

"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The **Word and Work**



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

AUGUST, 1994

Later Developments in the Stone/Campbell Movement: IS CHRIST AT THE CENTER?

"It is more important to know in whom we believe than what theories we believe."

-- L. L. Pinkerton

"Among the many heresies, there is 'the heresy of emphasis,' wrong emphasis; and of this heresy, too many Christians of our kind have been guilty. If we aspire to be 'New Testament Christians,' a people after the pattern of Paul and Peter, James and John, we must put the emphasis where they put it. Christ is central. Jesus Christ himself--HE is our main concern. It is quite possible, in fact easy, to become taken up with 'movements' and subjects good as they may be, more than with Him, our only Lord and Savior."

--E. L. Jorgenson

BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY--

The Heart of the Matter

A second-generation leader of the Stone-Campbell reformation movement, Isaac Errett (1820-1888), penned the following superb description of doctrinal and practical priorities among Christians. It is an apt amplification of the principle, "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

"With us the divinity and Christhood of Jesus is more than a mere item of doctrine--it is the central truth of the Christian system, and in an important sense the creed of Christianity. It is the one fundamental truth which we are jealously careful to guard against all compromise. If men are right about Christ, Christ will bring them right about everything else. We therefore preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified. We demand no other faith, in order to baptism and church membership, than the faith of the heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; nor have we any term or bond of fellowship but faith in the divine Redeemer and obedience to Him. All who trust in the Son of God and obey Him are our brethren, however wrong they may be about anything else; and those who do not trust in the divine Savior for salvation, and obey His commandments, are not our brethren, however intelligent and excellent they may be in all beside In judgments merely inferential we reach conclusions as nearly unanimous as we can; and where we fail, exercise forbearance, in the confidence that God will lead us into final agreement. In matters of opinion--that is, in matters touching which the Bible is either silent, or so obscure as not to admit of definite conclusions--we allow the largest liberty, so long as none judges his brother, or insists on forcing his opinions on others, or making them an occasion of strife."

THE WORD AND WORK

"Declare the whole counsel of God"

Alex V. Wilson, Editor

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WORDS AND WORKS RELATED TO FELLOWSHIP

Alex V. Wilson

Our title has a double significance. In the first article in this series we studied what *God's Word* says about Christian unity and fellowship, for God's Word is basic. Then last month we examined the attitudes of nineteenth-century leaders of the Restoration Movement, like Stone, the Campbells, Franklin, Lipscomb, McGarvey, *et al.*

Now we want to think about the teaching (words) and practices (works) of various preachers and teachers of what is sometimes called the "premillennial segment" of Churches of Christ. Four of them were editors of *Word and Work* at various times, and all of them contributed to it at least occasionally.

R.H. Boll

In Brother Boll's case let's concentrate on his practices more than his writings (which most of you have read, at least to some extent). In June 1961 E.L. Jorgenson wrote thus in *Word and Work*:

Some may have wondered, "what is the editorial position of his journal regarding fellowship?" This journal has no fixed "positions." Our writers are all free men, under God, to write what they believe is right. It may be remarked, however, that none of us have advocated anything on this line more than Brother Boll himself had long practiced. We think his course at Cedar Lake was scriptural and model. Year after year he went there to address the conservative Christian ministers of Chicagoland. By the courtesy of those good brethren, and on their initiative (not by any demand from Boll), no (instrumental) "music" was used when R.H.B. spoke. But when it came his turn to sit, while others who used it were speaking, he listened with interest and raised no fuss or protest. After all, it was their meeting, and Brother Boll was not like some who might have flung bombastic challenges at them. Here was the spirit of Romans 14 and of fellowship at its best--fellowship in spite of an unresolved difference. Those men loved our brother for himself, and for his humble attitude, and he loved them dearly in return. They all, both he and they, were benefitted, and the bonds of Christian love were strengthened.

Brother Boll's Bible knowledge coupled with his gentle, non-threatening attitude gained him invitations from many different churches. And he often accepted such invitations. He gave a lecture at Louisville's first Christian Church (Disciples) at least once; my

mother attended it. He led a series of classes (based on a Moody Bible Institute correspondence course) at Warren Memorial Presbyterian Church. One year he even taught a special series of Bible classes during Lent at the Second Presbyterian Church! That doesn't mean he condoned any errors which may have been taught in those churches. He didn't; but when he had opportunities to share God's truth with those who hungered for it, he gladly did so without compromising his own beliefs. He usually didn't publicize the talks he gave at other churches, probably for two reasons. First, perhaps he feared that immature members of his congregation might conclude that he endorsed all the teachings of those churches; he didn't want them to be misled in such a way. (Some of the churches where he spoke were not only denominational but also modernistic; but they heard the real Gospel from *him*.) Second, he knew that certain Church of Christ magazines--should they learn of his speaking in such churches--would eagerly attack him and try to create a scandal.

I remember at one of Brother Boll's Friday night Bible classes he called on Brother Wallace Cauble to lead in prayer. Cauble was then the preacher at the Church of the Open Door. This was not especially unusual; it is mentioned here simply to illustrate his attitude. Pardon me for including another family reference, but it seems relevant. Brother Boll believed Christians, whose citizenship is in heaven, should not participate in politics; he never voted. My father, who was an elder in the same congregation for ten years during Brother Boll's ministry, regularly voted. Brother Boll also believed that disciples of the Prince of Peace should not bear arms in the military service. My father was a major in the Air Force. Yet Dad thought the world of Brother Boll, and the latter deeply loved and respected Dad. What an example of fellowship--worshipping the Lord together and working for Him together, despite differences, because of unity in Christ Jesus! While that instance involved brethren within the same congregation, it illustrates a principle which also applies to believers outside our churches.

Brother Boll did not believe in cooperating with denominations *as such*. Nor did he invite preachers from Presbyterian or liberal Disciples churches to preach in *his* pulpit! Nevertheless, his writings plus his above-mentioned actions reveal that he had broad attitudes regarding fellowship.

Stanford Chambers

Brother Chambers was strongly against using instrumental music in worship. He had seen many congregations split up by people who forced its use despite the conscientious objections of fellow-believers. He also considered its use an unjustified addition to the New Testa-

ment pattern for church worship. Yet he never took a stand-offish attitude toward believers from other churches, as the following quotation shows. Someone wrote him this question: "The (Christian and) Missionary Alliance has many quotes and reprints appearing in *Word and Work*. Does it promote the cause of the restoration?" His reply was,

The Missionary Alliance is such a type that God can use it and does use it to promote the restoration of anything that needs restoring from the perversions of scriptural conditions brought about in past centuries. While there has not been declared a set purpose for such a restoration, God has been able by His overruling to bring about much restoration in which we rejoice. The writer has had a great deal of pleasant experience with Missionary Alliance people. D.J. Thant was a consecrated engineer on the south-western Georgia line. He conceived the idea of doing some evangelistic work during his vacation, and chose New Orleans as the place. Some friends of his were members of the 7th and Camp Street Church. They obtained for his purpose the use of the Y.M.C.A. building. We were asked to take charge of the meetings which we did. I was requested to lead the singing. Brother Thant preached Christ and Him crucified and his every sermon could be endorsed. We also helped him out to some factory noon-hour services where he preached the gospel and invited his hearers to attend the 7th and Camp Street Church services.

Later, Brother Forrest of Toccoa, GA wanted to come to 7th and Camp and preach, but he was coming as a representative and in the interest of the Christian Missionary Alliance instead of a simple N.T. messenger, and there is a difference.

H.L. Olmstead

Brother Olmstead preached for decades in Gallatin, Tennessee. In 1950 he wrote a pamphlet entitled "What is Wrong with US?" It seems directed *mainly* toward the "anti-pre-mils" or mainline churches. But not toward them only. Sadly and with some satire he penned the following reminiscences.

