

# 2014 LECTURESHIP

The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual  
Oklahoma City Lectureship  
April 24 – 27, 2014

## Why the churches of Christ are Not Growing at the Same Rate as They Did in Earlier Years

*Praising God, and having favour with all the people.  
And the Lord added to the church daily such as  
should be saved. Acts 2:47*



6001 Gardner Drive  
OKLAHOMA CITY  
(Located on 59<sup>th</sup> street,  
just west of Anderson Road)



# DEDICATION



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It is with pleasure that the “25<sup>th</sup> Annual Oklahoma City Lectures” lectureship book is “Dedicated” to Jerry and Eutha Simmons. It is with sadness in our hearts that Eutha could not have lived long enough to enjoy this expression of our love.

Jerry was born July 11, 1929, while Eutha was born January 23, 1932. They were married June 27, 1958. They lived in the Elk City, OK area. Each had been married before but they listed their children as: James, Juanita, Jeannie, and Mike (Cupp). They had under grandchildren: Marla and Mandy, Tomara and Cassy, Keeley and Noah; also seven great-grandchildren: Ashley, Alex, Gabe, Brynn, Danni, Ella, and Tristan.

Jerry was baptized in Elk City, Ok, but no information is known of Eutha’s place of baptism. They were very faithful members of the Barnes church of Christ in Oklahoma City for many years. Due to Eutha’s bad health, she was unable to worship with the church the last few years of her life; Jerry continued to worship with the church until last year when his health made it impossible for him to drive. Jerry also was a faithful attendant at the “Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies.”

A little personal information about each is here given; Eutha’s favorite color was red and her hobbies were: sewing, plastic canvas, gardening; while Jerry likes books.

We truly miss having this loving couple in our worship of God, as together we worship “in spirit and in truth!”







## PREFACE

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The theme of the 25th annual Oklahoma City Lectures, “Why the churches of Christ are not growing at the same rate as in earlier years,” introduces a negative thought. It is generally not a good way to begin a work; however, before the needed corrections can be made, the problems need to be identified. Therefore, ten likely reasons are to be covered as to why the churches of Christ are not growing at the same rate as in earlier years.

Is it really true, that the churches of Christ in America are not growing at the same rate as in earlier years? It would be a dishonor to the churches of Christ to make the charge of not growing at the same rate as in earlier years, if in fact, the growth is the same, or even greater! Therefore, the first lecture will cover this history of the churches of Christ in America, looking at the growth rate. Starting with the first efforts to restore “the ancient order of things,” it was learned that no records were to be found for the first thirty-two years. Looking then as the growth of the churches of Christ through the years, covering the dividing years of 1850-1906, the rebuilding, the troubling years that followed; issues arose, but growth continued. Though the rate of growth varied through the years; it was sometimes faster and at other times slower. Then, it was reported that the churches of Christ was one of the fastest growing churches in America, but numbers were called into question and later learned that the numbers given were untrue. However, starting about the year 2000, the churches of Christ began to see a real change in the growth rate. Therefore, the question: What might be the ten most likely reasons for this change in the growth rate in the churches of Christ?”

Ten reasons will be covered in “the 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Oklahoma City Lectures. They are not covered in the most likely order, as this maybe beyond our ability to know, but one thing is sure, the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not the same as the 20<sup>th</sup> century! The educational system has failed in teaching the young that there are absolute truths; while they have taught them that everything is relative; and they have failed to teach the young how to reason and logic is a thing of the past. Worldliness, meaning the interest of people has greatly changed. Worldliness is here used, not just to refer to sinful activity, but to non-spiritual activities as well which consume time that should be given to spiritual things. Then, there are the “functional agnostics,” who no longer believe in God, nor that the Bible is the word of God; but many churches of Christ are still trying to reach them as though they believe both! The churches of Christ must understand the world of today no longer have even a general knowledge of the Bible; this lack of Bible knowledge must be understood as the churches of Christ put forth efforts to teach the lost!

Then, within the churches of Christ some things have arisen, that hurts her ability to grow at the same rate as in earlier years. When, every effort should be made to keep unity and fellowship, remembering a motto of the earliest years, “In faith, unity; in opinion, liberty; and in all things, charity,” would be a benefit to the growth rate. A difference in attitude has arisen in some in regard to keeping fellowship. Every division among churches of Christ is evidence of sin on the part of someone! While division is necessary at times, every effort to keep fellowship must be made. If division is necessary; it must come only with tears and broken hearts, or no division should take place. The prayer of our Lord must be dear to the heart of every member of the churches of Christ. Some subjects have been made a test of fellowship, when in earlier years this was not the case. For instance, if two agree on a subject, but reach the conclusion using different scripture, fellowship may be broken because of a disagreement on a passage; though both agree on the overall subject. At the same time, another may be labeled a “false teacher,” meaning a teacher, who is false himself; and not regarded as a teacher who may be in honest error. Then, there is the subject of “traditions.” Traditions may be good, neutral, or sinful. Many have heard, “This is the way we have always done it.” Meaning, we are not about

to change, when a change would be helpful to the growth of the local congregation. When it comes to the “traditions” of the apostles, no changes are authorized, but when “traditions” are of a local nature and changes might actually help the local congregation do a better job in teaching, both the members and non-members, then, we must be willing to make the change! We must be willing to change our methods, we are not any longer in the “horse and buggy” day, but in the world of the internet, the day of mass mailings; yet, we must not just throw out old methods, just because they are old. Yet, the traditions of men must never be bound on the churches of Christ!

The churches of Christ must be known for the good they do! It is generally understood by the world, that churches are to do good! If the churches of Christ are not seen helping the poor, few there be who will be willing to listen to anything we have to say. The world must see our efforts in doing “good.” Jesus said as much: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). If the churches of Christ are not known for doing good, the lost are not going to notice us; they will not come to glorify God! Though the churches of Christ are not a benevolent institution, they certainly are an institution that must be benevolent!

If the churches of Christ are to grow at the same rate as in earlier years, or even greater than in earlier years, evangelism must be done with a passion for the lost! It must not be seen only as a duty, but true love on a level of that which Jesus had/has for the lost. Teaching the lost is not a pastime, but a mission done with passion! The churches of Christ must pray, study, and search for ways to reach the hearts/minds of the lost; if the churches of Christ are to grow at the same rate as in earlier years, but we must not be satisfied with growing at the same rate as in earlier years! Why should we?

Finally, it must be remembered, the world in the years of the apostles of Christ was as bad, if not worse than the world today. Yet, Christ sent them out with the gospel of Christ; and nothing else! My brethren, we have the same gospel, it still has the same power (Rom. 1:16); and we must be like the churches of Christ in the 1st century: “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4).

It is the desire of “The Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies” and the Barnes church of Christ, and each one who speaks on this lectureship, that this lectureship will help the churches of Christ awake from sleep and see anew our mission and now better we to reach the lost with the gospel of Christ.

-- Frank R. Williams,  
lectureship director



# Introduction to the Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies

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The Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies (OKCSBS) began its work in 1991. Presently there are men laboring in this work: Marion R. Fox, director; Frank R. Williams, dean of students; and Mike VonTungeln and Jerry Gore, instructors.

Classes have been conducted in various locations in Oklahoma. The work is centered in Oklahoma City with classes being conducted in congregations in the Oklahoma City area. The Barnes church, where the school is located, is an excellent location for this work. Classes have been conducted in Binger, Chandler, Hydro, Maysville, Piedmont, and Tuttle in the recent past. Other congregations have contacted us concerning our conducting classes in their building.

The Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies is designed to prepare men to be leaders in the Lord's church (elders, preachers, deacons, teachers, etc.) and women to serve in the church (teachers, etc.). The curriculum is Bible-centered and is designed to prepare the student to become an independent student of the word of God. It is the intention of the faculty at Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies that our students should not be taught "what to believe," but "how to learn from the Scriptures the will God."

The full-time curriculum consists of four years of classes, one night per week presently (subject to change to two nights). Students seeking advanced options may choose to attend extra courses in Greek and other subjects. Also, part-time or audit students may choose to just take one course per night at their convenience. By stretching the course-work out into a four-year format there is a greater maturation in the learning process than in a two-year program. In addition, students can take advantage of our night schedule by continuing in secular work without needing to raise support from the church. By offering a schedule that fits people's busy lives, we allow our students to immediately increase their usefulness in local congregations.

Mike VonTungeln, Frank R. Williams, Jerry Gore, and Marion R. Fox have experience as preachers, elders, and as faculty members in other preacher training schools.

We believe in the inerrancy and absolute authority of the Scriptures. We invite anyone to check out our school by contacting us and attending our classes. We are available to make presentations about our school to any congregation.

For more information, contact:  
Marion R. Fox, director  
1001 Twisted Trail  
Oklahoma City, OK 73150  
[marionfox@okcsbs.com](mailto:marionfox@okcsbs.com)



## A Word from the Dean of Students

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The “Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies” is one of the ways the Barnes church of Christ, with the help of sister churches of Christ and individuals, fulfill our “motto: “...the things that thou hast heard...the same commit thou to faithful men (the Greek, *anthropos*: male and female), who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2). Men and women, of varying ages and backgrounds, are studying to learn the Word of God to be better themselves and to teach others the soul saving gospel of Christ. We have a number of former and present students who are now preaching full-time. Others are filling-in when congregations call saying they need a preacher. Still others, both men and women, are teaching Bible classes at their home congregations.

Unlike some other “school,” some of our students come to class after having worked eight or more hours a day; thus, showing their determination to learn! The “Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies” offers a large number of subjects. It is our aim to cover every book, both in the Old and New Testaments; plus, we cover a number of Bible related subjects. Then, we have special subjects which are added from time to time. In addition to all these, we have two Greek classes; one for beginners and a second class for advanced students. Next year, Marion Fox will be teaching 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John from the Greek text. He is also hoping to move the “Greek for Beginners” class to Saturday. This is being done in hope that more people will be able to enroll in the class. If it is not moved, then, it will continue to meet on Monday nights.

We encourage those in the Oklahoma City area to check out the school, and make plans to enroll next year. Our students consist of those who are serving in local congregations as: elders, deacons, preachers, Bible class teachers, and those who desire to enhance their knowledge of the Bible. For those who desire to be better “personal workers,” who engage in local evangelism, we have classes that should be a great help in such efforts. These classes cover such subjects as: The Gist of the Bible, How to study the Bible, Logic and the Bible, of course, a better knowledge of every book in the Bible will be of great help in teaching the lost. As it is the mission of the local churches of Christ to teach the lost the gospel of Christ, these and other classes should be of great interest to members of the Lord’s church.

Our students remain our best recruiters, as they best know what takes place in the “Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies.” At this time our faculty is: Marion R. Fox (elder and Director of the school), Frank R. Williams (elder and Dean of Students), Jerry Gore, (elder Barnes church of Christ) and Mike VonTungeln (elder, Ridgecrest church of Christ).

As dean of students I would like to commend our students! The quality of our students is of the highest order: Christian! These students come to us from a number of congregations in the Oklahoma City area. Some have to drive miles to reach the building. Their appreciation for the school is seen in their eagerness to talk to others about coming to “The Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies.”

Frank R. Williams,  
dean of students

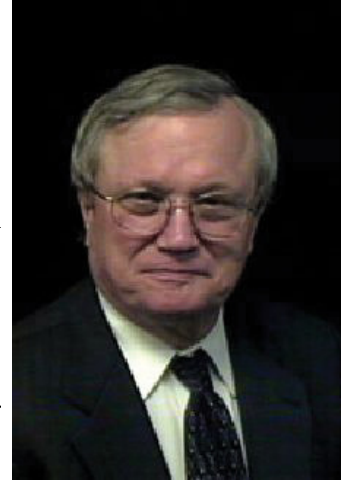


## Our Faculty

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### *Marion Fox, director*

Marion is a graduate of the Elk City School of Preaching and has preached for over 40 years and now serves as one of the elders of the Barnes congregation. His college degrees include: an A.S. (1963) from Southwestern Oklahoma State University, a baccalaureate (1965) and doctorate (1991) from Oklahoma State University, and masters (1969) University of Illinois. He has completed upper division Greek courses at Oklahoma Christian College. He has been a college professor (engineering-science division) and a National Science Foundation fellow in engineering, physics, and semiconductor manufacturing. Marion has authored several books and has engaged in several debates on various subjects.



Marion has served as a teacher for the Elk City School of Preaching; Elk City, Oklahoma 1973-76; Westside School of Preaching; Duncan, Oklahoma 1976 (Fall); Oklahoma School of Bible/ Preaching; McLoud, Oklahoma 1977-1981; Great Plains School of Bible/Preaching; Elmore City, Oklahoma 1989-91; Rocky Mountain Audio and Video Bible Institute; Selmer, TN: 1999- 2005; and Online Academy of Biblical Studies; Dyersburg, TN: 2000-2005. Marion has served as Director of the Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 1991-present.

Marion has held gospel meetings and preached by appointment in fourteen other states. He preached and lectured at two state universities in Russia on scientific evidences for the existence of God and lectured on the existence of God and the work of the Holy Spirit in England. Marion has authored six books



# Our Faculty

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## ***Frank R. Williams, dean of students and instructor***

Frank works full-time with the school and the Barnes church of Christ and now serves as one of the elders of the Barnes congregation. He adds more than forty years of preaching experience to our staff. He attended the Northside School of Preaching in Harrison, AR, graduating in 1972 with a Masters in Sacred Literature. In 1977, Frank made an evangelic trip to India where about 200 people obeyed the gospel. He served as local preacher for churches in Arkansas, Oklahoma, Wyoming, and Missouri and wrote weekly articles for four local newspapers. He has preached daily on three radio stations. He has preached in gospel meetings and lectureships in Arkansas, Oklahoma, Wyoming, Missouri, Georgia, Iowa and Tennessee and has preached at four congregation in California. He has had articles published in The One Heart Journal, Gospel Advocate, Firm Foundation, contending for the Faith, The Gospel Standard, The Gospel Journal, and edited The Spirit of Restoration for three years. He has written a weekly bulletin article for nine years. Also in this experience is three years in the U.S Army where he served in the Army Security Agency. Frank has taught at the following schools: Northside School of Preaching (Harrison, AR.) 1971-1972 and 1975-1976, Wetumka School of Biblical Knowledge (Wetumka, OK.) 1992-1995, and Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies (Oklahoma City, OK.) 1995 – Present.



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## ***Mike VonTungeln, instructor***

Mike brings to the school years of experience in working in the church and has served as an elder in the Ridgecrest church of Christ, Midwest City, OK for ten years. Mike attended Panhandle State University, Pepperdine University, Hawaii Pacific University and received the following degrees: BS in Chemistry, MA in Education, and an MS in Information Systems. Mike has also taken classes at the Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies. Mike is not a full-time preacher, but he did share the pulpit in Kailua, HI from 1996-2000.



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## ***Jerry Gore, instructor***

Jerry was born in Amarillo, TX., but has made his home in Midwest City, OK, for many years. He served in the U.S. Army from June 1967 – June 1970. He received a degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Oklahoma. He did most of his work at Tinker Air Force Base. Jerry and Judy have two children. Jerry has taught Bible classes at the Barnes church for many years. Last year, he taught the full year at the Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies, and has been a very good addition to the school and with his “engineering” mind, he is very detailed in his teaching.





Dear Reader:

The One Heart Journal was originally conceived of as a much needed avenue to spread the news about the Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies. In the first issue, an eight page, black & white journal went out and was well received. Less than one hundred addresses were sent copies of the first issue.

Almost eight years later, the Spring 2013 issue of One Heart was mailed out to about 465 addresses and bundles were sent to congregations by our students for local members. The original eight pages have been extended to twelve, and a beautiful color cover has been added. While this is still small compared to many brotherhood papers, we believe things are moving in the right direction.

The Spring 2012 issue saw a change in the physical size of the Journal. This change was made to reduce the work in preparing the paper for mailing. This will also allow an increase in the number of pages; thus, the number of articles in future issues. As the number of pages and articles are increased, we will not reduce the quality of the articles. Sound biblical writers will be asked to write articles! It is our deepest hope that we can finally get four issues of the Journal mailed out each year. Subjects will be assigned to writers months in advanced so each will have time to study and write, quality articles!

It has never been our desire to add just one more paper to hundreds already produced by the churches of Christ. It has been said: "the churches of Christ have more papers per member than any other religious group!" This Journal was intended for a specific purpose: to demonstrate the level of teaching and soundness of doctrine taught at the "Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies. Inside each issue you will read articles by our faculty representing the kind of material they present in class on a regular basis. However, we are now reaching out to seek other sound brethren to write. A number of these are speakers on our lectureship. As the "Annual Lectureship" is a work of the Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies.

The Journal also allows us an opportunity to keep students, supporters, and area congregations informed about upcoming events and the class schedule for the school. We intend for the school to be a benefit to the church in the central Oklahoma area, and to do that we need more people to be aware of what we offer.

Just like the school, the One Heart Journal is made available at no cost to subscribers. Loving members of the Lord's church contribute to the work and make it possible to publish and mail the Journal every quarter so that no subscription fee is ever necessary.

If you would be interested in receiving One Heart individually or for your congregation, please let us know so that an appropriate arrangement can be made. More people receiving One Heart mean more people are learning about the school and potentially participating in its work and growth.

In His Cause,  
Frank R. Williams,  
Editor, One Heart Journal



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## Thursday – April 24<sup>th</sup>

- 7:00 P.M.** Proof that the churches of Christ are not growing at the same rate as of earlier years. – *Frank R. Williams* **1**  
– *Seminole*
- 8:00 P.M.** First, that many in the church have accepted the doctrine that truth is relative and not absolute. – *Benjamin J. Williams* **11**  
– *Glenpool*

## Friday – April 25<sup>th</sup>

- 7:00 P.M.** Second, that some who have been taught that teaching the lost is their duty are not motivated by their love for the lost. – *Richie Martin* **21**  
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– *Luther*
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- 10:30 A.M.** Tenth, that some people are converted only after they have seen the good works of Christians. – *Mike Von Tungeln* **81**  
– *Midwest City*
- 1:00 P.M.** Members of the churches of Christ must have a passion, not just a passing thought, for the lost. – *Frank R. Williams* **87**  
– *Seminole*





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# **The proof that the churches of Christ today are not growing at the same rate of earlier years**

***Frank R. Williams***

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Frank R. Williams was born in Seminole, OK, on December 16, 1940. Frank and Martha (Gordon) were married in September, 1967, and they have four children: Virginia, who is married to Paul Mosiant, Clint, who is married to Teresa (Goode), Benjamin, who is married to Selene (McKnight) and they have one son, Lucas, and John, who has one son, Elias. He graduated from Seminole High School, attended Yuba Junior College in Marysville, CA, and graduated from the Northside School of Preaching in Harrison, AR, with a "Master" in Sacred Literature in 1972. Frank also taught in this school through the years, starting in 1972 – 1977, serving under all three directors: Reggie Nalls, A. J. Hendrix, and Bryon Nichols. He has also taught in: The School of Biblical Knowledge and The School of Biblical Studies, which he continues to teach and serve as Dean of Students.

Frank started preaching in 1968, first in Jasper, AR, and has preached for 46 years. He has done local work in Arkansas, Wyoming, Missouri, and Oklahoma. He has preached in the following states, in lectureships, gospel meetings, other occasions: Arkansas, Oklahoma, Wyoming, Missouri, Texas, Georgia, Iowa, and California. He has written articles appearing in: Gospel Advocate, Firm Foundation, Christian Standard, Gospel Journal, edited, "The Spirit of Restoration" for about three years, and now serves as editor of the Journal "One Heart." Frank made a preaching trip to India in 1977. Frank is now serving as an elder and associate preacher for the Barnes church of Christ.

Frank served this nation in the Army Security Agency with one year being in Korea: 1962-1965.

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The theme of the 25<sup>th</sup> Oklahoma City Lectures is: "Why the churches of Christ are not growing at the same rate as of earlier years." This implies the churches of Christ are not growing at the rate as of earlier years. Therefore, the proposition: "The churches of Christ are not growing at the rate as of earlier years." I am reminded of the words, "As goes the proposition, so must be the demonstration." This means it is my obligation to put forth the evidence that will prove the proposition!

At the birth of the church of Christ on the first Pentecost after the Lord's resurrection, Luke the church historian gave to the readers of "The Acts of the Apostles," the growth of the church. He wrote: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." (Acts 2:41); then, "... And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:47); followed with: "Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand" (Acts 4:4); finally, Luke drops the number and wrote: "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." (Acts 5:14).

With this the conclusion is reached that God was and is interested in the growth of the church! If God is interested in the growth of the church, and he is, then, we need to be interested! With these opening remarks, let us get to our subject: "The proof that the churches of Christ today are not growing at the rate as in earlier years."

## **THE PLAN OF OUR STUDY**

First, a brief look at the first efforts to restore the "ancient order of things" in America between the years: 1792 – 1844;

Second, a brief look at the division of the years between: 1845 – 1906;

Third, the growth of the churches of Christ during the years: 1906 – 1950;

Fourth, a look at the growth of the churches of Christ during the years: 1950 – 1970;

Fifth, a study of the growth of the churches of Christ during the years: 1970 – 2000; and

Finally, a look at growth of the churches of Christ during the years: 2000 – 2013.

### DISCLAIMER

It is necessary that a “disclaimer” be given and understood, just there. There is no earthly headquarters for the “Church of Christ” which has authority to speak for the churches of Christ. Therefore, it is difficult to get real numbers, as to how many congregations there are; how many members in each congregation. Therefore, there are no real, absolute numbers. The numbers used in this study are the best that could be located!

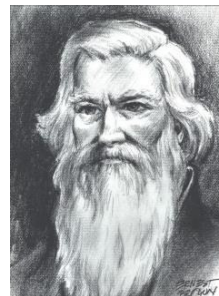
### THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST: WHO WE ARE

A quote from the pen of the late V. E. Howard will help us understand just what these men were producing and how they were producing it: “The church of Jesus Christ is non-denominational. It is neither Catholic, Jewish nor Protestant. It was not founded in ‘protest’ of any institution, and it is not the product of the ‘Restoration’ or ‘Reformation.’ It is the product of the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11ff) grown in the hearts of men.” (V. E. Howard, What Is the Church of Christ? 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (Revised), 1971, page 29).

There was no desire on the part of the men we are about to study, to add one more denomination to the list of denominational churches already present in early America.

### THE FIRST GROUP OF “SEARCHER”

It should be of interest to members of the churches of Christ to see how the churches of Christ in America were started and their growth. The earliest information we have, as honest men turned in the direction of “*searching for the ancient order of things*,” is that of James O’Kelley.



1738 - Oct 16, 1826

On Dec. 25, 1792, he and about half of those in attendance at a Methodist Conference, walked out and the call of “the search for the ancient order of things” was launched. It must not be forgotten that with O’Kelley was Rice Haggard. Barton W. Stone wrote about these two men, that both officially joined the Christians at Cane Ridge. (According to Barton W. Stone, in the Christian Messenger, 1826-1827, O’Kelly with Haggard officially joined the Christians at Cane Ridge at that time.)

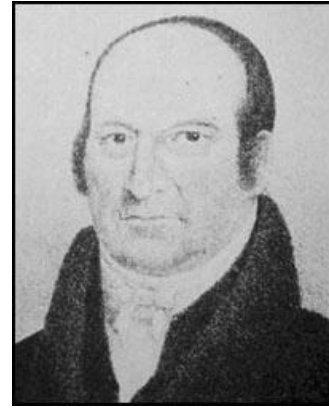
To the name of James O’Kelley, must be added the names: Elias Smith and Abner Jones.



