

CHRISTIANITY: THEN AND NOW

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A VISIT TO A CHANGED CHURCH

Recently I visited the websites of **Jeff Jenkins and the Shannon Oaks Church of Sulphur Springs, Texas**. I was greatly impressed. Since for many, "Seeing is believing," I share with you my readers some of what I learned. (For those unfamiliar with the change movement, I offer a few observations and explanations, in italics, to focus the picture).

On the church's page I read:

* About the Holy Spirit: "The Holy Spirit is present in the world, continually making men aware of their need for God" "He (the Spirit) provides the Christian with...understanding of spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right." (*This is the Calvinistic doctrine of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the human mind, convicting sinners, enlightening Bible readers. The problem is, those who claim this enlightenment end up with different understandings of the Bible and guided into hundreds of different kinds of churches.*)

* About Salvation: "This Salvation is available for all who turn to Christ in faith and make Him Lord of their life...and baptism is our confession of the sufficiency of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus to Save us from Sin." (*Their doctrine is salvation by faith, before baptism and baptism to declare one's salvation. Both borrowed from the Baptists.*)

* About the Church. "The church is the entire body of Christ on earth. Regardless of denominational titles there is one body; and, though it is diverse, it is empowered by the Holy Spirit..." (*This is an affirmation that all denominations are of equal standing before God, and that their church is also a denomination.*)

* Their "Core Values." "Shannon Oaks Church is an autonomously led, non-denominational Christian Fellowship. We value and operate in the freedom to be flexible in areas that are not considered to be **permanent-core doctrine** (i.e. doctrines that are

explicitly stated and are not understood to be bound to a particular time in history or culture...) Our non-negotiable doctrines lie solely in the matters directly related to a person's salvation...In matters regarding gender roles, church structure and organization...as long as our actions do not directly violate the clear and permanent core doctrines and expressed will of God, we will operate freely..." (*"Core doctrine" is a major teaching of the change movement. It seeks to limit the essentials of Christianity to a few chosen items leaving all the rest open to change. Any doctrine or practice not directly related to salvation (by believing in Jesus) they feel free to change if they desire. Gender roles is the code term for women in leadership roles, church structure and organization has to do with the government of the church.*)

* Their "Vision." "God is envisioning us to be a church that is open to change and emerge as God leads us." (*Notice they attribute to God their desire to change the pattern of the church, her doctrine and worship. It does not matter to them that He has provided instruction for all of these in his divine Word.*)

* For the church's Memorial Day worship service, Don Shannon played Amazing Grace on his Bagpipes

* They no longer identify themselves as a church of Christ. (*This is a proper decision since they no longer are a church of Christ in name, worship or doctrine.*)

On **Jeff Jenkins'** personal page (www.jeffjenkins.blogspot.com) for June 28, 04, I read:

* "Yesterday morning was powerful as one of my friends shared his heart about how much he has struggled with the changes at Shannon Oaks in regards to the style of worship and instruments in worship." (*They have already embraced the use of instrumentalmusic in worship, although such did not*

enter Christian history until 600 years after Christ).

* At a special gathering of the church, one brother commented “there are many people hurting over the people who have left Shannon Oaks in the last year because of the changes that have been made and some because of the way the changes were made.” (*As in virtually every congregation, when the change agents move in with their agenda, faithful Christians are forced out because they cannot accept the errors being introduced. When such separations happen in a “traditional” congregation, they brand it as division. When it happens to them it is “a few folks left”*).

* The preacher observed, “There is nothing we can do about people who disagree with processes and issues...but from this point forward we have to love everyone and keep on moving toward the mission of doing whatever it takes to honor God...” He closed with the strong affirmation, “No turning back!” (*Brethren may be forced out, but he will not be deterred from his goal of changing the church into a non-denominational denominational body. This spirit will eventually drive a wedge into the very heart of the church throughout the world*).

* The preacher’s site offers lots of links to help his readers get on the fast track to change: There are links to **Wineskins Magazine** (*chief organ of the change movement*), Willow Creek Association (*Role model for those wishing to build a mega church*); Rick Warren and Saddleback Church (*Chief architect of the philosophy driving the change movement*) and under Restoration Ministries he links to Farmer’s Branch Church, Richland Hills Church, (*Prominent Changed Churches*) and John York, Rubel Shelly and John Mark Hicks (*Chief promoters of change*). **JHW**

HOW DO YOU SEE THE CHURCH?

Observation reveals that not all Christians see the church in the same light. These different points of view affect the way those people act toward the church.

* For some preachers the church is “my place of employment, my source of income.” They seem not to be too concerned about what is happening to the church beyond the congregation by which they are employed. They work diligently to build up that congregation, to mend its breaches, to protect it from danger; but they manifest no interest in what is happening to the church elsewhere.