I had been called upon to decide whether I would be organ or anti-organ, whether I would be for this religious periodical or that, whether I would be for the colleges or against them. I found I was not only disfellowshipped if I believed Christ's Second Coming preceded the thousand years mentioned in Revelation 20, but I was disfellowshipped if I fellowshipped with anybody who did believe it. Now, all this was no pleasure to me, having to make all these decisions and many others like them before I could tell the story of Jesus' dying love. It made my soul sick

In most places people who differ from us are regarded as heathen, or worse, as apostates! This certainly was not the attitude of the fathers of the Restoration Movement toward those who were among the denominations. We proceed upon the principle of exclusion. We figure altogether upon the number of people who should be excluded from our fellowship rather than trying to see how many could be included upon the basis of our only professed creed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Can we regard a Baptist as a Christian in any sense? Would you ask him to pray in the assembly? The answer among us is "No!" How about the folks who use the organ? The answer is the same. Well, what about the "pre-millennial" brethren? Certainly not! Isolate them, ostracize them, and insulate everybody against them! And notwithstanding all this, we use a Bible translated entirely by "sectarians." We sing hymns, most of them written by people who never had any connection with our Movement

It was the intention of this Age of Grace to make saints of God rather than to make them Restorationists or "Loyal Brethren."

E.L. Jorgenson

Back in 1917 Brother Jorgenson defined a nonsectarian spirit as "a spirit which recognizes God's children as such wherever they may be and whether they have as yet separated themselves from the various religious parties or not." In 1919 *Word and Work* ran as an article a tract he had written. It said, "Many members of God's church are now members of something else also, and they have become sadly scattered abroad When I say I am a Christian only I certainly do not mean to say that I am the only Christian." Referring to the custom of receiving into fellowship a man "who has been scripturally baptized," he wrote that this "simply shows that they recognized him as a Christian before he came. They recognize that he was a Christian before he took his stand as a Christian only."

In 1961 he took the same position: "Let the limited proposition which we support be clearly understood: It does not say that there are Christians in *all* denominations, nor that *all* in the denominations are Christians, nor that Christians ought to be in any denomination as such, nor that the simple pattern of work and worship will be found in many of the sects, etc. It affirms simply that 'Christians are to be found in many denominations.' On this proposition we say yes." Later he added, "Many who profess the unsectarian position have never yet learned the first primary step out of sectarianism. And what is that first step? It is, after a true conversion, to get one's eyes opened to the present scattered state of the members of God's church."

Again: "We were asked recently this hard and searching question: Why is it that members of denominational churches often seem

more devoted and sacrificing, more prayerful and missionary, than 'we' are? (*If they are so, it ought to give us pause and great concern when we come to fix our lines of fellowship.*)" He then proceeds to try to answer the question.

Among the many heresies, there is "the heresy of emphasis," wrong emphasis; and of this heresy, too many Christians of our kind have been guilty. If we aspire to be "New Testament Christians," a people after the pattern of Paul and Peter, James and John, *we must put the emphasis where they put it.* Christ is central Jesus Christ himself, the glorious risen, living Being who is the center of all that concerns Him--*He* is our main concern. It is quite possible, in fact easy, to become taken up with "movements" and subjects good as they may be, more than with Him, our only Lord and Savior.

Other Examples

A few more examples will conclude our survey. *J.R. Clark* wrote, "Let us beware lest, in assuming this high calling [of being "just a Christian"], our hearts be lifted up with pride and we conclude that we are the only Christians and set all others at nought."

J. Edward Boyd commented, "There may be some who are sincere believers in the Lord Jesus, who have become 'obedient from the heart to the form of teaching whereunto they were delivered,' and who therefore have been baptized into Christ and so are members of His body, but who are not identified with any group which is known simply as a 'church of Christ.' When one such comes indicating his desire to be a simple, undenominational Christian, we gladly receive him. Such being the case, he does not now become a member of the church of Christ--he has already done so, perhaps long ago."

Frank Mullins, Sr. had similar words and works. If I remember him correctly, in New Orleans he sometimes preached the Gospel at evangelistic rallies held by the interdenominational organization, Youth For Christ. Yet he never trimmed his message nor compromised his teaching at such times. I remember too how thrilled he was with the faith, love and zeal of the five young missionaries who were martyred by the Auca Indians of Ecuador in 1956. Yet he knew those men were not of "us." Or were they? That is really the question, isn't it? Yes, they were our brothers in the Heavenly Father's family.

None of the men quoted in this article are our bishops, popes, or authorities. They were not infallible. But when we see their unanimity of belief on this issue of "Who is my brother?," it again provides us much food for thought.

FAITH--RELATIONAL OR MERELY RATIONAL?

Richard Hughes

Alexander Campbell frequently spoke of the "gospel facts." The "gospel facts," he said, included all the sayings and doings of Jesus but consisted especially in his death, burial, resurrection and ascension [Yet] he often insisted that mere intellectual assent to "gospel facts" is not saving faith. The faith that saves, he urged, "is not the belief of any doctrine, testimony, or truth, abstractly, but belief in Christ; trust or confidence in him as a person." [But] while Campbell emphasized the relational dimension of the gospel to which the facts pointed, the relational dimension sometimes escaped later members of Churches of Christ

Perhaps the first scholar to designate [the "Restoration Movement"] as evangelical was Robert Baird, in his *Religion in America* (1844), though he did so, as he put it, "with much hesitation." Baird acknowledged that these Christians in many ways appeared orthodox.

Yet I understand that there is much about their preaching that seems to indicate that all that they consider necessary to salvation is a cold, speculative, philosophical faith, together with immersion as the only proper mode of baptism; so that there is little, after all, of that "repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ" [Acts 20:21], which are the indispensable terms of the gospel.

In 1934, K.C. Moser, an Oklahoma preacher among Churches of Christ, declared that "the gospel concerns a person, not mere facts." Further, he wrote, obeying the gospel did not mean simply obeying commands. To obey the gospel was "to believe the gospel--to believe in, trust in, Christ crucified, buried and raised for our justification." The response to Moser, swift and almost unanimously negative, revealed that leaders among Churches of Christ had difficulty even comprehending what Moser had in mind.

--*Variety of American Evangelicalism*

J.N. Armstrong, founder of several Christian colleges: "Christianity contains not only forms, ordinances, precepts, that must be carefully and faithfully observed, but a *spirit* also that must permeate and saturate the lives of those keeping the forms, lest the very keeping be an abomination in our Master's sight. Cold, lifeless formality is the pit into which God's people have never failed to fall. Let us not forget that there are small and large, lighter and weightier matters of the law. May we not be gnat strainers and camel-swallowers."

LESSONS FROM CAMPBELL'S LUNENBURG LETTER

Leroy Garrett

Here of late I have had occasion to study once more Alexander Campbell's response to the woman in Lunenburg, VA who wrote and asked him if only those who are baptized by immersion are Christians. Campbell's reply became controversial in his own time, and all these years it has remained one of the most famous documents of our heritage. This time around I examined it with greater depth and am persuaded that it has much to say to us today, not so much about baptism itself, however important that is, but about principles of religion in general.

The woman was disturbed by Campbell's frequent references to "Christians among the sects," and she wondered how this could be since Campbell himself had championed the position that people become Christians by believing in Christ, repenting of their sins, and being buried by baptism into Christ, and this was not generally what the sects taught. She asked Campbell to define a Christian point-blank.

The editor responded by giving a definition that is now well-known among our people: "But who is a Christian? I answer, 'Everyone that believes in his heart that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of God; repents of his sins, and obeys him in all things according to his measure of knowledge of his will.'" He went on to say that he could not make immersion absolutely essential to a Christian.

This disturbed many of his followers then and continues to do so today, even though he made it clear that if one understands that immersion is according to the will of God he must submit to it to become a Christian. No one can despise an ordinance of God and be a Christian. Yet he said he could not make any one duty the standard of Christian state or character, not even immersion. One who has a submissive heart before God will obey a command in the sense in which he understands it. He emphasized the importance of habitual or general obedience, not loyalty to one duty.

What gives the letter special significance are the principles that Campbell draws on in reaching his conclusions about baptism. It is these that I want to call to your attention. You will find them liberating.

1. Mistakes of the mind and errors of the heart are greatly different.

This important truth is often neglected. Campbell says errors of mind and heart are poles apart. An angel may mistake the meaning of a commandment, but since it is not an error of the heart he will obey in the sense in which he understands it. He notes that John Newton and John Bunyan had very different views on baptism, but both had good hearts and obeyed according to their understanding. There are others who have depraved hearts whose errors are wilful. Errors of the heart are therefore much more serious than errors in understanding, which are unwilful.

