

CHRISTIANITY: THEN AND NOW

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“BROTHERHOOD: LOST AND MUST BE FOUND”

Churches of Christ are faced with a determined enemy who is working to overrun their borders and impose drastic changes on their faith, worship and practice. Where once we stood shoulder to shoulder in defense of the kingdom of Christ, brethren are now scattered on a thousand hills, virtual strangers to each other. This loss of brotherhood has left us vulnerable to those who would do us harm. Many factors have contributed to this sad situation. I have observed the following:

- **The disintegration and lack of cohesiveness of our modern society has found its way into the church.** Brethren are preoccupied and too busy for a broader circle of friends. This has meant a loss of brotherhood.
- **In days past we had outstanding preachers who traveled the nation preaching in gospel meetings.** They were loved and respected. They preached the same message everywhere they went. This promoted brotherhood. As brethren went to their meetings they became acquainted and bands of fellowship grew.
- **Much of our inter-congregational fellowship in the past centered around gospel meetings.** Brethren visited and supported each other on these occasions. With the decline of meetings came a decline of acquaintance and fellowship.
- **Fellowship was enjoyed and cultivated at the annual lectureships of our Christians Schools.** With the growing tensions from both liberalism and ultra-conservatism, these occasions of fellowship and brotherhood have diminished in effectiveness. Many choose to stay at home.
- **There was a time when most brethren read the same gospel papers.** Journals such as the **Gospel Advocate** and the **Firm Foundation** served Christians over the entire nation. Preachers sent reports of their work, allowing others to keep up with them. The editors of those papers promoted brotherhood interests and undertakings. This gave all a better awareness of the brotherhood of which they were part. It fostered a holy pride in the accomplishments of other brethren. Today those papers do not command the readership they once did. Little news is carried.
- **In days past, all of our Christian Schools held and taught a common understanding of the gospel of Christ.** That consistency in doctrine helped to create and maintain an environment of unity of thinking and that encouraged brotherhood. Today this is not the case.
- **In the last 40 years, as the bands of fellowship weakened, two equally destructive forces grew up, tearing the fabric of brotherhood.** On the left was the gradual rise of both theological and practical liberalism; on the right was ultraconservatism. As these polarizing forces struggled for dominance, the bands that had bound us together began to unravel. The liberals tended to tolerate any and all variances of belief and practice. They were united in their disdain for the mainstream of the church. The ultraconservatives attacked any one who did not subscribe to their code. The majority found themselves in the middle, attacked from both sides. Rather than presenting a united front against the liberal threat, many conservatives shattered

themselves by turning against each other. They splintered into different camps, all conservative, all opposed to liberal departures, but suspicious of each other, unwilling to cooperate, and in many cases turning their guns on each other. While they exhausted themselves on each other, the united liberals gained strength and have now reach a position of dominance.

- **The rise of a destructive kind of journalism** that specialized in harsh personal attacks on preachers and congregations made a large contribution to the loss of brotherhood. This reckless style of writing appealed to a class of ultra conservative preachers and such journals multiplied. In this environment, everyone is suspected of heresy until he proves himself innocent to the satisfaction of each editor. In response, brethren shielded themselves by avoiding contact with others with whom they might have even a small difference. Brotherhood faded in the face of this hostile environment.
- **With the rise of large city churches a situation arose that has taken an unintended toll on brotherhood fellowship.** Many such churches have a full schedule of activities, hence have no time or interest in those of sister congregations. Feeling self-sufficient, they have no need for the fellowship and encouragement of other congregations.

The sad result is a band of Christians under siege but unwilling or unable to stand side by side with their brethren in defense of their common cause. Standing alone or in small clusters, they can offer little or no resistance to the juggernaut of the change movement. Tragically, men with the sword of truth and the shield of faith may well be beaten because they would not stand beside their brother and offer a united resistance to a lesser enemy. What Sir Walter Scott wrote of the human race is especially true of the church: "The race of mankind would perish did they cease to aid each other--We cannot exist without mutual help..." Oveta Hobby rightly observed, "Brotherhood doesn't come in a package. It is not a commodity to be taken down from the shelf...it is an accomplishment of soul-searching prayer and perseverance." May we learn this lesson before it is too late. **JHW**

