

TRUTH

Godly Characteristics of Preachers

Jarrold Jacobs

Knowing that the preacher, due to the public nature of his work, is subject to public scrutiny and criticism from time to time, I thought it would be good for us to examine what God considers godly characteristics of a preacher of the gospel. Many are sometimes confused as to the nature of a preacher's work and how he ought/ought not be. Let us simply take the Bible, and learn what ought and ought not be a part of the preacher's life. While we could study this in a number of ways, I have chosen to focus this article on 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12. Please read that section of Scripture, and then study with me. Godly characteristics of the preacher include:

Boldness (v. 2)

Boldness is missing from much of our preaching today. Yet, this was characteristic of Paul's preaching (Acts 13:46; 14:3). In fact, such an attitude is encouraged no less than 31 times in the Scripture. It is imperative that we be "bold," i.e., "to be frank in utterance, or confident in spirit and demeanor . . . to venture plainly" (Strong's) in our preaching.

"Speaking the gospel in much con-

ention" (v. 2)

Let no one deceive himself into thinking that preaching is "easy" and "free from worry." A reading of Acts 17:4-8, where Paul was in Thessalonica, shows some of the contention ("an effort or anxiety: — conflict, fight, race" (Strong's) he faced! Preaching the gospel is not for the faint-of-heart, nor the thin-skinned!

Not deceitful (v. 3)

Paul had no intention of misleading people, but spoke the truth (Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 11:31; Gal. 1:20). Any man who wishes to preach must be of an honest character (Rom. 12:17; 2 Cor. 13:7-8; Eph. 4:29; Col. 3:9). Dishonesty/deceit will ruin a man's reputation and his effectiveness in the gospel.

"Not as pleasing men, but God . . . Nor of men sought we glory" (v. 4, 6)

Let the preacher never forget who he is serving! Paul told the Galatians, "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). Preachers work *for* the Lord, and *with* the brethren! Let there be no mistake about that. Reversing this order is the recipe for apostasy.

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"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

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Church Membership

Mike Willis

Jesus built his church (Matt. 16:18). The church is composed of all of the saved in the world in its universal sense; it is composed of those saved people who agree to work together in a certain geographical area in its local sense. Those who are saved have an obligation to work together in a local capacity.



How One Becomes A Member of the Church

1. In the universal sense. One becomes a member of the Lord's church in the universal sense when Christ adds him to the church (Acts 2:47). One cannot "join" the church in the universal sense; Christ places him in his body (1 Cor. 12:18). Christ adds those to his church who are saved from their sins (Acts 2:47). Therefore, the conditions for salvation are also the conditions for membership in the universal church. The conditions for salvation are: hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized. When one does these things, he is saved from his sins by the grace of God when the blood of Christ washes away his sins (see Acts 22:16). At the same time as one is baptized into Christ, he is also baptized into one body, the church (1 Cor. 12:13).

2. In the local church. A person joins himself to a local church, just as Saul/Paul did when he moved to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26). The local church makes a decision whether or not to receive that member into its fellowship based on their perception of whether or not he is among the saved. On some occasions, a local church may have one in its fellowship who is not saved (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1-11, the fornicator); on other occasions a church may refuse to receive those whom God receives (3 John 9-10). Membership in a local church is not synonymous with acceptance by God. However, God's will is that those who are saved join themselves together in their local area for the purpose of doing his work. In this respect, one has responsibilities toward the local church.

The Christian's Responsibilities to the Local Church

1. The contribution of attendance. A Christian has a responsibility to attend the worship services of the local church. In Hebrews 10, the author said, "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (vv. 24-25). A person who willfully misses the worship assemblies is violating the Lord's commandment. Therefore, the writer of Hebrews continued:

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Is Benevolence Evangelism?

Dick Blackford

Wayne Jackson has written a booklet on “the church cooperation and orphan home controversy,” titled, *A Church Divided*. I had considered writing a response to it until I saw that Al Diestelkamp had done an excellent job of it in his booklet, *A Brother At Our Door*. There is a statement made by brother Jackson to which I wish to comment.

On page 8, he says “The ‘saints-only’ doctrine draws an artificial line of distinction between benevolence and evangelism. *Benevolence is evangelism!*” (Italics and exclamation point are his.)

In recent years, this, and similar statements have been made by brethren who promote churches contributing to man-made institutions to do the churches’ work and also promote centralizing the control of various evangelistic projects under one eldership (known as a “sponsoring church”). Brother Jackson (as well as others) believes this so strongly that he asserts it *without proof of any church in the New Testament using benevolence in this way*. He even emphasized it with italics and an exclamation point.

What is the motive for stating that *benevolence is evangelism*? (1) It would mean the patterns for churches working in evangelism and benevolence could be mixed up, enabling several churches to centralize evangelism under one eldership. (2) It would mean a church could use benevolence as a drawing card to evangelize the world. Does all of this really follow?

First, if *benevolence is evangelism* then every time a church helps the needy it has evangelized them. No need for any preaching.

Second, it is possible to engage in benevolence without doing *any* evangelism. The United States government, the Red Cross, and the United Way all do benevolence but that doesn’t mean they have evangelized anybody.

Third, if *benevolence is evangelism* why did Peter say the apostles would be “leaving the word of God to serve tables” if they (the apostles) tended to the benevolent needs of the Grecian widows (Acts 6:2)? Think of all the sinners who might witness this and be won to Christ! What brother Jackson calls evangelism (benevolent work), Peter called “leaving the word of God” and “serving tables.” According to brother Jackson, Peter was drawing “an artificial line of distinction between benevolence and evangelism.”

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Fourth, Jesus scolded those who followed him for the loaves and fishes (John 6:26). Why would he do that if *benevolence is evangelism*? If this is true, it would follow that the more benevolence a church does, the more evangelism has taken place.

However, did Jesus bait the people with benevolence by advertising a free fish fry and upon drawing a crowd with “all the fish you can eat” then switch to a sermon? Did he use a “bait n’ switch” tactic? If benevolence is evangelism this would certainly be in order.

When Jesus fed the four thousand he said they had “continued with me now three days and have nothing to eat: and I would not send them away fasting, lest haply they faint on the way” (Matt.15:32). That doesn’t sound like he had used benevolence to draw a crowd to hear the gospel. Before Jesus fed the five thousand his disciples urged him to “send the multitude away, that they may go in to the villages, and buy themselves food” (Matt.14:15). That sure doesn’t sound like he had enticed them with benevolence.

No, Jesus didn’t say, “Here is what you see (benevolence) but here is what you get (evangelism).” He never used the promise of benevolence as an enticement. The good news was enough. If people weren’t drawn by the message of the cross and the good news of salvation and escape from hell, then they were not good soil (Luke 8:15).

Fifth, if *benevolence is evangelism* then why are we forbidden to help a lazy man or a false teacher (2 Thess. 3:10; 2 John 9, 10)? Don’t they need to be evangelized?

Sixth, that benevolence is *not* evangelism is seen in the fact that every person in the world needs to be evangelized,

but every person does not need benevolence. We have a Great Commission to “go into all the world and preach the gospel” (Mark 16:15), but we don’t have a Great Commission to go into all the world and do benevolence. Some would turn the church into a general welfare agency. Its primary mission is spiritual, not physical.

Seventh, if *benevolence is evangelism* then brother Jackson should have no objection to putting the church’s evangelistic work under a “Board of Directors,” separate and apart from local churches, as are many of the man-made benevolent institutions that brethren associated with him have defended through the years. Most of them have opposed putting programs like the *Herald of Truth* and their schools of preaching under a board. They have kept them under the eldership of a “sponsoring church.”