2. Ignorance is always a crime when it is voluntary, but innocent when it is involuntary.

It is wilful neglect of the means of knowing what is commanded, Campbell says, that indicates a corrupt heart. He concedes that there must be many who are guilty of wilful ignorance. But still there are many who cannot even read and others who are poorly educated who have difficulty understanding aright, and there are many others who innocently follow their teachers. There are those who desire to know the whole will of God who mistake the meaning of this or that commandment. Campbell says he would sin against his own convictions to say that such ones must perish forever.

3. There are perfect Christians and imperfect Christians, but both are Christians.

That the apostle Paul would urge the Corinthians to be perfect in understanding (1 Cor. 14:20) infers that some or most were not. In 1 Cor. 2:6 he referred to speaking wisdom "among those who are perfect," which implies a distinction between perfect and imperfect believers. He also distinguished between the carnal and the spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1) and between the weak and the strong (Rom. 14:1). Jesus in his parables taught that even among the honest and good hearts some bring forth thirty fold while others bring forth a hundred fold. Some of God's children are retarded, others are highly gifted. Some have a defective faith, some a defective obedience, which might be a mistaken view of baptism. But still they are Christians if their hearts are set upon following Christ the best they know how. Campbell notes that it is an easy thing for the supposedly "strong" or "perfect" Christians to pass judgment upon the weak and immature. Many a good man has been mistaken, Campbell says.

4. It is the image of Christ that the Christian looks for and loves.

Campbell insists that this does not consist in being exact in a few items, but in general devotion to the whole truth as far as known. We should not substitute obedience to one command for universal or general obedience, he says. If he saw one who had been only sprin-

kled who was more spiritually minded and more generally conformed to the likeness of Christ than one duly immersed, he would be inclined to favor him or her the most, he ventured.

Campbell concluded his letter to his Lunenburg reader by observing that because one might be excused from exact obedience to a command through honest misunderstanding does not excuse one who understands what his duty is. One who tries to use the involuntary mistake of another to justify his own wilful neglect of any commandment does not have the Spirit of Christ.

The reformer received a lot of negative response to the Lunenburg letter, which reflected a more liberal view of baptism in general and religion in general. He noted that all the negative reaction proved that there were not many Campbellites after all! What they saw was a compromise of the doctrine of baptism by immersion, while Campbell was trying to avoid what he called ultraism. Too, Campbell could not bring himself to conclude that until his people came along there was no Church of Christ upon earth, no Christians, no kingdom of God and that the promise that the gates of hell would never prevail against the church had failed. "Therefore, there are Christians among the sects," he told the sister in Lunenburg.

The furor over this letter lived on. It identified a strong reactionary element within the Movement that Campbell was hardly aware of. It was the beginning of the exclusivism that eventually divided the Movement, not as long as Campbell lived, but it began to bear its destructive fruit soon after his death.

But it is the principles in this letter that matter most of all. If we could implement them into our thinking today they would go far in liberating us from some of our self-deprivation.

--From *Restoration Review*

L.L. Pinkerton, evangelist and college founder: "It is more important to know in *whom* we believe than what theories we believe. Christianity meets us first, not as a theory, not as a series of doctrines, not as truth expressed in scientific formulas, but as a history, a biography--a history of a life and a death, of a burial and a resurrection"

"The New Testament is not a code of cast-iron laws for trembling slaves; but a rule of life for loving children"

FRIENDSHIP, FELLOWSHIP, LEADERSHIP

Gordon R. Linscott

"Christians only, but not the only Christians." Years ago a little booklet by this title was published by the Broadway Church of Christ in Lubbock, Texas. It was translated into other languages and thousands of copies were distributed. The booklet deplored the existence of denominations but acknowledged that there are genuine believers in such man-made organizations. The writer appealed to his readers to break away from their unbiblical organizations and be "Christians only." This is, of course, the original theme of the "Restoration Movement" of 150 years ago. Christians should not, it was said, be separated by denominational creeds and organizational walls. Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, etc. were urged to give up their distinctive names and doctrines to be "Christians only."

With a beginning like that, how is it that now the Church of Christ--heir of the "Restoration Movement"--has established for itself a reputation for exclusivism? "We are the only Christians." Whether intended or not, this is the message the general public is getting. It certainly represents the thinking of a great many Church of Christ members. To those who are happy in this rut, I have nothing to say. However, there are some congregations and a good many individuals who would consider it arrogant to say, "We are THE Church." These shrink back from consigning to hell all who are not "one of us."

The Fellowship Dilemma

There are two dangers here, as indicated by David Gill in *Interest Magazine*: "We dare not be *unequally yoked* together with unbelievers, but we dare not be *unscripturally separated* from real believers either." The temptation is strong to take the easy route of one extreme or the other. To avoid the unequal yoke, all you have to do is to narrow your circle of fellowship to the extreme--"Me and my wife, my son John and his wife; we four and no more." Obviously, my circle is too tight; ideally it should include all those whom Christ has received (Rom. 14:30)

To be sure that I recognize all who have been received by the Lord, I might go to the opposite extreme and receive all who wear the "Christian" label. This is the ecumenical movement, and it is as wrong as the circle that is too small. I would almost say that drawing the circle too large is worse than having it too small, for it brings about a conglomeration of saints and sinners, a mixture of light and darkness. This is an abhorrent thing to God, yet I see little concern

about it. A strange thing I see is this--some of those churches with the most restrictive membership policies do not screen their applicants on the basis of whether or not they have been born again. If you are in agreement on certain key doctrines, you're in--whether you've been to Calvary or not. If you've had certain experiences (e.g., baptism, the gift of tongues), you're in, and they never ask if you've been redeemed. If you casually drop the names of a few brethren who are "in," you can usually ride in on their reputation, whether or not you know the Lord of glory. The result is a congregation that is both unscripturally separated from many real believers and unequally yoked with unbelievers--spiritual chaos!

This is not to say that the problem of fellowship is a simple one with neat black-and-white answers. One-to-one fellowship with a friend on the job is not the same thing as inviting him to bring a sermon on Sunday morning. Perhaps there should be no such thing as different degrees or depths of fellowship, but Romans 14:1 seems to say that circumstances may limit our ability to share freely with certain other believers. I believe that there is a "minimum" position from which fellowship may be expanded.

David's Church

When someone asks Nick Russell (missionary to the West Indies) about his church affiliation, Nick answers, "I belong to David's church." Then he turns to Psalm 119:63 and reads, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee." Certainly there is a kinship of spirit between "them that fear thee," even though some of these are not yet born again. In such a relationship, the believer is aware of the need of his friend and he uses every opportunity to point him to the Lamb of God. One thinks of Peter and Cornelius or Paul and the twelve men in Ephesus (Acts 19). When the only common ground is a concern for spiritual reality, I believe we should share that much, even with an unbeliever.

To receive one *as a brother*, one who has been purchased out of the earth by the blood of Jesus to be a worshiper of His--this is quite a different matter. We have been constituted (by the Holy Spirit) one body, and we are obligated to maintain that unity. And yet, there may be restrictions on the scope of our fellowship. Out of consideration for a brother's weakness, others may need to engage in their "doubtful disputation" when he isn't around. Two brothers who could freely share a steak dinner together would change their menu when eating with a brother whose conscience did not permit him to eat meat. So fellowship must be flexible; There must be room for give and take.

Receiving a brother into fellowship does not mean that he must (or even should) be elevated to the place of a teacher. The elders are to act as a "filter" on the teaching that the congregation receives. A mis-taught, self-appointed "teacher" should certainly be prevented from leading the church astray--but this does not mean that he should be put out of fellowship (unless he goes around trying to create a faction). Should excommunication of an unruly Christian be necessary, we are still commanded to "count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (2 Thes. 3:15).

No Schism

It is God's design "that there should be no schism in the body" (1 Cor. 12:25). The word "schism" speaks of a rent or a rip, rather than an open division or breaking away. Note that it is "schism *in* the body," not "*from* the body." The formation of cliques--for whatever reason--encourages clique members to draw away from other believers, to some degree. This pulling away (or schism) is like the rent in a garment; it spoils the garment without destroying it. However, in real life the breach between brethren tends to continue to widen until there is complete division with no fellowship between the two parties. Add just a little arrogance and soon one group is telling the other, "We are THE church. We are the only Christians."

