dripped from the apostle’s pen as he explained his harshness. His fervent desire was that this sinner’s “spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (v. 5b) (17).

Not trying to get a brother or sister to see the error of his way is unloving and mean-spirited. When we know that a Christian has “erred from the truth” and we choose to say and do nothing because we do not want to hurt his feelings, well, that is unloving. The reason is that one is then demonstrating a lack of concern for that individual’s soul. The apostle Paul stated:

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ (Gal. 6:1-2).

Bringing an erring brother or sister back to Christ is fulfilling the law of Christ. James also wrote:

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins (Jam. 5:19-20).

Saving a soul from spiritual death is “Building Better Love One for Another.” Friends, we have only touched the *hem of the garment* on what love is not. There are many other things that love is not and many other ways the world and some brethren misuse *love*. We need to remember how the Word of God defines *love*, not man.

### BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF LOVE

*Webster’s Dictionary* defines love as strong affection for one another arising out of kinship or personal ties. It also defines it as attraction based on sexual desire, plus, affection based on admiration, benevolence, or common interests (690). The Bible defines it differently, depending on how it is used. There are several kinds of *love* recorded in the Bible. Two of the more prominent types found in the New Testament will be the focus of our attention.

*Phileo* is a form of love mentioned in the Scriptures. Vine defines this love as “tender affection” (693). It is an unselfish love, ready to serve (694). It is found in *philadelphia* or *brotherly love* (1 The. 4:9), which is a “warm, emotional love or attachment such as exists between marital spouses, those of close physical kin (as parents and children, brothers and sisters), and those of close spiritual kin” (Taylor 139). One of the great blessings of being a Christian is the love one experiences from the brethren. Many times this love is stronger than the love one feels from their own flesh and blood. This love draws us closer together as a spiritual family, the family of God, which is the greatest family on earth. As Paul stated, “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another” (Rom. 12:10).

*Agape*, and its verb form *agapao*, is the other type of love we will notice. This represents the strongest form of love in the Bible. John 3:16 depicts the love the Father had for mankind. This form of love is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Dub McClish states:

This word is by far the most frequently occurring “love” word in the New Testament, appearing 116 times. The verb form, *agapao*, appears an additional 142 times. The *agape* family of Greek words represents the very highest concept of love. This word conveys the idea of seeking the very best for others, with or without affection for them, and whether or not they are worthy of our benevolent attitudes and actions. This love arises not from the worthiness of its recipient, but from the benevolent nature of its giver. Thus God loved wicked and sinful men although He certainly did not like them or approve of their conduct (John 3:16). *Agape* is basically an act of the will that can be commanded (John 13:34; Eph. 5:25; 1 John 3:23; et al.), rather than a

spontaneous emotional response of the heart which no man can command (282).

This strongest form of love is a sacrificial kind of love, one that esteems the needs of others above our own. It even teaches us how to treat our enemies as Jesus taught, “Love your enemies” (Mat. 5:44). The apostle Paul gives a thorough definition of love recorded in 1 Corinthians 13:1-8. The greatest demonstration of this love is the Father giving His only begotten Son for the world (John 3:16). Once again, this love is one of action, of concern for others whom you may not feel much or any affection. This is a characteristic that the child of God must learn to have and must learn to demonstrate.

Love is a command from Jesus that His disciples are to love one another. Jesus referred to it as a new commandment:

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another (John 13:34-35).

Why did He refer to it as a “new commandment?” The Law of Moses did teach love: “thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Lev. 19:18). Jesus simply took it a step further by commanding His disciples to “love one another; **as I have loved you.**” Jesus loved us to such a degree that He was willing to die for us. It was not the nails, the Romans, or the Jews that kept Him on the cross; His love for man kept Him on the cross. As Christians, we must strive to the best of our ability to be more Christ-like in our love one for another. This will be how others, especially the world, will know we are His disciples. This is our badge of discipleship, our badge of Christianity. Is not Christianity built on a foundation of love, God’s love for man?

What would man know about love if God had not shown us love and demonstrated its true meaning? “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8). Building better love one for another begins by understanding what the biblical definition of love truly means.

### EXAMPLES OF LOVE

Several times, we learn how to do something through a demonstration of it or by observing certain examples. Through noticing the examples of the love others had one for another, Christians can better understand and put into practice the concept of “building better love

one for another.” Plentiful are the examples to choose from in the Bible of individuals that demonstrated great love.

### David and Jonathan

What a shame that ungodly men would try to turn the beautiful love these two men had for one another into some unholy homosexual union. Some in this world are so wicked it is nearly impossible for them to have good thoughts about others. Since they are wicked and live a life of sin, then others must do likewise.

True are the words: “But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13). Jonathan’s love of David is described as: “the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul” (1 Sam. 18:1). *Knit* means to “bind” (Wilson 239). Therefore, Jonathan’s soul was bound or tied together with David’s soul. Adam Clarke commented:

Jonathan loved him as his own soul. The most intimate friendship subsisted between them; and they loved each other with pure hearts fervently. No love was lost between them; each was worthy of the other. They had a friendship which could not be affected with changes or chances, and which exemplified all that the ancients have said on the subject; “Friendship produces an entire sameness; it is one soul in two bodies: a friend is another self” (270).

When all the members of a congregation display the love that Jonathan had for David it can only help to build up and strengthen that local congregation. Souls being knit and bound together in love with no love lost between them is “building better love one for another.”

### Ruth

The book of Ruth is one of the great love stories recorded in the Bible. Great characters are found in the book: Ruth, her mother-in-law Naomi, and her husband to be, Boaz. The love of Ruth for Naomi is what draws our attention. After Naomi’s husband and sons die, she decides to leave Moab and return to her home in Bethlehem. Naomi tries to persuade her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, to stay in their own country of Moab. Orpah stayed behind, but Ruth would not hear of it. Ruth’s words have been repeated at countless marriage ceremonies over the years, but how many know these were the words of a daughter-in-law to her mother-in-law:

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people *shall be* my people, and thy God my

God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, *if ought* but death part thee and me (1:16-17).

No longer were they mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, but simply mother and daughter. Building better love one for another means loving the family of God as Ruth loved Naomi, a willingness to sacrifice for one another and to cleave to one another. A willingness to put the welfare of the brethren above our own can only elevate Christian love, as God would have it.

### **Syro-Phoenician woman**

Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30 records this account. A mother's love for her young daughter is demonstrated in this account. She knew the whereabouts of Jesus and believed He could help her daughter who was "grievously vexed with a devil" (Mat. 15:22). Jesus would try her faith a number of times before He gave in to her request. Through every test, she remained persistent in asking Him to help her. When she begged for His help, Jesus stated: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast *it* to dogs" (15:26). She was a Gentile and Jesus' earthly ministry was to the house of Israel—the Jews. Her faith is seen in her response: "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (15:27). Jesus complimented the great faith she had and gave in to her request. She was persistent and determined to save her young daughter. Everyone knows the love that mothers have for their children and the great lengths they will go to keep them from harm. Building better love one for another means being persistent and going to great lengths in ensuring the peace and spiritual safety of the precious bride of Christ.

### **The Father**

We just noticed the great love a mother had for her child. However, how many mothers or fathers would give their only child to die for someone else? Take it a step further and ask how many parents would give their only child to die for someone who hated and despised them. The love the Father had for the world is demonstrated in His giving His only begotten Son to die for the sins of the world. Guy N. Woods ably mentioned:

The "world" which God loved and so loved as to give his only begotten Son, is the world of mankind, often rebellious, full of iniquity, wicked and cruel, lost and without God and without hope apart from the gospel. It is the wondrous marvel of the ages that this

world God is said to have loved, and to have given his Son to die for rather than to have annihilated it in one stroke of destruction (67).