* For some folks, the church is “my social center.” It fills the same need in their lives as social clubs, lodges and civic clubs do for others. It is the hub of their

social life. There their friends congregate. They love their congregation and readily work for its welfare. But they care little for the kingdom of Christ beyond their home church. If other congregations are wrecked and destroyed they are not the least disturbed.

* For some the church consists of those congregations with which they are familiar. They are concerned about churches in their vicinity, or where their extended family worship, or where a friend or former classmate preaches, or where they may once have preached or worshiped. But their vision and concern ends with those five or ten congregations.

* Some are concerned with the churches in “their circle of influence.” Those who have preached a while gradually build a circle of congregations where they have influence. It may be churches with which they have worked or held meetings; it may be where they are personally acquainted with leadership figures. It may be those whose preachers yield to their suggestions and ideas. Those congregations they are very concerned about, but the welfare of others seems not to concern them.

God would have us see the church as he does. The church of Christ is the household or family of God (I Tim. 3:15). All Christians, everywhere are the brotherhood of Christ’s disciples (I Pet. 2:17). The church is Christ’s kingdom (Matt. 16:18). It is the spiritual body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). Perceived this way, the church is precious beyond words. Whether it be a dozen disciples meeting in a mud hut in Africa, a little band meeting in a rented hall in Russia or a great congregation of 3,000 in a costly plant in a great metropolis, each congregation is dear to the Father and the Son. They all should be just as dear to us. We should love even those whose faces we have never seen, because they are our kindred in the faith. We should care about their welfare and lend them our assistance when they suffer or are threatened by false teachers. We must never be content to be concerned only with our home congregation or our small circle of friends or relatives in Christ. To love such a small portion of the church is like person who has five siblings but loves only the one living near him.

This lesson is especially timely in the crisis fomented by the promoters of change. While your congregation may not yet be effected by the drummers of error, others are. We must rise to their defense. We must strive to extend protection even to those in distant places because they are God’s beloved children. We must reach out across our nation and even into our mission fields, reminding brethren of the “faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). We must exhort them

to stand fast in the ancient faith and not be blown about by these winds of error (Eph. 4:14). Don't be among those small-minded men who close their eyes to dangers threatening the Lord's Cause in places beyond their sight. With Paul, every faithful disciple will daily feel "anxiety for all the churches" of Christ wherever they may assemble to serve him (II Cor. 11:28). **JHW**

IS IT WORTH THE EFFORT?

We are now mailing CTN to the preachers and elders of half of our congregations here in America. As you can imagine it is done at considerable cost and labor. This is born by a few Christians and congregations who love the church and feel compelled to act in her defense when false brethren are undermining her spiritual foundations.

Do you share our concern? Do you appreciate our efforts and judge them to be helpful? If so would you be consider helping us sustain our efforts and expand them? The threat posed to the Cause we love dictates the following needs:

- * To mail CTN to every congregation in the USA.
- * To mail the congregations in the English speaking nations.
- * To mail all of our foreign missionaries.
- * To send monthly bundles to all schools where preachers are trained.
- * To place bound volumes of CTN in the libraries of all Christians schools.
- * To produce additional books and tracts that address the problems we face.

Your contribution will enable us to reach these goals. A gift of \$50 a month allows us to mail two copies of the paper addressed to the Minister/Elders of 100 congregations. Ask yourself, "If the foundations be destroyed what shall the righteous do?" (Ps. 11:3).**JHW**

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC & NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP

This fine book by the late James D. Bales was first published in 1973 and is now enjoying its third printing. The book consists of Bales' debate notes on the subject, gathered over his long career as a preacher and teacher of God's Word. The first three chapters are devoted to a study of acceptable worship. The remainder of the book is a collection of the many and

varied arguments made in defense of instrumental music in worship. To each argument, the author provides us with one or more concise, effective rebuttals. He provides us with an extensive bibliography of books and materials relating to the subject. Also there are complete scripture and subject indices to expedite the finding of needed information.

Few men who have served among us, stood in the ranks with James Bales. He not only held his doctorate, he was a man whose entire life was devoted to the study and proclamation of the Word of God. Over the years he accumulated a vast personal library and read more broadly than most students dream of. He developed an effective system of collecting and filing information that enabled him to produce the hundred or so books that bear his name. His knowledge was legendary. No one ever read a book from his pen without profit.

This book is a veritable encyclopedia on the subject of instrumental music and worship. In addition to his logical and scriptural responses to the assertions of those who want to use instruments, he provides us with valuable biographical and historical information relating to this subject. These references range from the earliest days of Christianity, through the great apostasy, the Protestant and Reformation and the early years of our movement to restore the ancient faith and practice of the church.

Bro. Bales oft tested his sword against representatives of the Christian Churches who advocated instrumental music. I doubt he could have imagined that thirty years later, some of his own brethren in the church of Christ, and in her schools of higher learning, would be using the same feeble arguments to defend the introduction of instruments into the worship of the church.