Elias Smith

17 June 1769 – 29 June 1846

Smith founded The Herald of Gospel Liberty in 1808, which he claimed (in his autobiography) to be “the world’s first religious newspaper”

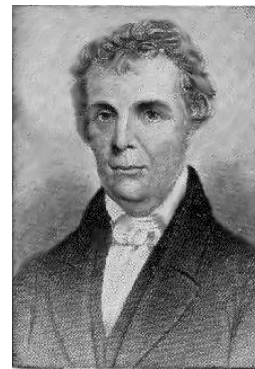


Abner Jones

April 28, 1772 – May 29, 1841

### A SECOND GROUP OF “SEARCHERS”

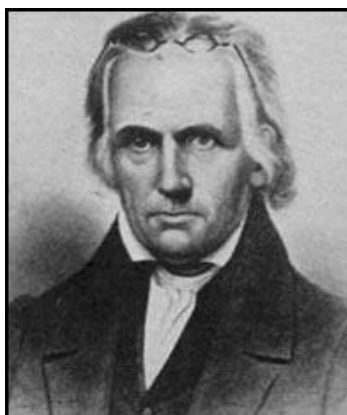
Then, a second group of “searcher of the ancient order of things” stepped forward: Barton W. Stone.



Barton W. Stone

December 24, 1772 – November 9, 1844)

Then, the team of father and son:



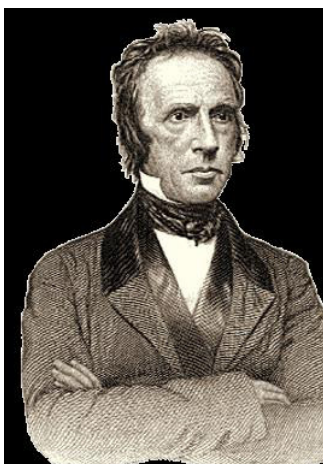
Thomas Campbell

February 1, 1763 – January 4, 1854

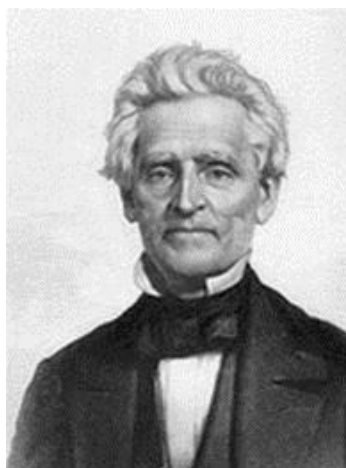


Alexander Campbell

1788-1866



Walter Scott  
1796 – April 23, 1861



"Raccoon" John Smith  
1784-1868

as other men who would take up **“the search of the ancient order of things!”** Then, it was no longer a **“search of the ancient order of things,”** as one would add furniture to an empty room; these men of faith put the “ancient order” into place; and the churches of Christ began to appear throughout the land of early America.

### **PUTTING THE ANCIENT ORDER OF THINGS INTO PLACE**

There was no desire on the part of these men to add one more denomination to the list of denominational churches already present in early America.

Membership and the number of congregations during these early years are unknown. In these early years, the members of the churches of Christ did as Luke wrote, where ever they went; they went preaching the word of God, the seed of the kingdom (Acts 8:4). However, as early as 1832 records are available which helps us see the growth of the church. Starting with zero (an arbitrary number) in the year 1800 the membership of the churches of Christ had reached 22,000 by 1832. (Which were also known as the Disciples of Christ.) This is a yearly increase of 688.

During the years between 1832 and 1860 the membership reached 192,000. This is a yearly increase of 6,071 members. Needless to say, never in America has the churches of Christ grown at such a rate again! However, during these same years the issues arose which would finally produce division between the churches of Christ and the Disciples of Christ.

### **THREE MAJOR ISSUES**

The three major issues were:

- 1) Disagreement over centralized organizations above the local congregational level, such as missionary societies and conventions;
- 2) The use of musical instruments in the 1850s and 1860s.
- 3) As early as 1849, L. L. Pinkerton denied the inerrancy of the Bible.

Two other issues added fuel to the flames of division, which were:

- 4) L. L. Pinkerton also supported “open membership” (recognizing as members individuals who have not been baptized by immersion)
- 5) The rise of women leaders in the temperance and missionary movements, primarily in the North, In

1889 the Erie Christian Church confirmed the leadership role of women by ordaining Clara Celestia Hale Babcock as the first known woman Disciple preacher (Zuber, Glenn (1993). "The Gospel of Temperance: Early Disciple Women Preachers and the WCTU," *Discipliana*, 53 (47–60).

The church would continue to grow, but keep in mind, these numbers do not really identify the true growth of the churches of Christ, as the Disciples of Christ were growing apart and division was slowly taking place. These years were a heart wrenching time!. Efforts were made to keep unity, but finally it was impossible and division was necessary!

### **GROWTH BETWEEN 1860 and 1900**

The membership standing at 192,000 in 1860, reached 641,051 by 1890, increased a yearly growth of 14,968. It must be kept in mind, articles were being written (In the *American Christian Review*, edited by Benjamin Franklin and the



Benjamin Franklin  
1812-1878



David Lipscomb  
1831 - 1917

Gospel Advocate edited by David Lipscomb) declaring there is no New Testament authority for either the missionary societies, or the use of musical instruments in worship. The lines of division were being drawn! But, the church was still growing! Between 1890 and 1900, the number of membership increased to 1,120,000, a yearly increase of 47,895. After a study of these numbers, the conclusion is reached, that most of this growth was taking place in the Disciples of Christ churches and not in the churches of Christ! The cost of division is seen in the years between 1900 and 1906. In 1906, the membership had only reached 1,142,359, a yearly increase of only 3,727; down from a yearly average increase of 47,895.

### **DIVISION RECOGNIZED – 1906**

The year 1906 marks a year of sadness, but a year of undeniable truth! The United States Census Bureau began a religious census in 1906, and in their study, they noticed two separate churches; on the one hand, the churches of Christ and on the other, the Disciples of Christ Church; with this the division was formally recognized! At times division is necessary, but it should never happen without every effort to keep unity; then, only after many prayers, and tears!

The numbers are most revealing at this time. The total membership before the division was 1,142,359, but after the division, the Disciples of Christ membership was 982,701, while the churches of Christ stood at 159,658. A difference of 823,043 in favor of the Disciples of Christ; this reveals what happens when truth is comprised. The numbers may go higher, but the authority of Christ suffers and souls are lost! It

was not only the membership numbers that went down, but the Disciples of Christ took over most of the church buildings and the schools operated by members. This also reveals the leadership, not only in many congregations, but in the schools, had been taken over by liberals!

### **GROWTH FOLLOWING THE DIVISION: 1906 - 1946**

It would be expected that growth in the churches of Christ would be slow following the formally recognized division. Church buildings were lost; therefore, new places of worship had to be located, new congregations had to be formed based upon the authority of Christ. Nevertheless, within twenty years, 1906 – 1926, the churches of Christ membership had grown from 159,658 to 433,714. A yearly increase of 13,703. By 1936, the churches of Christ membership had reached 558,000 a yearly increase of 12,429. The number does not reveal greatness in growth, but growth nevertheless.

Issues and divisions would continue to face the churches of Christ. By the early 1920s, a mere fourteen years after the recognized division of 1906, a division had developed over the use of multiple cups versus a single cup in the serving of the Lord's Supper. There was also the division over the "Sunday School," but the churches of Christ continue to grow. These were also the years of debate over "pre-millennialism. Robert H. Boll had begun to reveal his views on this subject about 1915 in the Gospel Advocate, to the dismay of J. C. McQuiddy, who was serving as office editor and business manager. Boll was fired from the paper, but continued to write in "The Word and Work." However, the biggest event dealing with the subject was a debate in Fort Worth, TX, between Foy E. Wallace, Jr. and J. Frank Norris, a Baptist, in 1934.



Foy E. Wallace, Jr.  
30 September 1896 –  
18 December 1979

It has been said, that nearly single handedly, Wallace stopped "pre-millennialism" in the churches of Christ. However, the point of this study is the growth of the churches of Christ, which had a membership of 558,000 in 1936 a yearly growth of 12,429. This was an increase in membership of 124,286 in ten years. However, over the next decade, which included World War II, saw the reopening of the debate which had taken place during the war between the north and south, "Pacifism:" Can a Christian go to war? Nevertheless, the churches of Christ saw growth reaching a membership of 682,000 by 1948. This was a growth of 124,000 in membership in twelve years, with a yearly increase of 10,333!

### **THE GROWTH BETWEEN THE YEARS: 1948 – 1970**

In the years of 1948 – 1960 the churches of Christ were hit with a number of issues which produced divisions. A few are here identified:

- 1) was there New Testament authority for the churches of Christ to financially support colleges; (G.C. Brewer was an advocate of churches supporting colleges.)
- 2) was there New Testament authority for the churches of Christ to financially support orphan homes;
- 3) was there New Testament authority for the churches of Christ to cooperate, financially, in preaching the gospel (Sometimes called the sponsoring, or overseeing church.);
  - a. The "Herald of Truth" was one such effort which stood at the center of this debate. (Roy Cogdill and Fanning Yater Tant were two who stood against this effort.)
  - b. The sponsoring church, being the overseeing church in sending preachers overseas.

Churches divided over these issues which may be put under the general heading, "institutionalism;" as in "institutional churches" and "non-institutional churches." In spite of these divisions the membership in



the churches of Christ, between 1950 and 1960 grew. But the numbers were debated among some. It was reported the membership in the churches of Christ had reached 2,163,000. (Another reported the membership had reached, 2,500,000.) The churches of Christ were heralded as one of the “fastest growing religious group in America!” However, Mac Lynn, of Harding University Graduate School of Religion in Memphis, TN, conducted a national membership survey in 1980, and he discovered that the numbers were “highly inflated.” How did this happen?

Mac Lynn questioned “prominent church leaders:” Batsell Barrett Baxter of the Herald of Truth,” and M. Norvel Young of Pepperdine University, about these numbers which they had reported to the Yearbook of American Churches and Encyclopedia Britannica; “Each indicated the figures they reported were estimates based on a common perception that Churches of Christ were growing rapidly,” (The Christian Chronicle in 2007). He continued, “The figures they submitted simply added a percentage like 10 percent each year.” It is of great interest to read the words of Flavil R. Yeakley in a work dated, September, 1998. “The number of congregations reported in the Yearbook in 1951 was 14,500. By 1959, that number was up to 16,500. Just one year later, the number had grown to 17,500. In 1962 it reached a high point of 18,680 congregations. In the mid-1960s, the total membership of the churches of Christ was estimated to have reached about 2,500,000. After that, the reports began to moderate. In 1980, however, the Yearbook was still reporting 17,000 congregations.” ((Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr. Ph.D. Harding Center for Church Growth Studies, September, 1968, REVISITED Part One: Correcting the Record, page 5). Flavil Yeakley sums up these numbers: “Churches of Christ have never had that many congregations in the United States’.” If the churches of Christ never had 17,000 congregations, then, the churches of Christ never had a 2,500,000 membership! There are no real numbers that could be found for the years, 1950 – 1960.

### **1970 - 1980**

Attention is now turned to the years of 1970 – 1980 and the growth of the churches of Christ. Mac Lynn did a survey in 1980 of the churches of Christ and counted 12,762 congregations and a membership of 1,601,661; a yearly increase of 28.739. (Information taken from the Christian Chronicle, February, 2009, by Bobby Ross, Jr.). It must be noted that during these years, once more, a major problem arose in the churches of Christ. This problem is here identified as the “Crossroads Movement” lead by Chuck Lucas preacher of the 14<sup>th</sup> Street church of Christ in Gainesville, FL. (later renamed the Crossroads Church of Christ). In 1979 this movement, under the leadership Kip McKean, a convert of Lucas, moved to the Boston area and it became known as the “Boston Movement.” It was a “movement” out of the churches of Christ and in 1993 it was formally organized into the International Churches of Christ. This is brought to your attention, because any numbers reflecting the membership in the churches of Christ during this period of time, would have included this “movement;” thereby, inflating the membership of the churches of Christ.

### **1990 – 2000 – YEARS OF DECLINE IN GROWTH RATE**

Nevertheless, the churches of Christ grew from 1906 through 1980. However, the numbers of 1990 reveal a mixed growth; remember the survey of 1980, the number of congregations was 12,762 and the membership was 1,601,661. By 1990 the churches of Christ had grown to 13,174 congregations and a membership of 1,284,056. Though the number of congregations had increased by 412, the membership had declined; showing a loss of 33,549; this is a yearly loss of 31,761! This change should have alerted members, and even more so the local elderships, of the churches of Christ. If the numbers of 1990 did not get the attention of local elderships, the numbers revealed in 1994 sure should have. The numbers revealed a loss of congregations by 161 (13,013); and a decline in membership of 23,218 (1,260,838); a yearly loss of 5,805. Maybe there was some comfort in the year 2000. Even though the number of congregations continued to decline; going from 13,080 to 13,032 (a loss of 48), the membership showed growth; going from 1,260,838 to 1,264,152, a net increase of 3,284 a yearly growth of 552. However, think of it this way;

13,080 congregations converted 3,284 people! This is 0.25 converts per congregation per year! Can you really, in all honesty, say this is growth?

### **2003 - 2006**

The numbers in 2003 show a slight increase, but not enough to stand up and shout about. The number of congregations stood at 13,155 and a membership of 1,276,621. The number of congregation grew by 123 and the membership increased by 12,569. But, would this growth continue over the next three years? Sadly, the answer is no! There were in 2006, 12,963 congregations and a membership of 1,265,844. These numbers reveal an increase in congregations of 192, but a loss in membership of 10,777 a yearly loss of 3,592.

### **2006 – 2009**

Over the next three years, the question comes to mind, is this decline an anomaly, or a pattern? In 2009 the records reveal, 12,629 congregations and a membership of 1,224,404. Yes, it now appears a pattern of decline has been established! By the end of 2009, the churches of Christ had lost 334 congregations and 41,440 in membership a yearly loss of 13,813.

### **2009 – 2013**

Over the next four years, 2009 – 2013, the numbers do not get better. The churches of Christ lost another 193 congregations; and a lost 14,380 in membership. Over the six years, 2003 – 2009, churches of Christ had 526 fewer congregations and 78,436 fewer in membership! Now, we come face to face with more numbers which show a continuing decline!

The latest numbers provided by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christian, compiled by Carl H. Royster, December 2013, are even more revealing. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christian reported the following numbers: the number of congregations stood at 12,436 and number of membership at 1,210,024. The math tells the story! This means that between the years 2000 and 2013, the churches of Christ have lost 596 congregations and 54,128 members a yearly loss of 3,595!

## **THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST ARE NOT GROWING - - AT THE SAME RATE AS IN EARLIER YEARS.**

The word “earlier” is a relative terms as used in the subject before us. Meaning it must be defined by the person using it. As used here, the word “earlier” refers to the period of time from 1948 through 1999. In these years the churches of Christ added 2,943 congregations and increased in membership 963,473. During the last 13 years, 2000 – 2013, the churches of Christ have lost 596 congregations and declined in membership 54,128. Even if my math is incorrect, by a few, the evidence is clear; “the churches of Christ are not growing at the same rate as in earlier years!” “As goes the proposition, so must be the demonstration!”

## **THE GREAT QUESTION**

Facing reality is not an easy thing, but an honest search for answers and looking at the evidence is even more difficult! What must the churches of Christ do in order to reverse this decline? Allow me to give you the words of a Southern Baptist statistician; he said: “The commonalities between Southern Baptists and Churches of Christ would probably be the need to find ways to engage culture that we’ve forgotten. If the ’50s came back, most of your churches and most of my churches are ready to go. The reality is, we don’t live in the ’50s anymore” (Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research in Nashville. As reported in the Christian Chronicle, February, 2009, by Bobby Ross, Jr.) We do not live in the 1950’s anymore! We must face the world we live in and understand it is not all that much different from the world in which the

gospel of Christ was first preached! It is time to stop looking for an easy way and accept our God-given responsibility to teach the gospel of Christ! Paul, the apostle of Christ, gave the mission of the churches of Christ in these words:

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; (9) And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: (10) To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, (11) According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: (12) In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him” (Eph. 3:8-12).

## CONCLUSION

The world must come to know more about the churches of Christ, than, “Oh, you’re the church that doesn’t have music.” It matters not what the news media and liberals may believe, “one god is just as good as another, one faith is just as good as another, and one church is just as good as another;” the churches of Christ must make known our differences: one God, one faith, and one church! We must teach/preach, using every means available in this modern age, the gospel of Christ, which is God’s only power unto salvation! (Rom. 1:16-17). It was true in the first century, it was true in the 1800’s, in the 1950’s, and it is true in the 21<sup>st</sup> century!

We must put to death our fears and do as Paul wrote: “having done all, to stand, stand therefore!”

“And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”  
- Acts 20:32

*Note:* I would like to thank: Flavil Yeakley, Mac Lynn, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christian, compiled by Carl H. Royster, and Christian Chronicle and Bobby Ross, Jr.; for their work and the information used in this study.

From 1980 to 2007, Oklahoma (home of the Quail Springs Church of Christ and their critics) lost more members than any other state — 9,406 net and 11,011 adherents.

Source: Churches of Christ in the United States, published by 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christian  
Christian Chronicle article by Bobby Ross, Jr, February 2009

Favil Yeakely, Jr. director of the Harding Center for Church Growth in Searcy, Ark.,



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# The Church, Postmodernism, & Relative Truth

## *Benjamin J. Williams*

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Benjamin J. Williams was born December 18th, 1982, in Morrilton, AR. He is the son of Frank and Martha Williams. He is a graduate of Seminole High School, Seminole, OK. He received his Bachelor Degree in Astrophysics from the University of Oklahoma.

He and Selene (McKnight) were married in 2001? And they have one child, Lucas who is four years old and they live in Jenks, OK.

Benjamin started preaching as a teenager and has preached for about fifteen years. He has worked with the Barnes church of Christ as an associate and fulltime preacher. He also taught in the Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies during his years at Barnes. He presently is working with the church of Christ in Glenpool, OK, where they are building a new auditorium. All of his preaching has been in Oklahoma. He has been a speaker on the Oklahoma City Lectures for a number of years.

He served as the first editor of the Journal, "One Heart," a work of the "Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies" and as written articles for every issue of the paper. He has also written an article for the "Gospel Journal." He has an article which will appear in the "Restoration Quarterly."

Note of interesting, Benjamin is currently working in Oklahoma Christian's Graduate School of Theology.

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### Introduction

- A. We see increasing evidence each day that we live in a "postmodern" culture.
  - a. We can pretend otherwise, and the church will suffer.
  - b. We can see this change as "defeat," and the church will suffer.
  - c. Or we can respond as Christianity has to every other worldview shift in the last 2000 years, and the church can flourish.
- B. In this lesson, we hope to explain:
  - a. The history of our current situation,
  - b. The consequences of postmodernism, especially in regards to relativism,
  - c. The Biblical model of evangelism for differing worldviews, and
  - d. A proposal for the church as it encounters the postmodern world.

### I. The History of Our Worldviews

- a. The medieval era was characterized by almost constant warfare and strife, most commonly under the direction of or in collusion with the Roman Church.
- b. The Enlightenment
  - i. The Enlightenment was a movement that undertook the project of finding a new direction out of the chaos of the medieval past.
    - 1. Voltaire from *Essay on the Manners and Spirits of Nations* (1754): "We have beheld our Europe overspread with barbarians after the fall of the Roman Empire; and these barbarians, after becoming Christians, continually at war with the Mohammedans or else destroying each other. ... All history, then, in short, is little else than a long succession of

useless cruelties. ... The field and the scaffold ran with blood on account of theological arguments, sometimes in one century, sometimes in another, for almost five hundred years without interruption; and the long continuance of this dreadful scourge was owing to the fact that morality was always neglected to indulge a spirit of dogmatizing.”<sup>1</sup>

2. Immanuel Kant in “What Is Enlightenment?” (1784): “Enlightenment is man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man’s inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. ... If I have a book which understands for me, a pastor who has a conscience for me, a physician who decides my diet, and so forth, I need not trouble myself. I need not think, if only I can pray – others will readily undertake the irksome work for me.”<sup>2</sup>

- ii. The central premise of the Enlightenment was that every human had the capacity to make ethical determinations separate from the Church.

1. Thomas Paine in “The Age of Reason” (1794): “I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church.”<sup>3</sup>

2. Wright summarizes: “The Enlightenment (whose leading thinkers include Hume, Voltaire, Thomas Jefferson, and Kant) was, in fact, for the most part an explicitly anti-Christian movement.”<sup>4</sup>

### c. Modernism

- i. The climax of the Enlightenment was the shared belief that the Enlightenment project was succeeding in the Modern Age.

1. Marquis de Condorcet in *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Human Mind* (1794): “Everything tells us that we are approaching the era of one of the grand revolutions of the human race. What can better enlighten us as to what we may expect, what can be a surer guide to us, amidst its commotions, than the picture of the revolutions that have preceded and prepared the way for it. The present state of knowledge assures us that it will be happy.”<sup>5</sup>

2. Wright summarizes: “Indeed, the idea of progress is one of the Enlightenment’s most enduring legacies. When people say, as they often do, ‘In this day and age ...’ or ‘Now that we’re living in the twenty-first century ...’ they are invoking the implicit notion that ever since the eighteenth century the world has been reordering itself by an inexorable movement of moral, social, and cultural rationalization in which old rules and beliefs have been either left behind or, if retained, tamed and brought into line with reason itself. The world has entered a new era, declared the philosophers, and now everything is different.”<sup>6</sup>

- ii. The first clear indication that modernism was in fact a colossal failure was when the world got a close look at a truly modern society – Nazi Germany.

1. Nazi Germany was motivated strongly by Enlightenment/Modernistic ideals.
  - a. They believed science could produce better health, even an ideal human (eugenics).

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1 Isaac Kramnick, *The Portable Enlightenment Reader* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 370-371.

2 Ibid., 1.

3 Ibid., 175.

4 N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 84.

5 Kramnick, 394-395.

6 Wright, 87-88.



- b. They believed this could happen in their own lifetime.
  - c. They believed modern production techniques would lead to superiority in every field.
  - d. They believed no price was too high in attaining the bright future promised by the Enlightenment.
- 2. The result of Modernism was catastrophic.
  - a. Instead of producing global peace, it produced global warfare.
  - b. Instead of improving human life, it led to massive death totals and even genocide in the Holocaust.
  - c. Instead of creating great civilizations, it destroyed nations.
  - d. Instead of progress, the world teetered on the brink of annihilation.
  - e. Science was used to produce better bombs and gas chambers instead of improving the human condition.
- d. Postmodernism
  - i. Postmodernism makes the following rebuttals of Modernism and the Enlightenment.
    - 1. Modernism is a failed experiment.
    - 2. Human reason is subjective, and truths derived from it are not objectively true.
    - 3. Since much of post-modernism continues the Enlightenment's rejection of the only alternatives to human reason (the Church, the authority of Scripture, and divine revelation), then its typical conclusion is that all truth is derived from human reason and therefore relative.
    - 4. Postmodernism asserts that worldviews of the past and their various interpretations were methods of attaining power and rationalizing the subjugation of others.
  - ii. Postmodernism is typically characterized by the following:
    - 1. Validation of individual, subjective human experience in determining truth.
    - 2. Reevaluation of various traditional interpretations through the lens of individual experiences.
    - 3. Embrace of conflicting ideas as being true in equal, but not exclusive ways.
    - 4. Definition of "truth" outside of the scientific method or the world of mathematics and logic.

## II. Critique of Postmodernism

- a. The Absence of an Alternative Model
  - i. The greatest shortcoming of Postmodernism is that in one sense, it simply does not exist.
    - 1. Like the Enlightenment, it has excluded the traditional Christian faith and Scriptures as sources of authority.
    - 2. Furthermore, it has rejected objective human reason as a suitable replacement.
    - 3. However, it has not suggested any clear and meaningful alternative for the question: What is truth?
    - 4. The problem is apparent in the name "postmodernism." It is just the "thing that comes after modernism." It doesn't have a unique name because it does not actually have a proposal to offer the world after which it could be named.