### The Son

The Son of God demonstrated His love by leaving the glory of Heaven, taking the form of a man and teaching humanity how to live. Most importantly, the Christ demonstrated His love by dying for our sins. “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phi. 2:8). The world then, as it is today, was full of sin: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Mankind needed to be reconciled to the Father and only through the giving of His only begotten Son is that accomplished. Redemption of mankind would not be accomplished with corruptible things, but the offering of a perfect, sinless sacrifice or as Peter said, “But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:19).

Recently, this writer read the book, *Flags of our Fathers*, which was about the taking of the island fortress of Iwo Jima. So many men sacrificed themselves for their country and for their fellow Marines. There were many accounts of a Marine dying to save his friends. However, these men died for ones that cared for and loved them. Paul places Jesus’ death in perspective when he wrote:

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:7-8).

To die for one who loved you is one thing: to die for one who hated and despised you is quite another. The greatest example of love demonstrated is the Father sending His only begotten Son and the Son dying for the sins of the world. Building better love one for another means always working and striving to become more Christlike in our love “unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). Christians must always remember that loving one another means loving one another as Christ loves us.

### 1 CORINTHIANS 13 AND BUILDING BETTER LOVE

Recorded in 1 Corinthians 13:1-8 is the importance and power of true love and how it can help build up the church. This *agape* form of love demonstrates itself through action and sacrifice. The sentiment found in these verses emphasizes the importance of doing things out of

love. The apostle Paul was able to work all miraculous gifts, but if he did not use them out of love, Paul went on to say, “I am nothing” (13:2). Service and worship to God rendered out of love is what our Lord expects from us. Therefore, our service rendered to those in the world and the brethren is out of love.

Paul could give all of his goods to feed the poor and give his body to be martyred, but if he did not do these things out of love, “it profiteth me nothing” (13:3). In other words, it was worthless to him. It is possible that Christians give of their possessions to help those who are in need in such a way that they will not profit from the gift. Giving that is done to receive the praises of men is not pleasing to God. Likewise, if one helps another, but grudgingly does it, it profits them nothing. A brother may give on the Lord’s Day as he purposed in his heart, but if he gives his contribution in a grudging manner and out of necessity, it profits him nothing. To be a “cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7), as God commands, we must give out of love.

Someone once said that we should put our own names in place of *charity* or *love* found in verses four through eight. This will help us as Christians to apply these verses as we should. For example: “Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up” (1 Cor. 13:4). Now each one should put his own name in place of *charity* and notice how it reads. Each one of us should suffer long or be patient with one another, as our heavenly Father is longsuffering toward us (2 Pet. 3:9). We should be kind, serviceable, good, pleasant, and gracious one to another (Vine 622). Christians should not be envious of one another, but, as Paul taught, “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” (Rom. 12:15). Each one of us should delight in the blessings and good fortune of others. In addition, we are not to vaunt ourselves, nor are we to be puffed up. Pride has destroyed more families, more friendships, and more congregations than one can count. “Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Pro. 16:18). Pride does not build the church up; it tears it down. A “proud look” is one of the seven things God hates (Pro. 6:17). Christians are to be filled with true love, which is self-effacing, not prideful. Jesus said, “Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mat. 5:3).

Through verses one through eight, Paul set out to show “a more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31) for all Christians. Hugo McCord wrote:

Since God is the personification of love (1 John 4:8), one can read the preceding verses omitting the word “love” and substituting the word “God” and the reading would be true. Likewise, one could do the same thing with the word “Jesus” and it would be true, and so with the word “Christian.” When one concentrates on those verses, he know precisely what is the more excellent way (165).

One will find other definitions of *love*, but Paul’s definition in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 can hardly be improved upon. This attitude of love will definitely help to build up the local congregation if all Christians will carry it out. As Christians we can “build better love one for another” by applying this more excellent way.

### LEARNING ABOUT LOVE

Where do people first learn about love and loving someone else? We first learned about love in the home around family members who first loved us, especially our loving fathers and mothers. Blessings are numerous for children who grow up in a loving Christian family where all members of the family love and cherish one another. It is in this kind of atmosphere where we, who were blessed to grow up in this environment, first learned about love and how to give love back. Little children are always trying to help with some chore their parents are involved in to please their “mommies and daddies” because they love them. Jesus used a little child as an example to His disciples who were arguing over who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Mat. 18:1-2). They needed to be humble and submissive as little children are.

Although we first learned about love in the home, where did we learn to love the family of God? It was in Bible classes, in the worship services, and in fellowshipping the brethren where we learned this form of love. Little children learn to love their extended family in this Christian environment. Adults, who later in life become Christians, learn of the beautiful love that Christians have one for another. As Peter stated:

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, *see that ye* love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever (1 Pet. 1:22-23).

This love of the brethren extends to other congregations through Gospel meetings, lectureships, area-wide singing, and other religious

endeavors. Brethren get to know one another through these godly events, and over the years they “build better love one for another.” Gospel meetings bring brethren from different congregations together to visit and worship God. They fellowship and support one another in the cause of Christ. This writer remembers growing up in the Pensacola area and attending a number of congregations that were involved in holding a Gospel meeting. One gets to know other brethren and strike up lasting friendships, and we are then able to “consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (Heb. 10:24).

Likewise, lectureships “build better love one for another.” They not only bring in brethren from around the area, but they bring in brethren from around the country (and sometimes the world) to hear the Word of God preached. This writer’s father recently reminded him of the first time Bellview conducted a lectureship. He had begun to think there were not a lot of faithful congregations left and Bellview was seemingly standing alone for the cause of Christ. However, after so many faithful Gospel preachers attended and so many faithful brethren attended from all over the country, he changed his mind. There were many brethren from around the country that thought and believed the same way as he did. With so many unfaithful congregations prevalent today, we may start thinking the same way; lectureships help us to realize there are many others who have not “bowed their knees to Baal.”

Lectureships such as the Bellview Church of Christ annually undertakes, along with other sound lectureships, **must** continue. It is the Word of God proclaimed that draws Christians to them, and the bond of fellowship can and will get stronger because of them. Looking forward to seeing the same brethren over the years at the different lectureships is a great way we can “build better love one for another.” Brethren who have never been to a lectureship do not know what they are missing, and all of us must encourage them to start attending. What a wonderful feeling it is, a blessing, to be with so many Christians from all over the world as we worship our Father together. The early Christians were exposed to this same kind of unity and fellowship that Christians today are exposed to at these godly lectureships. As Luke wrote:

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the

people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:46-47).

### PUTTING LOVE INTO PRACTICE

Christ gave us the command to love one another (John 13:34). James said, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (Jam. 1:22). It is one thing to know what God expects of us; it is quite another to put it into practice. God expects us to “love one another,” but how do we put it into practice? A good example of brethren putting into practice God’s Word is the churches of Macedonia recorded in 2 Corinthians 8. The Macedonians, who at this time were deeply impoverished, gave liberally to help the poor saints in Jerusalem. How could the brethren give so liberally, how could they give “beyond *their* power” (8:3), or their ability? As Paul stated, “And *this they did*, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God” (8:5). They were able to give liberally, above their means or ability, because they had first given themselves completely and unreservedly to God. Brother Carl B. Garner aptly stated:

This principle is so fundamental to the practice of the Christian faith that it cannot be over-emphasized. One who still regards himself as “his own person,” who considers everything as his own, and looks upon giving and service as duty, will have little reason to feel gratitude, to express reverence and worship, or to give generously and effectively (189).

