

CHRISTIANITY: THEN AND NOW

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A SEEKER FRIENDLY CHURCH

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Among the catch-phrases of our day are that churches wishing to grow, must be "seeker-friendly," or "seeker-sensitive." By this is meant church leaders must determine what their unchurched neighbors want in a church and then adjust their message, worship and program to meet those expectations. These slogans are standard stock of the "church growth" industry and are frequently used by our promoters of change. Looking through my concordance I found numerous Scripture references to "seek" and "seeking" but in no case was their message that suggested above.

The Holy Word makes it clear that we must be seekers if we are to please God. God said to David, "Seek ye my face;" and David replied, "Thy face, Jehovah, will I seek" (Ps. 27:8). Again David said, "earnestly will I seek thee" (Ps. 63:1). Later he wrote, "Ye that seek after God, let your heart live" (Ps. 69:32). When young king Josiah "began to seek after the God of David" he found the "book of the Law of Jehovah" and read therein. (II Chron. 34:3, 14, 18). The knowledge he found convicted him of his sin and led him to a correct understanding of God's will for him and his nation. He commenced a renovation of the ruined temple and a restoration of God's ordinances and worship. Ezra the priest "set his heart to seek the law of Jehovah, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and ordinances" (Ezra 7:10). Isaiah exhorted his contemporaries to "Seek ye out of the book of Jehovah, and read..." (35:16). Amos, the shepherd prophet, taught his neighbors to "Seek Jehovah and ye shall live" (5:4) but he straitly warned them against trying to find God at the unauthorized shrines at Bethel, Gilgal or Beersheba. He warned that if they did not hear and heed God's word, he would take it from them and they would seek it in vain (8:12). Note well that none of these devout men set about to change the worship ordained by God to make it more acceptable to their peers. None of them thought to change the various ordinances and institutions set forth in the law of God. They first

devoted themselves to learning and understanding God's will and then called others to back to it. God has always been concerned for those desiring to serve him. "Thus said the Lord Jehovah: Behold, I myself...will search for my sheep...will seek them out...as the shepherd seeketh out his flock...I will seek that which is lost, and will bring back that which was driven away..." (Ezek. 34:11-12, 16). When the time was right, He sent his Son "to seek and save that which was lost" (Lk. 19:10). He has charged us to assist him in that great search and rescue mission (Mk. 16:15).

God expects man to play a part in his salvation. We are to seek Him, but like Josiah and Ezra, to find Him we must seek His Word. We are to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matt 6:33). His kingdom is his church (Matt. 16:18). We do not go shopping for the church of our choice, nor should Christian leaders adjust the God-ordained faith, worship or practice of the church to attract adherents. His righteousness is his righteous teaching (Ps. 119:172) and the blessings only He can bestow. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man seeking goodly pearls: and having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matt. 13:45-46). When seekers find Christ's true church they must be willing to pay the price if they wish to possess it. God does not barter with those who wish to possess his kingdom/church! Imagine a sinner saying to the Almighty, whose church was purchased by the tortuous death of his Only Son, "I prefer instrumental music and I will come only if you provide it!" Or imagine some lady saying, "If I chose your church, you must let me have a role in the public leadership of your church!" Such is the height of arrogance! The Rich Young Ruler was a seeker who was not pleased with the message Christ gave. But there were no negotiations regarding the conditions Christ set forth. He went away sorrowful (Mark 10:17-22).

We are to "seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated" (Col. 3:1). Christ promises that he that seeketh his way will find it (Matt. 7:8). Heaven's richest blessings are reserved for "the soul that seeks him" (Lam. 3:25). Those however who "seek their own, (and) not the things of Jesus Christ" have no promise of God's blessing (Phil. 2:21). A faithful church will always be seeking to please the Lord of the church rather than seeking to entice unsubmitive souls in on their own terms. JHW

LOYALTY TO CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

When Jesus said to the saints in Smyrna, "Be thou faithful unto death" he was calling for their loyalty, even in the face of great hardship and suffering. For their loyalty they would receive "the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). Loyalty: some profess it, some practice it. Only the latter can always be counted on. A. P. Gouthey wrote, "If virtues be graded, loyalty I think, would stand near the top of the list. At any rate, no leader can demonstrate his full capabilities without it." John Ruskin said, "The noblest word in the catalogue of social virtues is 'Loyalty.'"

Loyalty is expected in many areas of life: marriage, family, friends, nation, and employment. God also expects loyalty of his children, the subjects of his kingdom. We must be loyal to God, his Son, his Church and his Word. Loyalty to the church includes the universal church of Christ (I Pet. 2:17) scattered throughout the world and the congregation of which we are members.

Many of those who now lead our congregations came into the church in the days of her prosperity. They fought no battles, knew no hardship, endured no hateful scorn. They made few sacrifices for their faith. They inherited congregations long established and facilities built and paid for by others. So also is the case with the administrators and teachers in our Christian Schools.