- ii. Having rejected modernism, the most commonly accepted alternative drawn from postmodernism is relativism.

b. Relativism

- i. Relativism is a recognition that all previous attempts at determining truth (epistemology) and right behavior (ethics) have failed.
  - 1. Thus, any assertion of truth of any kind is equally valued. No truth is objectively true. No truth claim is better than any other.
  - 2. We are told by some philosophers that this is not the only possible conclusion of postmodernism, but it is certainly the simplest and most common.

ii. Conclusions for Religion <sup>7</sup>

- 1. “All major religions are equally valid and basically teach the same thing.”
  - a. Do we truly believe that religions that require child sacrifice are not inferior to any other faith?
  - b. This typically reveals an ignorance of what religions actually teach.
    - i. Buddhism doesn’t believe in a personal God at all.
    - ii. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam believe in a God who holds people accountable for their beliefs and practices and who attributes could not be all reduced to one single characteristic.
  - c. The insistence that doctrines do not matter is really a doctrine itself, though not one held to by many religions.
- 2. “Each religion sees part of spiritual truth, but none can see the whole truth.”
  - a. How could you possibly know that no religion can see the whole truth unless you yourself have the superior, comprehensive knowledge of spiritual reality that you just claimed that none of the religions have?
  - b. With this claim, postmodernists turn their philosophy into an exclusive religion.
- 3. “Religious belief is too culturally and historically conditioned to be ‘truth.’”
  - a. This is essentially the opposite claim to the previous assertion, saying all religions are equally false instead of saying all religions are equally true.
  - b. However, this has to apply to postmodernists as well.
    - i. A person born in Morocco is more likely to be a Muslim than a Christian.
    - ii. A person born in Morocco is also more likely to be a Muslim than a postmodernist.
    - iii. If this proves that Christianity is a faith only produced by culture and society, then it proves the same for postmodernism.
  - c. The reality is that we all make truth-claims of some sort and it is very hard to weight them responsibly, but we have no alternative but to try.
- 4. “It is arrogant to insist your religion is right and to convert others to it.”
  - a. Again, the same could be said about postmodernism/relativism. Why is it not arrogant to insist that everyone adopt this new view as superior?
  - b. Skeptics believe that any exclusive claims to a superior knowledge of spiritual reality

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<sup>7</sup> The section that follows is taken almost entirely from Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2009), 7-14. His simple and approachable work on this subject should be read by all.

cannot be true, but this objection is itself a religious belief.

- c. It is no more narrow to claim that one religion is right than to claim that one way to think about all religions (namely that all are equal) is right. We are all exclusive in our beliefs about religion, but in different ways.

c. Consequence for Evangelism

i. The Impotence of the Evangelist

1. Wright explains: “All we can do with the Bible, if postmodernity is left in charge, is to play with such texts as give us pleasure, and issue warnings against those that give pain to ourselves or to others who attract our (usually selective) sympathy. *This is where a good deal of the Western church now finds itself.* The fact that this position is merely assumed, not usually spelled out, makes it all the more potent, since postmodernity is currently what ‘feels right’ in Western culture, and does not open itself to challenge by coming out into the open.”<sup>8</sup>
2. “[Postmodernism] cannot successfully challenge real evil, since every challenge can itself be deconstructed into the hidden motivations of the challenger(s); and scripture itself is thereby muzzled into silent connivance with radical evil.”<sup>9</sup>
3. Thus, the evangelist who has fully embraced postmodernism and its relativistic tendencies has stripped himself both of the tools and the motivation for doing evangelism at all.

ii. The Disconnect With the Lost

1. The evangelist who has fully ignored postmodernism may find himself disconnected with his audience who has embraced it.
  - a. Evangelism tools that assume a student/teacher relationship fails in a world that is looking for shared learning experiences rather than “top down” instruction from authority.
  - b. Evangelism tools that assume a respect for the authority of Scripture fail when the Bible is, at most, valued as one of many, equally significant religious texts.
  - c. Evangelism tools that presuppose a “reasonable quest for truth” structure, building on the Enlightenment worldview, have no appeal to those who have rejected the Enlightenment altogether.
2. Evangelists who continue in methods that do not meet the need of their audience become frustrated or fall into despair (“No one wants the truth these days,” etc.). However, people still want “truth,” but truth and the method for finding it have been redefined.

### III. The Biblical Model for Evangelism & Apologetics

a. What Is The Christian Worldview?

- i. The Christian worldview is distinct from any specific human worldview and is a replacement for them all.
- ii. The Christian worldview is best understood by asking the question, “What is the story that Christianity tells? How does Christianity make sense out of the world?”
  1. Wright asserts, “[Biblical authority] is not, for start a list of rules, though it contains many commandments of various sorts and in various contexts. Nor is it a compendium of true

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<sup>8</sup> Wright, 98-99.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 100.

doctrines, though of course many parts of the Bible declare great truths about God, Jesus, the world, and ourselves in no uncertain terms. Most of its constituent parts, and all of it when put together ... can best be described as story.”<sup>10</sup>

2. We all live our lives as we see ourselves in part of a story, and that story is our worldview. It is what makes sense of the world.

iii. Christianity has/is a story.

1. One God is our creator.
2. Humans made a mess of His creation. “Sin” is the name of the problem, and “death” is the name of the consequence.
3. God has selected a people (Israel) through whom to put things right.
4. Jesus is the culmination of Israel’s story.
5. In Jesus, we see the beginning of the story’s resolution. Jesus is risen from the dead, conquering the consequence that has pursued humanity since the “sin” problem took began.
6. God today is working in His Church to finish the story, to reconcile humans to their Creator.

- iv. That story, shaped and given detail by the canon of Scriptures, is what controls the way Christians see the world. It is different from every other worldview, and thus does not require any other worldview as a prerequisite.

b. The Shortest Path

i. From Jerusalem to Christ (Acts 2)

1. The earliest Christian sermons were delivered to a Jewish audience.
2. The speakers shared the worldview of the audience.
3. The sermon was constructed in a way that connects the concepts from the current worldview (first century Judaism) to the new worldview (Christianity).
  - a. The speaker used terminology that the audience understands and accepts (Messiah, Lord, etc.).
  - b. The speaker used texts that the audience accepts as authoritative or significant to support his case (v. 16-21, 25-28, 34-35).
  - c. The speaker removed possible alternatives and asserts the new worldview (v. 29-31).
  - d. The speaker told the story of Jesus, the basis for the new worldview (v. 22-24, 32-33, 36).



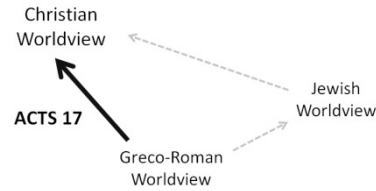
4. However, not all sermons in Acts were alike.

ii. From Athens to Christ (Acts 17)

1. Later, Christian sermons were delivered to a Gentile audience that had a Greco-Roman worldview, very different from the Jewish worldview in certain important respects.
2. The speakers did not share the worldview of the audience. This left them with two options.
  - a. Either they could first convert the audience to a Jewish worldview and then convert them to the Christian worldview,

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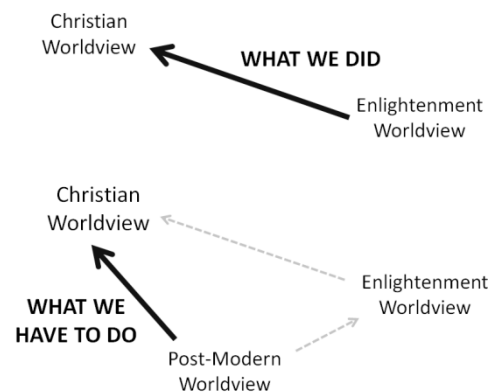
<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 24.

- b. Or they could simply move directly from the Greco-Roman worldview to the Christian worldview.
  - 3. In Acts 17, we have an example of a sermon constructed in a way that connects the concepts from the current worldview (Greco-Roman) to the new worldview (Christianity).
    - a. The speaker looked for a place within the Athenian experience to launch his sermon (v. 22-23).
    - b. The speaker uses terminology that the audience understands and accepts (God/god).
    - c. The speaker used texts that the audience accepts as authoritative or significant to support his case (v. 28).
    - d. The speaker removed possible alternatives and asserts the new worldview (v. 29-30).
    - e. The speaker told the story of Jesus, the basis for the new worldview (v. 31).
- 
- 4. Notice what the speaker does not do.
    - a. He does not use terms that would be unfamiliar to his audience.
      - i. The term “Christ” does not appear in the sermon at all. It is a term rooted in the Jewish worldview, and so would have to be explained.
      - ii. The term “Lord” is used once (v. 24), and the term “God” is used most often. This is a term that would not need as much careful definition.
    - b. He does not quote from any Hebrew Scripture.
    - c. He does not neglect any essential Christian element, even though they maybe controversial (v. 31).
  - iii. In both of these cases, the presentation of the gospel does not back-track through the worldview of the speaker, because the gospel does not require a specific starting place. There is always a way to get from where a person is to the Christian worldview.
  - iv. The epistles read much the same way.
    - 1. Churches with large Jewish populations receive instruction from the Hebrew Scriptures (Romans, Galatians, etc.).
    - 2. Churches with mostly Greek populations receive little or no instruction from the Hebrew Scriptures (Thessalonica, Corinth, etc.).
- c. How Truth Survived The Enlightenment
- i. Some believers dogmatically insisted on retaining the medieval worldview and stood against the Enlightenment. Other believers in the Enlightenment did not try to drag their peers back into the medieval worldview. Instead, in an age that valued reason, they tried to present Christianity as reasonable.
    - 1. Isaac Newton
      - a. From *Opticks* (1704): “The main business of natural philosophy is to argue from phenomena without feigning hypothesis and to deduce causes from effects, till we come to the very first cause, which certainly is not mechanical. ... Does it not appear from phenomena that there is a Being, incorporeal, living, intelligent, omnipresent, who in infinite space, as it were in his sensory, sees the things themselves intimately and thoroughly perceives them, and comprehends them wholly by their immediate presence to

- himself, of which things the images only carried through the organs of sense into our little sensoriums are there seen and beheld by that which in us perceives and thinks? And though every true step made in this philosophy brings us not immediately to the knowledge of the first cause, yet it brings us nearer to it, and on that account is to be highly valued.” <sup>11</sup>
- b. From a letter to Rev. Dr. Richard Bentley concerning the arrangement of the solar system (1692): “Why there is one Body in our System qualified to give Light and Heat to all the rest, I know no Reason, but because the Author of the System thought it convenient; and why there is but one Body of this kind I know no Reason, but because one was sufficient to warm and enlighten all the rest.” <sup>12</sup>
  2. John Locke in *Letters Concerning Toleration* (1689-1693): “Every man has an immortal soul, capable of eternal happiness or misery; whose happiness depending upon his believing and doing those things in this life which are necessary to the obtaining of God’s favor, and are prescribed by God to that end. It follows from thence, first, that the observance of these things is the highest obligation that lies upon mankind, and that our utmost care, application, and diligence ought to be exercised in the search and performance of them; because there is nothing in this world that is of any consideration in comparison with eternity.”
  3. Essentially all the works of C.S. Lewis attempt this reasonable approach to Christianity, presenting it as both a simple and logical alternative to all other systems. <sup>13</sup>
    - ii. Some were more successful than others, and some compromised the essential values of Christianity to make their case. Overall, Christianity survived the Enlightenment, despite the predictions common in the age that Christianity and all religions were nearing their end.
    - iii. As we hear prophets of doom predict the eminent fall of religion in our post-modern world, we should not yearn to go to the Enlightenment. We should instead recognize that every age spawns a worldview that will be used by humanity as an alternative to God’s reality. It is not our job to fix the alternative, but instead to show a path from this age’s favored worldview into the light of God’s Son.

#### IV. Evangelism In a Post-Modern World

- a. Beginning Where We Are
  - i. It is essential that we imitate the work of the apostles in finding a way to Christianity from where people currently are, not where we would like them to be or even where we were.
  - ii. Dragging people back through the Modernism or the Enlightenment as if that was the only path to Christ is neither necessary nor Scriptural.
  - iii. There is no place a human being may ever be that cannot be a safe departure point toward Christianity, and there is not a worldview essential to Christianity, save Christianity itself.



<sup>11</sup> Kramnick, 96-97.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>13</sup> See especially *Mere Christianity*, available as its own work or in collections: C.S. Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007).



b. Acknowledging Post-Modernism's Successes & Advantages

i. Biases

1. When evangelizing people with an Enlightenment worldview, we spent a lot of time trying to convince people that they had biases that prevented them from reasoning correctly, thus their lack of faith or right doctrine.
2. With adherents of Post-modernism, the work has already been done for us. Everyone already accepts (at least in principles) that we are full of different kinds of bias.
3. My response: Thanks Post-modernism!

ii. Level Playing Field

1. In Enlightenment thinking, everyone was predisposed to think that their view of reality was better than everyone else's. This created a pretty steep hill to climb in elevating a new way of thinking. You were not just suggesting their "second favorite view;" you were suggesting they switch to a view that was infinitely inferior to their own.
2. In Post-modern thinking, everyone's view is supposed to be equally valid. While this is ultimately false, in terms of evangelism, it can work to minimize the predisposition to reject Christianity. Christianity starts out no worse than any other view.
3. My response: Thanks Post-modernism!

iii. Fascination With Stories

1. In Enlightenment thinking, stories (like the material that fills most of the Gospels) were not as helpful as logical arguments (like what you are more likely to find in the epistles). As a consequence, Christian teaching focused almost exclusively on the epistles, especially of Paul.
2. In Post-modern thinking, stories with all their ambiguity and need for interpretation is preferred to the pursuit of truth through reasoned arguments. The result is a renewed interest in the Gospel material as both shaping the way we think about Christianity and the way we explain it to others.
3. My response: Thanks Post-modernism!
4. Bonus: We get the Old Testament, too! It's full of stories!

c. Setting Forth The Alternate Worldview

- i. The conclusion that all truth is relative is simply incompatible with the definitive truth claims of Christianity.
  1. There is one God (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).
  2. Humans must learn to love this one God with all their being (Matthew 22:34-38).
  3. Humans must learn to love each other (Matthew 22:39-40).
  4. Jesus of Nazareth was Resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).
  5. Jesus is God's anointed, and the Church is part of God's purpose (Matthew 16:13-18).
  6. The Holy Spirit continues to work in and through the Church (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19-20).
- ii. We do not have to claim that every truth is absolute to claim that some truth is absolute.
  1. Our teaching should look like the Scriptures, in that they spend great amounts of time on topics the Scriptures frequently address and spend much less time on topics the Scriptures speak of less frequently.

2. We should be willing to acknowledge the limitations of human knowledge and reasoning: "... he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end" (Ecclesiastes 3:11).
3. Thomas Campbell, though a devote Enlightenment thinker, acknowledges this necessity in Declaration and Address (1809): "Although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power and veracity of God. Therefore, no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the Church. Hence, it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the Church's confession."

## **Conclusion**

- A. 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some."
- B. As the world continues to change, Christians need to imitate Paul in that he demonstrates flexibility of presentation and behavior while maintaining consistency of message and faith.

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## **Second, that some have been taught that teaching the lost is their duty are not motivated by their love for the lost.**

***Richie Martin***

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He received an Associate in Science from Vincennes university. He is presently a student at the Oklahoma School of Biblical Studies at the Barnes church of Christ in Oklahoma City, OK.

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### **INTRODUCTION :**

**WHY THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST ARE NOT GROWING AT THE RATE AS IN EALIER YEARS.**

A. I want to take this time to thank my teachers here at Barnes and the students here who I appreciate so much for there wisdom and the love of GOD that is shown in them may the grace of GOD always abide in with them. The prayer that I pray is that the biblical Studies Lectureship will continue long into the future, GOD BLESS ALL INVOLVED.

B. Why are Churches of Christ are not growing-

1. We need Spiritual growth in The Lord's Church today, is this very important for the future of our growth.

Growth is development or improvement toward a goal called "maturity". When one is "born again" as a child of God, he is spiritually immature.

2. When time passes the Christian, should develop the qualities or abilities which the Bible says characterize the mature.

A congregation matures as individual members mature.

Many Scriptures describe the need to grow and mature spiritually:

3. Ephesians 4:14-15 KJV

[14] That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

[15] But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

C. Be no longer children, but grow up in Christ.

1. 2 Peter 3:18 KJV

[18] But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

2. We have to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

D. The Thessalonians grew exceedingly in faith.

1. 2 Thessalonians 1:3 KJV

[3] We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;

2. Paul prayed for their love to abound more and more.

3. Philippians 1:9 KJV

[9] And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;

E. Many problems result when members fail to grow: some go back to the world, others cause strife because of ignorance or become stumblingblocks because of irregular attendance, worldliness, or indifference.

1. Concerning spiritual matters, Christians must WANT to grow.

2. 1 Peter 2:2 KJV

[2] As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

F. Desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.

Some seem to like being spiritual babies.

They don't want to grow. It's easy to be a baby - no responsibility. Others feed you, clothe you, change your diaper.

In the church, you don't have to teach, rebuke sin, or do work.

1. When we just want to on milk as a baby is not our goal of life. We are born babies so we can grow up and be productive and useful. Likewise, we are born again, so we can become mature Christians, actively serving the Lord.

2. One of the conditions for becoming a child of God is REPENTANCE. One must determine to turn from sin and GO TO WORK in God's vineyard.

3. Then one must bring forth the FRUITS of repentance. This will lead us to grow and improve in God's work. Otherwise, if we don't, we will not accomplish our purpose for becoming children of God.

G. Jesus set an example for us, and we should follow in His steps.

1. 1 Peter 2:21 KJV

[21] For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

2. Ephesians 2:21 KJV

[21] In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

3. We should ask ourselves, "Don't I want to grow up to be spiritually strong like Jesus?"

## **BODY**

### **I. SCRIPTURES SHOW NEED FOR NOURISHMENT**

A. Christians were rebuked for not growing as they should have, because they had not studied. Time and again members fall away or are spiritually starving because they do not eat properly.

1. Hebrews 5:11-14 KJV

[11] Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hear-

ing.

[12] For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

[13] For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

[14] But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

B. Bereans were able to determine whether truth was taught because they searched the Scriptures DAILY. We need REGULAR nourishment.

1. Acts 17:11 KJV

[11] These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

2. Psalm 1:1,2 - Meditate on God's word day and night.

3. Psalm 1:1-2 KJV

[1] Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

[2] But his delight is in the law of the Lord ; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

4. Psalm 119:47 KJV

[47] And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.

5. Psalm 119:95-99 KJV

[95] The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: but I will consider thy testimonies.

[96] I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.

[97] O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. [98] Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.

[99] I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.

C. Joshua 1:8 KJV

[8] This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

1. Children and adults need physical food regularly, and get very upset without it. But are we content to go for days at a time without feeding on God's word?
2. Do we make use of the opportunities the church provides for nourishment? I never ceased to be amazed when the church provides a spiritual feast, and members choose to do other things. We don't miss a meal if can help it, why miss God's meal for our soul.

D. The Teaching of God's Word

1. We Need Spiritual Food from God's Word.

2. A child cannot grow physically without proper food.

Good parents are concerned about proper nutrition.

They want children to eat what is good, not bad for them. We are touched by pictures of children starving due to poverty.

3. Most children WANT nourishment. Babies cry for food. Once as a child I got so hungry I

cried, and my mother felt really bad.

Even adults know we need food, and don't like to go long without it. We want it every day, regularly, several times a day.

E. Matthew 4:4 - Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

1. Ephesians 4:15 KJV

[15] But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

2. Matthew 5:6 KJV

[6] Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

F. Jesus made a comment in Matthew that we are all familiar with

1. Matthew 28:20 KJV

[20] Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

2. 1 Timothy 3:2 KJV

[2] A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

3. 1 Timothy 4:11 KJV

[11] These things command and teach.

4. 1 Timothy 6:2 KJV

[2] And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.

5. 2 Timothy 2:25 KJV

[25] In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

G. We need to be spiritual teachers.

1. 1 Corinthians 2:13 KJV

[13] Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

2. We as Christians must teach in Truth.

3. 1 John 2:27 KJV

[27] But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

H. Our Lord and Savior went teaching in Galilee

1. Matthew 4:23 KJV

[23] And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

2. Matthew 7:29 KJV

[29] For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

I. When your heart is open to the WORD wisdom starts.

1. Mark 6:34 KJV

[34] And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.

2. Luke 4:15 KJV

[15] And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.

3. Luke 5:3 KJV

[3] And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

J. John 3:2 KJV

[2] The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

1. John 7:14 KJV

[14] Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught.

2. John 8:2 KJV

[2] And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them.

II. WE HAVE EXAMPLES IN THE BIBLE

A. Ezra 7:10 KJV

[10] For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord , and to do it , and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

B. Ezra 7:25 KJV

[25] And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not.

C. THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH another example.

1. Nehemiah 8:2-8 KJV

[2] And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.

[3] And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.

[4] And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

[5] And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up:

[6] And Ezra blessed the Lord , the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

[7] Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place.

[8] So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

D. Ezra did three things

1. He prepared (studied)
2. He practiced (applied his knowledge to his own life)
3. He taught
4. Jeremiah 9:24 KJV

[24] But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord .

5. Hosea 6:3 KJV

[3] Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord : his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.

E. Many Christians, when they are newborn, are full of fire - telling everyone they come in contact with about the blessed news that saves people's souls.

1. The Scriptures teach that growth is always needed.
2. Even Paul, as mature as he was, did not consider himself to have achieved perfection (maturity) such that he could cease striving to improve. He forgot past achievements (and failures) and pressed on to greater accomplishments.
3. Philippians 3:12-14 KJV

[12] Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

[13] Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do , forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

[14] I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

F. Peter thought he had reached a level where he would never deny Jesus. But that very night he denied Him three times.

1. Matthew 26:31-35 KJV

[31] Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.

[32] But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.

[33] Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.

[34] Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

[35] Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise



also said all the disciples.

- G. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. Christians never reach the point we are so mature that we cannot fall.
1. 1 Corinthians 10:12 KJV
- [12] Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.
2. One of the main reasons Christians do not grow is that they do not see the NEED for growing. They have no desire to work and serve to the full extent of their ability.
  3. When people develop a burning hunger and thirst to work for the Lord, then they will develop the other steps they need to grow.
  4. Do you have that burning desire to accomplish more for the Lord? Have you set specific goals of work you want to accomplish for God, improvements to make, new levels to reach?
- H. Too often, the fire dies down. Why?
1. They never learn how to teach
  2. Learn? All you have to do is open your mouth!
  3. Sure. Ask our school teachers in this congregation if that is true!
  4. We need to learn how to teach.
- I. They have no set goals
1. Take this test to check your spiritual nourishment.
  2. How much time did you spend this week watching TV?
  3. How much time watching sports or entertainment, or reading the paper, magazines, etc.?
- J. How much time did you spend on some hobby or outside interest, that may not be immoral but is not necessary?
1. How many hours did you spend studying your Bible?
  2. How many services of the church did you attend?
  3. How many did you miss that you could have attended?
  4. Which do you nourish the best: your spirit or your body?
  5. Are you feeding your mind on God's word or pleasures?
- K. Christians need regular nourishment from God's word to grow.
1. Just what is it that you are trying to accomplish?
  2. Are you trying to show off how much you know?
  3. Are you trying to put false teachers and their doctrine in their place?
  4. Are you trying to lead lost souls to Christ?
- L. They have unreasonable expectation
1. They are disappointed to learn that every person is not interested in the gospel.
  2. They expect people to respond quickly. If we don't baptize someone in two or three lessons, it just isn't worth the effort.
  3. We are a society of instant gratification.
  4. You can drive down to McDonalds and have a meal in minutes. Yet, if there are two or three cars ahead of us in the drive-thru, we fume over the delay!