This is an age-old problem, and I don't pretend to have a formula that will put an end to it. A beginning point for any one of us might be an awakening to and a sharing of the concern of the Lord Jesus in His prayer of John 17. Immediately before Him loomed the cross, but He prayed for His own rather than for Himself. And of all the things He might have asked for us, one need was evidently our greatest--that we might be one. Brother, sister, let that fact sink into your heart.

THOUGHT--PROVOKERS

From Restoration Movement Later Leaders

David Lipscomb, a leading editor: "Worldly possessions, honors, [and] responsibilities above a modest competence steal the time, wear the affections, and hinder service to God. Don't seek the rich and honorable to preach to, but preach to the poor, the neglected, the degraded, and if you live poor, you will be one of the world's true heroes and Heaven's crowned victors. Christ came to save the lost, enlighten the ignorant, to lift up the down-trodden, the offcast, the outcast."

James A. Harding, outstanding evangelist and educator: "I believe that 'sectarian teaching' is wicked and that it cannot but have a

bad effect on every one who receives it and is influenced by it. But when Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, or any man of any faith, teaches God's word, that is not 'sectarian teaching.' God's truth is divine teaching, no matter from whom it comes. At many points ministers of the different denominations preach God's truth with great simplicity and power, and he who says they do not is a miserable sectarian himself"

T.B. Larimore, outstanding evangelist and educator: "I propose never to stand identified with one special wing, branch or party of the church. My aim is to preach the gospel, do the work of an evangelist, teach God's children how to live, and, as long as I do live, to live as nearly an absolutely perfect life as possible."

B.A. Hinsdale, preacher and president of Hiram College, Ohio, regarding tradition: "Called infallible, tradition is a deadly thing. Looked upon as human but constantly deferred to and venerated, it is a barrier to progress. Respected but thoroughly discussed and calmly weighed, it is a source of both beauty and strength."

"We must respect the historical development of doctrines, institutions and societies. [Otherwise] both the individual man and the human race must begin its mental existence anew every day."

Isaac Errett, a leading editor, had a son who studied in France and was murdered there. Not long after, answering a woman whose children had died, Errett wrote: "We cannot presume to interpret the designs of providence. The events of life are so far-reaching, and have so many possible ramifications, and we are so limited in our knowledge, that it would be presumptuous to attempt to say why this or that event is allowed to occur. There are painful and perplexing mysteries which may never be explained to us. We must trust our Father's hand to lead us in ways that we know not of, and wait until, in our immortal manhood we can look and trace the way by which we were led"

R.H. Boll, outstanding preacher and editor: "That differences of views and doctrines should exist in the church of the Lord is not strange. Nor is it in itself bad. When free brethren study God's word independently it is to be expected that on one point and another they will arrive at different conclusions. Where brotherly love rules, these different views and the discussions that follow, are mutually helpful. Where motives other than love control, differences result in dissension, strife, bitterness, sectarian parties and partisan hate. The blame in such a case, however, does not rest on the differences themselves, but on the spirit and attitude of those who differ. The wrong comes in when lines are drawn, when brethren are branded, ostracized, disfellowshipped."

HOLY MYSTERIES

C. Leonard Allen

The modest audience in the small Bethany church building on that Sunday morning in 1848 waited eagerly as Dr. Robert Richardson rose from his seat, walked slowly to the communion table, then turned to face the congregation.

Alexander Campbell had just delivered the morning sermon, as usual. But now the audience awaited a special treat--a communion meditation from Dr. Richardson. These meditations, delivered from time to time over the years, were memorable events and the Bethany Church of Christ--made up mostly of students and faculty--eagerly anticipated them.

The doctor stood facing the congregation for several moments. There was utter silence. He was a thin, dignified man standing somewhat taller than Mr. Campbell.

"How truly incomprehensible and beyond comparison is the love of God for man!" He began in his high-pitched reticent voice. "Inscrutable as his ways, unsearchable as his judgments, deep as the exhaustless mines of his wisdom and knowledge, his love but partakes of the infinitude of his nature." He paused slightly. "How, then, can we hope to fathom its depths, to estimate its value, or to realize its power!"

Richardson spoke further of the magnitude of that love and of how weak and small seem our noblest efforts in comparison. "But, alas! how shall man return a love of which he can not even adequately conceive?" he asked. "It is as high as heaven; it is vast as the universe! How can he attain to it? How can he compass it?"

These exclamations and questions point to the heart of the spiritual life as Richardson conceived it. "True religion" meant entering into spiritual union with God. It meant contemplating the divine glory and the "ever-opening mysteries of redeeming love." It meant allowing oneself to be renovated into a living temple for the Holy Spirit.

Throughout his life Richardson addressed these themes with a quiet passion and eloquence. In a time when doctrinal, polemical and organizational matters preoccupied the movement, he remained a persistent--at times almost solitary--advocate of deeper, richer spirituality. It was here, he felt, that the movement was most lacking. In 1842 he noted, for example, "a dull insensibility in respect to spiritual

things, which seems to arise from an ignorance of there being any such thing as a true and spiritual union with God and Christ."

A few other voices had raised such concerns before him. John Rogers of Carlisle, Kentucky, for example, had written to Campbell in 1834, noting that "many of us, in running away from the extreme of enthusiasm [i.e., fanaticism], have, on the other hand, passed the temperate zone, and gone far into the frozen regions." "There is, in too many churches," he added, "a cold-hearted, lifeless formality, that freezes the energies."

And Campbell himself, on a few occasions, could raise such concerns. Religion certainly was an intellectual matter, he wrote in 1837, "but religion dwelling in the heart, rooted in the feelings and affections, is a living, active and real existence." This is what fills the soul with divine life. "This is religion," he concluded; "all the rest is machinery."

Richardson picked up such concern and made it a life-long focus. His writings resound with the call to the spiritual life. But nowhere is his vision of that life more powerful and eloquent than in his many communion meditations delivered to the Bethany church.

J.W. McGarvey was a student at Bethany College in 1847-48 and heard many of them. "The richest service of all," he later wrote, "was when they had a sermon by Mr. Campbell followed by Dr. Richardson in a five- or ten-minute talk at the Lord's table." These talks were gems of beauty, he said.

Between 1847 and 1850 Richardson published a series of the talks in the *Millennial Harbinger* under the title "Communings in the Sanctuary." Later, at the urging of McGarvey and others, he collected twenty-four of them into a small book of the same title. That book remains the first and greatest of the devotional books written in the movement.

At the heart of the book lies a constant sense of the awesome mystery of things human and things divine. Three themes predominate.

(1) *The mystery of the holy*. In Richardson's view, recognition of the divine mystery is fundamental to Christian faith. Far from hindering one's vision or obstructing one's spiritual progress, the recognition of mystery brings "truer and nobler" views of God. "In proportion as the mysteries presented to us deepen, *they approach nearer to God*," Richardson said. "He is the great mystery of mys-

teries, and we draw nearer to Him as we approach the veil that conceals his inner temple."

In pointing to the mysteries of faith, Richardson did not cast out reason. The Christian faith contains intellectual depths, to be sure, and the mind seeks to plumb them. Reason especially plays an important role in the "preliminary examination of the facts and evidences of the gospel." But reason's power is sharply limited. It simply cannot purify the heart and bring human passions under control. Only the gospel can do that. In purifying and transforming the heart the gospel reveals its greatest power and profoundest mysteries--here one finds that "a 'deeper deep' speedily exhausts the plumb line of reason and philosophy."

(2) *The mystery of Christ's atoning death.* Because Richardson prepared these talks for the communion service, they invariably centered in Christ's death. Though the coming of Christ into the world was a great mystery, he said, "how much greater *the mystery of his death!* What new and wonderful developments it gives of the divine character! What startling thoughts it suggests of things invisible!"

So inscrutable was the mystery of the atonement, many preachers in the movement thought, that dwelling on it or trying to explore it yielded little profit. One did better to affirm the simple historical facts, then turn to more practical and understandable matters--like what people must do to be saved.

Richardson thought otherwise. To him the events of Jesus' death were "transcendent facts" full of meaning and mystery. By fixing one's eyes there, troubled consciences and rough desires were stilled by the "potent charm of Jesus' love." By entering its dark places and exploring its deeps time and again one grew ever more captivated by holy things and higher loves. Indeed, in contemplating such mysteries, one came to "see more of God than angels knew before!"