For Christians to put into practice the command to “love one another,” Christians must first give themselves to the Lord. Jesus taught, “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this *is* the first commandment” (Mark 12:30). When Christians learn to love God with all their being, they will learn to love the brethren and the lost of this world, which will lead them to “putting love into practice.”

Sometimes the church forms committees to put a command of God into practice. They will ask, “What is the most efficient and expedient way we can ‘build better love one for another’? How can we get the brethren to put love into practice?” However, the best-laid plans will not amount to much if the church does not act upon the plan. The old saying, “Plan your work and work your plan,” is very true. In addition, there always seems to be individuals who criticize whatever plan a congregation tries to implement. Is it not interesting they never have a

plan themselves to bring to the table, and they are usually not doing anything themselves, but they will criticize what others are trying to do?

The High Plains Church of Christ, where this writer preaches, put a plan into place this past year. It is similar to the one that many congregations have in place. Once a month the brethren meet in each other's homes for a fellowship meal. Preferably, we like to meet in a different home every month. After the meal, we sing some songs and one of the men presents a short spiritual lesson. Toward the end, we hand out cards with the names of individuals that need to be contacted. These individuals are members who have not been attending faithfully, members who are sick and shut-in, members who are in the hospital, and visitors who have recently worshipped with us. Not only is the bond of fellowship strengthened by doing this, but also we are "building better love one for another" through this endeavor. More brethren are involved in contacting other brethren, thereby showing love and concern for their spiritual and physical health. More brethren are involved in contacting the visitors who have worshipped with us. Some of the visitors, whether they are Christians or not, will hopefully be motivated to return the next time. As we all know, it is one thing for the elders or preacher to contact an individual; it is quite another when the whole congregation does it—it does make more of a difference.

How can we "build better love one for another." All we have to do is open our Bibles and God will tell us. Matthew 25:34-40 tells us how to "build better love one for another." Jesus spoke of those who helped others, who were hungered, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick and in prison. The King will bless Christians who help those in this state of need (Mat. 25:34). Matthew Henry stated:

He will take the kindness done to them, as done to himself; *Ye have done it unto me*; which shows a respect to the poor that were relieved, as well as to the rich that did relieve them. Note, Christ espouses his people's cause, and interests himself in their interests, and reckons himself received, and loved, and owned in them. If Christ himself were among us in poverty, how readily would we relieve him? In prison, how frequently would we visit him? We are ready to envy the honour they had, who ministered to him of their substance, Luke 8:3. Wherever poor saints and poor ministers are, there Christ is ready to receive our kindnesses in them, and they shall be put to his account (863).

James states: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world” (Jam. 1:27). *Visit* means “looking to their needs to help them.” Stories abound of brethren helping others in one way or the other: cleaning houses, mopping floors, taking care of the yard, and bringing food over to those who are sick or unable to do these things are just some of the many examples of visitation. Many do not like to visit the elderly in nursing homes, but the elderly sure like the visit. Is that not “building better love one for another”? Think of all the elderly brethren who were so busy for the Lord when they were younger and now cannot attend. We must not forget about them! Sad to say, some brethren will not do these things, because it is not important enough. They see no glory or praise of others coming from an endeavor like this. The godly brethren who are involved in these good works are not looking for praise from others; they are simply “building better love one for another”!

The Bible is full of instructions on how we can “build better love one for another.” Possibly, the problem is not that we do not know what the Bible says; it is just that we are not doing it as much as we should be. To put love into practice we must “practice what we preach.” We must first give ourselves to the Lord to be able to do His will.

### CONCLUSION

Building better love one for another is all about responsibility. Every member of the Lord’s church has a responsibility to be involved in this work, and it is a work. More than that, if we have the attitude Jesus had, it will be a labor of love. Not only will we love the brethren as Jesus does, but also we will love the lost as He loves them. Undoubtedly, every generation has probably said that what the church needs now more than ever is more love between its members. Certainly, that is true in our time. If every Christian will put the needs and welfare of others before their own, we can “build better love one for another.” As Jesus said, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34). **Amen!**

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# BUILDING BETTER DISCIPLINE

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## INTRODUCTION

The mission of every congregation is to seek and save the lost (Luke 10:19; Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). To accomplish this mission each congregation must strive to keep its members faithful. We would accomplish a great feat if we could figure out a way to hold onto all those we baptize. However, as long as the devil is active and false doctrine exists, we know that some of our members are going to listen to and follow these false messages (Gal. 1:6-9). We simply are not going to keep every member we gain. However, the real tragedy is that sometimes we do not really try to keep them. We baptize them, and if they remain faithful, we rejoice. On the other hand, if they fall away, we feel that it was their fault. This attitude is the result of a lack of discipline.

From its beginning, the church has been lax in practicing discipline. Much of the New Testament is devoted to disciplinary problems in the church and their solutions. History later records similar problems, but seldom offers the same solutions. As a result, disciplinary deficiency has run rampant throughout the church like an infectious disease, which has caused the spiritual death of one or more members at a time and has weakened those that remained. Consequently, the church has been left weakened to the point that it cannot effectively do the work it has been given. This condition has left the church susceptible to doctrinal and moral error. Like those in the time of Jeremiah, many have become callused to the shame of sin and no longer even blush (Jer. 6:15; 1 Tim.

4:2). Since discipline is essential to personal growth as well as overall church growth, it is vital that we *Build Better Discipline*.

### WHAT DOES DISCIPLINE MEAN?

Since we live in a age of permissiveness and indulgence that has little or no regard for self-control, restrain, or limitations, it behooves us to define discipline. When discipline is mentioned, most will jump to the conclusion that we must be talking about withdrawal of fellowship. However, the biblical idea of disciple covers much more. Church disciple in its broadest sense includes everything that the church does in training, educating, and encouraging its members to walk in the light (Eph. 4:11-16; 1 John 1:7). Paul stated:

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

*Instruction* could be translated “discipline” which is a marginal note in some translations. This is translated from the Greek word *paideia*, of which Thayer says, “Whatever in adults also cultivates the soul, esp. by correcting mistakes and curbing the passions; hence, instruction which aims at the increase of virtue” (473). Strong’s definition of *paideia* is, “tutorage, i.e. education or training; by implication, disciplinary correction:—chastening, chastisement, instruction, nurture” (54). Discipline and disciple are closely related and have the same origin in the English language. A disciple is one who learns from the teacher for the purpose of conforming their lives to the principles learned. Thus, a disciple must lead a disciplined life.

Discipline can be broken down into two subcategories—preventive discipline and corrective discipline. Preventive discipline consists of instructive discipline and self-discipline. Corrective discipline includes instructive discipline, self-discipline, and, if necessary, punitive discipline. Since it is harder to correct a problem than it is to prevent one, we must work diligently in the area of preventive discipline. If we are successful here, we would have less corrective discipline to worry about. Like the old adage so plainly states, “A stitch in time saves nine!”

### PREVENTIVE DISCIPLINE

Self-discipline is necessary for anyone to reach their goal. Yet, self-discipline without the proper instruction is futile. Peter said:

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity (2 Pet. 1:5-7).