### III. IT STARTS WITH KNOWLEDGE

#### A. Colossians 3:16 KJV

[16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

##### 1. Proverbs 3:13-24 KJV

[13] Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.

[14] For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.

[15] She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.

[16] Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour.

[17] Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

[18] She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her.

[19] The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens.

[20] By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew.

[21] My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion:

[22] So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck.

[23] Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble.

[24] When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.

#### B. Many false doctrines come from an imperfect knowledge of God's will.

##### 1. Israel's zeal was not according to knowledge.

##### 2. Romans 10:2-3 KJV

[2] For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

[3] For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

##### 3. Instead of becoming teachers, we need to be taught all over again.

##### 4. Hebrews 5:12 KJV

[12] For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

#### C. The simple solution is to let God's Word do its own teaching

##### 1. Avoid injecting your own thoughts and opinions -

##### 2. 1 Corinthians 3:5-11 KJV

[5] Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?

[6] I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.

[7] So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

[8] Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.

[9] For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.

[10] According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon.

But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

[11] For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

D. No one can teach better than God!

1. Direct people to the passages that answer their questions, the passages that teach them what they need to do to correct their lives.
2. You don't need to be a great orator, but it does mean you need to know your Bible.
3. In recent times, when the church was the fast growing religion in the U.S., its members were known as walking Bibles.
4. Would anyone accuse you of that today? Is this an improvement?

#### IV. TEACHING TAKES TIME

A. Even the apostles could not absorb everything at once -

1. John 16:12-13 KJV

[12] I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

[13] Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

B. The teacher is the key to the success of any Bible class. Having a good teacher is far more important than having modern facilities and the latest teaching aids.

1. While there may be extenuating circumstances, still, the ultimate success or failure of every class lies with the teacher.
2. But good teachers do not just "happen," they are made. No matter our present level, we must make ourselves into better teachers.
3. James 3:1 KJV

[1] My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

C. We must take our responsibilities seriously. James warned in his book, "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we will receive a stricter judgment".

1. He was not trying to discourage people from teaching. Rather, he wanted those who teach to recognize their great responsibility.  
Souls are at stake and they should be doing all they can within their means to do the best they can.
2. We must recognize the qualities of a good teacher and we must seek to develop and expand them in our lives. What are some qualities of a good teacher?

#### D. The Christian Teacher

1. A good teacher is a Christian. By “Christian,” we do not just mean someone who has been baptized. Rather, it is one who is all the word embodies.
2. He should be a constant follower of Jesus Christ whose life is totally dedicated to serving God.
3. His speech, dress, habits and entire deportment should be above reproach. He will faithfully attend all the assemblies of the church for one who is not faithful himself cannot be expected to teach faithfulness to others .
4. Romans 2:21 KJV  
[21] Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?

#### E. He prays. He studies and meditates on God’s word. He is constantly endeavoring to increase his knowledge of the Bible while at the same time striving to practice the things he is learning.

1. Really Wants to Teach
2. Some only teach because a class is thrust upon them. No one else would take it so they feel they have to teach it. But to do something well, one must want to do it.
3. A good teacher not only wants to teach but loves to teach. He is enthusiastic about his task. That enthusiasm will positively affect his students. He will instill within them a burning desire for greater knowledge of and greater appreciation for God’s word.
4. Able to Teach  
Enthusiasm alone makes for a poor teacher. One must have some native ability upon which to draw.

#### G. Not everyone is capable of teaching a Bible class .

1. 1 Corinthians 12:29 KJV  
[29] Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?
2. When a person really wants to teach he will sincerely try to increase his ability.

#### H. Start with easy things and let the student grow

1. Too many people are choking the babies on meat!
2. 1 Peter 2:1-3 KJV  
[1] Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,  
[2] As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:  
[3] If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.
3. Lessons need to be tailored to the maturity of the student.
4. Hebrews 5:13-14 KJV  
[13] For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.  
[14] But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

#### I. We need to have a foundation.

1. We want to jump from baptism to expecting people to understand the details of marriage,

divorce, and remarriage with no grounding in the Word.

2. It takes time!

3. Psalm 92:1-15 KJV

[1] It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord , and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High:

[2] To shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night,

[3] Upon an instrument of ten strings, and upon the psaltery; upon the harp with a solemn sound.

[4] For thou, Lord , hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the works of thy hands.

[5] O Lord , how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep.

[6] A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this.

[7] When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever:

[8] But thou, Lord , art most high for evermore.

[9] For, lo, thine enemies, O Lord , for, lo, thine enemies shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered.

[10] But my horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn: I shall be anointed with fresh oil.

[11] Mine eye also shall see my desire on mine enemies, and mine ears shall hear my desire of the wicked that rise up against me.

[12] The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

[13] Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.

[14] They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing;

[15] To shew that the Lord is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

J. The wicked spring up like weeds and wither just as quickly

1. The righteous grow like palm and cedar trees.

2. Trees become a lot mightier than grass, but it doesn't happen overnight.

3. Strong trees take time to develop. They don't appear overnight!

K. Plan each study with the idea of spending at least six months

1. Don't rush it. Some will respond quickly, but most will need to contemplate what they have learned.

2. Feed a little bit at a time. Consider Jesus; he spent three years teaching the Jewish people.

3. You don't have to teach everything at once. Save some points for later.

## V. WE DON'T NEED TO HURRY THEM

A. Jesus was a shepherd - Shepherds lead their flocks.

John 10:2-4 KJV

[2] But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

[3] To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by

name, and leadeth them out.

[4] And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

B. Gently teach -

1. 2 Timothy 2:24-26 KJV

[24] And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,

[25] In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

[26] And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

C. It may be gentle, but our weapon is so mighty! - Let the weapon do its purpose

1. 2 Corinthians 10:4-6 KJV

[4] (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

[5] Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

[6] And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

## VI. JESUS USED QUESTIONS

A. Suppose you are teaching a Jehovah Witness, who does not believe in the deity of Jesus

1. Instead of "Look at this verse. See, it says Jesus is God!"

2. Say, "Whom do you think this verse is speaking of? What does it say of this person."

B. Help a person discover the truth for himself.

C. Jesus was very effectively using questions to convict the Jews. How often did Jesus answer a question or an accusation with another question?

D. Often as you question your student, you will not get the correct answer, but as you poke into their line of reasoning, it is gratifying to see understanding dawning on their faces.

## VII. WE CAN BE EMPATHETIC

A. Put yourself in the other person's shoes.

B. Treat others as you want to be treated

1. Matthew 7:12 KJV

[12] Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

C. Look at Paul's example -

1. Acts 17:16,22-23 KJV

[16] Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

[22] Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in

all things ye are too superstitious.

[23] For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD . Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

- 2 . He was provoked by the rampant idolatry
- 3 . He approached them gently - “I see you are a religious people.”
- 4 . They did know better, no one has taught them of the Lord, yet.

## VIII. WE ARE JUST GETTING INTO THE PROBLEM

### A. We must learn to be good teachers of God’s WORD.

1. We are indeed saved to save others, and in doing that we save ourselves, or keep ourselves saved.
2. We are ministered to that we might minister to others, and in ministering to others we are benefitted as much as they -- perhaps more so.
3. Unless we have a desire to share the joy of salvation with others, it is doubtful that we have truly received that joy.
4. Unless we are truly concerned about the lost and want them to have forgiveness, peace, and hope, there is every reason to question our own condition.

### B. Being Christians, we should go out into the “streets and lanes of the city” and out into the “highways and hedges” and constrain lost souls to come to the feast of God’s kingdom.

1. Christians are those who come to Christ and learn of Him, and who then go and tell others of the Lamb of God.
2. Luke 22:32 KJV  
[32] But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.
3. 1 Timothy 4:16 KJV  
[16] Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

### C. Exercise and Practice Are Essential to Spiritual Growth.

1. Scriptures:
2. Hebrews 5:14 - Those who are of full age, by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Growth requires exercise as well as nourishment.
3. 1 Timothy 4:7 - Exercise yourself toward godliness.  
Like children, athletes, and musicians, we must work again and again at applying Bible principles to become effective in the Lord’s work.

### D. Applications:

1. To learn to TEACH, we must do it repeatedly: teach your children, home studies, Bible classes, preach sermons, again and again.  
To learn to LEAD SINGING, practice songs at home, sing with your family, lead during church meetings over and over.
2. To understand the BIBLE, study it again and again, talk to others, drill yourself, memorize. Get in and dig.

3. To learn to PRAY, do it over and over.

Kids may not be good at activities at first, but parents encourage them to do it over and over.

4. Likewise, older members must encourage the newer ones to use their talents. They may not be skilled at first, but they learn by doing.

We need to encourage teachers, preachers, and song leaders. Don't complain. Surely don't stay home. They need the practice!

E. Children do not become full-grown instantaneously.

1. At birth they are so small you can hold them in a little basket. Soon they are outgrowing new clothes every month. Eventually they can wear their parents' clothes or even larger. But it takes time.
2. Sometimes children become impatient. "I can't wait till I'm 18 (or 21)." We say, "Take your time. It will come soon enough." Time passes and, sure enough, what they were waiting for has come and gone, and they're looking back wondering how the time passed so fast!
3. Likewise spiritually, do not expect maturity overnight.

James 1:4 - To become perfect and mature (entire), lacking nothing, we must have patience.

4. Some new-born Christians want to know everything and do everything right away. They may not be willing to take the TIME to STUDY and DEVELOP ability. Yet they want to be just like the mature members - and want other members to treat them with the same respect that they do mature members - before they have taken time to grow.

F. Sometimes older members are impatient with new members. We don't understand why new converts have trouble with some basic concepts.

1. Then sometimes these new members explain, "I never was really taught what the BIBLE said before." They have no background in the Scriptures, and it takes TIME to grow.
2. Remember that people who may be mature today did not get that way overnight. It took years of study and practice. And new converts will not become mature overnight. It will take time.
3. New members should not get discouraged and give up. Older members should not be impatient or overly demanding. Remember how our children took time to grow, and how we had to show patience with their immature ways as they grew. But growth will come as long as people are trying and we give them time.

G. Don't Become Discouraged by Mistakes and Rebukes.

1. We as Christians, we are going to make many mistakes and must occasionally be told we are wrong.
2. How often does a child fall while learning to walk? They fall again and again, gathering bumps and bruises.
3. They spill their milk, don't hold their spoon properly, fall off their bikes, and come to bat in the bottom of the ninth with the winning run in scoring position and strike out.
4. Parents are continually correcting, instructing, and punishing, till we almost feel sorry for the kids. Growing up is tough!
5. If kids are going to become mature, they have to keep going in spite of mistakes and rebukes.
6. They will look back on their own childish mistakes and just smile.

The new converts will make many mistakes and must often be told they are wrong.

H. We have some of the greatest Bible characters who committed terrible errors and had to be re-



buked.

1. Moses made excuses when God called him to lead Israel out of bondage.
  2. David committed adultery with Bathsheeba and was rebuked by Nathan.
  3. Peter denied Jesus three times.
  4. Paul persecuted Christians before his conversion.
  5. Thomas doubted Jesus' resurrection.
- I. All the apostles forsook Jesus when He was arrested and crucified.
1. Matthew 16:21-23 KJV

[21] From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

[22] Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

[23] But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.
  2. Yet all of these are remembered as some of God's greatest servants.

Great servants are not people who live without ever sinning, but people who learn from their mistakes and go on to serve God faithfully.

Judas betrayed Jesus and is remembered as a traitor.
  3. Peter denied Jesus three times and is remembered as a great apostle. What is the difference? Judas, after betraying Jesus, hung himself. Peter, after denying Jesus, repented and went to work preaching the gospel.
  4. Proverbs 29:1 KJV

[1] He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

## CONCLUSION:

- A. Everyone needs to grow as a Christian, and everyone can grow, if he/she simply applies the Bible principles of growth.
- B. All Christians everywhere at some time in their lives recognize that they have spiritual needs.

They need guidance and direction to find hope for eternity and answers to the questions of life.
- C. Being a Christian alone cannot provide this spiritual guidance.

Christians have to make an attempt to seek out the answers for the meaning and purpose of life and other serious spiritual questions.

So they can know the answers are right or wrong, and live a Godly life.
- D. Jeremiah 10:23 KJV

[23] O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.
- E. You need to find and study a source of spiritual direction and guidance from someone who really knows the answers.
- F. Isaiah 55:8-9 KJV

[8] For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord .

[9] For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

G. The Bible claims that it teaches the true answers to these questions.

H. Psalm 119:105 KJV

[105] Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

I. John 17:17 KJV

[17] Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

J. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 KJV

[16] All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

[17] That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

K. Bible teaching affirms that belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ and Christian teaching will give the spiritual direction you need to show you the meaning and purpose of life.

We can find these answers in God's word if we will diligently study the Scriptures.

L. Proverbs 4:20-23 KJV

[20] My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings.

[21] Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart.

[22] For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh.

[23] Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

M. When a Christian has been In Christ and some years has past without growth there is a problem, we as leaders in The Lord 's church should recognize this and see if our brothers and sisters would be interested in a bible study. We as leaders have to get involved if want to see change for the future. God bless each of us .

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## **Third, that people have been taught have less Bible knowledge but we are still trying to teach them in the same manner.**

***Dan Fredman***

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Dan Fredman was born in Oklahoma City, OK. He and Pam were married, May 30, 1968 and they have three children: Johnie, Christie, and Lacy. Dan attended the Barnes church of Christ in 1952 as a boy.

Dan attended Harding's Christian Communication Program (CCP) in 1980-1982 and attended Oklahoma Christian College (now University) receiving a Bachelor's Degree in Bible in 1993. He started preaching in 1967 as fill-in and part-time; he began preaching full time in 1980 and has now preached for 47 years; and has done full time local work for 34 years. He is presently working with the church of Christ in Wagoner, OK, and has been there for the last two and half years. Before moving to Wagoner, he served the church in Broken Bow, OK, for many years! He has done local work in three states. He has preached in Arkansas, Texas, and Oklahoma.

He has written article for our Journal, "One Heart," and has appeared on the Oklahoma City Lectures about seven times.

Dan has served this nation in the National Guard.

Note of interest: Dan is now doing a radio program in Wagoner, where he gives brief Biblical points. This is a one minute program. It is a Monday – Friday and comes on at 11:50 A.M. This is something other congregation might look into!

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### **Introduction**

- A. The 3<sup>rd</sup> reason the church is not growing is the lack of Bible knowledge in the Lord's church and in the world today.
  - 1. Our world has definitely changed!
  - 2. Think about what our world, our society was like just 30 to 40 years ago.
    - a. Back then a majority of people acknowledged, believed in God (whether true Christians or not).
    - b. Back then, God was a part of our communities and even our state and local governments.
    - c. Prayers were an accepted part of all community activities including sports and government meetings.
    - d. Back during this time, most people had, at least, a superficial knowledge of the Bible.
    - e. Most attended "church", one of the denominations, somewhere and, while mislead, were sincere about their beliefs and many were willing to sit down and study to learn the truth.
  - 3. During this time, there were two or three very popular Bible study programs being used by those in the church to try to convert the lost to Christ.
    - a. One of those was the Jule Miller videos.
    - b. They were simple, to the point and put together in way that they were interesting to watch.
    - c. They simply helped turn people to the truth of God's Word.
    - d. This worked when studying with people who believed in God and were sincere in serving Him.
- B. Now, we live in a totally different world.
  - 1. God has been removed from just about everything in a public sense.

2. He has been removed from our government and from our schools.
3. God is just not a part of people's lives anymore and, sadly, that even includes many who claim to be Christians.

I. Now, let's talk about the Lord's church in particular.

A. Where we are today is a direct result of what we did back in the early days.

1. We were deeply involved in evangelism, deeply involved in reaching out to others and trying to save souls.
2. But, in the course of all this, there was one part of the Lord's instructions we neglected. We didn't do it on purpose but we did it.
3. Notice one thing the Lord said in His instructions to the apostles in Matt. 28:19-20.
4. Matthew 28:19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
5. Now notice what the Lord's instructions are here!
  - a. They were to "go", that is, go out, go to those who were not saved, go to those who needed forgiveness of sins.
  - b. Go where – essentially everywhere, all nations, leaving no one out.
  - c. And do what – make disciples of them by teaching them and baptizing them in the name of, by the authority of the Godhead.
  - d. But then, notice what Jesus said, "Teaching Them!" Teaching who? Teaching those who had just been baptized, those who were now disciples of Christ. And, teaching them what, all that Jesus had commanded.

B. Here is the area in which we failed miserably.

1. Again, let me emphasize, it was NOT something we did on purpose or intentionally.
2. But, what we tended to do was to go out and work, and teach and reach out to those that were lost. Once they were converted, baptized into Christ we tended to leave them to their own devices and go searching for others to teach and baptize.
3. Now, we did have some great men who tried to help with this, men who developed study plans such as "Now That I'm A Christian" and others.
4. Men who tried to emphasize the importance of continuing to teach new converts and helping them grow and mature as Christians.
5. But, this was not emphasized in the church as a whole.

C. But, this is not a new problem, notice what the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says concerning the recipients of this letter in Heb. 5:11-14.

1. Hebrews 5:11-14, "Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil."
2. It is not enough for one to just become a Christian, one must also grow and mature as a Christian.

3. What would happen to a new baby if the parents brought him home, laid him in the baby bed and said, "Ok, he is here, now it is up to him!" and they just walked off and left the baby laying there?
    - a. Can that baby feed himself?
    - b. Can that baby change his diapers.
    - c. Can that baby cover or uncover himself as needed to stay warm and comfortable?
    - d. We all know the answer to this – that baby is going to die if the parents don't love and care for him by feeding him, etc.
  4. New Christians are babes in Christ. The need to be fed milk to begin with, simple things, easily understood.
  5. But, as they grow, they need to change to solid food.
  6. They need to grow in their understanding of what it means to be a Christian and serve God.
- D. And this is where we have failed in the church.
1. Back in the early 1900's the churches of Christ were one of the fastest growing religious groups in America.
  2. By the 1950's and 60's we were not growing at all, in fact we were losing members.
  3. Then by the 80's and 90's we, more or less, stabilized or were growing at a rate of one to one and a half percent.
  4. Why was the church not growing? Especially since during those times we had some great evangelistic efforts taking place and a lot of people were being baptized into Christ?
  5. Simply because we were losing people out the backdoor faster than we were bringing them in the front door. A result of not helping new Christians mature in the faith.
- E. What about the church today?
1. The Lord's church is not really growing today, why?
  2. For one thing, we are not as evangelistic as we used to be in reaching out to those who are lost.
  3. But secondly, we are not just losing Christians out the back door, we are losing whole congregations to the world and to denominationalism.
  4. Why, because a majority of members of the church today are not grounded in God's Word.
  5. Think about it, the majority of our members today are those converted in the mid and late 1900's, a time when the emphasis was on converting the lost and new members were not being taught, not being taken from the milk to the meat of God's word.
  6. How many Christians do you know who can sit down, take a Bible and show someone what the Bible says they must do to become a Christian?
  7. A majority of Christians can tell you what one must do to become a Christian – give them the "plan of salvation." But, they know it because they heard it preached, not because they studied it out for themselves in God's word.
  8. Sadly, a majority of people in the Lord's church today are ignorant of God's word.
- F. Why have I gone into all of this when my topic is the lack of Bible knowledge in the world and what we have to do differently to reach them today?
1. Basically to point out that the lack of Bible knowledge is not just a problem for those in the

world but also a problem in the church today.

2. We cannot reach out to others with something we do not have ourselves.

## II. Now, what do we have to do to reach those in our world today?

### A. We are instructed to teach God's word to everyone we possibly can.

1. That is why God has given us His word, that we should teach it.
2. 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;
  - a. Notice – profitable for teaching, to be used in teaching, reproving, correcting.
  - b. In other words, scripture is to be our authority in every way in our service to God.
3. And, we are to give attention to teaching, that is, work at teaching God's word.
4. 1 Timothy 4:13, "Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching."
  - a. Again notice, not just reading scripture but teaching it as well.
3. Consider the Great Commission as given to the Apostles.
  - a. Jesus gave them specific instructions on where to go – the whole world, and what to teach – the gospel and that those who heard and believed were to be baptized.
  - b. Notice, Jesus did not tell them HOW to go or WHAT methods to use in spreading the gospel.
  - c. So, what we see them doing is using every "modern" convenience available to them at the time.
  - d. They traveled by foot and by ship. They spoke privately, publicly and through written letters.
  - e. We must do exactly as they did – use every modern convenience available to us today to get the gospel out to all the world.
4. The problem is, we get caught up in old habits and customs.
5. I recently received my regular newsletter from GBN. On the front was an article entitled "A Mennonite Attitude In A Media Age" by Gary McDade.
  - a. In this article he compares the Mennonites and their reluctance and sometimes, outright refusal, to use modern conveniences to the attitude of the church towards the use of modern media and technology – computers, internet, etc.
  - b. The phrases "this is the way we've always done it" and "we've never done that before" are killing us.
  - c. Our reluctance to use new things, new technology and conveniences to spread the gospel is hindering the work of the church.
6. What can happen if we truly use every bit of technology available to us. Consider this:
  - a. GBN is currently available to 300,000 homes representing 750,000 people 24/7. Additionally, 60 million receive the programming for an hour a day via Dish and DirecTV.
  - b. In Search Of The Lord's Way is among the top 3 religious programs in America with an audience each week of 60-65 million. They are constantly receiving letters and emails of those baptized into Christ as a direct result of the program or have attended a local congregation where they were taught and baptized because of the program.

7. What does this have to do with us?
  - a. We need to support all efforts such as these as long as they stay true to the word of God.
  - b. We need to get more involved in our own congregations in reaching out to others instead of leaving it all on the elders and deacons and the preacher.
  - c. Some say our methods are outdated – and some may be but most are not. Quite honestly it is the members of the church who are the problem not the methods.
  - d. I know of a congregation that holds a gospel meeting every year running Wednesday through Sunday. Their nightly services sometimes run close to their Sunday morning attendance and their Sunday morning attendance has averaged three times their normal attendance. How do they do it? Several things are involved but, primarily, it is a result of every single member being deeply involved in working and inviting others to come.
  - e. Brethren, we must change our attitudes towards the church and the work of the church. We must realize that every single Christian is personally responsible for doing his or her part to help the church spread the gospel. This is God's plan.
  - f. 2 Timothy 2:2, "And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."

IV. Why is all this important? Because the people in our world are much different than the people of the world of the mid 1900's.

- A. We live in a technological world – everything people see, read, look at is on the computer, iphone or ipad.
  1. Not only this, but they believe everything they see on the internet – true or not!
  2. God is being totally left out of their world and their lives.
- B. If we are going to convert people to Christ today we must start where they are, not where we want them to be.
  1. The apostle Paul is a great example of what I am talking about.
  2. Paul was a man who knew and taught God's word! Of course, He and the other apostles were teaching and preaching Christ from the OT scriptures as the NT was in the process of being written.
  3. When teaching those Jews across the world, Paul quoted scripture after scripture to show what God had said.
  4. BUT, we see something entirely different when Paul addressed those Greek Philosophers on Mars Hill at Athens, Greece.
  5. Read his sermon there (Acts 17:22-31) and while he teaches solid Biblical principles, Paul does not quote one single passage of scripture.
    - a. The only quote he uses is from their own "poets."
    - b. Why did Paul not quote scripture to these people? They were Greek philosophers, the Jewish scriptures would have carried no meaning, no authority for them.
    - c. Paul started with them where they were and attempted to take them to where they needed to be.
    - d. This is a great example for us today in our present world – start with people where they are, help them move to where they need to be.
  6. How do we do this?