On the other hand, if *benevolence is evangelism* then their evangelistic work *is* under a “Board of Directors” in those benevolent institutions that operate under a board. Boy!

Eighth, if *benevolence is evangelism*, then it logically follows that *evangelism is benevolence*. If not, why not? The next time the congregation has a genuine benevolent need confronting it, it should just preach to them and the need will have been met.

Ninth, if we can mix the patterns for benevolence and evangelism, then by the same logic we can mix the patterns for the salvation of an alien sinner and a brother who falls from grace. This would make it permissible to tell the alien sinner to “repent and pray” (Acts 8:22) and the brother in apostasy to “repent and be baptized” for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). The only way we know it is permissible to mix the patterns in evangelism and benevolence is on brother Jackson’s say-so.

Such statements as the one under review show the desperation and degree to which some will go beyond reason to find justification of a practice they intend to hold onto, no matter what. Is it any wonder that we have “*A Church Divided?*” Brother Jackson furthers that division by his fuzzy thinking that “*benevolence is evangelism!*”

His use of italics and an exclamation point in saying “*benevolence is evangelism!*” won’t substitute for Scripture. It could be equated with the old saw about “pounding the pulpit when your argument is weak.”

The *truth* is, benevolence is *not* evangelism, regardless of how badly some want it to be.

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The Right Place in God's Scheme:

The Assembly of the Saved, Not the Administrator of Salvation

John Newton, the author of the hymn "Amazing Grace," wrote: "My memory is almost gone, but I remember one thing: that I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior." In one sentence, he summarized God's scheme of redemption. Man is lost due to his own sin and alone is helpless to do anything about that condition. God took the initiative in man's salvation and sent Jesus Christ as an offering for sin. Man responds to God's plan with obedient faith and is saved. He then becomes part of the body of the saved, the church. The church completes God's scheme by communicating the message of salvation to other lost persons who in turn can respond to the divine initiative.

Occasionally persons, saved or lost, lose sight of the fact that the church only teaches of salvation, and instead they develop the mistaken idea that the church saves. It must be understood that the church is the body of obedient believers who received salvation; the church is not an institution that dispenses salvation to the lost.

Several denominational influences have contributed to this misguided reasoning. The first is the tendency to institutionalize individual effort and accomplishment. The work of teaching the lost is completed one person at a time; sinners are saved individually, not collectively. The second is the prideful inclination to elevate the role of helper to that of administrator. The church only carries the message of salvation; the Lord does the saving. The third factor leading to this mistaken tenet is based upon an over-emphasis on the autonomy of local churches. In an effort to maintain control over membership and doctrine in local churches, some men press autonomy to the point that they lose focus on the centralized control and oversight of the church by Jesus Christ in heaven. His divine role as administrator of salvation is de-emphasized in an effort to press Christians into an unnatural, unscriptural level of dependency on the leaders of a local congregation. What

does the New Testament teach?

The Church is the Assembly of the Saved

The church is the body of believers and followers of Jesus Christ, saved from their sins by the grace of God, by the blood of Christ, and by obedience to the gospel. The church is the assembly of the beneficiaries of the blessings of the Lord. All members of the church are former sinners who received salvation from the Lord when they heard the word of God that informed them that they were lost and in need of the cleansing power of the blood of Christ (Rom. 3:23-25; 5:8-9). This word generated faith within them, and this faith moved them to repent of their sins and choose righteousness (Rom. 10:17; Acts 3:19). They declared their faith by confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God in the presence of others (Rom. 10:9-10). They completed the scripturally defined human response to the grace of God by being immersed in water for the remission of sins (Acts 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). When they rose from baptism, they were saved from their sins and the Lord added them to his church, the assembly of the saved (Acts 2:47). By this divinely ordained plan, they became the recipients of salvation.

While it is true that sinners are saved on an individual basis, it is also true that the New Testament speaks of Jesus Christ as the Savior of the church. He is the only authorized dispenser or administrator of salvation. The apostle Paul wrote: "And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Eph. 2:16). Christ did the work of uniting all obedient believers into one body by his death on the cross. He is "the savior of the body" (Eph. 5:23), and "he gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (5:25-26). Jesus is the agency by which the church receives salvation; however, some incorrectly assume that this implies that he saves the church collectively. It must be understood that his salvific work is universal to every member of the body individually. Salvation is never

en masse, nor will the church be judged collectively. Sinners are saved one by one, and members of the church will be judged based on their own works alone. Paul clarified this for the Corinthians: “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). Every member of the church is saved by the Lord and is saved the same way — the Lord’s way.

The Church is the Communicator of the Gospel

It is clear that man is saved by the grace of God (Eph. 2:8), but God does not personally communicate this to him. Also, the blood of Christ cleanses one from sin (Rom. 5:9), but Jesus does not speak to each lost soul of his need to contact the blood. Without doubt the gospel is the divine announcement of salvation (1 Cor. 15:1-2), but it cannot save until the lost hear it (Rom. 10:13-15). Enter the role of the church in salvation. The assembly of the saved has been charged with the duty of carrying the message of reconciliation to sinners. Preaching the gospel is the means the Lord chose to save the lost. Paul wrote: “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. . . . 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. 1:18, 21). The church is limited to this role in the matter of salvation; it does not save, nor can it influence the Lord in determining who is to be saved. The church’s role is restricted to preaching salvation.

In addition, the church is scripturally limited in what it can do in the work of spreading the gospel. The church is only authorized to function on a local basis to generate conditions that will facilitate the preaching of the gospel. Furthermore, the authorized activities of the church in evangelism are executed by individual members who have been equipped by Jesus Christ for this work. “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” (Eph. 4:11-12). Each member of a local congregation has some part for which he is responsible in the church’s work of teaching the lost. The elders oversee the local congregation, encouraging the members to be busy with their part in the work of salvation, and motivating preachers and teachers to seek out and enlighten the lost (1 Pet. 5:2). The preachers and teachers publicly teach the unsaved in assemblies for worship and in Bible studies (1 Tim. 4:16). The members invite the lost to hear the word proclaimed, and engage family members, friends, co-workers, and classmates in Bible studies for the purpose of converting them to the Lord (John 1:40-42). All members of local churches give of their means to support the preaching of the word. The elders distribute those funds to evangelists who devote their lives to proclaiming the

gospel (Phil. 4:14-19). Local churches do not save the lost, but rather the members of autonomous congregations work together to teach the lost how to be saved.

Moreover, in their role as communicators of the gospel, local churches have the responsibility to maintain the purity of doctrine. Elders must be sound in the faith, and must rebuke those who are not (Tit. 1:9). Preachers and teachers must preach the same thing in every church (1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17). Members must be united around the same doctrine (1 Cor. 1:10). Since the church is merely the communicator of salvation and not the author, it does not have the prerogative to make alterations to the message, not even on a local basis.

The Church is Not the Administrator of Salvation

Local churches cannot assume the power of the Lord in saving the lost, just as the church universal cannot function as a unit in the role of communicating the gospel to the lost. The religiously illegitimate denominations of men have attempted to usurp the authority of God in salvation with creedal membership schemes. However, congregations of saints must never view their work as that of regulating entrance into the kingdom of God. Consider, if the church has the power to dispense salvation, it also has the power to revoke it. This reasoning further suggests that if local churches have the power to save or condemn, then they also have the power to influence outcomes on Judgment Day. Christians and sinners who have this perception must be taught otherwise.