The order of the *graces* that we are to add to our faith is important. First on the list is “virtue” which is lion-hearted courage. To this courage, we add “knowledge.” This knowledge is of God’s will. To our knowledge of God’s will we add “temperance” or self-control. Thus, discipline includes knowledge and self-control. Without knowledge, we would not know what we should apply ourselves to or restrain ourselves from. Knowledge without self-control is just as useless as self-control without knowledge. Thus, Paul exhorts, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

While the individual bears the ultimate and primary responsibility for his own preventive discipline, he is not left entirely to himself. He is aided by the elders and his brethren. In instructive discipline, elders are to: (1) feed the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2), (2) be an example to the congregation (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:3), (3) take the oversight and rule the congregation (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 5:17), and (4) watch in behalf of all (Heb. 13:17). The congregation is to: (1) know the elders (1 The. 5:12), (2) esteem them highly in love for their work’s sake (1 The. 5:13), (3) count them worthy of honor and some double honor (1 Tim. 5:17), (4) receive no accusation against an elder quickly (1 Tim. 5:19), and (5) submit to the elders (Heb. 13:17). Brethren must exhort one another daily (Heb. 3:12-13) and provoke unto love and good works (Heb. 10:24-25). Love and respect for the elders and brethren will encourage the individual to comply with the instructions and exhortations by practicing self-discipline.

Through instruction one learns to: “abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11), “flee fornication” (1 Cor. 6:18), “avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain” (Tit. 3:9), and “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Tit. 2:12). In fact, God has given us “all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Pet. 1:3). Once these things are learned, one must determine to comply, which is

where self-discipline comes in. It takes strength of will to live up to one's convictions.

Solomon summed up self-discipline when he said, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it *are* the issues of life" (Pro. 4:23). The heart (mind) is composed of four parts: (1) intellect, (2) conscience, (3) emotions, and (4) will. The mind receives instructions, which affect the intellect, which affects the conscience, which affects emotions, which affects the will, which determines our actions. We *keep* (guard) our mind by supplying it with good information. Our conscience, emotions, and will can only be as effective as the information they are given. If the information is faulty, the conscience could approve inappropriate action or disapprove appropriate actions. Paul is a good example of this fact. He was able to claim: "Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1). Yet, he confessed:

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).

How could Paul do these things and still have a good conscience? He never violated his conscience because he was more "exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers" (Gal. 1:14). His conscience was operating on false information and caused him to believe he was doing the right thing, feel good about himself, and "zealously" pursue the wrong course of action.

Jesus is our perfect example of one who practiced self-discipline regarding what He had learned. Jesus "was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). How did He overcome temptation? He applied the Scriptures to His life, and when temptation presented itself, He refrained from sin by self-control. Like David, Jesus hid God's Word in His heart to prevent sin (Psa. 119:11). Knowing the Truth gave Jesus the courage to live up to His convictions. The difference between Jesus and Paul is that Jesus' conscience was operating with correct information. Jesus' example demonstrates that preventive discipline consists of instructive discipline and self-discipline.

### CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINE

Failure to practice self-discipline will result in sin. James warned, “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (1:14-15). When a brother or sister in Christ is “overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). Furthermore, James commanded: “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (5:19-20). From the foregoing passages, we learn that the faithful have a responsibility to restore/convert the unfaithful. In so doing, the faithful must conduct themselves in the proper way (meekness) and guard against temptation. This temptation could be to engage in the sin of the unfaithful or could be in the area of attitude toward the sinner. The seriousness of converting/restoring the erring is demonstrated by the fact that we are saving their “soul from death.”

To make corrective discipline most effective, we must obtain and maintain a close personal relationship between brethren. One way to obtain this closeness is by worshiping together. By worshiping together, we “edify in love” (Eph. 4:16). Our worship assembly is designed to “teach and admonish” as we sing, study, pray, and sacrifice together. In doing so, we are assisting one another to be faithful to the Lord. We must recognize our dependence upon one another (1 Cor. 12:14ff). The more we recognize and fulfill that need, the closer will be our fellowship and the more effective our day by day “discipline by example.” Our spiritual brothers and sisters must become our peers, whose approval or disapproval is important to us. This is the sort of communion that gives meaning to the various Scriptures on corrective discipline. Without this communion these Scriptures lose their effectiveness. No one will listen to the admonition and/or rebuke of someone they do not respect. Furthermore, one who has not enjoyed the benefit of true fellowship will not be overly affected when said fellowship is withdrawn. Thus, withdrawal of fellowship **has** meaning only to the extent that fellowship **had** meaning to us.

Even those who have enjoyed fellowship with the faithful can and do sin (1 John 1:7-10). One reason John gave for writing his first epistle is “that ye sin not” (1 John 2:1). It takes self-discipline to avoid

sin, and it takes self-discipline to overcome sin when it occurs. When a Christian sins, he willingly acknowledges his sin, repents, and asks forgiveness (1 John 1:9; Acts 8:22; Jam. 5:16). However, when repentance is not forthcoming, faithful brethren must take further action. This action comes in the form of corrective discipline.

### **The Process of Corrective Discipline**

As previously mentioned, corrective discipline is composed of instructive discipline, self-discipline, and, if necessary, punitive discipline. Sin must be acknowledged before one will put forth the self-discipline necessary to bring about repentance.

#### **Instruction Is Necessary**

Those in sin must receive instructive discipline to learn of their transgression and be encouraged to repent. Paul said:

And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all *men*, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And *that* they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

“Instruction” is translated from the Greek word *paideuo* and means “to train by discipline, to instruct.” Thus, when brethren “oppose themselves,” instructive discipline is necessary to recover them from the “snare of the devil.” This instruction ought to be designed to strengthen the resolve of the brother/sister and encourage them to discipline themselves to overcome sin and resist further temptation.

#### **Admonition Is Necessary**

Along with instructive discipline, it is often necessary to admonish the sinner. To the church at Rome, Paul wrote, “And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another” (Rom. 15:14). “Admonish” is translated from the Greek word *noutheteo* and means “to caution or reprove gently:—admonish, warn.” The person here is led away from sin through warning, instruction, reminding, teaching, and encouraging him to correct his conduct.

#### **Confrontation Is Necessary**

“Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him” (Luke 17:3). Notice that repentance must be forthcoming before forgiveness can be extended to

the sinner. *Rebuke* denotes the idea of censure and sharp rebuke. It demands serious speech and warning. Jesus commands, “If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault” (Mat. 18:15). *Tell* is from a Greek word meaning “to call to account, show one his fault, demand an explanation... from someone, Mat. 18:15” (Thayer 203). This confrontation is to prove with demonstrative evidence to convict the guilty of sin. The reproof is to be an impassioned plea from the Truth that brings about confession of sin or at least conviction of sin. “Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (Tit. 1:13). “These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority” (Tit. 2:15).

### **Restoration Is Necessary**

The goal of the foregoing process is the restoration of the erring brother or sister. It is God’s will for “all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). Thus, Jesus commands, “If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother” (Mat. 18:15). It is the case that some will lack the self-discipline necessary to bring about repentance and restoration. This is true since some are: “Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7). When restoration fails, further action is necessary.

### **Exposing the Impenitent Sinner Is Necessary**

Regarding the impenitent brother, Jesus commanded:

If he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican (Mat. 18:16-17).

This actions should be taken when one brother sins against another privately. When personal and group efforts fail, the impenitent sinner must be exposed to the church. In the case of public sin, an immediate public rebuke is necessary. When Peter sinned publicly, Paul “withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed” (Gal. 2:11). It was obvious that Peter “walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel”; so Paul rebuked him “before *them* all” (Gal. 2:14). Peter’s sin was public and his example was leading others into sin (Gal. 2:13). Thus, it was necessary to correct him immediately and publicly to deter

others from imitating his sinful actions. Paul commanded, “Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear” (1 Tim. 5:20).

We are saddened when a Christian becomes self-willed and leaves the safety of the fold. However, it is tragic when the faithful recognized that one has fallen away, but take no steps to restore him! Thankfully, there are still many who work ceaselessly to convert the sinner from his error. However, it is often the case that, when all is done, the brother or sister still refuses to repent. Once we have (1) visited such brethren, (2) expressed our love and concern for them, (3) exposed their sin, (4) exhorted, warned, rebuked them, and (5) plainly shown them the eternal consequences they face if they fail to repent, then we must take further action.