- a. Do most people want to see a better world? Do they want to see a world with less stress and strife and a world where people really care about each other? Yes!
- B. Herein lies another problem, very few people use or study the Bible anymore.
  1. Where do people get their “religious” knowledge today? Why do people believe what they believe and practice what they practice religiously?
  2. They get it from several different places.
    - a. It is what they have been taught by their family.
    - b. It is what they have been taught by a favorite preacher.
    - c. It is what is taught by the “church” they attend.
  3. But, the one place they do not get their “religious” knowledge is from the Bible.
  4. Oh, they are told “this is what the Bible says” but they never see it for themselves, they just take someone’s word for it and never question it.
  5. Add to this all those who have just separated themselves from religion period, those who, as a result of all the division, disagreements and false claims of religion in general today want nothing to do with it at all.
- C. So, how do we reach these people, what do we have to do to get them to listen to God’s word or even get them interested in trying to listen?
  1. First of all, we must get their attention, peak their interest in learning about God and His word.
  2. While we may know that a person’s beliefs and way of life are not right, we show them that we do respect them as a person and we do care about them and their life.
  3. We must not give the impression that our goal is just to show them how wrong they are and how right we are.
- D. We have a tremendous resource that can help us learn how to turn people back to the Bible today – that resource is the book “Muscle and a Shovel.”
  1. In this book which, as you all know, is a true story, the author, Michael Shank, describes his conversion to Christ.
  2. It all comes back to the man named in the book as Randall. Randall approached Michael as a friend and as a good person.
  3. He didn’t jump Shank out or tell him how wrong he was, he just asked some very simple questions – said can you show me that, etc.
  4. Randall began where Michael was and took him to where he needed to be.
  5. The whole key is LISTENING to others, really listening to them, treating them with respect and working with them where they are and helping them move to where they need to be.

## Conclusion

- A. If we want the church to grow, if we truly want to reach out to those who are lost in the world, we must change some things.
  1. First – change things about ourselves!
    - a. Work on our personal Bible knowledge.
    - b. Work on our personal attitudes towards the lost.
  2. Secondly, change the way we approach those in the world.



- a. Approach them with a loving, caring attitude.
- b. Listen to them, make every effort to find out where they are in what they believe and why they believe it.
- c. Work with them respectfully not condemningly and help them grow to where they need to be.
- d. Refuse to give up or quit – Randall refused to give up on Michael Shank and we must refuse to give up on those we work with.



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## **Fourth, that the people being taught are functional agnostics, but we are still teaching as those who believed both in God and that the Bible is the Word of God.**

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*— David Brassfield*

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David Brassfield was born in Cushing, Ok. and attended Oklahoma Christian from 1972-1976 and 1987-1990, receiving the following Degrees: Bachelor of Arts in Bible (1976) and Master of Arts in Ministry (1990). His wife's name is Carol and they have two children.

He has done local work in Kansas and Oklahoma and has written articles appearing in the following papers: One Body, Firm Foundation, Family (Harding Univ.), Image Magazine, Forthright Magazine. He has preached for 39 years and has worked with the Newalla church of Christ for 26 years. This is David's second time to speak in the "Oklahoma City Lectures."

His daughter and her husband and son are with the Waynesboro, VA church of Christ where he serves as the involvement minister. David's son-in-law (Michael Jones) is the grandson to Dr. Bill Jones, (retired) O.C. professor of Old Testament and Bible. David's son graduated last December from Oklahoma Christian with a Bachelor of Arts in Bible and currently preaches part time with the church of Christ in Cement, OK. He and his wife currently live in Oklahoma City while she completes her degree at Oklahoma Christian.

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Roughly 20% of today's population lists itself as either atheistic, agnostic, or unaffiliated when it comes to religion. Most of that number involves people who claim no religious affiliation. About 6% describe themselves as agnostic, while about 3% are atheists. The most disturbing statistic involves the under 30 crowd. About one third of those polled choose "none" when asked about their religion.

The churches of Christ were the fastest growing religious body in the U. S. in the 1940's. The numbers today are shrinking. In our geographic area, several congregations have dropped in their number in the past 25 years. One church has lost about 30, another dropped 60 and one went from an attendance near 150 to about 25-30 per week. It is undeniable that today's world is not the same as it once was.

Religion was once respected, religious figures elevated by the public, and the media reflected strong moral beliefs. Today religion is mocked, church officials are held up to ridicule, and the movies and air-waves are rife with profanity, sexual content, and crudeness that would have shocked our parents and grandparents. One would naturally deduce a connection between the move away from religion, a drop in church attendance, and a lowering of moral standards.

The question facing today's church is how we can and should respond. Where once our sermons were heard by sympathetic ears, today's audience is increasingly suspicious and critical. The answer to the issues facing us, I believe, are found in the pages of God's word. The first century church, oddly enough, faced agnosticism, gnosticism, as well as claims by some in their day that Christians were atheists since they did not acknowledge the gods of Rome and Greece.

Our subject today is how we are to respond to the challenge of reaching out to a world that does not believe one can come to any knowledge about God or religion. As this is one of the fastest growing segments of the population, it is necessary that God's people find a way to share the gospel in a meaningful way with those who need it the most.

Oddly enough, the response of the first century apostles to gnosticism and agnosticism was the same. They preached, taught, and wrote about what we as God's people know. At least 39 times in 1 John, John will combat the gnostic arrogance of what only they thought they could know with what believers know. Our knowledge of spiritual truths are detailed in a way to give the lie to the gnostic attitude.

Paul will deal with the agnostic attitude in his writings, and John will deal with what is and isn't known about Jesus in his gospel account. The remainder of our lesson will note what they say, how they apply their teaching, and how it can be adapted to our needs in evangelizing.

## I. The People Who Do Not Know

### A. Do Not Know God Acts 17

1. Many items of their worship for many gods
2. One dedicated to the “unknown god” (Greek for agnostic)
3. Paul’s explanation of what they worshipped in ignorance
4. Paul on what he knows

### B. Do Not Know Christ John 9

1. They thought they knew:
  - a. Jesus is not of God, v. 16
  - b. Jesus is a sinner, v. 24
  - c. God spoke to Moses, but don’t know where Jesus is from, v. 29
2. The man who knew, but did not know Christ
  - a. He is a prophet
  - b. He knew what he was and what he is
  - c. He did not know who Jesus was

## II. The People Who Know

- A. They know God and Christ (1 Jn. 2:1-6)
- B. They know they shall be like him (1 Jn. 3:2)
- C. They know what true love is (1 Jn. 3:16)
- D. They know they have eternal life (1 Jn. 5:13)
- E. They know God hears and answers them (1 Jn. 5:14-15)

## III. Bridging The Gap Between The Knows and the Know Nots

### A. Paul’s answer for the agnostic god

1. Reasoning about the nature of helpless gods and a God of power
2. Reasoning from their own poetry
3. Testimony about the man designated by God and proven by the resurrection

### B. The blind man’s answer to what the Jews did not know about Jesus

1. He is a prophet
2. God listened to him and God does not hear the prayers of sinners
3. I was blind. Now I see.

## IV. Applying Scripture’s Response to Agnosticism in Today’s World

### A. We must know God

1. A trust in his power, his knowledge, his love, and his actions

2. A belief in the Son he sent
  3. A reflection of our knowledge of God in our lives (Phil. 1:28)
- B. We must know where we were
1. The spiritual condition of our souls
  2. The hopeless condition we knew
- C. We must know where we are
1. In Christ
  2. In His kingdom
  3. Out of the domain of darkness
- D. We must know who changed us
1. “Not of ourselves. . . “
  2. What it cost God and Christ
- E. We must know how to share what we know
1. Many untrained people successfully shared and still share Jesus
  2. The woman by the well brought out an entire village to Jesus
  3. The demon-possessed man took the message to 10 cities
  4. Be prepared to give an answer concerning the hope within you

What do you know?

John 4:19-26

By personal, experiential knowledge. . .

By reasoning, understanding knowledge. . .



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## **Fifth, that many in the western world are so worldly minded that the soil of their hearts is of such that the seed of the kingdom will not take root.**

*Christopher Hill*

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Christopher Hill was born in September 1971 and graduated from Norman High School, Norman, OK. He also graduated from Moore-Norman Technology Center in 1990. He passed his ASE certifications and worked as a mechanic while attending college. He is a graduate of Oklahoma Christian University in 1997 with a Bachelor's degree in Bible and Ministry.

He and Joanna were married in 1997. Joanna is also a graduate of Oklahoma Christian University. They have two children: Rachel (11) and Luke (9).

Chris has worked with Camp Shiloh, a Christian camp for children in New York, from 1987-2001 and served on the board of directors from 1998-2001. He has also worked with the church of Christ in Honesdale, PA, from 1997-2001. He is currently serving as local preacher for the church in Luther, OK, where he also serves as a deacon. He has been the church in Luther 13 years. Chris has traveled to the Philippines twice in the past four years. While there he helped with the preaching and conducted auto repair seminars at the Mactan church of Christ and at Camp Arapal in Cebu. He is also on the board of directors for the Luther Community Service Center. This is a center which provides food and other necessities for low-income families in Luther.

Note of interest: this is Christopher's first time to speak on the Oklahoma City Lectures!

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### *Text*

- A. Why is the church growing so much in distant parts of the world, such as Africa, India, and the Philippines, yet seems to struggle in our own backyard?
- B. We all share the desire to see the church grow. We all see things that stunt church growth, numerically and spiritually. It is also our desire not just to state what hinders the growth of the church, but possible solutions that may be effective in our culture today. Why do people respond differently to the same message? Why do some reject the Gospel of Christ and others accept it and live Christian lives?
- C. Being worldly minded comes out in many ways and it is not just a problem seen in our day and time.
- D. In a speech made in 1863, Abraham Lincoln said, "We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us."
- E. The world today is much like the world of the apostle Paul's day. God had the only answer then—the gospel, and it is the only answer now. As we begin to read Mark 4, we find Jesus teaching a large crowd from a boat. We are told Jesus taught them many things by parables. A parable is a comparison. The English word comes from a compound word that means to lay something beside something else -similar to the word "parallel." This is the first of Jesus' parables to be recorded by the Gospel writers. Parables may be long or short, but they are meant to teach one basic truth.

Many other truths may be drawn from each parable but they revolve around one central idea. In this case, that idea is responding to the Gospel message. This parable is both a solemn lesson and warning, and also a description of what is actually taking place in the world even to this day.

- F. Mark 4:1 – 20: Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times." Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, " 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!'" Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop--thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown." (NIV)
- G. The seed falls on four different kinds of soil.
- H. Gospel preacher and songwriter Knowles Shaw wrote the song, "Bringing in the Sheaves," which illustrates a person sowing the Word of God among the lost. Shaw spent the better half of his life sowing the seeds of God among the people. His song describes God's workers bringing in souls to Jesus and rejoicing about the harvest. We all have that desire to bring souls to Christ and be able to rejoice about a harvest. Let's look at Jesus' parable of the soils to see what lesson we can learn that can help us evangelize today. In the parable of the soils we learn that there are 3 places the Word of God will not survive long term.
- I. The 1st place the gospel cannot survive is in a hard heart.
- A. Jesus says, "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up." Satan took away the seed that fell among the paths. Paths or roads are known for their hard soil. Pathways are not places where people plant seeds because the soil is packed down hard, it is trampled down and the seed can't penetrate.
- B. People who have hard hearts are like those who hear the Word but don't pay any attention to it.
- C. Much of the Western world is hard hearted toward the Word of God. Fifty years ago, prayer and Bible reading were banned in public schools. Our culture changed. Many have become hard hearted toward the gospel.
- D. The gospel cannot survive in a hard heart because the Word of God is not allowed to penetrate into one's life.
- E. The Pharaoh of Egypt is a great example of someone with a hard heart. Even after he had heard Moses' multiple warnings to let his people go, Pharaoh still would not let God's Word into his



heart. God even performed many signs and wonders for Pharaoh, but all it did was harden his heart. The Scriptures says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. We might wonder why God would harden someone's heart. God can soften or harden someone's heart. It all depends on how the person reacts to God's Word. For example, we could say God is the Sun and his light and warmth come down on two different people. One person is like butter, and when the warmth of the Sun hits it, it begins to soften. The other person is like the clay: when the warmth of the Sun hits it, it becomes dry and hard. The difference depends on who we want to be. It is our choice. Will our hearts be soft or hard toward God's Word? Many people have chosen to be hard hearted toward God's Word.

II. The 2<sup>nd</sup> place the gospel cannot survive is in an uncommitted heart.

- A. In the parable of the soils Jesus says, "Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root."
- B. This is the rocky ground, the shallow soil. It has only a little soil on the surface. I am told that in many places in Palestine there is only an inch or two of soil on top of a ledge of limestone rock. If seed falls on this ground it will grow and germinate quickly. The limestone holds heat from the sun which creates ideal conditions for seeds to sprout. But after the seed puts down roots in search of water it starves and dies as quickly as it grew.
- C. A person's faith that has no roots will not be able to stand up to the trials he faces in the Christian life. When testing comes his faith is found to be weak and shallow because he has relied on fickle feelings instead of God's truth. Without strong roots, a plant will be blown all over the place when the slightest winds come. He says, "I'll serve the Lord as Long as there are no difficulties or discouragements." The struggle with this type of growth is that the plants wither sooner. There is no depth to his faith.

III. The 3<sup>rd</sup> place the gospel cannot survive is in a crowded heart.

- A. Jesus continues in his parables of the soils, "Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain."
- B. This is the Infested Soil. Conditions for growth are very good, but thorns grow along with the seed and overtake the good plants.
- C. The thorny ground represents believers who fail to grow spiritually because of their divided interest. In today's world, we are smothered with things to do. We are always in a hurry to go somewhere or to do something. Our schedules are so crowded, that it seems nearly impossible to give time to God. Society tells us that time is money and that if we are not getting paid for something then it is a waste of time. This is Satan's most powerful tactic of all. He makes us believe that we are too busy to follow God's will. One person wrote:

Too busy to read a chapter a day,  
Too busy, yes much too busy to pray,  
Too busy to think of your wasted past  
In this whirlwind life which we know won't last.  
Too busy to speak a word of cheer,  
To the heart-broken friend, that stands so near.  
Too busy to help lift his heavy load  
That he's trying to carry on life's rough road.

Too busy gathering a dollar and dime,  
For the worthwhile things we haven't time.

The Devil keeps whispering, “Grab your share,  
Why waste precious hours in prayer?”

Too busy to heed the orphans cry,  
And with a glance we hurry by,  
Some day we’ll lift our voice to the sky,  
For not one of us is too busy to die.

Perhaps when we reach that pearly white throne,  
God will be too busy to call us His own,  
So let us calm down to a slower pace,  
And be ready to meet Jesus face to face.

- D. There are people that hear and accept the word and allow it to take root in their hearts, but the thorns grow up and choke out the growing seed. Thorns rob nutrition, water, light, and space from newly sprouting seed. Distractions and conflicts rob new believers of time to reflect on God’s Word. In Mark 4:18-19, Jesus describes the thorns in 3 categories. Jesus says, “Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.”
1. The 1st category of thorns Jesus describes is, “The worries of this life.”
    - a) For example, Society says, “Take care of yourself; no one else will.” Daily concerns, schedules, and pressures can snuff out our time and energy to grow. Worry consumes our thoughts, and reduces our trust in God.
    - b) The way to get rid of this type of thorns in our lives is found in Philippians 4:6. The apostle Paul says, “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs, and don’t forget to thank him for his answers” (TLB). What is so inspiring about these words from Paul is that they are found in a prison epistle.
  2. The 2nd category of thorns Jesus describes is, “The deceitfulness of wealth.”
    - a) Society says, “Wealth brings security, power, and happiness.” The problem is that wealth can take God’s place in our lives. It tempts us to deny our dependence on God, taking our eyes off of eternal values. Jesus tells the story of a rich man who tore down his barns and built bigger barns to store his goods. The man said to himself, “I have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat drink and be merry.” But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?”
    - b) The way to get rid of this type of thorns in our lives is found in Luke 12:34. Jesus says, “For where your treasure is your heart will be also.”
    - c) When we give the Lord of our time, talents, and treasures we are building treasure in heaven.
  3. The 3rd category of thorns Jesus describes is, “The desires for other things.”
    - a) This represents people who are preoccupied with things other than the spiritual, and are determined not to allow their faith to interfere with their fun or their finances. Sometimes it is our desire to acquire worldly wealth that chokes out our desire to follow the Word of God.
- E. Yes, there are many congregations shrinking in size. Several years ago, I visited with a minister in Oklahoma City about declining attendance in Bible class and worship in that congregation. The elders had a difficult time trying to explain why this was occurring. The church started keep-

ing better track of attendance and discovered that people who were faithful in attending weekly were now absent once every four weeks or so. Some of the families that were there three out of four times were now attending only about half of the time. The members' schedules were so full with work, school activities, sports, house repairs, and vacations that attendance to worship had slipped. Some weeds have crept in their lives.

- F. Sometimes trying to "straddle the fence" or stay as close to the line of sin as possible keeps the Word from growing in our lives. "The desire for other things" is essentially being worldly minded. The desire for other things does not have to be sinful things. Even good things, when ill-prioritized, can distract our focus off God. Things such as sports, entertainment, and work can be good, but when placed above God and worship, they can choke out the seed. A sinful lifestyle will choke out the seed as well. Society tells us to indulge ourselves; try it all; get all you can. Almost every commercial on TV and Radio tries to convince us that we cannot live without whatever product or service being offered.
- G. The question is – Why do some people who hear the Word respond positively and bring forth fruit, while others do not?
- H. Jesus' parable shows us that the gospel will not survive in a hard heart, an uncommitted heart, or a crowded heart. Let us all try to have the type of soil needed to produce a crop for the Lord. I want to encourage all of us to go out and encourage people to do some spiritual gardening and uproot those thorns and dig out those rocks in our lives that keep us from growing in God's Word. We all need to ask ourselves the question, "What is the condition of my will?" Do I stubbornly reject the counsel of God – like the hard soil? Is our response to Him only shallow and emotional – like the shallow soil? Is our faith genuine and our will surrendered to His?

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. There are many congregations in America that are shrinking. Some church buildings that were once full of worshippers are now nearly empty. Sometimes it seems that people aren't interested in the gospel. Sometimes we scatter seed, but Satan takes it way --making our work fruitless. We can get so focused on the negatives that we get discouraged and quit trying to evangelize. Before we get too discouraged, we need to also know that evangelism is full of happy surprises. There are reasons to keep sowing the seed. There are congregations that are growing and times that people will be more receptive to the Word of God. Saul of Tarsus is a great example of one who appeared to be thoroughly hardened to the gospel, but he saw the light, and God used him to produce great fruit. We need to let Christ's light shine through us.
- B. We get discouraged when the seed doesn't appear to be producing fruit as it did in the past. We may feel tempted to alter the seed to help it grow, to do some genetic modification to it so that it may be more acceptable to the soil today. We see examples of it all around us: the gospel of "health and wealth," the gospel of "miraculous healing here and now," the gospel of "come as you are –remain as you are," the gospel of "rock'n roll concert worship." We look at this and see buildings full of people and we are tempted to say, "Maybe we should do that too."
- C. There is another way – a better way. Let's don't compromise the seed. Cancel your appointment with Monsanto. We don't preach a GMO gospel.
- D. We need to help people do some gardening in their lives as we sow the seed. We need to show people how we live and how we care for them. We need to put on our gardening gloves and help people pull some "weeds" and remove some "rocks" so that God's word can thrive in their lives. At Camp Arapal in Cebu, Philippines, Salvador Cariaga helps people who are destitute. His goal is to teach people about Christ while assisting those who are destitute and displaced. He provides food, a small piece of land to live on and will even help them build a hut to sleep inside of. One of the most difficult lessons he has to teach to those who are dependent on the church is that they

need to raise a garden while they live there. Most people look at the soil and say, “it is no good!” “It is too shallow!” “It is too rocky!” “It is too much work!” Those who have so many needs become lazy, hopeless, and dependent on the generosity of others. If people live on the camp grounds, Salvador requires that they grow vegetables. He gives them a pick and a small shovel and tells them to dig a hole in that hard rocky soil and break up the rocks, remove them, and put good dirt in that hole and plant something. When I was at the camp, I could hear people pick at the rocks and throw them aside. People soon learned that vegetables could grow there after all. When people saw it was worth the effort they worked even harder on the next patch of soil.

- E. I believe that we need to be out in the world even more letting our lights shine. How will people see the light when we aren’t letting our light shine?
- F. How do we counter a culture that is so worldly minded that the gospel won’t take root or is crowded out by worldly desires?
  1. Sow the seed generously. People change. Conditions change. There are times in people’s lives when they are more receptive to the gospel. Keep on inviting people to Bible Class and worship. Be involved in other’s lives and let them see you give praise and thanks to God.
  2. Stay involved in the community. When the world is ready to do some spiritual weeding, let’s be there to help. In Luther, we are known for evangelism through benevolence. We help those in the community with food, clothes, furniture, and disaster relief. That has opened many doors for us to share our hope. That has given us multiple opportunities to tell people who we are. When people see how much we care, we will have opportunities to tell others who we are and why we care so much.
  3. When we stay involved in the community we will also have opportunities to find common ground. In Luther, the church is known for evangelizing through benevolence work. We don’t just give things away to the community or provide for people’s physical needs. We give the community opportunities to work closely with us so people can see that Christ is our hope. When we work with volunteers from the community we have time to talk about day to day things. We share our feeling and our hopes. We keep planting seeds and help do some spiritual weeding. We keep inviting people to Bible class and worship. When people come to the church building and open the door, they are welcomed in by those they have worked with at the service center. Some of them will eventually be rooted in Christ and grow up in Him.
- G. The good soil is a deep soil that is cultivated and weeded. These people hear the Word, accept it and produce fruit. The seed in that soil grows and bears fruit -- 30, 60, 100 fold. Evangelism can pleasantly surprise us, but for that to happen, we need to keep evangelizing, serving, caring --sowing the seed.
- H. In 1 Peter 1:23 Peter writes, “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.” (NIV)
- I. Sow the seed richly. Don’t just tell the message - show it! Apply it. Are we cultivating the soil? Are we feeding the hungry? Are we clothing the needy in our communities? Are we helping the hurting? Are we doing it consistently? Let’s let our lights shine in the community. Let’s keep planting the seed. Let’s rejoice whenever God gives the increase.

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## **Sixth, that our post-modern society has rejected logic and we need to be able to reason well in order to convert the lost.**

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*Marion Fox*

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Marion R. Fox was born in Sayre, OK, and graduated from Sweetwater High School. He continued his education at the Elk City School of Preaching (receiving a certificate), and Oklahoma Christian College (studying Greek). He has earned the following degrees: Associate of Science, Bachelor of Science, Master of Science, and a Doctorate of Education. He and Cynthia were married in 1966 and they have three children and eight grandchildren.

All of Marion's local work has been in Oklahoma. He has preached over forty years and served the Barnes church of Christ for over thirty years, where he is now serving as an elder. He is the Director of "The Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies" and has served in this for eighteen years. He has had articles appear in the following papers: Gospel Standard, Firm Foundation, Contending for the Faith, One Heart, Gospel Preceptor, Hammer and Tongs, and Think. He has written the following books: A Study of the Biblical Flood, The Work of the Holy Spirit, Vol. I, The Work of the Holy Spirit, Vol. II, The Role of Women, Vol. I, The Role of Women, Vol. II, and The Great Commission. He has also written many outline books for OKCSBS, including: Fundamentals of the Faith, A Study of Angels, Satan, and Demons, and Logic and Debate, Biblical Hermeneutics, Homiletics, and Introduction to the Bible.

As a note of interest, Marion has engaged in six oral debates and two written debates.