It is possible for a local congregation to mistakenly receive one into fellowship who has not truly obeyed the gospel or who is unfaithful or erring. Just because the local church extends fellowship to him, does not mean that the Lord enrolls him in the book of life. In addition, it is possible for a local congregation to unjustly withdraw fellowship from a member. Simply because they refuse fellowship with him does not mean the Lord has cast him out of the kingdom.

The church is not the well-spring of divine grace; it did not shed its blood for salvation, and it did not develop the gospel. The church communicates the divine initiative in the salvation of man and teaches men to obey the mandated response. The church is the fellowship and assembly of the saved who are given the task of telling sinners what they must do to be saved. By working together harmoniously with one another within local churches, the saved communicate the good news of God’s grace, Christ’s cleansing blood, and salvation by the gospel.

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The Right Work

It is notable that the Lord has given his church a great work. That work is not political, social, or secular in any way. God does not charge local congregations with the duty of keeping large bank accounts and engaging in ecumenical “church growing” gimmicks. The work he has given for his church is the noblest and greatest of works. This work is not optional and demands our obedience.

In Mark 16:15,16, Jesus told his apostles, “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.” Paul later told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2: “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.” In these verses we see the commanded privilege that all Christians are charged with in *evangelizing the world*. God’s personal work program is laid out as an “each one teach one” concept. The message of Christ is a spoken message and must be verbalized to a world of dying sinners. Jesus taught in Matthew 13:24-43 the importance of sowing the seed in his kingdom. We must ever remember that the emphasis is placed on *sowing*. Too much emphasis is given by many brethren to the number of baptisms and restorations. How much seed are we sowing, should be the question. Many brethren ignore requests from faithful men for support to sow the seed. Too many congregations seem more interested in fiscal and physical concerns than they do on spiritual work. Sowing the seed has taken a back seat to parking lot renovations, lawn care, bug control, and building large elaborate buildings to be used three or four times a week. Many elders run congregations like their own personal corporation. They ignore the privilege of supporting faithful men to preach, so they can present to the congregation a businesslike “profit and loss” statement.

When brethren are about the job of sowing the seed they are focused on the greatest work in the world. What better thing could be done for our fellow man than to teach them the precious message of Christ?

What greater and nobler work could there be than this? Read Mark 16:20; Acts 2, 8, 16; 13:5, 42; 17:18; Romans 10:15; 1 Corinthians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 4:5; Galatians 1:8-10; and 2 Timothy 4:2 and see the noble work of preaching.

God has commanded that those who would give their lives to evangelizing the world should be sent (Rom. 10:15). Paul elaborates on the duty and privilege of congregations to support men in this work (1 Cor. 9). Gospel preaching is to be supported by faithful brethren. It is past time for brethren to quit “pinching pennies” when it comes to supporting preaching. If a man is faithful to the cause and stands firm for the “old paths,” then why are many of them on the verge of bankruptcy? Preachers of this character will preach regardless of whether they receive essential support, but brethren will be held accountable for ignoring the legitimate pleas of good men. It is sinful and disgraceful that we have faithful old soldiers of the cross of Christ who have stood straight and tall in battle for decades, who have to live off of charge cards to make ends meet.

We have debated and argued the point with liberal brethren through the years that the work of the church is evangelism, edification, and limited benevolence. Those arguments are true and scriptural. Since that is the case, why do many not practice what is preached? Since we cannot take our money with us, why don’t we do more in supporting the spread of the gospel, not only “overseas” but also in barren areas right here in this country? Certainly there is a need to preach the gospel abroad, and we must support it also, but folks, we have many barren wastelands in this country that are ready for the spread of truth. There are no passports needed, no shots required, and no language barriers. All that is needed is men to go and brethren who can support them to do so. Door to door work is not glamorous but it opens doors. How many churches have ignored sowing the seed in the areas around the building? How many of us have sowed the seed to our immediate neighbors? Many churches are not growing, they are simply

“swelling” (as Granville Tyler used to say). Emphasis on evangelism of the community has given way among some brethren to gimmicks that do little more than “sheep steal” from other congregations.

The Lord has also ordained that his church be engaged in the work of *edification* (Eph. 4:12; 2 Cor. 12:19; Acts 9:31). This involves the encouragement of local Christians to “build up one another” (Eph. 4:15-17; Heb. 10:24). Edification is God’s essential tool in keeping Christians educated in truth, disciplined by the word and focused on going to heaven. It is hard for brethren to edify one another when some choose not to attend all the services and feast on spiritual things (Heb. 10:25). It is difficult to help brethren grow, when they have an observer concept of service. It is impossible for brethren to grow when all they hear from pulpits is “sermonettes delivered by preacherettes resulting in them becoming Christianettes.” Strong convicting preaching is what Timothy was commanded to preach (2 Tim. 4:1-5). Elders need to feed the flock what is necessary. Preachers must love brethren enough to tell them what they need to hear, not what they may want to hear. We are in a battle and are to have our armor on (Eph. 6:13-18). We need to love the truth more than we love the praises of men. Elders need to keep brethren informed of coming dangers. Preachers need to “reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” Elders need to love the flock enough to practice withdrawal of fellowship (1 Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 3:6). Exhortation and encouragement needs to be given often to brethren who are behaving as the Lord commands. Toleration of evil, soft preaching, and a failure to watch and warn may get a group a lot of numbers, but they will be “twofold more children of hell” than they were (Matt. 23:15). All that is accomplished by overlooking and compromising truth is that we encourage folks to go to hell with a smile on their face and we will answer for misleading them.

God’s social plan for the care of his people is laid out in Acts 6. *Benevolence* is to practiced collectively, toward those who are “among us.” Each local congregation is charged with taking care of its own needy. The church is not charged with taking care of the needy of the world. Individuals are (Gal. 6:10; Jas. 1:27). God is very specific in this area. Paul told Timothy in detail what type of widows were to be the charge of the church (1 Tim. 5:9-16). If a local congregation cannot provide for the needs of its own members then and only then can other brethren send to their relief. No central organization is needed. Each congregation is to send to the elders of the needy work (Acts 5:28-30). Those elders, knowing the needs of their own flock are to distribute those things to the needy. Notice this is not a continuing thing and the Lord’s plan is sufficient for this type of need.

It is essential that we practice what we preach on this

point also. Some brethren are so afraid of “being liberal” that they ignore legitimate and scriptural needs. God’s plan works. The extreme of a congregation never using its funds for the help of the scripturally needy is as wrong as helping those we have not authority to help.

God is so wise in simplifying his plan for the work of his church. The emphasis is primarily spiritual in nature. All of the gimmicks and trends toward secularism today may appear to be the answer to the worldly mind, but they are without authority and therefore unscriptural and sinful. Let’s not think that we can improve on God’s right work for his church. Let’s get busy implementing his plan where we attend.

Encourage gospel preaching and evangelizing by the local members. Sow the seed of the kingdom and be urgent about it. Edify your brethren by encouraging and supporting the truth. Ask for book, chapter, and verse preaching and seek the “old paths wherein is the right way” (Jer. 6:16). Be benevolent to your own brethren and encourage the congregation where you are to practice benevolence in a scriptural way. Individually, let all Christians be known as those who are willing to help “all men” (Gal. 6:10). There may be times when you are “taken” but would be better to “suffer yourself to be defrauded” than, seeing a person in need and not doing what you can (1 Cor. 6:7; Matt. 25:35-40).