(3) *The mystery of union with God and Christ.* In Richardson's view the Christian faith was not "a mere system of salvation from sin," with the cross being one part of that system. Neither was Jesus' death simply a removal of sin's penalties. Its purpose rather was "to effect a *renovation--a regeneration* of the soul."

Many believers, he thought, view redemption as a kind of commodity "which they may obtain upon certain terms, of which the ministers of the Gospel are supposed to be the negotiators." But redemption is no negotiable commodity. Rather, it involves nothing less than a transforming union with God and Christ through the Holy Spirit.

This union is one of faith's great mysteries. Through it the believer develops entirely new spiritual sensibilities. As those senses are cultivated, the believer grows "as fully alive to the things of the spiritual world, as is the natural man to the things of the natural world." He develops "a fellowship with spiritual existences and objects of whose very existence he was formerly wholly unconscious." In a word, the believer becomes fit for life in heaven with God.

Standing behind the communion table on that Sunday morning in 1848 Dr. Richardson brought his talk to a close. "How shall man return a love of which he can not even adequately conceive?" he had asked.

"Oh! how joyful the reflection," he now answered, "that however weak our powers, however imperfect our efforts, the Divine Comforter can shed abroad the love of God in our hearts, enlarge our capacities, transform all our feeble nature, and render us partakers of the divine fullness."

In front of him the table was spread and ready. He looked down at it for a moment then back to the audience.

"Inscrutable and sublime mystery," he exclaimed, his voice trembling slightly, that "the glorious Being, of whom our unequal powers can form no adequate conception, and whose glory fills both earth and heaven, can yet find a dwelling place in the human heart!"

Dr. Richardson turned and walked quickly back to his seat. Servers came forward and the congregation communed together, sharing the sacred emblems of divine suffering and glory.

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G.C. Brewer, outstanding preacher: "To trust a *plan* [of salvation] is to expect to save yourself by your own works. That is all wrong, brethren! We have a *Savior* who saves us. We throw ourselves upon His mercy, put our case in His hands, and submit gladly and humbly to His will. That is our hope and our only hope."

NEITHER LEGALIST NOR LIBERAL

Edward Fudge

A letter which came a few months back from a devout "missionary" brother on another continent raised questions which occupy the minds of many devout and earnest truth-seekers among us. In short, this brother expressed concern that, while emphasizing Jesus, we not disparage his teaching or "doctrine." And he wanted to be sure that, in avoiding and deploring certain poor judgmental and self-righteous attitudes, we not fail to maintain the "distinctiveness" and "identity" which ought to mark out faithful followers of Jesus. Grace does not work against sound doctrine, the brother observed, and faith cannot be divorced from faithfulness.

Because his concerns are legitimate and common to many who are learning to give Jesus his proper place of preeminence, I share my response to this brother's letter, for whatever value it might be to other fellow seekers-after-truth.

Dear _____,

Thank you for taking time to write and express your thoughts. You certainly are correct that it is possible for one to use Jesus as an excuse for ignoring or downplaying "sound doctrine" ("healthy teaching" is the modern translation of the Greek words, of course), and that is wrong.

My exhortations have to do rather with using Jesus as a smoke screen for human inferences and deductions which not only are not taught either by any of his first-century men, i.e., the apostles and prophets whose writings remain in Scripture. I find it interesting to compare the kind of concerns our movement has emphasized, debated and divided over, on the one hand, with the kind of concerns which are addressed as issues of urgency in the New Testament itself. For New Testament writers, the subjects which aroused fervor--either for exhortation, rebuke, warning or instruction--are those which deal with (1) the person of Jesus, (2) the mission/ministry/accomplishment of Jesus, (3) or the godly life to which Jesus calls those who in repentance and faith come to rely on Him as Savior and Lord. I have read through the entire New Testament with this in mind, making a list of every passage containing a warning, exhortation or instruction about "false teaching" or "false teachers/prophets" (not only using those words but also the ideas) and these are the categories into which the material falls.

On the other hand, how many debates, divisions and sermons have we had on those topics? Not many. We have, however, debated and divided over subjects about which neither Jesus nor the apostles ever spoke a word, or over those about which they said something but about which they did not become particularly exercised so as even to command, exhort or warn their readers. I do not need to make a list, as it is fairly obvious to any thoughtful person such as yourself.

Again I would stress that "sound doctrine," from a New Testament perspective is that teaching which promotes healthy Christians and healthy spiritual life and growth. First Timothy 6:2-5 is a fine passage along that line, as it contrasts teaching which results in wrangling, friction and debate with that good teaching which leads to love and clean consciences and good works (see 1 Tim. 1:3-5). Jesus' own admonition comes to mind also, that we test the fruit to determine the quality of the tree (Matt. 7:15-20).

Of course we must emphasize what Jesus taught. And I am quite as sure that we should be concerned greatly with what the apostles taught. What gives me problems is the frequent concern with what 19th and 20th century "restoration movement" preachers have taught, based often on proof texts gathered out of context and quite without regard to what either Jesus or the apostles ever said. I simply urge you to consider that for yourself and draw your own conclusions.

'The Lord's Church' And Its 'Marks'

If we assume that the "marks" of the true church are those which we and our recent (150 years) predecessors have outlined, we will reach certain assumptions. If we assume, however, that the "marks" which count are those noted in Scripture, such as in Philippians 3:3 (1. worship God in the Spirit; 2. glory in Jesus Christ; 3. Put no confidence in the flesh), then we reach other conclusions and presuppositions. Somehow our "marks" are usually external, concern time-worn distinctions among Christians over the centuries, are fairly easy to measure up to, and on which we make an outstanding grade already.

There are other "restoration" movements than our own which have discovered other "marks" of the "true church" in the Bible. They also take verses here and there, usually without regard to context, culture and so forth, and they also make a good grade using their list, although by their measure we sometimes come up short. What we all need to do is to read the Bible--book by book and chapter by chapter--to see what it actually is saying, in context, drawing out its line of thought and reasoning and use of Old Testament Scripture. When we do this, we hear the teaching of the apostles and New

Testament authors, and learn what we should ourselves teach and do. Insofar as much of our traditional preaching and teaching has not been derived in this fashion, we have simply been wrong and ought to seek correction.

"The Lord's church" is that great universal body of individuals from Pentecost until the end of the age who are in union with Jesus Christ. Whoever is saved is part of it. Scripture is quite clear that "the Lord knows those who are his," even though the clear implication is that no one of us does (2 Tim. 2:19).

We sometimes have played a cruel trick in the way we talk about the "one true church," I believe, which goes like this. We prove from Scripture that there is but one body or church and that Jesus is its Savior. That, of course, is true (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18). Then we, in effect, pick up the Yellow Pages and ask, "But which one is that?"

The fact, of course is that such sectarianism has been a target of Jesus and his faithful people since the first century, whether it has been found among the Pharisees, the scribes, the Essenes, the Jerusalemite legalists in Galatians 2 and Acts 15, or the gnostic types refuted in John's epistles.

How much better to note that the Lord has one true church (assembly, group) and that all who know him by faith are part of it, then proceed to study the Bible with mutual respect with all who profess to be part of that body, seeking together to learn the way of the Lord more perfectly. If we learn something from the other person, good. If the other person learns from us, good. We do not need to "change churches" for that reason, simply to reform our teaching or practice. Sometimes it might be easier to change churches, and that is not wrong, either, although one should then remember that the new church also needs reforming and teaching, if perhaps on different subjects than the old one!

That is what I am about and urging and trying to do myself. The Bible is always outside us all, calling and challenging us all. We cannot ever presume that we have reached a point beyond need of correction, or that we are God's chosen vessels to straighten out the rest of the world's population which also loves and trusts Jesus and is seeking to obey him to the best of its knowledge and ability.