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Introduction: Our nation has rejected deductive reasoning for inductive reasoning due to the influence of John Dewey.

I The Scriptures require the child of God to be rational.

A Explicit commands to be rational.

1-Israel was called upon to reason with God (Isa. 1:18).

a-God is calling upon Israel to come to Him and discuss his lawsuit against Israel.

b-Hear the Lord present His case against Israel.

2-We are commanded to "prove all things" (1 Thess. 5:21).

a-Thayer defines the word δοκιμάζω "*to try; 1. to test, examine, prove, scrutinize [to see whether a thing be genuine or not], as metals ... 2. to recognize as genuine after examination, to approve, deem worthy*" [Thayer, p. 154] cf. Trench, p. 293-ff.

b-We have a standard by which to judge matters.

3-The Bereans were called "noble" because they carefully studied what was being taught (Acts 17:11).

a-The Bereans went to the only infallible objective standard to examine the evidence.

b-Remember that faith is based upon evidence (Heb. 11:1).

c-Faith comes from the report of the Word of God (Rom. 10:17).

B Implicit evidence that we must be rational.

1-The Scriptures need to be interpreted (Lk. 24:25-27).

a-This implies that the Scriptures may need to be interpreted.

b-This also implies that there is some systematic method of interpreting the Scriptures.

2-Paul used a series of logical arguments in 1 Cor. 15:12-19.

a-This passage requires that we know something about reasoning in order to understand it.

b-A study of elementary logic would aid the reader in clearly seeing what Paul was arguing.

C Irrational arguments made by some in the Lord's church.

1- Appeal to authority *ad verecundiam* (appeal to reverence).

a-Thayer and Vine are often quoted when they are merely giving their commentaries. (This was discussed in Fox, Vol. I, 2003, Chapter One).

b-Example 1: "Brother so and so does not agree with you on that point; therefore you must be wrong."

c-Example 2: I cannot leave my grandmother's (mother's) religion because I revere her memory.

d-Just a cursory look at various books that have been written in the last 40 years demonstrates that our brethren have slipped into the mold of quoting prominent brethren to prove their point in a doctrinal matter. (Just look at books that were written 70 years ago or more and by-and-large they tried to establish their points by argumentation, but now a significant number of the books quote prominent brethren to prove their points.)

$\alpha$ -What is being done is brethren are just quoting assertions of other brethren.

$\beta$ -These preachers either do not know how to reason from the Word of God or they are lazy and are not studying for themselves. (In either case they should not be writing books.)

2-Logical argument derived from Mk. 16:15-16.

a-Form of a conditional syllogism:

If S, then N

S is true

Therefore, N is true

b-Form of the argument derived from Mk. 16:15-16.

If one is saved, then he has believed and has been baptized.

One is saved.

One has believed and has been baptized.

c-Proper form of a valid conditional syllogism:

If S then N

S is true  
Therefore N is true

d-Definitions of terms:

“A *necessary* condition for the occurrence of a specified event is a circumstance in whose absence the event cannot occur.” (Copi, p. 399)

“A *sufficient* condition for the occurrence of an event is a circumstance in whose presence the event must occur.” (Copi, p. 400)

c-Improper form of the argument derived from Mk. 16:15-16.

If one believes and is baptized, then he is saved.

One believes and is baptized.

One is saved.

$\alpha$ -This syllogism implies that belief and baptism are sufficient for one to be saved (all one has to be to be saved is believe and be baptized).

$\beta$ -This syllogism implies that everyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. (What about one who does not repent? What about one who does not confess?)

d-Proper form of the argument derived from Mk. 16:15-16.

If one is saved, then he has believed and has been baptized.

One is saved.

One has believed and has been baptized.

$\alpha$ -This syllogism is saying that it is sufficient to say that if one is saved, he has both believed and been baptized.

$\beta$ -This syllogism is saying that it is necessary to both believe and be baptized in order to be saved.

$\gamma$ -This syllogism is not saying that belief and baptism are the only conditions for one to be saved.

## II Reasons that a rejection of logic has stymied the growth of the church.

### A Most of the lost do not know how to reason very well.

1-Since God requires that we use our powers of reasoning, a lack of knowledge of how to reason hinders the ability of the Scriptures to convert a person.

a-People are more easily deceived when they do not recognize logical fallacies.

b-People cannot see the truth (for themselves) when they do not reason well.

2-Unsound arguments made by adherents to false religions have confused many people.

a-Some denominations claim there are no works involved in our salvation (Eph. 2:8-10, Rom. 4:2-4, and Tit. 3:4-5).

$\alpha$ -We are justified by works (Jas. 2:20-26)

$\beta$ -The problem with this is that Paul is contemplating works of merit in Eph. 2:10.

γ-The problem with this is that Paul is contemplating works of the Law of Moses in Rom. 4:2-4.

δ-The problem with this is that Paul is contemplating works of merit in Tit. 3:4-5.

b-Most of these denominations claim that baptism is a work, but no scripture teaches that baptism is a work.

α-In fact, baptism (the washing of regeneration) is part of what is involved in salvation (Tit. 3:4-5).

β-Their interpretation implies that the Scriptures contradict themselves.

κ-Baptism saves us (1 Pet. 3:21).

i-Their first claim is: No person is saved by any kind of works. This claim is false (Jas. 2:20-26).

ii-Their second claim is: Baptism is a work. (This claim is false.)

iii-Their conclusion is that no person is saved by baptism.

iv-The Scriptures teach that baptism is a condition of salvation (1 Pet. 3:21, Acts 2:38, Mk. 16:16, Acts 22:16, etc.).

ζ-The “square of opposition” chart demonstrates that this interpretation implies that the Scriptures contradict themselves.

i-The E type proposition is: No person is saved by any kind of works.

ii-This claim is contrary to the A type proposition: All people are saved by works (Jas. 2:20-26).

iii-This claim is contradicted by the I type proposition: Some people are saved by works (Jas. 2:20-26).

c-Some denominations teach that salvation is by “faith only.”

α-They confuse necessary and sufficient conditions in their framing of an argument from such passages as Jn. 8:24. Their argument is:

If one believes, then he is saved.

(They are claiming that belief is a sufficient condition for salvation.)

One believes.

One is saved.

β-The proper logical form of this argument is:

If one is saved, then he has believed. (This makes belief to be a necessary condition for salvation.)

3-Unsound arguments made by skeptics have confused many people.



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## **Seventh, that many members of the church do not know that there is a difference between a false teacher and one who ignorantly teaches doctrinal error.**

*Chris Stinnett*

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Chris Stinnett, was born in Tulsa, OK, and on July 29, 1975, he and Connie were married. He has attended: Oklahoma Christian University, Harding University Graduate School of Religion and receiving a Bachelor and Master's Degrees.

He has preached for 26 years and has worked with church of Christ in Seminole, OK for 16 years. Chris has preached in the following states: Missouri, Michigan, and Oklahoma and has preached in meetings in Texas and Arkansas. This is his second time to speak on the "Annual Oklahoma City Lectures."

Chris has written articles appearing in the Christian Chronicle, 21st Century Christian, Gospel Advocate, Christian Bible Teacher, Leadership Journal and Restoration Quarterly. He has taught classes at Seminole State College and is Religious Editor for the Seminole Producers.

Chris served in United States Coast Guard: 1975 – 1979.

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### **Introduction:**

When I came to work with the church of Christ at Seminole in 1998, I came from the greater Detroit area, where I had worked for several years. Within a couple of months of my arrival in Seminole, I was the target of an attack letter from outside the congregation addressed to my elders. My supposed fault was that I was preaching and teaching from the New International Version of the Bible. The individual had never heard a sermon I had preached, had no knowledge of any doctrinal error promulgated by me, had never talked to me or even attended a worship service where I was present. The person had heard from a relative that I was preaching from the NIV and concluded that I was certainly a modernist change agent, trying to lead people away from the truth and into rebellion against God. The writer strongly urged the elders of the Seminole church to require me to use a preferred translation or else cease supporting my ministry.

It hurts to be attacked like that. My elders replied with a letter of thanks for the interest the person showed. They assured the writer that they carefully monitored the teaching in the church. Nobody else in the congregation knew about it.

This incident could be multiplied countless times and intensified beyond measure, but it points up an ugly character trait among some who would be leaders—a spirit of contention and arrogance. Churches that spend their energy fighting don't grow. Visitors who enter a congregation characterized by constant fault-finding very quickly run away, correctly believing that they soon will be vilified for some transgression, real or imaginary. This contentious spirit is ugly and scary and does nothing to glorify Christ. It is not a Christian trait.

### **I. From where has this argumentative spirit come?**

#### **A. The Frontier Thesis:**

In 1893, the influential American historian Frederick Jackson Turner delivered an address, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," which came to dominate American history, summarized as "The Frontier Thesis." Briefly stated, he charged that the political policies, laws, and cultural practices of the United States were shaped by the interests of the frontier. Since our nation had a frontier since its inception, and since the frontier was often a place where civilization and its influence was lacking, certain personality traits could be detected within the attitudes of the citizens on the frontier.

Turner identified several characteristics of frontier residents, but among the attitudes commonly found were such things as:

1. Individualism and Self-reliance. With nobody nearby to call for help, residents of the frontier were forced to rely on their own strength, ingenuity and resources.
2. Emotionalism. There were a great many things on the frontier to elicit strong emotion: sudden death, crippling injuries, natural disasters, births, weddings, etc. Frontier folk were accustomed to giving vent to their emotions.
3. Populism. There was no ingrained respect for authority, breeding, position or nobility. People were accepted without reservation and nobody deferred to anyone else. All were considered equal and all retained the right of private judgment and personal conscience.
4. Pugnacious spirit. Frontier folk were accustomed to fights and welcomed a brawl. They were quite ready to defend their opinions with fists or a duel if they had no other ability.

These, and other similar traits, helped to shape America and create a cultural milieu that was distinctive to our nation. The last of the frontier only disappeared in the early 20th century and it could be argued that in isolated rural areas in the southwest and the far north, it has not yet been supplanted by civilization and the rule of law.

#### B. The power of debates to shape public thinking.

For many years, important public policy questions were explored and decided by means of public debates. It was believed that a fair and comprehensive hearing would result in the exposure of truth. This was embodied in the New England-style town hall meeting, but was widely practiced across the U.S. Perhaps the most famous such debate was the series of public debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas in the 1850s that clarified the legal and moral issues surrounding the institution of slavery and the trajectory of the union.

One of the most influential religious debates of the era was the debate between Alexander Campbell and Bishop Purcell of the Roman Catholic Church concerning the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. The debate was conducted in January 1837, was attended by large crowds in Cincinnati, Ohio, and was published in book form, resulting in even wider exposure. Campbell undertook the debate at the urging of community leaders, since he had shown himself so able a debater against Baptists, Presbyterians and the Utopian, Robert Owen.

In imitation of Campbell, and in a desire to promote New Testament Christianity, many other preachers engaged in public debates, with varying degrees of success. The ability to debate became a badge of honor and, when coupled with the American spirit of pugnacity, became practically a duty to gospel preachers. To win a debate would label the speaker as a defender of the truth and someone to be reckoned with in the kingdom of God.

Sadly, the desire to “win” the debate rapidly overshadowed the search for truth, and debates degenerated to side-shows for entertainment rather than serious engagement with the issues. Tactics and strategy, along with sophistic tricks, became more important than the issues and the facts. The bankruptcy of public debate was graphically illustrated in the 1960 Kennedy/Nixon presidential debate. Listeners on the radio believed Nixon easily carried the day by his encyclopedic knowledge of foreign affairs, while TV viewers gave the palm to Kennedy, largely on the strength of his youthful good looks and healthy appearance. This cemented the

shift from debate to propaganda in public policy issues. Most public policy issues today are determined by an advertising campaign directed at a single point of view. Entertainment also plays a part in shaping opinion, and sympathetic treatments in drama can completely overshadow the facts, as evidenced by the stage play and later film, “Inherit The Wind,” portraying the Scopes trial in Tennessee as a moral conflict between the noble champions of scientific thought and the bigoted, ignorant religionists.

- C. The intersection of these two elements results in a decidedly American tendency to argue, more with a goal of winning the argument than a goal of being truthful and right. Especially to young men who have been inflamed with the thought that their Biblical education is far superior to any previous generation’s training, their brashness and American arrogance may lead them to challenge—publicly, harshly, and unbiblically—any doctrine, real or imaginary, with which they believe themselves in disagreement. The marriage of ignorance and arrogance rarely produces admirable children.

## II. How should we deal with a false teacher?

It seems to me that the first order of business should be to determine whether to deal with a false teacher rather than ask how it should be done. It is not clear that in every circumstance it is our duty so to do. Perhaps this is best determined by asking a series of questions. The answers to these questions will direct our actions in harmony with God’s will.

- A. Question #1: Is the teacher truly rebellious against the Lord? Or is he merely mistaken?

If the teacher is merely mistaken, we may be able to serve the Lord by privately pointing out the error we believe we see.

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check (James 3:1-2 NIV).

A few years ago, I received in the mail a monthly publication which I look forward to reading. The editor in that month spent perhaps 15% of the publication’s pages railing against the “false” teaching of “salvation by grace alone.” I read the entire article, waiting to discover what portion of our salvation he believed was the result of our good works, but nothing indicated he actually believed we are saved by any portion of our works. Naturally, the truth is we are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8-10) without any part of our salvation the result of our good works. The editor, I was convinced, confused “faith alone” (meaning a faith undemonstrated by any actions) with “grace alone” and launched a strong argument against the “faith alone” position, unconsciously substituting “grace” in place of “faith.” I chose to send him an e-mail, complimenting him on the publication and pointing out that I thought he mistakenly stated something that he, himself, did not believe. He replied that his readers knew what he meant—which confirmed to my mind that he had merely made a mistake. He did, and does, believe that our salvation is a matter only of the grace of God. He had no intention of promoting the heresy of salvation by means of works. Our correspondence was entirely private, and nobody knew, or needed to know, of our exchange.

Of course, James exposed a truth about us all. We can be mistaken in what we say, including what we teach. If a teacher is merely mistaken, there is no reason for anyone to attempt disciplinary action. Yet what shall we do if the teacher is clearly rebellious and is attempting to promote a doctrine of unfaithfulness?

- B. Question #2: If the teacher is definitely rebellious against the Lord, is this teaching or teacher a danger to the congregation where I work?

If the teacher or teaching poses no danger to the congregation where I work, it simply is not my responsibility to take any action in the matter. If I choose to insinuate myself in such a matter, there is a word that describes that: meddler.

If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer, or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler (1 Peter 4:15 NIV).

When the Lord wrote individual letters to the churches of Asia in Revelation 2 and 3, He spoke to each separately. He did not urge the church at Philadelphia to withdraw fellowship from the church at Sardis or from Laodicea. Each congregation had its own direction from the Lord and each had its own responsibilities. There is Biblical warrant for a congregation to disfellowship a rebellious brother; there is no Biblical warrant for a congregation or a single Christian to disfellowship another congregation or any member of another congregation. That takes us back into the realm of meddling. Yet what shall we do if this teacher or teaching is actually dangerous to the congregation where I work?

- C. Question #3: If the teacher or teaching is dangerous to the congregation where I work, what shall I do in response?

If there is actual danger to the congregation, any preacher or teacher has a responsibility to warn the brethren and teach accurately what the Scriptures say.

Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position (2 Peter 3:17 NIV).

When the North Richland Hills Church of Christ made the calculated decision to introduce the use of instruments of music into their worship, Rick Atchley had the integrity to preach three presentations as a justification for this practice. The church made the presentations available on their website to be downloaded and heard in their entirety—including laudatory introductory remarks by selected elders and whistles, cheers and applause at the conclusion of each address. The introduction of instruments is a nonbiblical practice and it was my judgment that, by North Richland Hills' attendance and presumed influence, it was important for me to address that false teaching. To ignore it would be to leave our people—especially our young people—defenseless against the reasons advanced and, also, to leave a false impression that we simply had no rebuttal to offer.

With my elders' permission, I downloaded the three lessons by Rick Atchley, split them into portions, and spent 13 Sunday mornings teaching a combined adult/youth Bible class the truth about worship music and the false logic and dishonest pronouncements used to promote that position. The ability to hear the teacher in his own words and refute him immediately had a powerful influence on the congregation, encouraging the older members and enlightening those who had never heard our reasons for purely vocal music in worship.

My intention was to deal with the false teaching. It was not my responsibility to vilify the speaker or his superiors. It was my intention to empower my hearers with the truth so that they would not be carried away by the error of lawless men as were so many of the members at North Richland Hills. I believe that the great majority of the 4,000 or so members there were baptized elsewhere and were left untaught about the basics of our faith, or were simply worn down by many years of preaching and teaching leading toward that departure from the ancient faith.

These questions, and the Biblical answers to them, should guide our response to teaching that is not in harmony with the truth of Scripture. Naturally, this presupposes that none of us are elders where the teacher is active; their responsibility is markedly different and would be guided by the Scriptures dealing with church discipline. My remarks are intended for teachers and leaders who become aware of intentional and rebellious doctrinal error that originates outside our own congregations.

It seems to me that a serious warning should be inserted here. Those who seek to correct another's error must be very, very careful about judging the thoughts, motives and intentions of the teachers involved. It requires a very nice ability to know someone's heart—bordering on the omniscience of God. If you are able to know someone's heart as the inspired apostle Paul could (Philippians 1:17-18), then you can pronounce about his motives. If you don't possess that supernatural ability, I would recommend dealing with the false teaching and not attempting to label the teacher himself as "false." Again, it seems appropriate to note that there is no warrant in Scripture to discipline people in other cities or congregations although we are strictly charged to take care of our own souls (Romans 16:17-18; 2 Thessalonians 3:14). It is in that spirit of self-defense that I offer the following dangers for those seeking to remove the sawdust from another's eye (Matthew 7:3-5).

If I arrogate to myself the role of brotherhood censor:

1. I puff myself up in pride and consider that I am competent to judge every major doctrine and fine point of wisdom, opinion and taste. A stern warning in 2 Timothy 3:1-5 should be heard in this moment.
2. I look carefully to see what others are doing wrong and I rush to condemn them. Romans 14:4, 9-12 should be examined to determine whether this is righteous in the sight of God. It was said of the ancient Roman, Cato the Censor, "He loved not the right half so much as he hated the wrong." This is no compliment.
3. I congratulate myself on the destruction of others and consider their ruin to be a vindication of my holiness. This mind is contrary to the mandate in Ephesians 4:29-32.

Overall, it seems to me that we spend far too much time looking for trouble instead of looking for God's lost children. I am convinced that we will always find what we're looking for, so perhaps we should change our emphasis if any of us desires to police the brotherhood as a way of attracting lost souls to Christ. I just don't think that will work.

### III. What shall we actually do about the declining growth rate among churches of Christ?

Doubtless by now, you've heard a lot of statistics. As I write this, the latest figures reported to me show that from 2000-2012, our membership actually declined in the U.S. by about 5%. This is a terrible fact to face, yet apparently it is true. Lately, I have been told that from 2012-2013, our numbers are unchanged. This would indicate that it is unwarranted to extrapolate the extermination of the church in the U.S. from the 12 year decline.

Concerning the decline in the growth rate of the church:

#### A. Growth rate decline in the U.S. is not isolated to our fellowship.

A comprehensive 2008 Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey noted actual decline among almost all religious groups in the U.S. except Mormons and Muslims (their growth is almost exclusively the result of statistically very high birth rates). The study also revealed that there is a very great deal of shifting in and out of existing religious groups. (The entire report can be accessed and downloaded as a PDF document at this URL:

<http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf>

This shows the continued trend that was noticed in the 1990s by Dr. Flavil Yeakley. He pointed out that in the 1980s, our Decadal Growth Rate was 5.7%, which put us in the sixth position among the 15 largest religious groups in the U.S. The top spot for the 1980s was occupied by the Assemblies of God denomination, which boasted a Decadal Growth Rate of 34%! However, this actually marked a sharp decline from their 1970s DGR of 77%!

There are complex cultural forces in play that we have largely ignored, to our detriment. The study of church growth is the study of sociological, and not theological, movements. It is not surprising that the Lord would use methods of persuasion and influence that will be influential in human beings since He created us and knows precisely how we can be motivated to hear and obey the gospel! Nevertheless, it seems to me that we have focused on knowing, obeying and proclaiming the truth without taking into account how people hear.

There is excellent demographic research done by William Howe and Bill Strauss that reveals what attracts and repels people. They show very clearly that the methods and emphases of previous generations will not communicate now. In addition, the research by Thom Rainer thoroughly explores the attitudes of the unchurched and shows how we may speak to them in persuasive ways. Typically, elders, preachers and other leaders in local churches have no idea that such materials exist or how to access, analyze and adapt them.

- B. Previous high growth rates among U.S. churches of Christ were the result of these same complex cultural factors.

The G.I. generation (a label coined by Howe and Strauss, by the way!) exited the Great Depression and World War II exhausted by a sense of continual danger. They longed for a message of progress and hope, a brighter future for their children and a safer, happier world. Instead, they got the looming specter of nuclear annihilation and a Cold War that threatened to heat up at any second. Since hope was not to be found on this earth, it had to be sought elsewhere.

Into this atmosphere, Tex Stevens and Jule Miller developed an evangelistic tool that could be used easily by any church member. And they did. And the church exploded in growth. In one Gospel Advocate article, Tex Stevens made the assertion that the Visualized Bible Study was responsible for 40,000 baptisms since its introduction. That total seems to me to be low.

The explosive church growth experienced by churches of Christ in the 1950s, 1960s and into the 1970s were the result largely of two factors: a world hungry for a message of hope, and an organized method of presenting that message. Our success in those years likely led us unthinkingly to conclude that we deserved credit for the cascade of conversions, in contradiction to 1 Corinthians 3:6-7.

- C. The serious study of church growth is very well documented since the 1970 publication of Donald McGavran's "Understanding Church Growth," now in its third edition.

In addition to McGavran's body of work, a great number of researchers have explored the factors leading to acceptance of the "Christian" (broadly understood) message and the retention of dedicated and active members among religious groups in the U.S. They consistently identify the factors that attract, motivate and bond new people to religious groups. The factors are surprisingly few in our current culture, but it is vital in this moment to note one thing:

There is no real mystery to our anemic growth and retention rates. If a person wants to lose weight, all the diets, exercise programs, special foods, and so on reduce to one simple concept: burn more calories than you ingest. Biophysics will take over and you will lose weight. Similarly, if we want to improve our growth rate in churches of Christ, we must evangelize so that God will convert more souls than we lose to death or unfaithfulness. If we do that, the church will grow.

Necessarily, this involves two broad areas of concern:

1. Retention of current members must be a strong emphasis among church leaders. Based on current cultural factors, dedicated programs involving personal transformation in holiness, important and sacrificial service to others, and persistent messages of hope in Christ will be critical to this effort.
2. Evangelism must be recovered as a ministry for all Christians. Currently, many members avoid evangelism and training in evangelism due to a perception that it involves memorization of sweeping segments of Scripture, a naturally winning and outgoing personality, salesmanship, and the welcoming of abuse from strangers accosted with the canned presentation. Just as Tex Stevens and Jule Miller developed a cutting-edge multimedia presentation, so we must avail ourselves of every communication tool to present a simple, engaging and non-adversarial presentation of the gospel message. We must give our members tools that focus on hope, joy and peace that can be gained in Christ Jesus our Lord. We must train them to offer that message to their family and friends so that they can be an influence for Christ very naturally and amicably. The model for that method of evangelism is found in Jesus' charge to the man freed from his demons:

Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed (Mark 5:19-20 NIV).