### **When Should Action Be Taken?**

Since the Bible gives no specific answer to this question, it is in the area of judgment and left up to the wisdom of the elders (brothers in absence of elders) of the church to determine what is best in each specific case. However, we must recognize that the sinner must be given time to repent. Speaking of Jezebel, Christ said, “And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not” (Rev. 2:21). One factor that should be taken into consideration when determining when to take action is the influence of the sinner upon the faithful. In the case of the fornicator in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul commanded the Corinthians to withdraw from the sinner at their next assembly (5:3). The influence of sin in the congregation was the reason for the urgency of this action (5:7-13).

Paul speaks of the factious man: “A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject” (Tit. 3:10). The *heretic* is a man who is causing division among brethren. He must be stopped quickly before his influence affects others. When all efforts at restoration have failed, it is necessary for the church to withdraw its fellowship from the sinner.

As previously mentioned, Paul wrote the church at Corinth regarding a member who was a fornicator. Paul commanded the other members to deliver this brother unto Satan (1 Cor. 5:5). The extent to which the church must withdraw is seen in Paul’s command (1) to have no company with this brother (5:9), (2) not to eat with him (5:11), and (3) to put him away from among them (5:13). Although this fornicator was a member of the church and a brother in Christ, he had become

unfaithful, and the church could not support him in his sin by continuing to fellowship him.

“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us” (2 The. 3:6). The Lord commands us to withdraw from anyone who does not live according to the teaching of Jesus Christ. Thus, anyone who continues in any sin is subject to punitive discipline. We are commanded, “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count *him* not as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother” (3:14-15).

It is becoming more commonplace for brethren to refuse to obey this command. However, love demands obedience. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3). Therefore, if we love God and the souls of our brethren, we will obey God’s commands regarding punitive discipline. Withdrawing fellowship is not a pleasant task. This is especially true when close friends or family are involved. However, if we truly love God and our brethren, we will obey Him in all things, even punitive discipline.

### **From Whom Should a Congregation Withdraw its Fellowship?**

The church is to withdraw fellowship from all who do not walk in harmony with the teachings of Christ and refuse to repent (2 The. 3:6, 14). This includes those who are lazy and do not work but is not limited to them (3:10-12). The church is to have no fellowship with its members who are fornicators, covetous, extortioners, idolaters, railers, or drunkards (1 Cor. 5:10-11). The church is to have no fellowship with those brethren who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ.

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

The church is to have no fellowship with those who are heretics or cause division in the body of Christ (Tit. 3:10-11). If a child of God does not obey the inspired teaching of the New Testament, then the church is obligated to “note that man, and have no company with him” (2 The. 3:14). Although some would disagree, this would include those

who forsake the assembly (Heb. 10:25). This is commanded by God and is not just some man's opinion.

### **Why Should the Church Mark and Withdraw from Members Who Continue in Sin?**

First and foremost, we must practice punitive discipline to be pleasing to God because it is something that He commands us to do (2 The. 3:6, 14). Punitive discipline must be treated with the same respect that we have for any other command—such as baptism. Therefore, if we desire to please God, we must obey Him in this matter.

Second, we must practice punitive discipline to try and save the soul of the wayward. Our motivation must be “that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5). This action is taken to cause the sinner to be ashamed (2 The. 3:14). Our purpose here is not vindictive, but is intended to encourage repentance unto the salvation of their souls (2 Cor. 7:10). If we do not take this action, we are encouraging the wayward to continue in their sin. If we fail to do all in our power to restore the erring, their blood will be on our hands (Eze. 33:6-7).

Third, we practice punitive discipline to keep the church pure. It is often necessary in extreme cases of physical illness to amputate an arm or leg to save the body. This applies figuratively to the church. The sickness of sin must be removed to maintain the spiritual health of the church. Regarding the fornicator in Corinth, Paul wrote, “Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened” (1 Cor. 5:6-7). Any congregation which refuses to withdraw from the wayward is practicing sin and must repent (Eph. 5:11; 2 John 9-11).

Fourth, we must practice punitive discipline to show the world that the church will not tolerate sin. The church is “the pillar and ground of the truth” and must make known to the world the “manifold wisdom of God” (1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 3:10). To do so the church must maintain a good moral reputation in the community. It would be impossible to encourage others to forsake the world in becoming a Christian if there were no distinction between the church and the world. Paul commands:

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:17-18).

Fifth, we must practice punitive discipline to warn other Christians. This action shows other members that unfaithful living is not acceptable! When Ananias and Sapphira were put to death by the Lord for lying to God, we read, “And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things” (Acts 5:11). Withdrawing from the wayward causes other Christians to seriously examine themselves (2 Cor. 13:5).

### **Each Member Is Obligated to Participate in the Punitive Discipline of Wayward Members**

When all efforts to restore the wayward fail, the elders (or brothers in the absence of elders) of the congregation must inform the members of their decision to mark the sinner. It then becomes the responsibility of everybody to support that decision and avoid the one marked (Rom. 16:17-18). We demonstrate our support of that decision by keeping no company with the one marked or acting in such a way that would cause them to think that we condone their actions (1 Cor. 5:9-11). Any brethren who continues to have fellowship with those from whom the church has withdrawn are themselves sinning and need to repent. Otherwise, they become subjects of corrective discipline.

### **This Action must Be Carried out in Love**

The writer of Hebrews reminds his readers:

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth (Heb. 12:5-6).

Our actions toward the sinner must make it plain that we are acting out of love and concern for their soul. Acting out of love will not guarantee a positive response from the sinner. Like Paul, we may become the enemy of those we try to correct with the truth (Gal. 4:16). Regardless of the outcome, if we act appropriately, we will be “pure from the blood of all *men*” (Acts 20:26).

### **Consequences of Failing to Practice Punitive Discipline**

“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us” (2 The. 3:6). These words, from the pages of inspiration, plainly state the obligation of the faithful to the disorderly brother. Withdrawal of

fellowship occupies a prominent place in God's plan of salvation. Thomas Warren wrote:

Churches which fail in this point will fail in their mission of saving souls by "holding forth the word of life".... Failure to purge out sin leads to a toleration of sin. Toleration of sin leads to a love of sin. Love of sin leads to a practice of sin. This, Christ will not tolerate.

J. W. McGarvey, commenting on the effects of the discipline in Acts 5:1-11, asks:

When shall the rigid discipline which God established in the beginning be seen on earth once more? Let the shepherds of the flock give answer, as they remember that they must give account to God concerning the souls committed to their care (90).

G. C. Brewer sated:

If a congregation permits impure individuals to remain unchastened within its fellowship, it thereby becomes partaker of their sin and will soon so far drift out of the favor of the Lord that the candlestick will be removed (108).

Currently, we are undergoing digression in the brotherhood the likes which have not been seen in over one hundred years. One of the causes of this digression is a failure to mark **and** avoid false teachers. Men have been marked in the past and their error exposed, yet many brethren continue to hire them to preach at local congregations, hold gospel meetings, speak on lectureships, and write for religious publications. The apostle John condemned such fellowship when we wrote:

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

John contrasts two types of people in this verse: (1) those that have not God, and (2) those who have both the Father and the Son. When one teaches error, he departs from God and is subject to corrective discipline. Those who bid God speed to the false teacher are partakers of their evil deeds; they depart from God and become subject to corrective discipline. If repentance is not forthcoming from the false teacher or those who bid him God speed, both must be marked and avoided (Rom. 16:17-18).