Loyalty or the lack thereof is not easily detected in times of peace when all is well. It is in times of conflict that men's loyalty or lack thereof become evident. Now, a time of testing has come upon us. Living in a society that has been coopted by alien philosophies and an anti-Christian value systems, many members of the church have been influenced by the wisdom of the world. They are emboldened to question every aspect of the faith, worship and

practice of the church of which Christ is head (Eph. 1:22). Christian leaders who have attained worldly standing cast reproach on the church. They ridicule her doctrine and ancient forms of worship. Abandoning the sacred canons of Scripture, they look to the world of commerce to find new and exciting ways to enlarge their congregations. They loudly protest that they are faithful members of the church of Christ, but their actions demonstrate their disloyalty. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of little-known preachers and elders stand like opportunistic politicians waiting to see which way the wind is blowing before they declare themselves. They can follow the promoters of change if the tide goes their way, or they can hold to the old ways if that is to their advantage. Such wind-watchers are not loyal servants of Christ! They are serving their own interests. "Loyalty is one thing a leader cannot do without. It is as priceless as it is rare. It creates a quiet confidence in the heart of many leaders and is the assurance of success in any enterprise" (A. P. Gouthey).

Those who have already turned their backs on the church, as they seek standing among the evangelical denominations, protest that they are not disloyal to Christ; that they are only tired of the church. Although it may sound redundant, they must be reminded that you cannot be loyal to a king and disloyal to his kingdom! The church of Christ is the kingdom of Christ (Matt. 16:18). It is his body (Eph. 1:22) Acts of disloyalty toward the church of Christ manifest disloyalty to the Master himself.

"Loyalty to God is alone fundamental. Feelings, words, deeds, must be beads strung on the string of duty...say you ever and only, 'Lo I come to do Thy will, O my God.' Out of that dutiful root grows the beautiful life, the life radically and radiantly true to God—the only life that can be lived in both worlds" (Maltbie Babcock). In this mortal struggle for the heart and soul of the church we need the conviction expressed in the following words of Will Shakespeare, "Master go on, and I will follow thee, To the last gasp, with truth and loyalty" Only then will we prevail and the church we love be spare from desolation. May it be said of us as Alexander Pope said of a departed comrade, "friend to truth! Of soul sincere, In action faithful, and in honor clear; Who broke no promise, served no private end, Who gained no title, and who lost no friend" In a word, he was loyal! JHW

LESSONS TO FORTIFY YOUR FAITH

We have recently published a collection of 104 of our weekly email lessons on the change movement. The book sells for \$7.50 including postage. Send us a contribution for \$20 or more and we will send you a complimentary copy of this valuable book. We need to place copies of this book in the libraries of the 32 schools among us that train preachers. Your gift of \$160 would make this possible. Send your check to Church of Christ, c/o 12630 W. Foxfire Dr., Sun City West, AZ 85375.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

This little journal is sent to the preachers and elders of some 5800 churches of Christ. It is funded by Christians and congregations who love the church of Christ and are concerned for her welfare. We need your help. For every dollar we receive we can mail two additional congregations. Gifts are tax deductible. If you are interested in more information, write or call John Waddey, (623) 214-3715. Email: johnwaddey@aol.com

THE JESUS PROPOSAL, A Review

This book was co-authored by Rubel Shelly and John O. York, ministers of the Family of God at Woodmont Hills. This church began as the Ashwood Church of Christ and gradually evolved to its present denominational status. Dr. York is Professor of Preaching and New Testament at David Lipscomb University in Nashville, a post he could not have filled prior to 20 years ago. In our day of Biblical illiteracy, books such as this are extremely dangerous. Uninformed brethren are conditioned to trust highly educated scholars to tell them what the Bible "really" means and how they should practice their faith. Men enamored with their own wisdom and worldly attainments find it easy to deceive such folks and promote their own desires as the ways of God. The authors have embraced the new Postmodern world view and this book reflects their endeavor to reshape the faith, worship and practice of the church according to that new philosophical standard (See p. 124-125). Paul's charge to the church is, "be not conformed to the world" (Rom. 12:2).

The authors clearly accept virtually all denominational bodies as truly Christian, which implies an acceptance of denominationalism as a legitimate condition acceptable to God. This then implies that the church of Christ of which they still claim membership cannot be the one true church, but

is itself a mere denominational body. The rest of the book bears out these conclusions. The following errors are advanced in this book:

