

CHURCHES OF CHRIST: THEN AND NOW

According to our change agents, in the post-World War II era our brethren lost their way. To them, the situation has steadily deteriorated until now we have reached a state of near collapse. The only hope is for the rest of us to listen to and follow their agenda for renewal. As these progressives interpret things, preachers and elders who led the church the last 60 years were terrible failures in Bible knowledge and devotion and in faith and practice. Those brethren who are younger in years need to know the facts about what their parents and grandparents did in that era of time.

- * **Then**, preachers boldly proclaimed their message.
- * Distinctions between truth and error were clearly delineated.
- * Doctrine was stressed.
- * Error was refuted.
- * When necessary our preachers defended the church and her faith in public discussions with teachers of error.
- * Evangelism was stressed as a duty and practiced.
- * Gospel meetings were routine for every congregation. Souls were saved and churches grew.
- * Most of the congregations that now exist were planted then.
- * Great city wide campaigns brought hundreds to the Master.
- * Denominational folks desiring membership in the church of Christ understood they were leaving their old faith and religious system behind.
- * Those immersed clearly understood that it was to obtain salvation and remission of sins.
- * Bible classes for older children and adults were designed not only to impart Bible knowledge, but to indoctrinate and fortify the faith of students.
- * The average member of the church knew what he/she believed and why. They could give a ready response to questions about their faith.
- * Preachers were not always highly educated but they were full of Scripture and dedicated to doing Bible things in Bible ways. They were successful soul-winners.
- * Older Christian Schools were financed, enlarged and endowed and new ones established.
- * Care was provided for homeless children, the aged and unwed mothers.
- * Missionaries were sent around the globe planting the Cause of Christ in a hundred foreign lands.
- * Churches of Christ were recognized as the fastest growing religious body in the nation.

Now: Today a new spirit has evolved and gained dominance among our people.

- * The typical preacher is strong on diplomacy but not bold in preaching his message.
- * Distinctions between truth and error are not commonly stressed; rather the emphasis is on the things all nice churches hold in common.
- * People from denominations can attend many congregations and never realize that are in a different kind of church.
- * Many folks come into the church without realizing that they must sever their ties with and abandon their connections to the denominations from whence they came.
- * Today it is a rare preacher who stresses doctrine and fewer who refute error from the pulpit and in the classroom.
- * Many view indoctrination as in poor taste. Classes major in self-help, marriage, family matters and similar themes.
- * Evangelism has ground to a halt. Few souls are being saved. Few churches have gospel meetings.
- * Multitudes of our own members are drifting away from the church and into other religious bodies.
- * Few new congregations are being planted in unevangelized areas. Often those planted are in the midst of other congregations already serving a community.
- * Our number of missionaries has sharply declined and many of those going to foreign fields do not go to evangelize by teaching the gospel and planting churches. Many now go as “vocational workers” doing good for the temporal needs of the lost but bearing little fruit in terms of souls saved.
- * In some mission fields some of churches planted in years past have drifted away from Scripture into denominational practices. Unsuspecting US churches are still financing them even though they are no-longer truly churches of Christ.
- * Today an alarming number of our members do not know why they are members of the church of Christ rather than of some other body. They don’t know why they believe or worship as they do. This lack of knowledge and conviction leaves them vulnerable to the call of the sirens of change.
- * Then we were strong, now we are weak. Then we were flourishing and growing. Now we are stagnant and declining.

Then we had a bright future before us. Today we are in trouble. The changes that have been introduced were not inspired of God. Now we pay the price for the folly.

Given the marked difference in our churches then and now, one can't help but wonder, how this situation came to be. The answer is in the new approach to "doing church" being promoted by several of our Christian Universities. "Ministry" and Church Growth programs sow the seed and groom the young preachers. They then implement them in our churches. It is called "**the change movement**" and it has swept across the face of our brotherhood with disastrous results. JHW