The man was charged to go and tell his own story of an encounter with the Lord that changed his life. This is one method of many to tell the gospel, but it is a method with ample support. The apostle Paul told his story again and again to demonstrate that God is full of mercy and grace to sinners (Acts 22, Acts 26, Galatians 1, Ephesians 3, Philippians 3 and 1 Timothy 1, for example). It may be one strong reason the book "Muscle and a Shovel" has gained such firestorm status within our brotherhood—it simply tells one man's struggle to hear and obey the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it does so without attacking or condemning other religious groups. A number of anecdotes relate that members are purchasing copies of the book simply to give away to their family members and friends in an attempt to draw attention to a compelling presentation of the saving gospel. It is the responsibility of teachers and leaders within the church to put into the hands of the members the necessary tools to tell the gospel as a friend and neighbor, not as an adversary seeking to conquer resistance.

## **Conclusion:**

It is undeniable by any thinking Christian that our world has changed, becoming very much less concerned with morality and ethics, and very much more driven by a desire for luxury, sensuality and personal license. Previous methods of delivering the unchanging message of the gospel are far less likely to influence souls for Christ.

At the same time, a great number of people around us are hungry for true spiritual teaching and a genuine message of redemption and hope. They are starving and they have no idea how to satisfy their souls.

Meanwhile, most members of churches of Christ have little interest in promoting the spiritual riches we have in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14). We have succumbed to what Donald McGavran labeled “redemption and lift.” This describes the phenomenon that usually accompanies obedience to the gospel: as we obey Christ and live in His will, our lives stabilize and improve and we gain material, social and educational blessings in the wake of our Christian conduct. Once we get comfortable enough, wealthy enough and sufficiently distracted by the cares of life, we forget the source of all our blessings and inexplicably seek the approval of the world that has set itself in hostility to God. Very rapidly our evangelistic and spiritual fervor cools and we reject the consistent call to improvement in holiness and sacrificial service to others, including promoting the gospel message.

If we have any desire to reverse the decline of the church over the past decade or so, it will begin by our renewing our spiritual fervor to seek and serve the Lord. We can only lead people forward in their growth; we cannot drive or harangue them into service. We must reject the siren pull of the “quick fix,” by seeking to blame our failure on dull and antiquated worship practices, or the incorrigible nature of our society, or a perverse propensity for conflict and division within the brotherhood. If we identify these as the cause of our decline, we will be tempted to unbiblical compromises in an attempt to attract and mollify people who are not really interested in submission to Christ. Our failure is only due to our unfaithfulness in executing the Lord’s sovereign plan for the redemption of humanity. We did not arrive at this melancholy condition overnight and we should not expect to recover our former momentum rapidly, either. We must recover our faithfulness to Christ and lead God’s people forward, trusting in Him to give the increase in due season.

‘Let us go at once to entreat the LORD and seek the LORD Almighty. I myself am going’  
(Zechariah 8:21b NIV).

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## **Eighth, that many in the church are justifying their practices on human traditions.**

*Willard Cox*

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Willard Cox was born in Florence, AL. He and Yvonne were married on December 21, 1951e and they have five children: Ronald, Donald, Gerald, Sharon (Smith), and Curtis.

Willard has preached for 60 years. More than any other speaker on our lectureship! He has preached in the following states: Alabama, Florida, Texas, Oklahoma, , Missouri, and North Carolina. He has had meetings and spoke on lectureships in the following states: New Mexico, Tennessee, Wisconsin, Colorado, and Oklahoma. He retired from local preaching about two years ago. Willard also served the Barnes church of Christ, sharing the preaching with Marion Fox for a number of years. While here he taught in the "Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies" while working with the Barnes church. He and Yvonne are dearly loved by the members of the Barnes church! He has written articles appearing in "House to House, Heart to Heart."

NOTE OF INTEREST: Willard taught 55 lessons on the Life of Christ, teaching nearly every week for 14 months.

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*Eph. 5:14; Rom. 13:11; I Cor. 15:34*

### **Introduction**

#### **I The church did well in the first century**

- A. The church that Jesus built came into existence on the first Day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended back into heaven.
  - 1. The church of Christ came into existence in Jerusalem.
  - 2. It did well. It preached Christ, and His way of salvation. It grew rapidly from 3,000 on its very first day (Acts 2:41).
  - 3. The apostles of Christ and the New Testament prophets were not timid, nor ashamed of Christ.
- B. The church that Jesus built continued to grow in Jerusalem..
  - 1. Acts 4:4; "...many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about 5,000."
  - 2. Acts 5:14; "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women."
  - 3. "The word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7).
- C. In the meantime, persecution came upon the church.
  - 1. Stephen had preached a great sermon in rebuking his people, the Jews, for killing the Old Testament prophets, and "the Just One" (Acts 7:52).
  - 2. After they heard the sermon, they stoned Stephen to death (vs. 59, 60), and he became the first Christian to be martyred.
  - 3. Saul, who became the apostle Paul, was there consenting to the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1).
  - 4. Saul began to make havoc of the church, and committed men and women to prison (v. 3).
- D. The Church continued to grow in many other places.
  - 1. Acts 8:4; "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.

2. Persecution even made the church grow when it caused people to scatter to other places.
  3. The church grew from Jerusalem throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and the local churches were edified (Acts 9:31).
  4. Later the church was established in Antioch in Syria (Acts 11:20- 30) to where the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas, who went to Tarsus to get Saul, and it was at this Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians Acts (Acts 11:26).
    - a. It was also here at this local church of Christ where relief was sent to “the brethren that dwelt in Judea” during a great dearth by Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:28-30).
    - b. Also, from this great church Paul later went on three Missionary Journeys. The first one with Barnabas (Acts 13:4), the second with Silas (Acts 16:40), and the third missionary journey, Paul left Antioch by himself (Acts 18:22, 23).
- E. All these Bible verses are given to us so that we may understand that the church that Jesus built is a living body, designed to grow, bear fruit of righteousness, and teach God’s way of salvation.
1. A parable of Jesus tells that the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, a very tiny seed, when planted can grow and become a tree where birds can lodge (Matt. 13:31,32).
  2. Isaiah had prophesied that “in the last days the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountain, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isa 2:2, 3).
  3. As Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, he prophesied that God would set up a kingdom, the church, during the days of the fourth kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, Rome, that would stand forever (Dan. 2:44).
  4. Yes, God’s spiritual kingdom, “the mountain of the Lord’s house”, the church, has been established, as the prophets prophesied, it has grown world-wide, brought glory to God in preaching the Gospel, and has caused thousands of people to obey the Gospel, and to have the hope of heaven. The church has been attacked; its members have been persecuted, and killed.
  5. Yet the church shall continue to exist somewhere until Christ returns, and endure forever (Col. 3: 1-4).
- III In some localities the church has failed in being as evangelistic as it should, and has become weak, and dies. How sad!
- A. The church that Jesus built existed in Sardis for a few years, but it died.
1. “...Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead (Rev. 3: 1).
  2. They went through some outward appearances that they were alive. They met together; they may have allowed some bad traditions to be promoted to weaken their Gospel preaching; and they did not have the zeal of godly worship and work.
  3. God knew their works, and their works were not perfect before God (Rev. 3:1,2), and God told them to repent, and He would reward them when they became strong again and over-came their weaknesses (Rev. 3:2,5).
- B. It is sad that some local churches became weak and sickly, and some grew weary in teaching the Gospel to others.
1. The church in Corinth became weak and sickly, because they had misused the Lord’s Supper by partaking of it in an unworthy manner. They were not discerning the Lord’s body; they were not examining themselves like they should do (I Cor. 11:27-30). It was a bad tradition!

2. The church at Ephesus had many good characteristics, but they had left their first love, and were told to “repent, and do the first works” (Rev. 2:4, 5). Their personal desires and traditions came first.
3. The churches of Galatia had allowed false teachers to come and teach error. Paul wrote to the in Gal. 1:2-6-8: “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that hath called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that we preached unto you, let him be accursed.”

#### IV Traditions and Church Growth

- A. Some local churches of Christ today in the twenty-first century in the year of 2014 are not growing like they did in the first century, or in the 1800’s, or even in the 1950’s.
  1. It is sad that many members of the church are justifying their practices on the traditions that they have heard from their youth up instead of Book, chapter and verse in the Bible.
  2. These unlearned members generally may have good morals, and attend the services regularly, but their traditions of going through the motions, and by emphasizing the outward and material things of the church, they do not know why the church teaches and practices certain things, except “we have always done it this way”.
    - a. Christians need to realize that singing praises to God and admonishing one another, are commands of God that we must worship Him, and that praying to God, hearing a sermon, partaking of the Lord’s supper, and giving money cheerfully as we have been prospered, are commands that God gave His ways for us to worship Him, not by man’s traditions.
    - b. Some people grow up and do not know what the Bible teaches, yet they are outwardly doing what the Bible teaches, because people who have a great knowledge of the Bible had taught their parents, and their parents taught them, and they follow the tradition of their parents, grandparents etc.
    - c. All members need to know that our worship is authorized by God’s Word, the New Testament.
- B. Consider the worship service of the church of Christ on Sunday.
  1. We may have an opening prayer, followed by two or three hymns, and a Scripture reading, and another prayer.
  2. Probably next we will have a Bible sermon from the preacher on a much needed spiritual or moral subject, and another hymn to encourage hearers to come and obey the Gospel or confess their sins. Later we partake of the Lord’s supper, give a portion of our income to help in the God’s work of the church (I Cor. 16:2), and have a closing prayer.
  3. All this is not just “church of Christ tradition”, but it is Bible teaching with Book, chapter and verse.
  4. It is Bible teaching that determines how and what we do to worship God, not traditions of a few generations that our ancestors set for us.
  5. Some church members in this recent or current generation may think our worship, work, organization are mere “church of Christ traditions” handed down from several generations, but No, this is not true.
  6. Some people in these present generations are like Israel of old, that Paul described in Romans 10:2,3: “For I bear them record that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, for they, being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God”.

7. They are not intentional false teachers, but they have not yet learned the truth, the New Testament pattern for the church.
  8. They are somewhat like Apollos who had the zeal and ability to teach, but he taught only the baptism of John, so Aquila and Priscilla “expounded unto him the way of the Lord more perfectly” (Acts 18:25,26). Apollos then became a great teacher in “showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ” (Acts 18:28)
- C. The tradition of being “politically correct” that was begun a few years ago has slowed down the rate of growth of the churches of Christ.
1. Members of the church want to be friendly with their neighbors, relatives, and friends.
  2. They do not want to offend them, or break a good relationship between them. They fail to discuss their differences with them for fear of hurting their feelings.
  3. Christians, obedient believers of the New Testament, often forget who we are, and our duties to God.
    - a. We are lovers of truth. We love Jesus, and the lost.
    - b. Jesus said “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).
    - c. In His intercessory prayer, Jesus said to God, “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17). God’s word, the Bible is truth, and we must always stand up for Bible truth and teach it.
    - d. John 8:32: “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” It is “truth” not error, not the traditions of men, that makes us free from sin. The truth makes us free from sin when we believe it, and obey it.
    - e. In talking with people who are following the traditions and doctrines of men, we must remember to do as we are taught in Ephesians 4:15: “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ”.
    - f. Love leads the way in bringing people to Christ. “Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful be courteous” (I Pet. 3:8).
    - g. “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient” (2 Tim. 2:24).
  4. Christians, members of the church which Jesus built, are soldiers of Christ, who must always stand up for Christ and His word.
    - a. Paul wrote (2Tim. 2:3,4) “Thou therefore endure hardship, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.” --Christians must be loving, faithful, spiritual soldiers.
    - b. Eph. 6:10-17: “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the devil. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and suppli-

cation in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” We must fight the devil to teach truth to people.

5. We need to be soul-winners for Jesus, because of our love for Jesus, and because of our love for those who are lost in sin. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world.
- D. The Tradition of being Slow to Change, and not to keep up with the subtitles of the devil.
1. 2 Cor. 11:3; “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty,…”
  2. The devil is crafty, sly, cunning, in knowing how to tempt people and cause them to sin against God. He is a liar and the father of it.(John 8:44).
  3. We, as Christians today, must be aware of his devices, be alert, be prepared not to yield to sinful traditions, and be prepared to give to others Bible verses of right living.
  4. As the world is lured by satan’s devices and keeps up with many of the new appeals of lustful pleasures, the people of God must step up the pace with more Bible verses with a richer, and deeper understanding of God’s word of what is right and what is wrong, so people can resist and over-come the snares of the devil’s tricks.
  5. As the secular world promotes the traditions and cultures of men, and the snares of the devil, so must Christians, the obedient members of the church that Jesus built, steadily promote emphatically the true ethics of Christ and His true tradition of salvation from sin.,
  6. The farther some people go from God and the Bible, the closer Christians should stay with God and His Word, the Bible.

## V Traditions : Man’s and God’s

### A. Man’s

1. Matt. 15:2, 3; The Pharisees asked Jesus, “Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?”
2. Matt 15:6; “Thus ye have made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.”
3. Gal. 1:14; Paul said, “...I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it, and profited in the Jews’ religion, above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.”

Man’s traditions were made by the Jewish rulers, so evidently the man-made traditions originated to get a bigger following..

### B. God’s

1. 2 Thess. 2:15; “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”
2. 2 Thess. 3:6; “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.”

God’s traditions were set by the inspired apostles and prophets as examples or patterns of how the early church carried out the things revealed to them. Their traditions were not mere descriptions of what they did, but prescriptions for the church to continue to observe, such as the example for Christians today to partake of the Lord’s supper on the first day of the week as the New Testament church did (Acts 20:7).

### C. Church Traditions

1. Various local churches have had some traditions for years that are good for them. These traditions do not make God's Word of none effect, like one of the Jewish leaders' tradition did.  
(See Matt. 15:6).
2. When I was a boy, the church of Christ which I attended boy, had the tradition each year for decades, their Gospel meeting to begin on the second Sunday of August. It was the best time of the year, according to the older church members because for the farmers, the second Sunday in August was right between the times in which the farmers had their crops "laid by" in late July and cotton picking time in September.  
  
But times have changed. That old tradition of man is now out of date. It never was a command of God to have your Gospel meeting to begin on the second Sunday in August. Decades ago, the members started having the Gospel meetings at various times.
3. Back in the late 1950's the under-ground water table became so low in the Texas panhandle, a church of Christ in a town out there changed their tradition from a mid-afternoon Sunday service to a later afternoon service, for there was no irrigation in the late afternoon because it had become too expensive to pump irrigation water from deeper wells. The later afternoon service was still more convenient with the members, friends and travelers. The mid-afternoon service may have prevented some from attending afternoon worship service at all. Some old traditions and can do more harm than good.
4. Some local churches had a tradition of purchasing all their Bible class material at a certain publishing house. They probably did it for years. Some things in the church are left up to what the elders or the men think is the most expedient in doing God's work.
5. Some churches of Christ have a tradition that announcements be made before the worship service. Other churches of Christ have this tradition at the end of the worship service. Each local church is autonomous.
6. There are fellowship traditions in some local churches to show appreciation and to give encouragement to their Bible class teachers, traditions to give congratulations and encouragement to their graduating seniors from high school, traditions to have a area wide singings with other nearby churches of Christ and traditions for godly weddings, and showers, etc. Such traditions should always be done with love, peace, fairness, helpfulness and good will to all. All such traditions should surely help, and not hurt the local church in spreading the Gospel of salvation. "Love the brotherhood" (1 Pet. 2:17).
7. Jesus taught against traditions that transgress the commandments of God. Jesus said to the Pharisees: "Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition" (Matt. 15:2-6). Therefore individual Christians and local churches of Christ should never allow a tradition of man to transgress a commandment of God.
8. We as individuals and as churches of Christ need to be more diligent and enthusiastic, in evangelism and in doing all of God's will.
  - a. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:5, "Ye, also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood,..." (We are not "gold bricks" that just lay idle.)
  - b. When Philip was told by the Spirit to go near a chariot going toward Gaza, he ran to the chariot, got up into the chariot, preached Jesus unto to the Ethiopian eunuch, and baptized him (Acts 8:26-39).
  - c. Gal. 4:18; "But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you." (See also Titus 2:14.)

VI Bible verses that tell us what to do, why to do them, and how to live a life approved by God.

- A. Matt. 6:33; “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”
- B. Rom. 12 :2; “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”
- C. 2 Cor.9:8; “God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.”
- D. 2 Tim. 2:2; “And the things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”
- E. Heb. 9:27: “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.”
- F. 2 Cor. 5:10; “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”
- G. Rev. 2:10,11; “...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”
- H. Phil. 4:4-9; “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.

Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which, passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me do: and the God of peace shall be with you.”





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## **Ninth, that the church has split over various issues, while Jesus plainly stated (by implication) that division among believers will hinder the growth of the church.**

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*Marion R. Fox*

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Profile Marion R. Fox was born in Sayre, OK, and graduated from Sweetwater High School. He continued his education at the Elk City School of Preaching (receiving a certificate), and Oklahoma Christian College (studying Greek). He has earned the following degrees: Associate of Science, Bachelor of Science, Master of Science, and a Doctorate of Education. He and Cynthia were married in 1966 and they have three children and eight grandchildren.

All of Marion's local work has been in Oklahoma. He has preached over forty years and served the Barnes church of Christ for over thirty years, where he is now serving as an elder. He is the Director of "The Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies" and has served in this for eighteen years. He has had articles appear in the following papers: Gospel Standard, Firm Foundation, Contending for the Faith, One Heart, Gospel Preceptor, Hammer and Tongs, and Think. He has written the following books: A Study of the Biblical Flood, The Work of the Holy Spirit, Vol. I, The Work of the Holy Spirit, Vol. II, The Role of Women, Vol. I, The Role of Women, Vol. II, and The Great Commission. He has also written many outline books for OKCSBS, including: Fundamentals of the Faith, A Study of Angels, Satan, and Demons, and Logic and Debate, Biblical Hermeneutics, Homiletics, and Introduction to the Bible.

As a note of interest, Marion has engaged in six oral debates and two written debates.

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### *Jn. 17:20-23*

Introduction: Any time there is division, in the Lord's Church, there is sin on the part of at least one party to the division. Division causes some people not to obey the gospel (Jn. 17:20-23).

*Jn. 17:20 Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me. 22 And the glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them; that they may be one, even as we are one; 23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that thou didst send me, and lovedst them, even as thou lovedst me.*

1-The unity of the followers of Christ would cause the world to believe (Jn. 17:21).

2-The Lord intended for there to be unity among His disciples (Jn. 17:22).

3-The unity of the followers of Christ would cause His disciples to be perfected (Jn. 17:23).

#### **I Division over matters that constitute sin.**

**A** When the church divides over matters of sin, those who are guilty of the sin are responsible for the division (Rom. 16:17-18).

1- Some have introduced sinful practices into the worship of the Lord's church.

- a- Some congregations have introduced instrumental music into the worship of the church.
  - α- We have authority to engage in a specific kind of vocal music (singing – Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16).
  - β- The specific commandment to sing excludes all other kinds of music.
  - γ- There is no scriptural authority for instrumental music in the worship of the Lord's church.
  
- b- Some congregations have introduced women leaders into the worship of the church.
  - α- Men are commanded to be the prayer leaders (1 Tim. 2:8).
  - β- Men are commanded to be the teachers (1 Tim. 2:11-12).
  - γ - Men are commanded to be the speakers in the assembly (1 Cor. 14:33b-36).
  
- c- Some congregations have introduced hand clapping into the worship of the church.
  - α- Hand clapping for a sermon preached. (This essentially makes the sermon to be a performance – entertainment for the audience.)
  - β- Hand clapping for a baptism. (This essentially makes the baptism to be a performance – entertainment for the audience.)
  - γ- Both sermons (preaching God's word) and baptisms are holy acts and are not to be treated like something common (a performance at a theatre).
  - ⌘- The Children of Israel were forbidden to profane the holy things (Lev. 22:15, Num. 18:32, Lev. 10:10, Ezek. 22:26, etc.).
  - ⌚- Peter (a Christian) was forbidden to make something that was holy to be common (Acts 10:15).
  - λ- Where is our fear of God (in treating something that is holy like a common performance)?
  
- d- Some congregations have introduced dedications of babies into the worship of the church.
  - α- This practice has been adopted from the denominations who dedicate their babies

when they baptize them.

- β- We dedicate our babies when we obey the gospel – we pledge to obey the Lord with our whole life.
- e- Some congregations have introduced choirs into the worship of the church.
- α- Our singing is to the Lord (Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16), not to an audience of people.
- β- Some people seem to think that they can offer to God whatever they are pleased to do as worship to God. People seem to think that they can “barter” with God on what they are to do in worship.
- ⌘- Some people seem to think they can haggle (barter) with God (as they would a seller of goods in a marketplace) concerning what pleases God in worship.
- 2- We need to understand our rightful place with regard to God. (cf. Fox, 2006, *The role of women, Vol. 1*, pp. 32-37).
- γ- We need to understand that our covenant with God is a διαθήκη type covenant, not a συνθήκη covenant.
- ⌘- “...διαθήκη is properly *dispositio*, an ‘arrangement’ made by one party with plenary power, which the other party may accept or reject, but cannot alter. A will is simply the most conspicuous example of such an instrument, which ultimately monopolized the word just because it suited its differentia so completely. ... A covenant offered by God to man was no ‘compact’ between two parties coming together on equal terms. Διαθήκη in its primary sense, as described above, was exactly the needed word.” (Moulton-Milligan, p. 148)
- 2- συνθήκη “*agreement, pact, covenant* (based on an accord between two parties, in opp. to διαθήκη where one party usually imposes its will upon the other)” (Lust, Eynikel, and Hauspie, p. 592)
- λ- One may haggle (barter) with someone at a yard sale or a flea market, but one is totally misguided (foolish) to think that he can haggle with God over what kind of music pleases God. (Some say: “I like instrumental music, therefore God will accept it.”)
- 7- These people are engaging in will-worship (Col. 3:23). ἐθελορησκεία “(fr. ἐθέλω and ῥησκεία, q. v. ...), *voluntary, arbitrary worship* ... i. e. worship which one devises and prescribes for himself, ...” (Thayer, p. 168)
- 2- Some congregations have introduced sinful practices into the work of the church.

- a- The Lord's money (money placed into the treasury of the church) has been used for non-spiritual activities.
  - α- The contribution, given on the Lord's day, is holy and may not be used for profane purposes (cf. c-γ-8 above).
  - β- The improper usage of this money reduces the amount of money available for supporting those who preach/teach the gospel.
  - γ- The improper usage of this money makes the members of the Lord's church to be unable to distinguish between the profane and the holy.
- b- Some have allowed (even encouraged) women to take leadership roles, over men, in spiritual activities.
  - α- Women authoritatively teaching the gospel to men (1 Tim. 2:11-12).
  - β- Women leading prayer, with men present (1 Tim. 2:8).
  - γ- Women leading singing, with men present (1 Cor. 14:33b-36).

**B Division by unscriptural withdrawal from members of the church.**

- 1- This was a problem in the first century (Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8).
  - a- The strong should not run roughshod over the weak.
  - b- The weak should be receptive to reasoning from the Scriptures.
  - c- All should walk in love (Eph. 5:1-2).
- 2- I have seen various groups who are liberal that will not even listen to those who question their doctrines and actions.
  - a- They are not noble like those of Berea (Acts. 17:11).
  - b- When asked for authority for what they are either teaching or doing, they do not give any arguments from the Scriptures.
  - c- They seem to be oblivious to Paul's words in Col. 3:17.
- 3- I have seen members of the Lord's church practice half-fellowship with people.