Grace and 'Sound Doctrine'

I certainly do not believe there is any struggle between grace and "sound doctrine," properly understood. Grace is the topic of healthy teaching, and anything other than salvation by God's sovereign and unmerited favor is **not** healthy ("sound") teaching. Those who best know God's grace will most want to learn his will and follow it. Those who suppose that they are set right with God--or in some favored position--on any basis other than the meritorious work of Jesus Christ, performed outside of us but for us, are usually the ones who actually forsake the teaching of Jesus and the apostles to spin their own doctrines and impose them on others. Such doctrines always have the appearance of scripturalness, but the giveaway is that they do not focus on Jesus, do not derive from Jesus, do not glorify the work of Jesus, do not create more faith in Jesus, and do not lead to obedience to Jesus. Rather, they rest on proof verses taken here and there, glorify a particular group of Christians to the exclusion of others, create or promote self-righteousness, vain-glory and debate, and leave people feeling very "religious" and "sound" (in their own minds) while often having a very real emptiness in their own hearts. Such people also usually have a vacuum in their churches which they cannot quite grasp, since they suppose that they have the "truth." Of course the "truth" they are missing is Jesus himself who alone is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6).

I have no doubt that anyone who grows in allegiance to Jesus and in trust in his finished work at Calvary will want to obey him in all things and learn more and more of his will. I have no doubt that some people have (and will) pretend to do that, while using God's grace as a cloak for license. Such was true in the first century (Jude 4). The answer must be to preach Jesus truly, and to focus people's hearts and minds on him. It is not to manufacture traditions and doctrines of our own, even if based on Scripture verses plucked here and there. And it certainly is not to compensate by volume of voice what one lacks in substance of content. "Sound" does not mean the same thing as noise!

Conclusion

I appreciate much your letter and questions and observations. I agree with you that faith and faithfulness belong together. The real question is, "faith (trust) in whom or what?" and "faithfulness to what or whom?" We should be careful to urge others to put all faith in God through Jesus Christ--and zero in ourselves or our own efforts at obedience or good works. We should urge all (beginning with ourselves) to be faithful to Jesus Christ and the teaching he gave--either personally or through the apostles, not to "the church" or "what we have always taught," or some other abstract notion of a "pattern" or

"true church" as it has evolved through the decades of our own movement.

Please feel free to write me any time. I will attempt to answer as I am able.

Grace and peace through our Lord Jesus,
Edward Fudge
Box 218026, Houston, TX 77218

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QUESTIONS ASKED OF US

Carl Kitzmiller

Is it wrong for a church to have a savings account, C D's or a large bank account?

A church, like an individual, should be a good steward of the Master's goods, whatever that involves. Since there is a good bit of disagreement about what constitutes good individual stewardship, it is not very likely that all of us will fully agree about what constitutes good stewardship for a church in every instance. The scriptures are remarkably silent about the specifics of handling the Lord's money. We have to be guided mostly by principles rather than specific rules. We know some of the legitimate uses of church finances--caring for widows, ministering to the needs of poor saints, fellowship with missionaries, honoring those who labor in the word--but there are some uses that are only inferred by the fact that the work is to be done. We are taught more concerning the matter of giving than how the given funds are to be used. It would appear, therefore, that the Lord has left the handling of the funds largely to the sanctified good sense of the leadership He provided for the church. In this matter more rules have been laid down by human beings, sometimes those with an axe to grind or a pocket to be filled, than by the Lord or His word.

Likely one reason the Lord has not specified more exactly concerning the handling of funds is the fact that conditions in the world change. Even our own immediate age has witnessed a situation where funds once readily available at a nominal interest rate now can be obtained only at almost prohibitive costs. The wise course to follow under one condition is not necessarily the wise course to follow under another. Needs in one type of society or culture are not necessarily the needs of another type. Specific rules could easily have be-

come enslaving, but principles enable us to be guided under a variety of changing conditions and cultures.

There is a danger in wealth, both to individuals and to congregations. It is the danger of feeling an independence of the Lord, the development of an attitude that "we can take care of ourselves." The church at Laodicea is a good example of the dangers of a materialistic outlook. It is very easy in our age in this country to put too much emphasis on fine church buildings, plenty of space, the latest and best of equipment, etc. The progress of a church is too often judged by its accomplishments in material things. In our answer to this question let it first be stated that in the paragraphs to follow we do not intend to give approval of or encouragement to a selfish use of church funds, undue emphasis on having the latest and best, or neglect of those responsibilities given by the Lord. A selfish hoarding of funds that does not allow a church to see beyond its own doors and allows good, solid works to perish for lack of support is *sinful*. If a store of funds occurs because of a lack of vision, a lack of spirituality, a lack of commitment to the work of the Lord, then it is evident that is wrong. If we simply want to glory in the nice nest-egg that will carry us through even if God doesn't come through, then our faith is seriously misplaced.

There may be a time, however, when a wise handling of church funds will mean a savings account, CD's, or a relatively large account. The key word is stewardship. How do we best use the funds for the benefit of our Master? Quite frankly I was thrilled to read in a report by one of our churches that a fund being gathered for a certain missionary, which would not be needed until a given date, was put on short-term C D's at a good interest rate. My own personal judgment is that that was good stewardship, especially under prevailing conditions. When a church exercising good spiritual judgment decides that a new building or a new addition is needed, or that some other sizeable project should be undertaken, is it wrong to gather some of those funds beforehand? Personally I do not see how it is better stewardship to borrow such funds at high interest than to foresee the need and at least get a portion in a more economical way.

True, the church is not in the banking business. The Lord has arranged for His work to be supported by *giving*, and that is the basic way of financing His work. This I believe and preach. There is something "cheapening" about the selling of this gadget and the serving of that kind of meal in an effort to "raise money for the church." This is a sort of disguised way of asking the people of the world to help support the church. Generally speaking, churches have no business operating businesses as a subsidy for the church. They should not seek some kind of endowment that will help carry the load.

These things do not represent our calling as a church. Does that therefore mean that in the exceptional situation that a church is given a business it would have to turn it down because "that's not our work?" Might not good stewardship suggest operating the business until it could be sold? If a church finds itself in a situation where a parsonage is temporarily vacant, is it better to let it sit empty than to rent it for a while and receive the rent? There is a difference between a church buying houses to rent as a business and the temporary renting of a house obtained for a different reason. Again, I believe the key word is stewardship.

One problem created by a fund in the bank is that it tends to become a bone of contention. Zealous promoters of new projects want it. That money "just lying in the bank" would get their pet project off the ground (Never mind that the project in some cases is of questionable worth or lacking in solid scriptural foundation). The professional church bums want it. After all, the church is supposed to help the poor and unfortunate (Of course, the money is about all the help these want! None of that preaching to us.). The "If-you-have-it-spend-it" folks want to get rid of it. They don't believe in saving a dime in their personal life and they are especially that way with the church. I know of a church which built up a few thousand dollars surplus, largely due to being without a preacher to support. It was kept to help meet moving expenses for a new man, etc., but that did not materialize. In the hands of less capable leader it could have become a very destructive situation. But, as good stewards of God, were those leaders obligated to give the money to the first cause that came along with a hand out?

Perhaps this is a good place to mention that a church's support of a missionary, a project, a special work, etc., ought to rest on better grounds than "we have a little extra in the treasury, so let's give it to them." This writer believes wholeheartedly in sending and supporting missionaries as well as cooperating to establish and maintain certain good scriptural works that one congregation alone could not support. That church which is without missionary zeal either locally or world wide is lacking in one of the things which characterizes the N.T. church. Nor do we wish to injure in any way the reputation of those good men and women who serve and have served faithfully. But at the risk of being considered a heretic, we dare to propose that not every missionary or prospective missionary who seeks our support is worthy of it. Some are not well-grounded in the faith they ought to proclaim. Some will injure the cause of Christ more than they will help it. In other words, not every slick operator with a glib tongue and an understanding of promotional psychology is doing a great work. Good stewardship requires that churches exercise some discernment as to the worthiness of the particular men and works they

help support. Just because these men or works request our help and there's some extra in the treasury is hardly a good enough reason for getting that money out of the bank! You see, God has not given all the wisdom to those who initiate and propose such works; all the spirituality is not necessarily lodged with a few. It is not altogether a bad thing that there are some folks looking over our efforts and asking whether our zeal is according to knowledge.