Let’s work God’s right work for his church. It is a perfect work and a perfect plan. It brings forth good fruit. Let’s have the faith to believe and implement the perfect and right plan of God for his church.

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The Right Conditions for Membership in the Lord's Church

It is God's will that all men be saved and none lost. The apostle Paul writes, "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3-4). Peter writes, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). God sent Jesus Christ into the world in order to accomplish his will of saving the lost.

Jesus Christ promised his disciples in Matthew 16:18 that he would build his church, and in Acts 2:47 we read that the Lord added the saved to the church. Thus, the Lord determines membership in his church and he sets the conditions and admits those who obey his conditions. In this article we want to notice the conditions of membership given by Christ and compare these with the conditions given by denominational churches.

One question should come to mind as one reads this article. Can you find the terms of membership in the church you attend in the Bible? In other words, what does it take to become a member of the church you attend? Can you find these conditions or requirements in the Bible?

In the Bible the terms or conditions for being a member of the Lord's church are the same as the conditions of salvation. In Acts 2, Peter, guided by the Holy Spirit, taught that Jesus is both Lord and Christ and that those listening to him were guilty of murdering him (Acts 2:36, 22-23). The recognition of this sin pricked the hearts of many who were there that day (Acts 2:37). They asked the question, "What shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). About 3,000 gladly received

the word which was preached that day and were baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:41). In verse 47, we find that Jesus added those who were saved to his church. Therefore, the same thing it takes to become free from sin is the same thing it takes to become a member of the church of Christ. When we repent and are baptized for the remission of sins, we are saved and the Lord adds us to his church.

What are the terms of membership you had to meet in order to become a member of the church you attend? Are they the same as found in the Bible? They must not only be the same conditions as found in the Bible, but they must also be practiced for the same reason as given in the Bible. For example, the Bible says that baptism is for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). Most, if not all, denominational churches teach that baptism is an outward sign of an inward grace, and that it is not for the remission of sins. A person baptized in a denominational church has been baptized, but not for the right reason. This baptism is done under the authority of the denomination and not by the authority of Christ. This denominational baptism is not effective for removing sins. It may be effective to get one into a denominational church, but it will not be effective for washing away sins and admitting one into the Lord's church.

Many people who were baptized as infants, later came to hear the gospel and believe that Jesus is God's Son. Some of these people recognize they are sinners and turn from the sin they are engaged in; therefore they have heard the gospel, believed it, repented of their sins, and been baptized, but the order and purpose of these actions were wrong. Let us notice a short diagram of Mark 16:16 that may help us understand the importance of doing things according to God's direction.

teachings of men or the Lord Jesus Christ?

The question may be raised, “What about the blood of Jesus? I thought we were saved by the blood.” That is a good question and a correct observation. The blood of Jesus does save. Jesus said, “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28). But, when does the blood save? When is the blood applied

to my soul to remove my sins? The Bible teaches that the blood is applied when we are baptized in water. The blood is what saves us, when we are baptized. Notice the chart below:

What order did Jesus give? Does the order of Jesus agree with that of the Catholic Church or the denominational churches? Jesus put belief and baptism before salvation. Catholics and denominational churches have twisted the words of Jesus. Peter warns us in 2 Peter 3:16 that wicked men will twist the words of Jesus and we should beware of them, so that they do not lead us to destruction.

Jesus not only teaches that we must believe the gospel in order to be saved, but we must also repent of our sins (Luke 13:3). This means that we must be old enough to have committed sin, recognize that we have sinned, and turn from these sins (1 John 3:4; Acts 17:30). An infant cannot obey this command. An infant can be forced against his will to be baptized, but no one can force him to repent. He is not old enough or mature enough to understand the concept, much less obey it. The truth is, it is not necessary for the infant to repent or be baptized because he has not sinned and is not in danger of losing his soul. Jesus says, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3). The prophet Ezekiel revealed in the Old Testament that we do not inherit sin. “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself” (Ezek. 18:20).

Conclusion

These are the terms or conditions for salvation given by Jesus: Believe, Confess, Repent, and Be Baptized. When we obey these conditions, Jesus adds us to his church (Acts 2:47). This is the only body that will be saved when he returns. “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body” (Eph. 5:23). Are you a part of this body? Have you obeyed the conditions given by Jesus and are you worshipping God in the one true church that he built?

The Bible also teaches that one must confess his faith in Christ. Jesus teaches, “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 10:32). Paul wrote to the Romans, “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:10). An infant cannot do this!

Can you find the terms of membership of the church you attend in the Bible? If they are not, then there is at least one thing it is practicing that is not found in the New Testament. Could there be others? Also, how many departures from God’s word will it take before you realize you are not in his church?

As we have already seen, Jesus teaches that one must be baptized in order to be saved (Mark 16:16). The Bible teaches that baptism is for (in order to) the remission of sins. If one is baptized for any other reason, then our baptism is ineffective. We are not saved, no matter what others may say to the contrary. Will you trust your eternal destiny to the

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“What Must I Do to Be Saved?”

Larry Ray Hafley

To one who does not know the Lord and has not believed on him, the answer is — “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). To those who have believed, but have not yet repented and been baptized, the answer is — “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts

This question appears three times in the New Testament (Acts 2:37; 9:6; 16:31). What does it imply? What does it suggest? (1) It indicates that the questioner is lost. Why ask the question if he is not? (2) “What” implies something. There are terms, conditions, to be met. (3) “Must” contains the force of an obligation, a necessity. (4) “I” is individual, personal. A group is not under consideration. (5) “Do” is an action verb. The religion of Christ is one of duty and doing (Matt. 7:21; Luke 6:46). Man is active, not passive, in his reception of salvation (Heb. 5:9). (6) “To be saved” shows the end in view. “Saved” refers to the forgiveness of sins (Mark 16:16; Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19).

This question is not: (1) What must God do for one to be saved? God must act for one to be saved, but that is not the issue of our question (John 3:16). (2) What did Christ have to do before “I” could be saved? Without his work none could be saved, but that is not the object of our query (John 17:4). (3) What part does the Holy Spirit play in one’s salvation? The Spirit has done his work in the revelation and confirmation of the word of salvation (John 16:13; Acts 2:4). Without his work, there would be no answer to the question of our discussion (Acts 2:4, 37, 38). However, our theme is not directly concerned with the Spirit’s role. (4) Are God’s grace, mercy, and love, and Christ’s blood important? Certainly they are! Salvation could not be provided without them, but these

essential items are not the focus of the texts which contain our question.

Now that we have defined the question, let us discern the answer. The answer is not: (1) Determined by what “your church” or “my church” teaches. Since our question is a Bible question, it should receive a Bible answer (1 Pet. 4:11). Confusion and contradiction will reign if we allow various churches to provide their answers. (2) Decided by what “your preacher,” “my preacher,” or any other man says. We should learn “not to think of men above that which is written” (1 Cor. 4:6).

The Question and Its Answers

Acts 2:37, 38: When men believed that Jesus was “both Lord and Christ,” they asked the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” They were told, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” This was the Holy Spirit’s answer (Acts 2:4). It is consistent with what the Savior said. Jesus said repentance and remission of sins were to be preached in his name, and “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16; Luke 24:47). Those who “gladly received” the Spirit’s word “were baptized” (Acts 2:41). Those who did not “gladly” receive his word were not baptized “for the remission of sins.” The same is true today. Baptism “in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” was the consistent command and constant

practice of apostolic preaching (Acts 2:38; 10:48; 19:5).