## **Can One Congregation Mark and Withdraw from Another Congregation That Is in Sin?**

Yes! If not, then we would still be obligated to fellowship the Christian Church, the Boston/Crossroad congregations, and various congregations that have gone the way of the “community” church movement. The fact is, if there is a basis for fellowship between congregations, then when that basis is not maintained fellowship cannot be continued.

To the church of Ephesus, Jesus wrote, “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent” (Rev. 2:5). The candlestick represented Jesus’ approval and presence with the congregation. If they continued in their sin, they would lose Jesus’ approval and He would depart from them. Question: “Can we fellowship a congregation of which Jesus disapproves and from which He departs?” **No!**

To the lukewarm church of the Laodiceans, Jesus said:

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me (Rev. 3:19-20).

It appears that Jesus had already departed from this congregation and his return was conditional upon their repentance. Question: “Can we fellowship a congregation from which Jesus has already withdrawn?” **No!** We can no more fellowship a congregation of sinners any more than we can fellowship an individual sinner. However, we do recognize that there are times when there are faithful brethren opposing the error of their fellow congregants (Rev. 3:4). These are not only worthy of our fellowship, but also our praise and support for their good works.

## **Elders (Brothers in Absence of Elders) Will Be Held Accountable If Corrective Discipline Is Not Carried Out**

We are commanded:

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

Elders (leadership) must take the lead in corrective discipline. However, Paul commands, “Ye which are spiritual, restore such an one” (Gal. 6:1). Thus, each and every faithful member is responsible for

correcting a brother or sister who is in error. In doing so, we bear “one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). Those congregations which depend solely upon the preacher and/or elders to restore the lost are tremendously handicapped in their efforts to reach lost souls. They also prove themselves to be unloving and uncaring. Ezekiel warned the watchmen of his day:

When I say unto the wicked, O wicked *man*, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand (33:8).

### **The Key to Success Is Self-Discipline**

The principles that we are discussing will help us succeed in all areas of our lives. A child must be taught self-discipline to relate to others at home, school, in society, and at church. Parents must maintain self-discipline to be good examples so they can teach and correct their children. Spouses must practice discipline to remain faithful to their mate. Friends must maintain self-discipline to keep the respect of their peers. Workers must maintain self-discipline to keep their job and/or advance their career. Citizens must maintain self-discipline to avoid fines and/or prison. Christians must maintain discipline to be pleasing to God.

In obeying the Gospel, one must hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized (Rom. 10:17; John 8:24; Luke 13:3; Mat 10:32; Mark 16:15-16). It takes self-discipline to turn from sin and the world to obey the Gospel. Likewise, self-discipline is necessary to remain faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10; 2 Tim. 4:7). It takes self-discipline to resist temptation (Jam. 1:13-15). Individual self-discipline is necessary for a congregation to collectively practice corrective discipline against wayward members. Most of the problems in the church today could be avoided if we would *Build Better Discipline*.

Those who lack self-discipline fail to study and grow (1 Pet. 2:2). They become weak and soon fall away. We are exhorted:

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather,

brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall (2 Pet. 1:5-10).

Too often brethren become shortsighted and fail to recognize that heaven is their true goal. They allow the cares of this world to interfere with they journey to heaven (Luke 8:11-15). To reach our heavenly destination, we must

lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds (Heb. 12:1-3).

It is essential that we have the attitude of the apostle Paul who said:

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phi. 3:13-14).

He understood that:

they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

This passage is Paul's description of the Christian life in terms of athletes, the runner, and the boxer. No one can approach the Christian life with an undisciplined attitude. A Christian cannot indulge the body and its lusts and expect to win the incorruptible crown of the life. Paul probably used this example because Corinth was known for the Isthmian Games which were second only to the Olympic Games. Paul teaches here that the Christian is to live a life just as disciplined as an Olympic athlete. He actually says that we are to keep our bodies under control just as much as the athlete. From this text, we offer six steps to *Building Better Discipline*.

1. **Enter the race to run and win** (9:24). God wants every believer to enter the Christian life as a race with the intention of winning. The Christian strains in running to obtain the prize. Only hard running is acceptable. Walking fast, jogging, lagging behind, or showing little concern for the finish line is unacceptable. A Christian must

be self-disciplined enough to be vigorous and diligent (Heb. 12:1-2; 2 Tim. 4:7-8).

2. **Exercise and control oneself vigorously** (1 Cor. 9:25). A Christian will strenuously discipline and control himself. A Christian must be just as disciplined as the athlete because serving Jesus Christ is challenging and, sometimes, difficult. “Strive” (*agonizomai*) means agony. Like athletes, Christians should exercise self-discipline to resist to the point of pain or even blood (Heb. 12:4). Paul pleads with us:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

Each of us must practice self-discipline of our mind and thoughts.

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be (Rom. 8:5-7).

Each of us must practice self-discipline of our spirit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:22-23). The Christian works out constantly to continue in the service of the Lord (1 Tim. 4:7). “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

3. **Work for a worthwhile prize** (1 Cor. 9:25). Christ expects believers to run hard to obtain an incorruptible crown. The runners in an athletic contest run to obtain passing fame and a corruptible crown or trophy. However, the crown and fame of the genuine Christian runner is “incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:4). James said, “Blessed *is* the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (Jam. 1:12).

4. **Strive with certainty and a laser-like focus** (1 Cor. 9:26). A Christian runs with certainty and without distraction, because he knows where the track is, knows where the lines on the track are, and

knows where the finish line is. A Christian who lacks discipline will be easily distracted and often unsure of how to proceed.

Paul also uses the example of a boxer to teach self-discipline. A boxer knows where the ring is, and he knows his opponent. Therefore, he does not beat the air as a boxer who misses his target. He is not just swinging wildly, hoping to hit the mark. Nor does he walk out of the ring in the middle of the fight; he stays in and fights to the finish. He does not glance away; he keeps his eyes on the target. A good fighter knows the mark and the target; so his punches are planned, deliberate, controlled, and accurate. The Christian must know that he is in a spiritual warfare; therefore, he is fighting to conquer and to win the incorruptible prize. “For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds” (2 Cor. 10:4). Since our soul is at stake, this is a fight we cannot afford to lose.

5. **Accept the fact that victory requires sacrifice** (1 Cor. 9:27). The Christian is not to be controlled by his body; he is to control his body. God expects a Christian to master his own body. *Keep under* means to bruise, to beat back, literally to strike a knock-out blow. Paul figuratively beats back his body and its cravings to bring it into subjection. “Subjection” (*doulagogo*) means to enslave, to lead about as a slave. “And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

6. **Guard against disqualifications** (1 Cor. 9:27). Every athletic competition has rules. If one violates the rules, he is disqualified. Paul feared that he might fail to live what he preached. This is what he means by being disqualified. He is very clear about what he meant: “lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” Paul knew the absolute necessity of living what he preached. He knew that the Lord would not tolerate hypocrisy—not in the pulpit and not in the pew. We must speak and live righteously.

## CONCLUSION

*Building Better Discipline* is essential to individual as well as congregational growth and faithfulness. It is my heart’s desire and prayer that this lesson will help us all have a better understanding and appreciation of discipline. Let us all work on preventive discipline so corrective discipline can be avoided. When corrective discipline is necessary, we must have the courage and self-discipline to carry it out.

We must take the steps that will ensure our personal growth towards self-discipline. May we all work together toward *Building Better Discipline*. May God continue to bless all who study the material contained in this lesson and in this book.