Our question was provoked by a certain statement in a religious article. It is not our purpose to reveal the article nor the writer. We mention it only to point out that such statements are broader in meaning than they were meant to be sometimes. Preachers and others may sometimes generalize in discussing a matter and may not speak of the exceptions. One cannot always take the time or space to detail the exceptions or to suggest that in such and such a case the conclusion might not be true. For example, every time we rebuke missing the church services, we do not always stop to specify that, of course, there are those who might do so righteously because of sickness or something else the Lord will honor. A protest against a church with a sizeable bank account might in such a case be meant only to protest the unrighteous misuse of such an account, not necessarily a blanket condemnation of every such account. Whether this is the case I do not know, but as a writer and preacher I fully understand how it can happen.

In summary, I would suggest that we ought to be more concerned for the motivation than for the amount of dollars in the account. And we might even need to withhold judgment (condemnation) in those

Depressed preachers--this is for you

A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Bruce Russell

I am thoroughly convinced that Jesus Christ has commissioned the church and no one else to reach a world stagnating in the stench of sin. Jesus said, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). The challenge of church growth should not quickly be set aside even though it may bring frustration to churches that are not growing.

Some years ago, while I was preaching near Pasadena, California, Don and Mary McGavran attended our congregation for two

years. There was always the question of who was ministering to whom. [The late Donald McGavran was the founder of the influential "church-growth movement." He was a longtime missionary, author and seminary professor.--Editor] In their home once, as Mary poured tea in his cup, Dr. McGavran said, "*Until we learn that not sharing our faith is as great a sin as adultery we won't get very far.*"

I give you these details to enable you to understand the very strong tension I personally feel between "what ought to be" and what is" in the life of 98% of the churches in America. Current statistics show that two-thirds of the churches across this country are plateaued or declining.

A large percentage of the one-third that is growing is doing so by rotating the saints ("transfer growth"). *It is estimated that as little as one to two percent of all evangelical churches in America are actually reaching people who do not know Jesus as their commander in chief.*

During my last vacation, I visited a large fast-growing church in our state. I interviewed several people about how they had come to be part of that local fellowship. Without exception each one told how this congregation had so much more vitality than the church they had left.

A few weeks ago I was asked to speak at a celebration service for a growing congregation in my own community. Prior to my introduction, several members gave testimonies as to how this congregation's worship experience was deeper than the churches they had previously attended.

William Hendricks is not far off when he suggests, "*Almost all growth reported by North American churches today is the result of church switching and the birthrate within churches rather than conversion growth*"

We need to be reminded that what gets "high-fives" in Heaven is when one sinner repents rather than 99 who don't need repentance. The church in America is doing a pitiful job in accomplishing that mission Jesus gave us to do!

But I refuse to give up. I was asked almost eight years ago, "Why do you want to go to a dying church?" Without hesitation I responded, "Because I still believe in a God who can raise the dead!"

If you are in a plateaued or declining church (and most of us are), how do you cope with the discrepancy between the Great Com-

mission and the reality of the current situation? Let me offer these words of encouragement.

(1) Be Sure of Your Call to This Ministry.

If you are not positive this is where God wants you, then you will easily run from the battle when discouragement overwhelms you. This has been my toughest year in ministry for dealing with discouragement. A couple of times the only life preserver I had was knowing for certain this is where God wants me. (One other thing was a great help. I have a tape by Wayne Smith titled, "Why I Didn't Quit." One evening I listened to it six times.) If God hasn't called you to your current ministry, when the going gets tough you won't stay.

How do we identify God's call? For me it was a quiet assurance that came through prayer and fasting as well as the continued agreement of godly men and women that the circumstances and the gifts God had given were well matched for the time.

It also requires some confidence, not only in your own ability, but a conviction that God is in it with you. That doesn't mean you won't have any doubts. I often remind myself of the words of Vince Lombardi, "Fatigue makes cowards of us all." In identifying God's call, there has to be at the deepest gut level the assurance so that you can truthfully say, "This is where God wants me to be."

When I feel that inevitable cloud of discouragement moving in, I remind myself that Moses spent more than forty years in the wilderness, didn't enter the promised land, yet is still counted among the faithful in Hebrews 11.

I think it is interesting also that, by church growth standards, Dr. McGavran's thirty years in India were a failure. But out of that thirty years of failure came one of the most significant church movements of this century.

(2) Strive to Live a Life of Integrity.

The scandal of fallen saints in positions of leadership is well known. The fact is, Christians are called to live differently than the rest of the world. In 1 Peter 4:4 the apostle writes, "They are surprised that you do not now join them in the same wild life-style" (author's paraphrase).

A valid question for all Christians is, "Are people surprised by the difference Jesus makes in my life, or are they surprised that He makes no difference at all?" The reason there is so little difference between Christian and non-Christian is not because the world has become more holy, but because Christians have become weak in battle.

Those who are in leadership positions should be held to a higher standard. In striving to live holy lives we should not forget that challenge of the revivalist Jonathan Edwards who suggested two resolves for the Christian. First, resolve not to sin (most of us resolve not to sin very much). Second, resolve never to give up on your own inadequacies. Such a challenge requires not only God's help but the help He has provided in His body, the church. It requires the help of one or more to whom we will be accountable.

We do need each other, to share burdens and to keep each other alert. "As iron sharpens iron so one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17, NIV). This is a good proverb for today.

(3) Know Where God Wants You to Go.

Moses may not have known ahead of time the precise entry point, but he knew that God was leading to the promised land. A number of books have been written in recent years on vision. Such vision can only come from spending time with God. George Barna gives an excellent definition of such vision: "A clear mental image of a preferable future imparted by God to his chosen servants based upon an accurate understanding of God, self, and circumstances."

Helen Keller was reportedly asked if there was anything worse than being blind. She answered, "Yes, being able to see and having no vision." Church leaders need to be more concerned about where God is leading today rather than where He has led in the past.

There is a final point that needs to be added--*never give up!* It took Moses more than forty years; it may take you or me a lifetime. But of this I am certain--I still believe in a God who can raise the dead!

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VOICES from the FIELDS

Michiya Nakahara

Shizuoka City, Japan

July, 1994

Hot summer has come around again. It reminds me of my visit to the U. S. I made four summers ago. I vividly recall the churches I visited and the friends I met. My wife, Tomoko, is now into the eighth month of her pregnancy. Thanks to the Lord both Tomoko and the baby have been in excellent condition.

Since the new church building was given to us, several Christians were added to our congregation. Last year a very devoted family of four joined with us. Some of them joined us having a thirst for the word of God and others with hunger for the freedom of faith in Christ. Our congregation is currently well balanced spiritually and very matured in both human knowledge and the wisdom of God. At our annual congregation meeting with was held in April, each of us reaffirmed our faith in Christ and dedicated ourselves to the work of the Lord for the coming year. This work has been in existence for 34 years beginning when my parents, Shichero and Teruko, came here.

Moto. Nomura

Bethany Home, Japan

August 3, 1994

Last Sunday we had 6 families with 16 people to our Sunday morning worship services, two in the afternoon, one in the evening, another quite busy day in a small house church in a central highland of Japan. Of the 16 who attended the morning services, one if them was my former Tokyo YMCA English student in 1968. He said he was in my classes, and was baptized into Christ when he went to Canada. He thanked me for my leading him to Christian world while he was with us in YMCA English School years ago.

Last year throughout the summer it rained so much that the rice crop was in its worst record in the past 150 years. 22 pounds of rice went up to \$135! This year we have had very little rainfalls so far, therefore, in most parts of Japan we are suffering from serious shortage of water.

The house-church in Hachiman-yama, Tokyo was closed down by the end of last June after serving people for 33 years, and now we are concentrating ourselves in the mountains.

My wife Yoriko went to Tokyo today to be with her mother and her elder brother who is dying of cancer. Our daughter Megumi has received her student visa and she plans to leave for Ohio Valley College in Parkersburg, West Virginia on the 17th of the month. OVC was gracious enough to grant her a two fold scholarship of \$2,000, a great help. She has about a year's funds for schooling. After that no one knows so we wait upon Him. Our son Makoto is a government-qualified social worker/therapist. He has been living with and working for several mental patients in a house in Ibaraki Prefecture. It is an eight hour a day work, but in reality he is with them 24 hours a day. Parents don't want to keep them in their homes, so our son has to take care of them constantly. His paycheck is far lower than average young men in Japan, but he is satisfied and happy with the job. We hardly see each other.