Acts 9:6; 22:16: Before the apostle Paul was saved, he asked, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” The Lord told him to “go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.” He was instructed that what he must do would be “told” him in “the city.” When we find what he was “told” in the city, we will know “what (he) must do” to be saved. When God sent Ananias unto Paul, he “told” him, “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

Paul believed on the Lord, as is indicated by his obeying Jesus’ command to “go into the city.” Paul repented of his sins, for he terminated his murderous mission against the disciples and prayed for three days (Acts 9:1, 2, 9, 11). Thus, he did not need to be told to repent. Having believed and repented, he was “told,” “Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Thus, we know what it was that he was “told” he “must do.”

Baptism “for the remission of sins” is not a magical sacrament that imparts salvation. It is one of the conditions with which one “must” comply in order to be saved (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16).

Acts 16:31-34: When a jailer in Philippi inquired, “What must I do to be saved?” he was told, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” But how is faith produced? Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:14, 17). “And they spake unto him the word of the Lord.” Since Paul and Silas told the man to believe, it was necessary for them to preach the word so that he might do so. After hearing the word, the jailer “rejoiced, believing in God.”

Though not specifically stated, it is evident that he repented. First, as we have seen, one cannot be saved without repentance (Luke 24:47;

Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30). Second, the fact that the jailer washed the wounds of Paul and Silas indicates he had repented. Third, the jailer repented because he “was baptized.” One cannot be baptized unless he first repents (Acts 2:38).

What led the jailer to be baptized? All he had heard was “the word of the Lord.” Yet, the text says he “was baptized.” Where did he learn about baptism?

Jesus said, “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 16:16). (1) In Samaria, Philip “preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5). It is not said he preached baptism, but the result of his preaching “Christ unto them” was that they were baptized (Acts 8:12). To preach Christ includes preaching baptism. (2) In Acts 8:35, Philip “preached . . . Jesus” to an Ethiopian. The man asked, “What doth hinder me to be baptized?” In preaching Jesus, Philip had preached what Jesus said about baptism. How else would the Ethiopian have known to ask about baptism? (3) To the Corinthians, Paul preached nothing except, “Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). “And many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). Again, we see that to preach the gospel of Christ means to preach baptism.

That is how the jailer knew to be baptized. Having heard the word of God, he “was baptized.” If baptism is not part of the gospel, he would not have been baptized.

He was not told that “faith alone” would save him. We know this because: (1) If he had been told that all he had to do was believe, this would have excluded repentance. Since one must repent, we know he was not told to believe only. (2) To have told him so would have conflicted with Acts 2:38 — “Repent, and be baptized . . . for the

remission of sins.” (3) It would have differed from what Ananias told Paul when he was converted — “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). “But,” one may object, “Acts 16:31 does not mention baptism.” No, and neither does it mention repentance. Is repentance, therefore, not essential? Acts 2:38 and 22:16 do not mention belief in the Lord. Suppose one were to argue that since faith is not mentioned in those passages, faith is not essential to salvation. Would that be a logical assumption? Of course not! Thus, though baptism is not mentioned in Acts 16:31, it is one of the terms of pardon the jailer obeyed in order “to be saved” (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 16:31-34; 22:16).

Summary and Conclusion

We have learned there is something “I must do to be saved.” We have seen the Savior’s answer to the sinner’s question. To one who does not know the Lord and has not believed on him, the answer is — “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). To those who have believed, but have not yet repented and been baptized, the answer is — “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). To one who has believed on the Lord and repented of his sins, the answer is — “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

Have you done what one “must do to be saved?” If you have done something else, something less, or something different, you do not have the assurance of God that you have been saved. Why be in doubt? Why remain in spiritual darkness? If you have not believed on Christ, we encourage you to trust him as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world (John 1:29; 3:16). If you believe he is the Son of God, we urge you to repent and be baptized “for the remission of

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Preaching in the Early Days

As regarding this series of essays and as I continue to reminisce and write, I am receiving many e-mails (who

could have, in their wildest imaginations, conceived of “e-mails” back in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s? “Buck Rogers,” “Flash Gordon and Doctor Zarkov” space ships, distant planets, and ethereal regions we, as children, read about, saw at the movies, and understood, but not “e-mail”), letters, phone calls, and oral comments in my travels in gospel meetings. With many, sympathetic notes and chords are being heard and touched, and an older generation is remembering with me; to others this is all a waste of time and effort, having nothing to do with the present affairs of the kingdom of God. But the good editor of *Truth Magazine* says, “WRITE” (like brother Leon Odom, now deceased, used to loudly say, “PREACH,” when he was appreciating a sermon and wanted to encourage the speaker). So, being vain enough to think that someone, somewhere, will find a “nugget” of interest, of rapport, and of benefit, especially those who have experienced similar events and circumstances, I plan to continue for a season, the Lord willing.

For me, “the golden age” of preaching, of participating in gospel meetings, the pleasantness of unity and love of the brethren, with comparatively little conflict, was in my early days in the late forties and early fifties of the twentieth century. I’ve mentioned some interesting incidents which occurred in very early meetings with the Millersburg and New Zion congregations in Rutherford County, Tennessee, and during the Longview school house meeting in Bedford County. I will now write of some other unique events which occurred in meetings before beginning to discuss the divisive period when the “quarantine” put upon the “ANTIS” by the *Gospel Advocate* paper in Nashville, Tennessee, began to have its influence and effect among the brethren.

I held ten meetings for the Red Hill church in Cannon County, Tennessee, during the years 1951 through 1969. Every other year I stayed with brother and sister David Ghent Smithson (her name, was “Hattie”) in all of those meetings. During those years I held two meetings for a nearby congregation, McMahan, called by some “the Mac House Church,” and stayed with “Mr. Ghent” and “Miss Hattie,” or “brother Ghent” and “sister Hattie,”

in one of those meetings. They thus received me into their home eleven times for meetings. I spent other times and nights with them when I would be preaching meetings in Woodbury, Tennessee, or in and around Murfreesboro. He was almost 79 years old when he died. I spoke at his funeral in Woodbury on July 29, 1977. She was almost 95 years old when she died. I spoke at her funeral in Woodbury on July 16, 2002. He was a farmer, milked a number of cows, had a few beef cattle, hogs, mules, chickens, and sold “grade B milk” to the cheese plant in Woodbury. She worked in a garment factory in Woodbury, as a seamstress, for many years. They were such godly, generous, sincere, hard-working people. Never a better cook has ever lived (except my mother and my wife) than “sister Hattie.”

Each meeting at Red Hill was a ten or eleven days’ meeting, beginning on Sunday and going through two Wednesdays, or beginning on Monday night and going through two Wednesdays. We had baptisms and/or restorations in every meeting! We would go to Woodbury, to the “big church on the hill,” to use their baptistry. Most of the times we would go to the spring-fed, cold waters of a nearby creek and by car headlights, flashlights, and kerosene (“coal-oil”) lanterns, we would sing “Oh Happy Day” and have the baptisms. Sincere souls would thus be born again, of water and of the Spirit, into God’s heavenly kingdom and family (John 3:1-8; 1 Pet. 1:22-25; Col. 1:13-14; Gal. 3:26-29).