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# BUILDING COURAGE

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## INTRODUCTION

“And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it” (Num. 13:30). Caleb was a voice for courage midst a nation of faint-hearted folks! When you speak of the faithful, you will not separate courage from faith. The faithful are also courageous. The opposite of courage is cowardice, and you cannot, at the same time, be both faithful and cowardly. Cowards hurt the work of God; they stifle the saving of souls; they break ranks and run when opposition appears on the horizon. In the words of Shakespeare: “Cowards die many times before their death; the valiant never taste of death but once” (II, ii, 32-37). In every age there is a need for courage and saints with heart, virtue, and confident resolve. Fickle feelings and shaky knees are plentiful. Give us bold brethren, courageous Christians to fight the good fight of faith.

## EXAMPLE OF COURAGE

Moses was courageous. It was no small decision that Moses made when he chose from two contrasting lifestyles. Not many people would have looked at the Egyptian Pharaoh’s palace and concluded: “There is a far better road that I must travel.”

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to share ill treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he looked unto the recompense of reward (Heb. 11:24-26).

We look back at the life of this friend of God and see now an eighty-year-old Moses standing up against Pharaoh and demanding, by authority of the Great I Am, "Let me people go." "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (11:27).

Phinehas was an example of courage. Israel started flirting with Moab and before long idolatry and immorality was being flaunted. When an Israelite man and Midianite woman defied God's law in the sight of both Moses and all of Israel, Aaron's righteous grandson could take no more.

And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, while they were weeping at the door of the tent of meeting. And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from the midst of the congregation, and took a spear in his hand; and he went after the man of Israel into the pavilion, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel (Num. 25:6-8).

Twenty-four thousand people died of the plague due to sin. Phinehas stayed the plague, as well as God's wrath, by his own righteous indignation. Courage became righteously zealous and indignant here. We need brave souls to get really mad at sin. Speak out and at least attempt to stop spiritual Israel from flirting with immorality and decadence. Get the church away from Moab (denominations) and say loudly, "No more!"

Caleb was courageous. Caleb trusted God. He believed God and obeyed Him. Caleb had the courage of heart to oppose popular opinion and the political trend. It was Caleb, along with fellow-stalwart Joshua that stood out from the crowd. The spies had already been instructed to "be of good courage," but courage was not to be found among most of these men (Num. 13:20). When ten faithless spies gave their dismal prognosis of the situation, the Israelite nation was downtrodden and ready to return to Egypt. Faint hearts gave this report:

And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us; and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. Howbeit the people that dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified, *and* very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there.... But the men that went up with him said, We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had spied out

unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of great stature. And there we saw the Nephilim, the sons of Anak, who come of the Nephilim: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight (13:27-28, 31-33).

#### Faint hearts reacted:

And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would that we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore doth Jehovah bring us unto this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will be a prey: were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt (14:1-4).

In the midst of a chorus of spineless-quitters was the bold voice of Caleb. “And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it” (13:30). Caleb knew what was right and he was unafraid to be the minority voice for righteousness and faith. “Let’s get it done right now! We can defeat any opposition!”

Courage does not grow on trees, but it does grow within the spirit of the faithful. God demands that His followers be courageous, and our God commends courage in action. Caleb stood out in sharp contrast to the people surrounding him. “But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it” (14:24). May we say that Caleb’s spirit was one of courage? Even as a senior citizen, Caleb retained his valiant and sterling character. Now here is a dose of courage and supreme confidence in one’s God:

Then the children of Judah drew nigh unto Joshua in Gilgal: and Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said unto him, Thou knowest the thing that Jehovah spake unto Moses the man of God concerning me and concerning thee in Kadesh-barnea. Forty years old was I when Moses the servant of Jehovah sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land; and I brought him word again as it was in my heart. Nevertheless my brethren that went up with me made the heart of the people melt; but I wholly followed Jehovah my God. And Moses swore on that day, saying, Surely the land whereon thy foot hath trodden shall be an inheritance to thee and to thy children for ever, because thou hast wholly followed Jehovah my God. And now, behold, Jehovah hath kept me alive, as he spake, these forty and five years, from the

time that Jehovah spake this word unto Moses, while Israel walked in the wilderness: and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I as in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, and to go out and to come in. Now therefore give me this hill-country, whereof Jehovah spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakim were there, and cities great and fortified: it may be that Jehovah will be with me, and I shall drive them out, as Jehovah spake (Jos. 14:6-12).

Caleb was a man of boldness. He refused to back down from challenges. Caleb is an example of consistent courage throughout the decades of life.

Micaiah was courageous. Two kings wanted to hear a message of peace and blessings—one more than the other.

And the messenger that went to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets *declare* good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak thou good (1 Kin. 22:13).

How many preachers today are hirelings—selling out to popularity and job security? If you are in sin, you can probably find a preacher to help you rationalize your evil conduct. There are always men who will say what folks want to hear. But Micaiah was a proclaimer of truth. “And Micaiah said, As Jehovah liveth, what Jehovah saith unto me, that will I speak” (22:14). The king was angry. “Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace” (22:27). But Micaiah was not finished. “And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, Jehovah hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hear, ye peoples, all of you” (22:28).

We ought to be eternally grateful for every brother and sister who loves truth and supports faithful preachers. Still, there are people who would love for preachers to be lap-dogs who come when whistled, who sit on command, and who roll over when it comes to the *hard* spiritual issues. Faithful brethren are glad Micaiah was not a “yes” man. They thank God for the account of courageous Micaiah.

Ancient Israel needed someone with faith and courage to step out and confront Goliath.

And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together. And when Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid (1 Sam. 17:10-11).

Young David was courageous. When others were trembling, David was confident. His age was not an excuse for inaction.

And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine. And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth. And David said unto Saul, Thy servant was keeping his father's sheep; and when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth; and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant smote both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. And David said, Jehovah that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and Jehovah shall be with thee (17:32-37).

Many a soul would have wilted with the warriors of Israel. It is not a light thing to confront an enemy that towers more than 10 feet high! However, David was able to see the much *bigger* picture. He saw an enemy of Israel and more importantly, a defiant enemy of God. David would not—could not—sit idly by while others did nothing. Courage prompted his rebuke of those older who refused to step out in faith. Courage compelled him to commit himself to the perilous task of meeting Goliath in battle. Courage was measured in five smooth stones that were deposited in his shepherd's bag. Courage shines as “David hastened, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine” (17:48). Courage was victorious as David stands over the dead Philistine champion. Finally, courage inspired a nation as the Israelites left their shelter and pursued the fleeing Philistines (17:52).

“We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29), said Peter and the apostles. Peter was courageous. No, not always, but he grew in courage. Are you not encouraged when you read of Peter's development? Peter was brash, impetuous—quick with an answer.

Peter saith unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee even now? I will lay down my life for thee. Jesus answereth, Wilt thou lay down thy life for me? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice (John 13:37-38).

Peter was courageous in word, but when the time for action arrived, Peter remained “afar off” (Luke 22:54).

Could some today be like Peter was in denying the Lord because of fear? It is easy to preach, “*We must stand for truth!*” at a lectureship

where everyone nods and says, “Amen!” But what about the sermons delivered at home—are you ready to tackle the thorny problems of sin in the home congregation?

Will you rebuke the sin of a friend or of the wealthy and influential? Peter, at one time, was guilty of dissimulation—hypocrisy. Peter associated with the Gentiles one moment and then withdrew from them whenever those with a Jewish background might see (Gal. 2:11-14). Peter should have been courageous for the practice of truth, but he “stood condemned.” His lack of courage created inconsistent practice of Christianity. Parents might oppose sin with a vengeance in others, but when it comes to their own, they can change tunes quickly. We must be willing to oppose the sin of a family member just as we do the sin of a stranger. We must be courageous **and** consistent.