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Jack Blaes

Ladies, A GREAT Opportunity

During the fall of the past several years, Christian women and teenage girls from Ind., Tenn. & all around Ky. have gathered for an overnight retreat. Each one has been a great blessing to those who attended. This year's retreat is coming soon: Fri. Sept. 30 & Sat. Oct. 1. This is a marvelous chance to renew old friendships, make new friends, hear & sing spiritual songs, partake in interesting conversations & discussions, hear encouraging testimonies & Bible studies . . . & just "get away from it all" --relax in the peaceful atmosphere of Camp Kavanaugh. That's in Crestwood, Ky., not far from Louisville. The rooms are comfortable and the food good.

The cost is \$15.00. For more information call: Ramona Marsh (812) 945-7209, Sherry Marsh (606) 744-3021, Melanie Mitchell (812) 967-4861, Ruth Wilson (502) 897-2831.

Philippine Facts: Pray!

The Philippines since 1990 has suffered 702 natural disasters. It is geographically located in the typhoon and earthquake belt in the Pacific Ocean. The Philippines experienced the worst volcanic eruption (Mt Pinatubo) in July 1990 causing about 1600 deaths. A typhoon causing flash flooding hit Leyte in November 1991 killing about 6000 people and damaging billions worth of crops and properties. Among the ASEAN nations, the Philippines ranks second in infant mortality, population and foreign debt. Its Gross National Product and

literacy are second lowest in the ASEAN region. In addition to the natural disasters that have occurred, the closing of the US military bases in 1992 and the recent uncontrolled crime wave have cut aid flows and inhibited foreign investment, causing more poverty and unemployment. Yet, it is not all dark and hopeless in the Philippines. The poverty and suffering of the Filipinos have caused many Filipinos to seek a personal faith in Christ. There has been dramatic growth in Protestant churches especially among evangelicals and charismatics. The number of congregations in denominations that had gathered statistics doubled from 10,000 to over 20,000 and there are now 2,159 Filipino missionaries serving in 62 different mission agencies. -- Selected

Cramer & Hanover Church

Central Kentucky Churches of Christ--5th Sunday Singspiration. Sunday, October 30, 1994 at the Cramer and Hanover Church of Christ in Lexington, Kentucky. Time: 3:00. **Special Feature:** *Southeast Church of Christ Traveling Choir!*

Words of Life

On a weekly basis *Words of Life* is sent out by 10 stations in the U.S.A. and many stations overseas. By shortwave radio *Words of Life* covers Africa, Western Europe, the Middle East, and also the Philippines. This is a major percentage of the English speaking world.

Note Well

Miller and Esther Forcade are faithful laborers in God's vineyard and are in their 80's now. They have been with their daughter Dorcas and her husband since December. Sis. Forcade is in a nursing home with failing eyesight and hearing. We thought their friends would want to send them a card or a love gift. They are worthy. Their address: Dr. & Mrs. J. Miller Forcade, % Mr. & Mrs. Tom Brock, Rt. 5, Box 496-D, Gatesville, TX 76528.

Central Louisiana Christian Fellowship

The 20th annual C.L.C.F. will be held Nov. 14 - 17, 1994. Our theme this year is *"The Superior One"-- A Recall to Faith: Studies from Hebrews*. All sessions at Glenmora Church of Christ, Glenmora, Louisiana. Hospitality Committee: Dennis and Melva LaDoux, P.O. Box 314, Glenmora, LA 71433; Ph.:(318) 748-4243.

Jennings People Work and Provide

Dorcas Sends Gifts--The Dorcas Group has packed a box of items to send to the Maple Manor Nursing Home in Sellersburg, Ind. Included are 67 bibs, 25 lap robes, and 2 twin-sized quilts. Thanks to that group for the work.

Locust Street-Johnson City, TN

"For we are God's fellow-workers . . ."

Today - Aug. 14, 1994 - Brent Copenhaver begins his work with us as an Associate Minister. This was announced in the last bulletin, but we repeat it for those who might have missed the announcement at that time. Although he and Christine, his wife, have been with us in several of the services already,

this marks the official beginning of his duties, and you may wish to "welcome" them in their new roles. Your former minister also assumes the role of an Associate Minister, and the two of us will be conferring on how best to make of the two an effective whole.

"When you are growing in grace you are hard on and critical of yourself. On the other hand, when you are backsliding you are hard on and critical of others."

A good prayer . . . "Lord, when we are wrong, make us willing to change. And when we are right make us easy to live with." -Sel

Turkey Creek

"Let's hear it for our minister."

A Pastor's Job

The pastor teaches, but he must solicit his own classes. He heals, but he does it without pills, medicine, or scalpel. He is sometimes a lawyer, often a social worker, something of an editor, a bit of a philosopher and entertainer, a salesman, a decorative piece for public functions, and a student and a scholar.

He visits the sick, marries people, buries the dead, comforts the sorrowing, admonishes sinners, and encourages the weary. He plans programs, appoints committees, and spends considerable time helping people with their difficulties. On top of all this, he prepares a sermon and preaches it on Sunday to faithful members of the congregation. Then on Monday he smiles when some person slaps him on the back and says, "One day a week. What a job!"

Coming Events

Open House at Maple Manor Home Adult Division from 2:00-4:00 Oct. 15.

Woodland Bible Camp Annual
Meeting -- Oct. 22

Southeast Church of Christ

Bro. Burks is delivering a series of sermons titled

We Exist to:

1. Evangelize
2. Edify the Saved
3. Meet the Needs of People
4. Uphold the Standards of Morality

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM of our ISSUE on EVANGELISM

A brother in Christ whom I've never met but with whom I've corresponded a few times sent a gracious criticism of our June '94 issue, "Tell It Today."

Ray Downen writes: "On page 166, we're encouraged to lead sinners to salvation by way of a 'sinners prayer.' I don't think Leslie Flynn's advice is in accordance with scriptural practice. The same advice is repeated by Harold Englund on page 174. I doubt that you agree that personally praying, 'I take you Jesus, as my Savior and my Lord . . .' is, as claimed, the heart of saving faith. Yet you print this advice as if it were doctrinally correct." Brother Downen does admit those articles "include much valuable insight as to how we should evangelize for Jesus," but feels I should have made some editorial comment about their omitting all mention of baptism.

In reply, notice that the opening paragraph of Flynn's article mentions baptism. And the very next article, about training children to witness, also mentions it plus quoting both Acts 2:38 and Mark 16:16. I felt those four references eliminated any need for me to add further comment. And isn't the "sinner's prayer" a good way (though not the only way) to lead a convert into personal dealings with the Lord he is turning to, so long as we go on from there to baptize him into Christ?

A friend once told me, "Too often we rush folks past the Cross to the baptistery." Let's make sure we bring them to Calvary in repentance and faith. Then let's make sure we follow the Great Commission and Acts 2:38, etc. by bringing them to be buried with the Savior in immersion.

Englund's whole article stresses the urgency of our bringing folks into a personal relationship with Christ Jesus rather than merely getting them to accept a plan or take certain steps in an external way. So he uses marriage and the personal commitment expressed in wedding vows as an apt analogy of saving faith. He could have added that the exchange of rings is a fitting picture of baptism: faith in the heart demonstrating itself in outer action for all to see. Too bad he didn't.

Yet some folks (I don't mean Brother Downen) feel every sermon and article must mention baptism to be sound. Alexander Campbell lamented that some of his followers made baptism in itself--"a savior, or a passport to heaven." Note this month's article on his Lunenburg letter, by Leroy Garrett. More importantly, note that while Acts mentions baptism frequently, at least four times it tells of someone believing but omits recording their being baptized: 13:12, 14:1, 17:34, 19:18. Doubtless they were, but Luke didn't feel he had to mention it always. In 20:21 Paul summarized his message to the perishing as "they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus." Englund followed that example. Let's neither overemphasize baptism nor omit it as part of the conversion process.

Ray Downen, by the way, has written about 50 tracts (each 1 page 8 1/2 x 11 inches, printed on both sides) on many topics: the Holy Spirit, understanding the Bible, Christian unity, evangelism, baptism, etc. If you would like a copy of all of these studies bound into one volume, write him at P.O. Box 1065, Joplin MO 64802-1065.

--the Editor

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- We Need to be FORGIVEN, and FORGIVING
- God can do MORE with your Sin than just Forgive it
- Tell me a STORY (modern parables for the unsaved)
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