The “song service” was led in every meeting, every service, by brother Walter Smithson, an uncle of “brother Ghent.” Walter used a “tuning fork” to correctly “pitch” each song. He would adjust his “tuning fork,” tap it on the hymn book, quickly put it to his right ear to hear the “pitch,” then vocally and audibly run up and down the musical scale, hit the right note and pitch, and begin the hymn. The rafters and roof of that old white wooden meetinghouse would almost jump upwards as those talented, country singers and visitors would loudly sing God’s praises in those old and familiar, tried and tested and true songs of praise. Brother Walter was a great song leader and the people would sing with him. He could read the notes; others were singing “by ear.” My, my, my, how it seemed as if the portals of glory

were opening and we were entering into heaven when those crowds of one hundred or more were singing the beautiful hymns of Zion.

Good, happy, joyful, from-the-heart, enthusiastic, energetic singing is an essential facet of our worship. Such singing, led by knowledgeable and capable song leaders, adds tremendous interest and emotional response to scriptural and true worship of our Father in heaven, to prayers led by faithful men, and to the seriousness of listening to God's word as it is preached. Lively, sincere, attentive singing creates desires to respond to the gospel. It used to be that churches would use their very best, most capable song leader "to lead the singing in the protracted meeting." Sometimes, in those days, a church would secure a well-known, capable song leader from another congregation and/or another place "to come and lead the singing in the meeting" and would compensate him for doing so, just as they paid the visiting preacher for the meeting. Brethren Tommy Nicks, Billy Nicks, Dr. Ben Murphy, and others in the Nashville area, brother Sam Garrison in Cheatham County, brother Bill Werner in Dallas, and many others I remember or knew of, would lead the singing in many meetings for many congregations, due to their great abilities as song leaders. Dr. Murphy and brother C.M. Pulias led singing in the "Tabernacle Meetings" with brother N.B. Hardeman. Brother Austin Taylor used to accompany brother Foy E. Wallace, Jr. to lead the singing in Foy's meetings. Brethren wanted both of them, for they realized the spiritual value of enthusiastic singing in gospel meetings. Many of us have held meetings, in years past more so than in this present era, when a song leader was brought in from another place or church to "lead the singing in the meeting." This is what we should still be doing when the local church does not have a capable leader.

Somewhere, somehow, along the way, brethren have drifted into the practice and pattern of "a different song leader for every service" during gospel meetings. This is a real mistake, in my judgment. During a meeting a church ought to use the best, most talented song leader they have in their membership and have him lead all the singing, in each and every service. If we are going to pay a preacher to come in from another place "to hold us a meeting," and if we are going to invite our brethren, friends, and neighbors from regions round about to come and worship with us and to hear the gospel preached, then we ought to have the best, quietest, interesting, enthusiastic scriptural service we can

possibly have. We ought to have a brother to lead singing who knows how to lead, who knows and understands the songs he is leading, who knows such matters as tempo and pitch, who knows to begin "the invitation song" the second the invitation is extended, and who will co-ordinate his selection of hymns with the sermon topics of the preacher, as closely as possible. The hymns, properly selected, will enforce, enhance, and teach the same lessons of truth which are taught in the sermon.

Not every man is a song leader, just as not every man is a preacher. A service is often "killed dead in its tracks" by poor singing and by leaders who can't lead. No man in the church ought to be offended or get his feeling hurt or "feathers ruffled" because he is not asked to lead singing in a meeting, "to take his turn." We would have better gospel meetings if we would, among other improvements, have better and more enthusiastic singing (we need to get away from this idea and practice that every man who wants to do so "should have an opportunity to lead the singing during the meeting"). And to do that we must have a good leader who is skilled and experienced in leading hymns. Gospel meetings are not occasions to experiment with new songs and/or songs the people do not know. Sing the old-time hymns about "the old, old story" and "of Jesus and His love," and "the old rugged cross." Save "Stamps Baxter" and "Jumping, Jivey, Contemporary Joe" until another time and place!

I came to Red Hill the first time, August 5-15, 1951, by chance (Eccl. 9:11). I like to personally think this might have been by Divine providence. Brother James C. Bays, now deceased, a schoolmate at Lipscomb College, was scheduled to hold the meeting. He became ill, could not go, contacted "brother Ghent" to this effect, and recommended me as a replacement. Brother Smithson (he was "the leader"; the church had no elders) told him to tell me to come on. I got directions from brother Bays as to how to get there (we lived in Texas at the time, having moved to Cooper, Texas in May 1951; Marinel stayed with her parents on the farm south of Jackson, Tennessee). On Saturday afternoon, August 4, I arrived at their house, out on the farm, seven miles southeast of Woodbury. Mr. Ghent looked me over very deliberately, "eyeing" me up and down, not having much to say. "Sister Hattie" talked and was friendly from the first. I felt very welcome. She had a sumptuous, delicious meal, a supper which was enough for twenty or thirty people. She was one of those country cooks who didn't know how to cook a small meal!

They were in the process of building a new house and had moved into it, but it was not yet finished. The bathroom-to-be had been “plumbed,” “roughed-in,” but no fixtures had been installed, so it was not usable. The old house sat off at the back some distance from the new house, which was nearer to the road. The old house had no bathroom in it. I could not see an “outdoor privy” anywhere. I soon discovered that the old outdoor toilet had been removed, as the new house sat very near to the location where the old toilet had been. So there was no outdoor toilet at the time. Everyone went down into the woods behind the barn! Fortunately it was a big woods! Mr. Ghent and Miss Hattie went to milk the cows and I watched them from a window. I saw them go into the woods, stay a short while, come out, wash their hands at the pump in the barn lot where they pumped water for the cows and mules, and go about their milking and barn chores. They never said anything to me; I never said anything to them! When they came from the barn, I headed for the woods — to a different section from the area where they had entered and exited! Thus for eleven days nature’s calls, as God created this old body to function as it does, were answered in the woods, with corn cobs, a Sears Roebuck catalog, and Kleenex kept handy at the barn, and soap and water at the pump in the barn lot. Baths were “sponge baths” in the new bathroom with a basin of water, soap, wash cloth, and towel. No tub or shower for eleven days! This was the only place I ever stayed where there were no “facilities,” either indoors or outdoors.

This reminded me of my “raising” down in Bemis, Tennessee, where on Saturday afternoon, once a week, a bath was taken in the kitchen, in a number 3 galvanized wash tub, two children to a tub of water, one after the other, as there was not that much hot or warm water. The hot/warm water was dipped out of “the reservoir” on the end of that old wood-burning range (“cook stove”). My parents bought another house in 1940. We moved to this house which had “indoor plumbing” and an electric water heater on December 7, 1940, exactly one year before Pearl Harbor. I was 14 years old when we came to have a bathroom in a house, with a “bathtub” and a shower over the tub. How nice! Quite a change this was from the old “outdoor privy” down in the barn lot, about fifty yards north of the house, especially on cold winter days when the wind was blowing out of the north! Mr. Ghent and Miss Hattie were two of the dearest people in the world to me. I am planning on living with them eternally in “the land that is fairer than day,” and which, “by faith,” I am seeing clearer and dearer and nearer with each passing day and year.