- Repentance before faith (p. 137).
- Salvation by faith-grace before baptism.
- Baptism as a public token of one's salvation by faith.
- Open membership.
- Dismissal of doctrine as of importance.
- Unscriptural worship is accepted by God if based on good intentions (Matt. 7:21).
- Instrumental music in worship.
- Corruption of the Lord's Supper.
- Acceptance of women in the public leadership in the church
- Sowing discord and disruption in the body of Christ
- Failure to respect Christ's authority expressed in his Word.
- Acceptance of and promotion of a denominational view of Christianity.
- A low view of the church of Christ, shamefully treating her, as of no more value than a man-made denomination.
- They do great harm to the church for which Christ died by laying profane hands on her faith and practices, daring to change them and encouraging others to do the same.
- Hateful, sarcastic depictions of their brethren... thus violating the law of love.
- Ingratitude toward fellow-Christians who went before them.
- They practice and promote ecumenism, i.e., Christian fellowship with those denominational bodies whose faith and practice are contrary to the expressed will of Christ.
- This book is filled with faulty assumptions common to all promoters of the change agenda: They assume they have found something new, when it is really only the ancient errors of denominationalism.
- They present "unity in diversity" as their solution to the problem of division in the church. This is the doctrine of Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett promoted 50 years ago.
- They assume churches of Christ (other than their band) know nothing of salvation by the grace of God.
- They falsely assume that traditional preachers teach salvation by works of human merit?
- They falsely assume that we believe in baptismal regeneration or water salvation.
- They mistakenly assume that traditional

congregations still practice racial segregation and discrimination.

- They assume that a Postmodern approach to religion is better than the ancient way of Christ.
- They assume that denominationalism is acceptable to Christ, even though it is contrary to his prayer for his church (John 17:20-21) and the teaching of his apostles (I Cor. 1:10-13).
- They assume that baptism is not essential to a sinner's salvation (Acts 22:16).
- They assume that God will wink at those who tamper with his expressed will (Rev. 22:18-19) and tolerate those who teach a different doctrine than that recorded in the New Testament (II John 9-11).
- They assume that churches founded by mortal men are of equal value with the church founded by Christ.
- They assume the prerogative of bending the facts of history to justify their errant position.
- They assume churches of Christ will not survive in the Postmodern age unless they embrace their agenda for change.
- They assume that past and present generations of preachers in churches of Christ did not have a proper view of the Christian religion, such as the authors have attained.
- They assume that doctrine should not be a factor in deciding whom we shall fellowship (II John 9).

We acknowledge one point made in this book: "Oneness with Christ and his body is enhanced by means of a commitment to and pursuit of doctrinal purity within the revealed will of God in Holy Scripture" (p. 93). Earlier they asserted that emphasis on doctrinal purity is the root of our problems.

This book demonstrates that the authors have no love or concern for the body of believers known as churches of Christ. They are no longer faithful members of that body. Their hearts and home are now in denominationalism, whether they openly admit it or not. We should view them as Paul viewed Hymenaeus and Alexander, who made shipwreck of the faith. Like Demas they loved the present religious world more than the ancient way of Christ. JHW

THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS

War is one of those ugly blemishes on human history. All nations have at some point in time engaged in national warfare. The greatest brutalities and inhumanities have been committed in the midst of war.

In 1929, following the horrors of World War I, the great nations met, drafted and committed themselves to observe certain standards of civility toward combatants when forced to go to war.

Recently, some American soldiers were accused of violating those conventions in their interrogating of Iraqi prisoners. Iraqis have a notorious record of cruelty and barbarism towards prisoners, yet our government rightly insists that our troops must operate by a higher, more humane standard.

All of the above reminds us of our obligation as we fight this battle to protect and preserve the church from those who are set on corrupting her faith and capturing her citadels. We must conduct ourselves in a way that is appropriate for those who wear the name of Christ. Paul said, "Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1:27). Even in the most intense conflict we can not allow ourselves to behave in an unchristian manner; no matter what the opposition might do. It would help all of us who stand in defense of Zion to ponder the following words:

"We know how love acts! We know how hate behaves. Love is kind. Hate lifts its ugly head through unkindness. Love is courteous. Hate is rude. If we do not communicate the love of Christ toward one another, even toward the one with whom we disagree the most, we have violated the fundamental doctrine of Christ" (Larry West).

Soldiers we are called to be (II Tim. 2:3-4). To fight the good fight of the faith is our responsibility (I Tim. 6:12). But we are also to love our enemies and pray for them (Matt. 5:44). Our speech must always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that we may know how we ought to answer each one (Col. 4:6). By "speaking truth in love" (Eph. 4:15), we can not only overthrow the erroneous teaching of our adversaries, we can maintain good standing with the captain of our salvation (Heb. 2:10). JHW

ONE WAY STREETS

People who ignore road signs often suffer terrible consequences. Each day people who fail to see or observe warning signs are involved in horrible crashes that take their lives and harm others. Most intelligent people understand this elementary lesson of life when driving their car. But multitudes of people forget the importance of the principle when they come to religion.

Christ said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). The apostles preached that "in none other (than Christ) is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved." (Acts 4:12). Paul

said "there is one body, and one Spirit,...one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all..." (Eph. 4:4-5).

Yet many folks see the "One Way" sign and still seek other ways to heaven. No religion but Christianity will take you to God's heaven! No Savior but Jesus Christ can save your soul! No body (i.e. church, Eph. 1:22) is acceptable to God but Christ's church. Only the faith of Christ, revealed in his New Testament is an acceptable faith! No baptism but that commanded by the Lord will suffice for forgiveness of sins.

It is foolish and deadly to ignore the sign and drive the wrong way on a One Way street, It is the height of folly to try to get to heaven by going the wrong way. JHW