- a- They neither mark nor publicly withdraw from a person, but they refuse to fellowship them.
  - b- It might be simply because they use the wrong translation of the Scriptures.
  - c- It might be because they did not go to the right school.
- C Division because some congregations want to “swell” rather than bring about growth of the Lord’s church.
- 1- Larger congregations are swallowing up smaller churches.
    - a- Studies have shown that smaller churches produce a disproportionate number of gospel preachers (far more per capita than larger congregations).
    - b- Weak members are attracted by the “youth programs” of the larger congregations.
      - α- There is no scriptural basis for spending the money from the contribution (money that is holy) for entertainment of our youth.
      - β- Some youth ministers are unsound in doctrine.
      - γ- Some youth ministers are shallow in their teaching.
      - δ- This is sometimes more about social activities than about spiritual activities.
  - 2- I have attended gospel meetings and lectureships where the members tried to get me to quit attending where I was preaching and move my membership to the larger congregation (until they found out I was the preacher).
    - a- We have not retrieved a soul from Satan’s domination by moving them from one congregation to another congregation.
    - b- All that has been done is we have massaged the ego of the preacher of the larger congregation (look how we grew).
    - c- What scriptural justification is there for this proselyting of members of another congregation?

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## Tenth, that some people are converted only after they have seen the good works of Christians.

*Mike Von Tungeln*

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Michael Von Tungeln, was born at Clark AFB, in the Philippine Islands. He and Connie married November 25, 1979 and they have two children: John and Amy.

Mike attended Panhandle State University, Pepperdine University, Hawaii Pacific University and received the following degrees: BS in Chemistry, MA in Education, and MS in Information Systems. Mike has also attended at the Oklahoma School of Biblical Studies.

He is not a full time preacher, but he shared the pulpit in Kailua, HI, for about three and half years, from 1996 -2000. He is a member of the Ridgecrest church of Christ in Midwest City, OK, where he has served as an elder since October, 2001. Mike has preached in the following states: Hawaii, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Virginia. He has spoken on the Oklahoma City Lectures four times.

Mike is one of the instructors at the Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies. This year, Mike, has taught: "Life of Christ in the Fourfold Gospel," and is presently teaching the book of John. He has also written articles appearing in our Journal, "One Heart."

Mike has served this nation in the United States Marine Corps, from 1971 – 1991.

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When the Lord's People Know the Scriptures, Live by the Scriptures, and Love as the Scriptures Command, They Will Be Effective in Teaching the Lost.

"The **twelfth** likely reason for a decline in the growth rate of the churches of Christ is that some people are **converted only after they have seen the good works of Christians**. - - - When the Lord's people know the Scriptures, live by the Scriptures, and love as the Scriptures command, they will be effective in teaching the lost."

First, please don't get the impression that good works save. The gospel is what saves. All the good works in the world will not save a sinner unless he believes and obeys the gospel. As the Apostle Paul states:

*Romans 1:16 - For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.*

Regardless of the fact that good works don't save directly, they are still required in reaching the lost for Christ. Why? Because good works done for the lost by Christians get their attention. In a world where most people expect anything but good from those around them, the different, helpful example of Christians makes a positive impression. I'd like to illustrate with an example from the second and third centuries.

During this time two severe plagues ravaged the Roman Empire. The first was between approximately AD 165 and AD 180. The second was approximately 100 years later. The first plague took the lives of between one fourth and one third of the population of the empire. Emperor Marcus Aurelius was even killed by this plague.





Christians were afflicted by the plague in the same way their pagan neighbors were, but unlike the pagans, Christians were attempting to follow Jesus' example both in the way they lived and in the way they died. Their conduct during these plagues rocked the empire.

The pagans had no one to turn to. Their priests had no answers. Their gods were no help. Pagan gods were there to be appeased so they would not cause harm, but the pagan gods did not offer to have a loving relationship with the pagan people. Only Jesus did. The pagan gods offered no eternal life except the dark underworld.

Christians had hope and peace. They knew that if their physical lives were not saved by God's providential healing, they had an even better promise, the promise of eternal life. They displayed an attitude of outgoing love even in the severe trial they were facing. About 260 AD, Dionysius<sup>14</sup>, a Roman Bishop, wrote:

*"Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty; never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and caring for others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead.... The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner, a number of presbyters, deacons, and laymen winning high commendation so that death in this form, the result of great piety and strong faith, seems in every way the equal of martyrdom."*

Large numbers of pagans, including rulers, priests, and physicians, having no hope or anchor for their souls, fled to get away from the plague. They left their sick behind, alone, without care or the basic necessities of life. The Christians, as a whole, tended to remain and care for their loved ones, and for each other. In many cases the love of God in them stretched far enough to also enter the deserted houses of the pagans and care for those sick as well.

These individual acts resulting from Christians asking themselves what Jesus would do in the same situation had a profound impact in several ways. First, their example was in such stark contrast to the pagan example that large numbers of the plague's survivors were drawn to look favorably at the Christians around. Their own belief system had let them down, but their Christian friends seemed to know a better way. Many were brought to Christ.

Epidemiologists estimate that basic health care, such as providing adequate water and warmth, can result in as much as a 30 percent higher survival rate. Hence there were many more Christian survivors than pagan survivors. This by itself was enough to change the ratio of pagans to Christians substantially. Also, pagans who were cared for by Christians also enjoyed a higher survival rate. These survivors then would tend to have loving relationships with Christians in place of the suspicions of the past. Conversion rates soared.<sup>15, 16</sup>

Why aren't the people around us seeing our good works? Could it be that we're not doing any. It has

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14 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05009b.htm>

15 <http://www.gci.org/gospel/evang/ordinary>

16 Stark, Rodney: The Rise of Christianity, HarperCollins, 1997

been my observation that an increasing number of Christians believe their service to God consists of occupying a pew on Sunday morning.

When the Christians know the Scriptures, live by the Scriptures, and love as the Scriptures command, they will be doing things similar to those done by the second and third century Christians we just mentioned. But what does it really mean to know the scriptures? A lexicon search of studylight.org shows that there are twenty-one Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek words translated know. I believe the appropriate word for know in this context is the word we find in Jeremiah 31:34:

*Jeremiah 31:33-34 - But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.[34] No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."*

The Hebrew word used in this passage is yada. The definitions I believe are applicable in this context are:

1. To know by experience
2. To perceive and see, find out and discern.
3. To recognize, admit, acknowledge, confess

When we know the scriptures by experience, we will have the conviction and confidence to live by the scriptures.

What does it mean to live by the scriptures? Two scriptures stand out, John 14:15 and James 22-25.

*John 14:15 - "If you love Me, keep My commandments.*

*James 1:22-25 - But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.[23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror;[24] for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.[25] But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.*

We are not to keep Christ's commandments out of fear of punishment or out of a sense of duty but because we love Him. We love Him because he has done something for us we could not do for ourselves, something that He only could do. He has freed us from our sins. Our love for Him motivates us to want to do the things He wants us to do.

One way we live by the scriptures is through the choices we make. When we truly know the scriptures we can use them to guide ourselves to Christ-like decisions. When I understand that God does not want anyone to perish but for all come to repentance, it leads me to try to make myself an instrument for sharing God's word with others. To keep Christ's commandments we have to be doing something. We have to be serving others, but all the physical things we do for others are temporary. Mark Hagewood, Director of

the Luther Service Center, was preaching at Ridgecrest last month, and he put it this way. “We’ve been on several medical missions. When you treat people for intestinal parasites, you know they’ll have them again in a few weeks. When we treat children for head lice, we know they’ll be back in a few weeks. The only permanent help we can give is for their souls.” The only permanent help we can give to our family, friends and neighbors is sharing the gospel with them.

Finally, what is it to love as the scriptures command? Jesus told His disciples how they should love. There are many scriptures that relate what He has told us, but I believe these two capture the essence of how we are to love.

*Matthew 22:37-39 - Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ [38] This is the first and great commandment. [39] And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’*

*John 15:12 - This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*

If we attempt to share the gospel without a genuine love for those with whom we’re sharing it, we will be seen as insincere and judgmental. We not only must love Jesus, we must love those created in His image and those for whom He died. When we love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind, we’re not holding back anything for ourselves. We realize that our purpose is to do His will. We want what He wants and that is for all to be saved. When we love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind, we’re not worried that it might inconvenience us to share the gospel with a lost soul. When we love our neighbor as our self, it means that we do not want him to be lost. We will teach him God’s plan for salvation kindly and gently, but unapologetically. If he rejects our words, we will not become angry but continue to pray for him.

When we love one another as Christ has loved us, we will have a forgiving attitude toward our brethren. When we have differences, we will work them out as brothers and sisters rather than becoming enemies. We will not air our disagreements and dissatisfaction on social media. Rather than seeing God’s people fighting among themselves, those outside the Body of Christ will see the love and care that we have for each other.

The second and third century Christians underwent tremendous persecution, but when the plagues hit the Roman Empire they continued to live their faith. They took care of each other and rather than turning inward they reached out those around them who had been abandoned by their own people. The example these Christians set made people want to hear the gospel. They realized that Christians had something they needed for themselves.

The results were dramatic. The church grew. Christianity went from being opposed by the Empire to being the official religion of the Empire which brought a whole new set of problems. I will close with a word of caution.

*1 Corinthians 3:6 - I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.*

Our job is to plant and water. When we know the scriptures, when we live by the scriptures, and when we love as the scriptures command we will be planting and watering faithfully. We can trust God who gives the increase.

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# Members of the churches of Christ must have a passion, not just a passing thought, for the lost.

*Frank R. Williams*

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Frank R. Williams was born in Seminole, OK, on December 16, 1940. Frank and Martha (Gordon) were married in September, 1967, and they have four children: Virginia, who is married to Paul Mosiant, Clint, who is married to Teresa (Goode), Benjamin, who is married to Selene (McKnight) and they have one son, Lucas, and John, who has one son, Elias. He graduated from Seminole High School, attended Yuba Junior College in Marysville, CA, and graduated from the Northside School of Preaching in Harrison, AR, with a "Master" in Sacred Literature in 1972. Frank also taught in this school through the years, starting in 1972 – 1977, serving under all three directors: Reggie Nalls, A. J. Hendrix, and Bryon Nichols. He has also taught in: The School of Biblical Knowledge and The School of Biblical Studies, which he continues to teach and serve as Dean of Students.

Frank started preaching in 1968, first in Jasper, AR, and has preached for 46 years. He has done local work in Arkansas, Wyoming, Missouri, and Oklahoma. He has preached in the following states, in lectureships, gospel meetings, other occasions: Arkansas, Oklahoma, Wyoming, Missouri, Texas, Georgia, Iowa, and California. He has written articles appearing in: Gospel Advocate, Firm Foundation, Christian Standard, Gospel Journal, edited, "The Spirit of Restoration" for about three years, and now serves as editor of the Journal "One Heart." Frank made a preaching trip to India in 1977. Frank is now serving as an elder and associate preacher for the Barnes church of Christ.

Frank served this nation in the Army Security Agency with one year being in Korea: 1962-1965.

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## INTRODUCTION

At first, it would seem like the most unnecessary question ever asked the churches of Christ, but reality being what it is, the question has become necessary. So, what is the question? What is the mission of the churches of Christ?

Through the years we have taught there are three areas of work which the churches of Christ have authority to engage in. We have been correct in doing so. They are:

- 1) Worship and edification, (John 4:24; 1 Cor. 14:26;
- 2) Benevolence, helping those in need (Gal. 6:10; Acts 4:34; 6:1-3); and
- 3) Evangelism, teaching the lost (Eph. 3:9-12; Eph. 1:22; Luke 19:10).

Sadly, many members of the churches of Christ are unable to even identify these three areas of work and give New Testament authority for each. If the "work" being done by local churches cannot rightly be put within one of these three areas, then, the church should not be doing it! Yet, we have missed a point in our teaching that is most important.

It is the word "mission." The word "mission" means: an important assignment carried out; also the vocation or calling. Vocation means: a strong feeling of suitability for a particular occupation. How we view the "mission" of the churches of Christ will determine how it is carried out. The "mission" is the vocation and the vocation is the occupation of the churches of Christ!

- 1) Do we think it is important?
- 2) Do we think it has any relationship to our own salvation?
- 3) Does it have any eternal consequences for the lost and for us?
- 4) Can the local churches of Christ be pleasing to God without it?

Paul in addressing the universal church of Christ, “the house of the living God,” wrote:

*“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; (9) And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: (10) To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, (11) According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: (12) In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him” (Eph. 3:8-12).*

Paul was blessed in what he calls, “this grace,” referring to his apostleship, to:

- 1) “preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;” and
- 2) “make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery.”

Of which he writes, “which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God.” A few things are needed here to help with our understanding.

- 1) Paul used the Greek word “aion” which is translated “world” in the text.
- 2) This word means, “a period of time, age” (Among other things.)
- 3) Thus, the conclusion is here reached that Paul is teaching that the “the fellowship of the mystery” had been “hid” (The Greek “apokruptō”), “concealed, kept secret.”
  - a) How long has the “mystery” been “kept secret?”
  - b) From before and through the Jewish age.

Next, the apostle writes: “To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.”

- 1) “To the intent” (hina) meaning: in order that
- 2) “might be known (gnōrizō) meaning: to have thorough knowledge of.

And this is to be done “by the church;” “which is the house of the living God” (1 Tim. 3:15). And that which is to be “thoroughly known” is “the manifold wisdom of God.” This leaves us with the question, what is this “the manifold wisdom of God?” The words of Ephesians 3:9-12 are very much like those 1 Corinthians 2:7 – “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory.” Notice the same words in both text:

Eph. 3:	1 Cor. 2:7
1) “mystery, (mustērion)	mystery (mustērion)
2) “hidden (apokruptō)	(“hid” apokruptō),
3) “before the world (aiōn)	world (aion) and
4) “wisdom of God” (sophia)	wisdom (here the word is added by the translators)

It seems logical that both texts are addressing the same subject. Therefore, the “manifold wisdom of God” in Ephesians is the same as the “wisdom of God” in 1 Corinthians. But, what is it? It is the gospel of Christ, by which peace was brought between the Jew and the Gentile; and salvation to both. (Salvation comes when each one obeys the gospel.)

But Paul did not stop here, he went on to write in Ephesians 3:11 - “According to the eternal purpose (prothesis, a setting forth) which he purposed (poieō - to make, to prepare) in Christ Jesus our Lord.” In other words, “According to the eternal setting forth which he prepared in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Both the plan and the gospel are “according to the eternal setting forth;” and this “eternal setting forth,” he “prepared in Christ Jesus our Lord,” and he did so before the Jewish age started (Gen. 12:4; Gal. 3:16). Therefore, it is according to the eternal plan of God, that the church be changed with making thoroughly known the gospel of Christ. Therefore, this means in simply terms; the churches of Christ must preach/teach the gospel to

the lost!

## **AUTHORITY: THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST**

The apostle informs us that the church is the fullness of Christ. As he wrote:

“And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, (23) Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23). The word “fullness,” (plērōma) “in the fullness of him” means, that which is filled; like a ship that is filled and ready to leave the harbor. While the words “filleth all in all” (plēroō) means, to fill to the full. This word expresses that which is crammed full. Thus, Paul is saying the church is completely full, crammed full of Christ! But what does this mean, as it relates to our subject of teaching the lost? It means that the church, if she is to be completely full, crammed full of Christ, she must have the same mission he had in coming to this world; the world of the lost!

The whole system is the result of God’s love for the lost! The “golden text” of the Bible reads:

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).*

To these words, which reveal God’s love for the lost, which is the compelling force, “for God so loved,” we add Paul’s words to the Romans:

*“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. (7) For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. (8) But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:6-8).*

Understand, the most powerful positive power is that of love! Through the love of God, while all mankind was lost, God through his own love sent his only begotten Son to die upon the cross. If God, our Father, so loved the lost can “the house of God,” this children, do any less?

But, let us hear the words of Jesus himself, as he declared his mission:

*“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).*

Do you believe that the church, for which Jesus died and purchased with his own blood, can be completely full, crammed full of Christ, and not have the same mission he had? God forbid! That anyone would ever think so.

Therefore, the authority for the mission of the churches of Christ, “house of the living God,” is the One God, and his only begotten Son, and the revelation, the inspired word of the Holy Spirit; which is realized when the churches of Christ are “the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”

## **OUR LOVE FOR THE LOST, COMES FROM OUR LOVE FOR GOD**

Now for another question: Just where does our love for the lost come from? It comes from our love for God. A scribe came to Jesus once with one of the most compelling questions ever put before Jesus. This scribe asked Jesus, Which is the first commandment of all?” (Mar. 12:28). How would Jesus answer this seemingly unanswerable question? His answer:

*“And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: (30) And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. (31) And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these” (Mar. 12:28-39).*

Therefore, if we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; then, our love for our fellowman must come from, out of, our love of God! The mission of the churches of Christ has as her author-

ity, and her mission, standing in our love of God.

## OUR LOVE FOR THE LOST IS FOUND IN JESUS' LOVE FOR THE LOST

Go with me to the Mount of Olives. It is about midnight, Jesus having introduced what will be known as the Lord's Supper; he and the disciples sang a song. Then, Jesus and his disciples walk toward a garden called Gethsemane. Luke records the event in these words:

*"And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation. (41) And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, (42) Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:40-43). (43) And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. (44) And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:40-44).*

It is safe to say, never has such agony been experienced by a human being! Jesus here seen in his struggle for victory; not only for himself, but for all of mankind! The agony is seen in the fact that he prayed three times, for the same thing: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done."

Notice with me how Luke now describes when the praying had ended. Luke wrote:

*"And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. (44) And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:43-44).*

The anguish of which Jesus was going through produced sweat as "great drops of blood." This means Jesus' sweat "as it were" large thick drops of clotted blood. But, in those "drops" victory was won, both his and ours! In the letter to the Hebrews, the writers said of Jesus:

*"Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; (8) Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered: And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:7-9).*

Therefore, in Jesus' love for the lost he found surrender necessary, and we find the necessity of surrender for the churches of Christ in order to fulfill her mission!

## OUR HUMBLE OBEDIENCE TO THE LOST IS FOUND IN JESUS' HUMBLE OBEDIENCE

We are making the point, that our efforts to fulfill the mission of the churches of Christ, is located in the efforts of Jesus to seek and save the lost. Attention is directed to the second chapter of Philippians. Here the inspired apostle wrote of the second member of the Godhead:

*"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: (7) But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: (8) And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. (Phil. 2:6-8).*

The 'Word' of John 1:1, in order to save the lost, thought it not something to be seized, as in concrete, to be the quantity and quality with God. But he emptied himself and laid hold of the nature of a servant; he began to exist in the nature of mankind. Thus, being seen as a man, he humbled himself, he made himself low, and became obedient unto death, but not just any death; but "even the death of the cross!"

In the Hebrew letter these words appear:

*"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man"*



(Heb. 2:9).

Let us recall Paul's words in Romans: "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6).

It must not be overlooked, that Paul started the Philippian passage, quoted above with the words:

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5), and that "mind" is humble obedience!

Therefore, in Jesus' humble obedience to save the lost; we learn the necessity that the churches of Christ must also be humbly obedient in their efforts to save the lost; as we have the mind of Christ!

## PASSION UNTO PASSION

Having now some understanding of the "mission" of the churches of Christ, and how that "mission" is given to the churches of Christ; it is time to address the question: "Where does this "passion" come from which is the subject of the lecture?

First, let us understand the two words "passion unto passion." They look alike, they sound alike, but they are not the same! The first word "passion" in the phrase: "passion unto passion," comes from the a Greek word (paschō / pathō / penthō) referring to death, the death of Jesus upon the cross! The second word "passion" in the phrase: "passion unto passion," means, as used here, a very strong feeling about a thing. Passion is an intense emotion compelling, enthusiasm, or desire for anything. Therefore, the case is to be made here, that the passion which the churches of Christ must have toward the lost, comes from the death of Jesus upon the cross!

A few questions to help us get the point are in order just here.

- 1) How can we not love the one who died for us?
- 2) How can we not love the one who died that we might receive forgiveness of our sins?
- 3) How can we not love the one who died that we might have eternal life?

Go with me as we go to the Sea of Galilee after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus appears to the disciples for the third time after his resurrection (John 21:14). John reveals that at least seven of the eleven disciples are present (John 21:2). It is at this time that: "Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing" (John 21:3). When morning arrived, "Jesus stood on the shore," but the disciples did not know it was Jesus, but he asked if they had any meat? The disciples answered, no, having caught no fish through the night. Jesus said unto them: "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find;" this they did just as Jesus said to do, and they drew forth "the multitude of fishes." At this time John, said: "It is the Lord." Peter "girt his fisher's coat unto him," for he was clad in undergarments only, and cast himself into the sea" (John 21:7). As they came upon the shore; "they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread" (John 21:9).

After eating Jesus engages Peter in a series of questions and answers. To Peter and to us these are a heart searching series of questions and answers. Let us remember the background of these questions. Peter had denied Jesus three times. As Peter denied him the third time, Jesus turned and looked at Peter. As their eyes met, Peter remembered the words of the Lord how he would deny him, not once, but three times. The text says, Peter "wept bitterly!" With this event in mind, let us look at Jesus' questions and Peter's answer.

Jesus said:

*"Simon, son of Jonas, lovest (agapao) thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love (phileo) thee." Jesus said unto him: "Feed my lambs."*

*A second time Jesus asked: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest (agapao) thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love (phileo) thee." A second time Jesus said: "Feed my sheep."*

*A third time Jesus asked: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest (phileo) thou me?" But now, John informs us that, "Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest (phileo) thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love (phileo) thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17).*

Much has been made of the fact that Jesus used the Greek word "agapao" two time as he questioned Peter and Peter replied using the Greek word "phileo." But, the third time Jesus used the word "phileo," and Peter replied using the same word. However, Peter's grief was produced because Jesus questioned him three times. For a simple understanding of the "agapao," just remember it expresses the idea of, "doing the right thing at the right time for the right reason!"

It is our intent to focus on Jesus' words that he uttered at the end of each answer, "feed my sheep." First, our efforts to "feed" Jesus' sheep are because we love him! It may be debatable, but I believe Jesus' sheep are those described in the words:

- 1) *"Blessed are the poor in spirit: ..."*
- 2) *"Blessed are they that mourn ..."*
- 3) *"Blessed are the meek: ..."*
- 4) *"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: .."*
- 5) *"Blessed are the merciful: .." and*
- 6) *"Blessed are the pure in heart: ...". (Matt. 5:3-8)*

They are the lost, who are honest, who have a right disposition, to hear, believe, and obey the gospel.

## **WHY SHOULD WE LOVE THE LOST?**

Our proposition is: That our passion for the lost is produced by Jesus' passion! Remember the meaning of these two words:

- 1) Our passion is a very strong feeling, an intense emotion compelling, enthusiasm, and a desire to teach the lost; and
- 2) is the Jesus' death on the cross that produces our "passion!"

What God loving Christian can fail to love those whom God loves? What God loving Christian can fail to love those whom Jesus' loves? Please understand, the death of Jesus upon the cross is the greatest love ever demonstrated in heaven and on earth! Jesus' death on the cross is the center piece of love; it is the heart of all that is good; and it is the spirit of love! Therefore, from Jesus' passion is found our passion for the lost!

What member of the churches of Christ can read about, can look upon the cross, and not have passion for the lost? Look at the crown of thrones upon Jesus' head; see the nails in his hands and feet, and see the spear that pierced his side; does this not produce a passion for the lost? Does this not create an intense emotion compelling the churches of Christ to teach the lost the soul saving gospel of Christ? Finally, hear his last words: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Yes, in death, in his passion, salvation for the lost was upmost on his mind!

## **THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST AND THE GOSPEL**

By means of the being baptized with the Holy Spirit, the apostle of Christ, gave to the churches of Christ the gospel of Christ. By example, Paul would say to the churches of Christ today:

*"So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.*

*(16) For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (17) For therein is the righteousness*

*of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:15-17).*

Is there is any reason we should do less? Is there is any reason we should be ashamed of the gospel of Christ? Is it not the case that teaching the lost is “doing the right thing at the right time for the right reason?”

Therefore, I leave you with the word of Paul to the elders of Ephesus:

*“And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).*