There were other interesting meetings and people in those days: when part of a ceiling fell one night into the bedroom where I was sleeping, the ceiling tiles, the wood strips, the insulation, barely missing my bed. And when a mousetrap “snapped” and “sprung” one night under my bed, when I didn’t even know there was a mouse in the room and

a mousetrap under the bed, and I could hear the little mouse squeaking and moving about in his death throes, and then there was silence. And the time when a good sister screamed “bloody murder” when she went to the kitchen to prepare breakfast and found a snake in her electric range amongst her pots and pans, the snake evidently having crawled up the 220 electric wire, through the hole in the floor for that wire, and stayed in her stove. Her husband came running, rescued his wife, and captured the snake. I stayed in my room! And the time Marinel and I stayed in a house during an eight-day meeting and the owners were away. They kept cats and dogs in the house regularly but had removed them to other places while they were gone and while we were in their house. The rooms were carpeted with “shag carpet” and “deep pile” rugs. The fleas “swarmed” us the first evening and night, a Saturday night. On Sunday, at the first service of the meeting, a daughter of this family asked us, “Did you make it alright at my parent’s house? Did you have any problems?” We told her about the “flea epidemic.” She said, “I was afraid of that!” On two separate days, Monday and Thursday, she came and “fumigated” the house. We had to get out of the house, all day, both days, coming back in the evenings just before the services to dress for worship. I threatened to buy Marinel three flea collars — two for her ankles and legs and one around her neck! We had fleas all week.

And there was the time I found a ‘Playboy Magazine’ under a cushion of a living room couch when I was having dinner (noon dinner) with a young couple during a meeting. He had led singing at the morning service. I went home with them, his wife was preparing the meal, the two children were playing about in the floor, the brother and I were talking and I was sitting on the couch. I inadvertently put my hand down between the cushions, felt this magazine, pulled it out, and it was filthy. His face turned crimson red with embarrassment, his wife heard me scolding and upbraiding him, and she came into the room and began to cry. She said, “Brother Cavender, I am so thankful that you found that trash. I have tried and tried to persuade him to quit buying and reading this garbage. He brings this into our house, reads it, looks at the pictures, and then gets up and leads the singing. It is so degrading and sinful. Perhaps now he will quit this since you know this about him.” The meal was eaten in a quiet, strained, hushed atmosphere. That night he made confession of his sins to the Lord, to the church, and to his family. I have not seen this family in years. The last time I did see them, some twenty-five years ago, they were so courteous and friendly, and thanked me for that visit to their home. The “Playboy” matter was not mentioned. (To be continued)

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Gene Lyles

Trying to Stop the Denominational Train

Having come into this world in 1927, I well remember the great depression of the 1930s. Most everyone in the nation was going through hard times. The minds of people in general were focused on God and how he would help us survive this trying situation. The Bible was the predominate source of conversation, and most everyone went to church somewhere on Sunday. In my home town of Justin, Texas there were four different churches: the Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Church of Christ, and in the late thirties a Pentecostal church came to town. In my earliest remembrance of church going, it seems my family favored the Baptist church, although none in my family ever became Baptist. My dad was very open minded religiously and insisted that we look into the teaching of them all before settling down into a certain church. However, one particular church in town was shunned because it taught it was the one true church, and you would go to hell if you were not a member of it. This certainly didn't make it very popular, and people in general seemed to steer clear of that group. Yet many leading citizens of the community were members of it, including the local doctor. So in the summer of 1936 my dad insisted that we attend their services. I was nine years old at the time.

Needless to say, it was certainly different. There was no instrument of music, but the singing was unusually good. One didn't hear the banging of a piano or an organ that drowned out the singing. The preacher gave book, chapter, and verse from the Scriptures for everything he taught. One thing that stood out in my mind was his ability to quote the Scriptures without looking at his Bible, and he could quote plenty of them. He showed great confidence by saying that if anyone could show from the Scriptures that what he taught was not what the

Scriptures teach, he would gladly change. His preaching was so different from anything my dad had ever heard that my dad invited him home for dinner. After dinner (that was the lunch meal back then), my dad and two older brothers sat under a nice shade tree out in the yard with the preacher and discussed the Scriptures. I sat nearby and listened in on what they had to say. The two main subjects of discussion were faith only and whether or not a saved person could be lost, better known at that time as "once saved, always saved." That really started more discussion among the family in the days to come.

One of the most difficult things that my family had to deal with was the idea that there was only one true church and to be saved one must be in it. Was the church of Christ indeed the one true church that one must be a member of? My dad was very leery of this, but insisted we hear more about it and try to understand why such a claim was being made. It was explained in this manner. Christ only gave to the world one gospel. When men obeyed that gospel as they did in Acts 2:37-41, they were saved from their sins, and the Lord added to the church those that were being saved (Acts 2:47). Since there is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Eph. 4:4-6), then only those who follow the one faith and are baptized according to the one baptism are truly saved. This certainly made a lot more sense than believing that there were many faiths and many different forms of baptism. So within a short time my family started to regularly attend the church of Christ. Within five years every member of the family were members of the Lord's church except one. I was the youngest, and at the age of fourteen, I obeyed the gospel by being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins according to Acts 2:38 and Acts 22:16.

I was fully convinced then, and have been ever since,

that there is only one true church. I felt then, as I feel now, that I was added by the Lord to the church he purchased with his own precious blood (Acts 20:28). I have always understood that simply becoming a member of the Lord's church does not give one a sure ticket to heaven. The Lord said, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). I was also convinced that denominationalism was not true Christianity (1 Cor. 1:10-12) and that people in denominational churches were not true Christians. First, because they had not obeyed the one true gospel, and second, they did not follow God's word in their faith and practice (Luke 6:46). I was ready at all times to discuss these matters with my school mates, and I must say we had plenty of heated discussions. Maybe I should say "hot arguments." Many say, "You are not suppose to argue religion," but the Lord and his apostles often did so. Thus I make no apology for all the good arguments I have had with those I have differed with. However, I do confess that there were times when good argumentation digressed into wrangling, and this I confess was out of order.

During the years of the thirties and forties, the church of the Lord grew rapidly. We were well united, and brotherly love seemed to prevail. Satan could not stand by without making his move to put a stop to this rapid growth and unity among us, so he made his move. In the late forties and early fifties, Satan changed the way the wind was blowing. World War II had ended, and needs arose that we had not before faced. Young men who had been pulled from their schooling for military service were now ready to start back. War torn nations were crying for help, and doors were opened to take the true gospel where it was virtually unknown. This seemed to call for drastic measures, at least Satan made it appear that way.

Very few churches were able to send a preacher overseas fully supported, although some of the larger churches were able to do so. They suggested that the smaller church simply send them what money they could, and they would assume the oversight of evangelizing the war torn nations. This sounded like the sensible thing to do, and it took the oversight off the shoulders of the elders of the small churches. Should this plan be accepted, Satan had fully accomplished his mission in getting churches to change God's divine pattern of each local church doing its own work under the oversight of its own elders. All Satan had to suggest was that it couldn't be done the way God said to do it. So the "sponsoring church" once again became an issue to divide us, and divide us it did.

But this wasn't the only problem we faced. The young men who were ready to start back to school found that facilities were very poor in the schools operated by brethren, and housing was hard to find. Brethren who operated the schools felt they were in desperate need of financial help. Individual contributions were insufficient to supply their

needs, so they decided to start asking churches to help in their needs, even though their charters clearly stated that the schools would neither solicit nor accept funds from churches. Satan again took advantage of this situation.

Two great decisions had now come before the church. Could the small churches do their work of evangelism through the larger churches (a plan that had clearly been classed as being without scriptural authority by the great preachers of the past generation)? Should the churches start supporting our colleges from the church treasury (which was not only contrary to the initial charter of the schools, but had been clearly counted as an unscriptural practice by the great preachers among us)? So Satan steps up and says: "Surely you men know by now that the end justifies the means," for he knew well that following this course was without scriptural authority. Every brother should have remembered that King Saul decided that "the end justifies the means" and got himself in serious trouble (1 Sam. 13:8-14), but they seemed to forget it. These were the two great issues that Satan was using to divide us. The schools and many outstanding preachers decided to follow Satan's plan and get on the denominational train, so get on the train they did.