IF ANOTHER CENSUS WERE TAKEN

In 1906 Mr. S.N.D. North of the U.S. Census Bureau went to Nashville to speak with David Lipscomb. He wanted to know if he were correct in assuming that there was a division within the ranks of the our brethren? North was not a member of the church, but he detected significant differences between those who styled themselves "progressives" and those who wished to continue in the same way and manner their predecessors had served the Lord. Bro. Lipscomb sadly confirmed his suspicions. Plans were then made for a more discriminating census to determine the specific numbers for each camp. Bro. J. W. Shepherd was commissioned to supervise the project for our brethren. He found that only 149,658 members gathered in 2,649 congregations could be found within the churches of Christ while those who preferred to worship with instruments of music and have societies to do the work of the church numbered 982,701 members in 8,203 churches. That was a sobering day for those of our people who did not think the problem was all that severe; those who felt it would eventually fade away if just ignored; for those who could not bring themselves to stand up and fight for the truth of the gospel; for those who felt the issues were not all that important.

A few brethren had seen the flood approaching, they knew it was sweeping all before it. They had warned and pleaded but many turned a deaf ear, some even thought they were alarmists, or narrow mossy backs who were not keeping up with changing times. Some blamed them with being troublemakers.

Churches of Christ of today are greatly indebted to Bro. David Lipscomb and the little band of men who stood with him in the face of that flood of apostasy. They saved the day by their determined stand for the ancient gospel and for the purity of the church. We now see them as heroes, but it took a few years before folks realized that they were the true and faithful knights who had risk all to save the kingdom of Christ from those who were bent capturing and distorting it into something other than Christ had ordered.

Since the 1960s another band of progressives have been busily at work among us. At first there were just a scattered few of them. They found a fertile breeding ground in the tolerant environs of some of our Christian schools. There they quietly labored to strengthen their grip on the schools and to influence the young men and women who came under their influence. Now a second generation has arisen to leadership posts in our churches and schools. We

know them as change agents. No longer are they a small minority, working quietly behind the scenes, they are numerous and bold. They have ensconced themselves in many of our largest congregations and in many of our schools. Their advocates are on the lecture circuit among our schools and churches, spreading the doctrine of change. They are openly calling for a change in our worship, our faith and our practice. They want women in leadership posts in the church, they want choirs and special singers in our worship. They want to change the terms of salvation and membership in the church of Christ. They want a different atmosphere in worship. Despising the worship of the past they want entertainment and excitement. They want a new approach to preaching. No more of the old book, chapter and verse proclamation. They want story telling and drama. Some of them want instrumental music in their worship.

As dangerous as this band of rogue change agents is, another danger confronts us of even greater magnitude. It is the lack of concern, the unwillingness to address the issue, the failure to take a strong stand against these innovations that affects large numbers of our brethren. Peace at any price is another name for surrender to the enemy. For at least 20 years this spirit has prevailed among us. If tomorrow a census were taken to determine which congregations are willing to tolerate and go along with the change agenda and which are determined to continue in the old paths of the gospel, I tremble to think what the results would be. If such a poll were taken in your congregation, what would the finding be? Brethren, our situation is just as critical as that of our brethren a century ago. While so many sleep, the enemy is sowing tares of error in the fields of the kingdom (Matt. 13:24-30). I plead with all who love the church to awake to the danger, arm yourselves and man the walls while you can. To tarry is to invite disaster. **JHW**

INSPIRATION AND AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURES

This book was written by Jimmy Jividen. The author opens his discussion by saying, "A persons' view of the Scriptures, more than any other thing, determines his faith and practice" (Intro). Beneath the more visible issues of the current change movement among churches of Christ is a flawed attitude toward the Word of God. This principle is true in every apostasy and error that has troubled the people of God. While we are unaware of any change agent who has openly denied the inspiration and authority

of the Bible, by their teaching and practice all of them reject the full authority of the Scripture in matters of faith and worship. For example:

- Some suggest that there are some mistakes or flaws in the sacred record and that such does not bother them.
- All of them refuse to recognize and respect the silence of Scripture as prohibitive. This allows them to have instrumental music and other innovations unknown to the New Testament.
- Some suggest that truth is best arrived at by consensus of a congregation rather than by a direct appeal to the written word of God.
- Most of them seek to explain away Biblical prohibitions about women in church leadership by appealing to culture and social convention.
- They pit one Bible teaching against another to negate the importance of the one they don't care for (as in salvation by grace through faith as opposed to salvation that requires Christian baptism).
- They refuse to recognize and respect the primacy of the New Testament of Christ over the Old Covenant of Moses in all matters relating to the faith and worship of the church (Col. 2:14; Heb. 8:6).
- They refuse to accept what the Bible plainly says about the unitary nature of the church and the sinfulness of denominations (Eph. 4:4; I Cor. 1:10).
- They reject plain biblical teaching that the New Testament is the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), preferring to view it as a love-letter.
- They refuse to acknowledge that in the New Testament God has provide us a sacred pattern which he expects us to honor and follow (II Tim. 1:13).
- They do so by allowing the sentiments of the human heart (subjectivism) override the clear declarations of Scripture which they find hard to accept.