This book should be read by every preacher. It should be on the shelves of every congregation's library. Bro. Eddie Cloer has done the church a great favor by reprinting this valuable book. Copies may be ordered from **Truth for Today World Mission School, 2209 S. Benton, Searcy, AR 72143. JHW *****

More lessons can be found at www.christianity-then-and-now.com.

POTS WHO CALL KETTLES BLACK

One of the favorite tactics of change agents is to label those who oppose their efforts as harsh, bigoted and unloving for speaking and writing against their positions. But it seems not to bother the promoters of change to oppose, criticize and condemn those whom

view as traditionalists. One need only read one of their many books to see just how critical and caustic they can be. That one uses more sophisticated terminology, and cloaks his criticism in sarcastic put-downs does not make his actions any different than the conservative, country preacher who cites Scripture, refutes the error and calls a spade a spade!

As change agents work to subvert and capture congregations, one of their favorite tools is blaming "traditional" churches with the responsibility for the various factions and divisions that have occurred over the years. It seems never to occur to them that their agenda for change is divisive and when they agitate their doctrine, additional strife and division will occur. Blinded by the own sense of righteousness, they cannot or will not recognize that they are gendering yet another schism in the Body of Christ.

They denounce churches of Christ and their "back to the Bible movement" as a terrible failure because we have had divisions in our ranks. Hardly a charitable word can be found in their writings for the church of their fathers. Yet they eagerly embrace, with virtually no criticism, a myriad of denominational bodies all of which have their divisions. There are at least 15 kinds of Baptists, 8 kinds of Methodists, 9 kinds of Presbyterians, 10 kinds of Lutherans, 5 kinds of Churches of God, several varieties of Christian Churches/Disciples of Christ, etc. These they embrace with little or no criticism. As Paul put it, "Wherefore thou art without excuse, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest dost practice the same things" (Rom. 2:1).

Thus is fulfilled the ancient saying "Behold how can the pot call the kettle black?" (Hezekiah 6:14)! **JHW**

BOUND VOLUMES OF CTN

We have bound a few copies of the first three years of this paper. They are available for \$6.50 each post paid.

Each issue contains lessons on the fundamentals of the faith, responses to teachings of the promoters of change, book reviews and suggested strategies for dealing with the problems we face. If you send us a contribution of \$30 we will send you a set of the these books and place a set in the library of one of our schools. Make you check to the church of Christ and mail to **John Wadley, 12630 W. Foxfire Dr. Surprise, AZ 85375**

THE SERIOUS BUSINESS OF

WORSHIP

One of our rich privileges as Christians is to approach God in worship. When we meet on the first day of the week our purpose is to worship the Creator through his Son (I Tim. 2:5). The author of Hebrews reminds us to "offer service well-pleasing to God *with reverence and awe*: for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb.12:28). Our sermons, songs, prayers, communion and offerings should be presented to our Lord with the dignity and reverence appropriate for Almighty God. "Serious implies a concern for what really matters." "Sober stresses seriousness of purpose and absence of levity or frivolity" (Webster). Those who preach should stand as the Sovereign God's representatives to dying men, beseeching them to be reconciled unto God (II Cor. 5:20). Knowing the terror of the Lord, they must persuade lost souls to turn to Him (II Cor. 5:11). The pulpit of Christ's church is no place for clowns, comedians or those who treat the church or the gospel lightly. Some preachers obviously have not understood this point.

We expect those who preach to be prepared and do their best when leading in worship. So also those privileged to lead in communion, songs and prayers should prepare themselves and make their very best to do so in a solemn and effective way. In so doing they will honor God and bless all who participate. When guiding hearts in worship to God, there is no place for being cute, winging it and cracking jokes.

When leading folks in worship, we must consider **how our conduct appears** not only to our fellow-Christians, but **to those who are visiting our assemblies**. Most people from Catholic, and mainline Protestant churches are accustomed to worship that is serious, reverent, solemn, well-planned and smoothly conducted. If they come and observe our worship sprinkled with joking, petty talk and fumbling efforts, think what their impression must be. Thus it behooves all who are privileged to lead in worship to make proper preparation so as to do their very best. Paul was concerned lest he had bestowed labor upon his hearers in vain (Gal. 4: 11). No matter how well prepared and delivered a lesson may be, an atmosphere of irreverence, frivolity or slovenliness in worship can nullify its impact on the hearts of sinners. They leave, never to return, thinking, "they did not exhibit proper reverence for God." Paul exhorts us, "Give no occasion of stumbling, either to Jews, or to Greeks, or to the church of God" (I Cor. 10:32).

Whenever we worship Jehovah, always keep in mind that: "Holy and reverend is his name" (Ps. 111:9). Our service should exhibit proper reverence for the Great I AM. **JHW**

BE INFORMED:

Books About the Change Movement: Reviews and Recommendations. \$14.95

Surviving the Storms of Change, \$17.95. For a short time only, order both for \$27.50 post paid.