There were those who fought this digressive movement in its very beginning, only to be classed as anti toward all the "good work" they were doing. They were classed as "anti-cooperative" and "anti-benevolent," even though they were not opposed to church cooperation but to a centralized form of it. Neither were they opposed to benevolence but to the church doing its God ordained benevolence through human institutions. They were not opposed to our young boys and girls getting a good education under faithful Christian teachers, but to church support of such human institutions. So there is still a great remnant that refused to get on that denominational train.

But now we hear the crying of many who did get on this denominational train. Though they thought they could stop it where they thought it ought to stop, they now see they can't. They were very proud of themselves when they first got on it, but once they saw they couldn't stop it, they are crying to others on the train to help them stop it, only to be laughed at. The sad part is that pride will not allow them to admit their great mistake for getting on the train in the first place. If they would admit their great mistake and come back to God's appointed way of doing things, God would stop the train and allow them to get off. But as long as they hold on to their unscriptural activities, they will go down with the train they never should have gotten on in the first place.

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“Godly Characteristics” continued from front page

Not using flattering words (v. 5)

Flattering words do nothing to help a lost soul. Christ taught his apostles not to use such words (Matt. 23:7-12). Even Elihu knew not to “accept a man’s person” nor “give flattering titles unto man” (Job 32:21). Let us learn that lesson!

Not covetous (v. 5)

A preacher preaching for money will not preach for the Lord (1 Tim. 6:10)! God said this was idolatry (Col. 3:5). Yes, may every preacher be paid according to his work (1 Cor. 9:14), but let God defeat every man preaching for money. I thank God for men like Paul who sacrificed in years gone by so that the gospel was preached in our country and souls were saved.

“Gentle” (v. 7)

Preachers must remember to be gentle in dealing with people. Men, like sheep, must be led to the living water (John 4:10, 14). Let us care for those who are lost, as well as for the saved. There is a time for having “compassion, making a difference” and a time to “save with fear, pulling them out of the fire” (Jude 22-23). “Boldness” and “gentleness” are not contradictory as Paul shows (v. 2, 7). A preacher must be both!

“Labor and Suffering” (v. 9)

A stereotype often joked about is the “lazy preacher.” A preacher mustn’t be guilty of contributing to the stereotype! Preaching God’s word is work from beginning to end (2 Tim. 4:5). When we forget this, we open ourselves up to covetousness, i.e., just preaching for the money (see v. 5)!

Behaving “holily and justly and unblameably” (v. 10)

How necessary it is that our behavior reflect what we preach! What Paul taught is what he practiced (1 Cor. 9:27). Ezra of old did the same, as did Jesus (Ezra 7:10; Acts 1:1). Preachers, do your actions match your preaching? Some need to repent!

Exhorting, Comforting, and Charging (v. 11)

This is the final responsibility noted in this section. Notice please that the preacher is to “exhort,” “comfort,” and “charge” that men and women “walk worthy of God who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory” (v. 12)! Paul’s prayer for the Colossians was that they might do this as well (Col. 1:9-10). How this type of living is needed today. Christians need to be reminded at times of who they are serving! Let us all walk worthy of God that we might see Heaven one day.

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“Temptation” continued from page 2

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (10:26-31).

The Lord has a purpose in Christians assembling together. The worship assembly is designed to encourage Christians to persevere in their service to God, much like the regular meetings of Weight Watchers and Alcoholics Anonymous are designed to encourage their members to persevere in their respective programs for self improvement. Think about what attendance at worship does for the Christian.

- He remembers the Lord’s death, burial, and resurrection through the observance of the Lord’s supper (1 Cor. 11:23ff).
- He receives exhortation to faithful living through the preaching of the word (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 2 Tim. 4:2).
- He offers his worship to God in song and in prayer (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Acts 2:42).
- He offers his petitions to God in prayer (1 Tim. 2:1-2).
- He is exhorted and taught through the singing (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19).

When one sees God’s purpose in having Christians to assemble, he recognizes his need to be present when the church assembles for worship. He is not “punching a time clock” when he worships; he is doing those things which enable him to continue growing in the Lord.

2. *The contribution of finances.* The Christian has a responsibility to help finance the work of the local church. The early church is commanded to take up a weekly collection for its work to be financed. Writing to the saints at Corinth, Paul gave them commandment to take up such a collection; this commandment was also given to all of the churches of Galatia, demonstrating that this was not a limited commandment. He wrote,

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

Other passages of Scripture show the church spending

funds, such as the following:

- Acts 2:42-47 — the church helped those who were poor among the saints in Jerusalem
- Acts 6:1-6 — the church helped the widows in a daily ministration
- Acts 11:27-30 — the church at Antioch sent funds to relieve the suffering of poor saints in Jerusalem
- 2 Cor. 11:8 — the church at Corinth supported Paul while he preached
- Phil. 4:15 — the church at Philippi supported Paul
- 1 Tim. 5:17-18 — the church supported elders who gave their time to teaching

While there are several passages that speak of spending church funds on various things, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 is the only passage giving instruction on when to take up a collection: on the first day of every week. One should give according as he has prospered (that is, in proportion to what he makes), as one has purposed/planned (2 Cor. 9:7), and cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:7). The story of the widow's mite emphasizes the virtue of sacrificial giving (Luke 21:1-4).

3. The contribution of one's time and energies. For the most part, the work of the church is done by volunteer labor. Every individual has a responsibility to do everything he can to promote the Lord's work. Paul wrote, "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). The church functions through each part of the Lord's spiritual body doing what he has the ability to do. Paul compared the church to a physical body in which each individual member contributes to the overall functioning of the body (1 Cor. 12:14-26). He also wrote, "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. 4:15-16).

Understanding how the local church functions is important to understanding the necessity of one contributing his time and energies. The local church decides, either through its eldership or business meeting, to do a given work. Every individual member has a responsibility to do what he can to accomplish that work. Compare the local church in this respect to a football team. The quarterback calls a play in the huddle and then every member of the team works together to execute that play. If the blockers decide that they do not want to participate in a given play, the runner or quarterback is tackled for a loss. Were the running back to decide he did not want to run on a given play, the quarterback may hand off the ball to him, but the play is going nowhere. The football team is able to move the ball only when every member does his part. In a similar

every member does his part.

Sometimes a church decides to have a gospel meeting. The good that can be accomplished is hindered by members who decide they do not want to attend. Some members take their children to ball games, play practices, and allow them to study their school lessons rather than attend the meeting. Some stay at home and watch TV. Visitors do not come because members decide they do not want to invite their neighbors. Then one scratches his head and says, "Having gospel meetings doesn't do any good any more."

The same can be said of Sunday evening worship services and mid-week Bible study. The congregation makes a decision to have these services, but a sizable element of the congregation makes a conscious decision not to participate. Such decisions undermine the effective functioning of the local church. How can a church accomplish any of its goals if the members do not support the decisions that are made? When one willfully refuses to support the work decided upon by the church, he undermines the ability of the church to accomplish its work.

For this reason, one needs to use his abilities in the service of God to his fullest extent. Peter wrote, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; *if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever*" (1 Pet. 4:11). Paul said the same thing: "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness" (Rom. 12:5-8). Whatever one has the ability to do, he should use that ability in the Lord's service. These verses obligate every individual member to look at himself to see what he can do to promote the Lord's cause.

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