The very fact that Peter did grow in courage indicates that it is not something with which one person is born and another is not. We can increase in courage. When we look back and examine our lives and see timidity, we can change and become courageous.

Paul was courageous. Note Acts 9:6: “And he trembling and astonished said, **Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?**” (Acts 9:6—KJV). It took courage to ask that question. Paul was a man of stature amongst the Jews. Listen to his own words:

Though I myself might have confidence even in the flesh: if any other man thinketh to have confidence in the flesh, I yet more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; as touching zeal, persecuting the church; as touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless (Phi. 3:4-6).

How difficult and shocking it must have been for Saul the moment he realized that he had been persecuting the very Son of Jehovah God! What intellectual courage is displayed by a man who had been in religious error!

From time to time we have Bible discussions with people who just cannot bring themselves to admit they are in error. Yet they would be infinitely better off in view of eternity if they not only admitted error, but then promptly obeyed the Truth. There is a truth to be known regarding God’s existence, sin, salvation, the inerrancy of the Bible, the church, Christian conduct and activities, the Judgment Day, and the soul’s eternal abode. Ignoring Truth does not change it. Pretend that a Ford is a Chevrolet all you want—it is still a Ford. You cannot be saved

in a denomination, for every person in a denomination will be lost. Will you be courageous enough to study the matter? Courage and honesty are agreeable attributes. Would you put aside passion, family, and pride and humbly, fearlessly open the Bible and say with Saul of Tarsus, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” Paul was an example of intellectual honesty and courage.

Jesus was courageous. Our Lord knew what was to befall Him, yet he would not be deterred. “But behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table” (Luke 22:21). See the passion of Gethsemane and at the same time see the courage of Judah’s Lion:

And he was parted from them about a stone’s cast; and he kneeled down and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: **nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.** And there appeared unto him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground (22:41-44).

There surely is a difference between us and Jesus in that we are not omniscient. Not being God, we cannot see everything the future holds in store. Yet through the Bible we have revealed to us certain facts:

1. Life is uncertain (Jam. 4:14).
2. Death is no respecter of persons (Heb. 9:27).
3. Earthly sojourn is fraught with pain, sorrows, disappointments, persecution, challenges, and temptations (Jam. 1:2-3, 13-15; John 16:33; 2 Cor. 4:8-18).
4. All things work together for good for the faithful (Rom. 8:28). Everything will ultimately be just fine.
5. Heaven awaits us (Phi. 3:20; John 14:1ff).

In a very real way we say, “It takes courage to live the Christian life.” Day in and day out, the faithful constantly press on toward the goal. We do not know what will happen tomorrow, but it will be bearable (1 Cor. 10:13). God’s faithful prophet Elijah faced discouragement and you will, too. Song birds do not always sing. The sun does not always shine in this life. Storms arise and friends forsake us. Health is fleeting at best. Relationships so dear on earth can be broken in a moment. Courage looks past the immediate and leans on the promises of God. We keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus and the home prepared for the righteous, and we dare not quit the fight (Heb. 12:1-3).

## WHAT COURAGE IS NOT

Courage is bravery. It is seen in its beauty when the Christian is under fire—when facing the persecution that comes with standing for Truth. However, there are certain things that we must not confuse with courage.

Courage is not eagerness for a fight. It is a mistake to believe that a sharp tongue and a bull-head are synonymous with courage. You can be brave and a peace-seeker at the same time. “And the Lord’s servant must not strive, but be gentle towards all, apt to teach, forbearing” (2 Tim. 2:24). We are not to be contentious but rather gentle and humble (Tit. 3:2). Jesus was courageous and meek; He was neither mean nor vicious. Yet, Jesus was firm—completely unyielding when truth was at stake.

Courage is not pride. It is not arrogance. Courage is not seen in the statement: “I tore this fella up in a Bible discussion.” That is not courage—that is pride gone to seed. Our task is to preach Truth and defend Truth. Pride is not commended but rather condemned by God (Pro. 8:13).

Courage should not be confused with recklessness. Throw a hand grenade in the room and you may kill all present—it is not a discriminating weapon. A person can be both courageous and discerning. There is a difference between the calloused heart bent on error and the honestly mistaken heart that is open to correction.

Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by race, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spake and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, knowing only the baptism of John: and he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more accurately. And when he was minded to pass over into Achaia, the brethren encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to receive him: and when he was come, he helped them much that had believed through grace; for he powerfully confuted the Jews, *and that* publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 18:24-28).

Courage demands we correct error. Discernment and love demand we try to rehabilitate the one in error. We pull aside an Apollos, patiently teach him, and then return to him to productive service for the Master. Of course this assumes, as previously mentioned, that the one reproved is willing to accept correction.

Courage is not waiting to see how others in the brotherhood will *vote* before opposing error and upholding truth. Some fair-weather soldiers of the cross hide in the shadows while others fight on the front. Then after they count noses and see truth prevailing, they dash onto the field of battle saying: “Yep, we sure stopped that error.” “We?” “We?” Where were you, dear brother, as another wave of the new liberalism swept from Dan to Beersheba, from Memphis to Austin, and points elsewhere. “I don’t have a dog in this fight” is the statement that is uttered by the spineless as they seek to justify their Meroz-like conduct (Jud. 5:23). It takes no courage to rush onto the battlefield when the combatants have long since departed.

### BUILDING COURAGE

Examples of courage are seen throughout the Scriptures. Why? They are written for our learning (Rom. 15:4). We learn from examples, and courage is something that must be learned. Surely it goes without saying that our children need to see that their parents were courageous for Truth.

In a congregation without elders a “men’s business meeting” was tensely discussing crucial doctrinal matters. A number of men, generally less spiritual and of little Bible knowledge, decided that they did not want certain topics preached from the pulpit any longer. The preacher objected and voiced his concern that the whole counsel of God needed to be declared. Silence fell on the group. Only two other voices out of some 20 would contend for the Truth. Later, a man who had been speechless in the meeting said to the preacher, “Well, you know I’m behind the preaching of the truth.” Unfortunately, you could not have determined that from his silence in the meeting. When it mattered most, voices would not speak. That congregation has long since gone completely to the liberal element. However, here is another point to consider from this example—what about the children of such men? Will they see that dad loves God and loves Truth enough to stand? Show some heart! Show some courage! Stand up and be counted. Do not let your children grow up in the shadow of a coward!

Teach families in the congregation the fundamentals of the faith. One such basic is that every soul welcomed into heaven will be one that was courageous for truth and righteousness. If you want to be saved, is courage simply a nice option or a requirement? How God must hate cowardice!

And he also that had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou didst not scatter; and I was afraid, and went away and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, thou hast thine own. But his lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant (Mat. 25:24-26).

But for the fearful...their part *shall be* in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death (Rev. 21:8).

If Paul wanted the brethren to pray for him to be bold, how much more we should pray to that end as well (Eph. 6:20). Clearly, “the righteous are bold as a lion” (Pro. 28:1). Do the right thing; then let those chips fall. We cannot continue to shrink back in terror when matters of faith are at stake. In matters of faith, let preachers and elders set examples of courage rather than compromise. Patiently instruct in the right way of the Scriptures; then passionately exhort brethren to “contend earnestly for the faith” (Jude 3).

### CONCLUSION

Risk being ostracized and labeled a radical when truth is under attack. Let the compromisers threaten your support, yet do not hush. Let the lukewarm withhold their contribution, let them move their membership, let them get as mad as wet banty hens, but do not dare back off of the right! God did not give us a spirit of fear (2 Tim. 1:7). To God’s people of old, Moses delivered a farewell speech. Let these words ring out through a smaller yet purer brotherhood: “Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he *it is* that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Deu. 31:6—KJV).

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