The author points out that the acceptance of the Bible as the inspired word of God is a matter of faith. The Bible claims inspiration (II Tim. 3:15). Faith comes from hearing the Word of Christ (Rom. 10:17). We either believe (accept) or do not believe this claim. The claim of inspiration is substantiated by numerous internal and external evidences, but the fact is a person either approaches the Bible with faith in its

dependability or with doubt. He then sets forth the basic reasons why we should view the Bible as indeed the complete, inerrant and authoritative Word of God.

One valuable aspect of this book is the summary of the various inadequate views of inspiration held by modern men. This section helps readers understand what many are saying and to see the flaws in their approach. It also allows them to mark sharp distinctions between what the Biblical writers claim for their work and what skeptical scholars are trying to make of it.

Of special interest are his two chapters on Scripture Interpretation. They help readers to correctly understand what they read in the Bible. They also remind them of why we interpret the Word as we do. Since the promoters of change have justified their efforts by their so-called new hermeneutic, this section is most helpful.

Chapters are devoted to The Restoration Principle and The Road to Apostasy, topics not usually found in books on Inspiration and Authority of the Bible. In the first he shows what our commitment to restore the original faith and practice of the church demands. In the second he demonstrates what happens when that commitment is abandoned. The commitment is to view the Bible as the complete and final authority in all matters religious. Apostasy is sure to come when that commitment is set aside.

Preachers will find in the several chapters of this fine book excellent material for sermons relating to the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures. It would also make a very useful book for a Bible class on the subject. Such lessons are sorely needed in every congregation. Paul exhorted Timothy to put his brethren in mind of the things of which he wrote (I Tim. 4:6). Every faithful preacher will do the same. You may order this book from the **Gospel Advocate Co. 1006 Elm Hill Pike, Nashville, TN 37210.**
JHW

A CHURCH THAT IS CHRISTIAN

My title may sound strange, but there are some churches that clearly are not Christian. For example there is a Church of Satan based in California. Over the centuries, numerous individuals, thirsting for power, recognition and wealth have started organizations they called churches. Calling their organization a church, brought them respectability

and tax exemption. Interestingly, among the several names used in Scripture for the church one never finds it called "Christian Church." The adjective "Christian" describes a person or organization that exhibits the characteristics of and strives to live by the principles of Christ. Thus "the disciples were called Christians...at Antioch" (Acts 11:26).

- A church that is Christian has no head but Christ (Eph. 1:22).
- It has no rule of faith and practice but the New Testament of Christ (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 8:8).
- In its worship it observes all that Christ ordained, but nothing more (Rev. 22:18-19).
- The government of its congregations is modeled precisely after Christ's original plan with elders and deacons in each church (Acts 14:27; I Tim. 3:1-12).
- It wears names that honor Christ and the God of heaven, but no other (Rom. 16:16; I Cor. 1:1).
- Its members wear the name "**Christian**" without shame or apology (Acts 11:26; I Pet. 4:16)..
- It strives to do the work that Christ ordained for it to do, (seeking the lost, edifying its members and helping the poor), but refrains from social and political issues that distract from its heavenly mission.
- It teaches people how to be saved and become Christ's disciples exactly as he did (Mark 16:15-16).
- Most importantly, the spirit of Christ is reflected in the lives and deeds of its members (Phil. 2:5).

If you would like to worship with a church that is truly Christian, visit a **Church of Christ** near you.
JHW

"A dogmatic spirit inclines a man to be censorious of his neighbors—Every one of his opinions appears to him written as with sunbeams, and he grows angry that his neighbors do not see it in the same light—He is tempted to disdain his correspondents as men of low and dark understanding because they do not believe what he does—" (I. Watts).

"He is most free from danger, who, even when safe, is on his guard" (Publius Syrus).