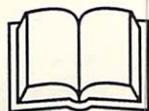


"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The *Word and Work*



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

October, 2005

Doing Things *Differently*:

*"The secret to a happy life is
to accept change gracefully."*

* * *

"Someone has wisely said, 'We can neither break with the past nor return to it.' Of course we are the result of our past. And we should recognize and honor our past. But to attempt to reproduce that past is suicidal. It cannot be done."

--Denny Boultinghouse, *Image* magazine

* * *

"Every church has its own traditions. We are free to change any of those traditions which are . . . neutral. The problem sometimes comes in distinguishing between those "authoritative scriptural traditions" and our own traditions.

"In reality, we all do many things simply because that is the way we have always done them. There is nothing wrong with that. You have to do it some way. The problem comes when we think that our way is the only scriptural way when Scripture is silent on the subject." --Jack Fish

Introduction to This Issue

Alex Wilson

This month's magazine is the result of two other magazines. One was the July 1993 *Word and Work*. As I browsed through some past issues one day looking for something, it caught my eye. The theme grabbed me: "*Doing Things Differently*." Somehow that still seems relevant, so I refreshed my memory. Result: You can read some twelve-year-old articles here—and really *benefit from* them! The principles are timely even yet, and various congregations are even now wrestling with several of the same specific concerns.

The second magazine I had never heard of before. A friend got a copy and said, "You have more use for this than I do." It is a top-flight journal called *Journey*, and is published by Emmaus Bible College in Dubuque, Iowa.

This school represents a group of churches quite similar to us in many ways. They call themselves simply "Brethren" and their congregations "assemblies." They resulted from a back-to-the-Bible movement in Britain in the early 1800s. A number of Christians became fed up with the widespread deadness and divisions in the major denominations. They desired to be simply New Testament Christians by following as closely as possible the pattern of the first-century churches. Sounds familiar, right?

Through the years I have had contacts and at times wonderful fellowship with some of these folks—especially in the Philippines. But to learn more, I went to a website called "Plymouth Brethren FAQ." (They dislike that name, but other people often call them that.) It observes that "a number of doctrines now widely held in evangelical circles" were either discovered or more widely propagated by the Brethren, including "lack of a clergy/laity division, priesthood of all believers, the difference between the Church and Israel, dispensationalism, and the pre-tribulational rapture." They practice believers' baptism by immersion, and celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly. Sounds familiar, right?

According to the web, here are some of their "current issues": "Should elders be elected or appointed, and for how long? Should we have musical instruments in our meetings? Should we have more modern music? Should the sisters participate audibly in the meetings? Should we have ties/links to denominational churches?" We too face such questions. That section ends, "It should be pointed out that each church differs and what might be a very contentious issue for one church could be a settled and accepted matter for another."

Some "Brethren" made a great impact on evangelical Christianity at large, notably George Muller (known for his faith, prayer, and care for orphans) and J. N. Darby (the first popularizer of dispensa-

[Continued on Inside Back Cover]

THE WORD AND WORK

"Declare the whole counsel of God"

Alex V. Wilson, Editor

Dennis L. Allen, Missions

Bennie Hill, News & Notes

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In This Issue

Theme: Doing Things Differently

Introduction -- Alex V. Wilson	IFC
Doing Things Differently -- Alex V. Wilson	290
Services As Usual -- Randy Fenter	294
Can Worship be Improved and Still be Biblical? -- Bailey Mc Bride . . .	295
Unity Requires Sensitivity -- Charles Moore	296
Are Changes Uncomfortable?	298
Abilene Mission Exemplifies Efforts to Reach 'Unchurched' -- Jack Welch	299
Some Churches are Leading the Way -- Leroy Garrett	301
Tradition and Change	304
Why Does God Choose the Younger over the Older? -- Nick Boone	309
Grace In Action -- Edward Fudge	311
Voices From The Fields	312
Why Prayer Grows Tiresome -- R. H. Boll	315
What Do You Do for Fun?	316
Sovereignty and Responsibility -- Edward Fudge	318
News and Notes -- Bennie Hill	319

DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

Alex V. Wilson

Times change, and people do things differently. I once saw a picture of a Puritan church meeting in the 1600's. All the men sat on one side and the women on the other--at least in that picture--and the men were wearing their hats inside the building! (The movie *Oliver Cromwell* showed King Charles I wearing his hat at mealtimes inside his palace, so that must have been accepted custom in those days.) The Puritan preacher and commentator, Matthew Henry, "in public services usually prayed for half an hour, preached for an hour, and joined in singing Psalms." Are you glad or sad that we do things differently from the Puritans?

Alexander Campbell lived 150 years ago. He too didn't quite follow our pattern, or rather, we don't follow his in every way. In his magazine he reported visiting a church on one of his trips to the Midwest. Shocked, he wrote something like this: At that meeting I saw something I've never seen before and hope never to see again, a congregation remaining seated during prayer to the Heavenly Father! He expressed his profound wish that such a disrespectful, irreverent custom might never spread elsewhere. He believed we should either kneel or stand before the Lord when we pray. His view may have been wise, but times have changed, haven't they?

Campbell also did not follow our custom of having invitation songs in most meetings. Earl West writes, "When J. W. McGarvey enrolled at Bethany College, he determined to become a Christian. He made up his mind that at the first opportunity he would confess Christ and be immersed. He listened to Alexander Campbell preach much, but it was not Campbell's custom to extend an invitation after each sermon, so McGarvey waited two weeks after he made up his mind before he had the opportunity of stepping forward." There's nothing wrong with having invitation-songs, of course, but they are not essential. Peter at Pentecost didn't say, "If you want to become Jesus' disciple, come forward while we sing #131." It's too bad McGarvey thought he couldn't confess faith in Christ till "the invitation" was publicly given in some set way.

Memories from the Early 1900's

I once was sent an old pamphlet telling the history of Berea Church near Sullivan, Indiana. That was interesting to me because Stanford Chambers, editor of *Word and Work* in the early 1900s, considered Berea his first home-church. But it was surprising to read the section, "Sunday Morning at Berea Church." Here is an excerpt:

Mrs. Clara (Chambers) Blakeman led singing at Berea Church for as long as I can remember. Clara was an excellent song leader and when we went to Harding (College) or visited nearby congregations, we always could sing the songs correctly, because she was very strict about singing the songs as the music was written. She never stood to lead singing but sat near the front row, usually in about the same place.

Well, that was different, wasn't it! We mention it here, not to push the idea, but to rejoice in the fact that in those days such an unusual practice didn't cause any uproar, division, or attacks by other congregations. We wonder if it happened today, whether the church would be blacklisted and find few churches extending fellowship to it? Apparently Stanford Chambers, a man who was never accused of compromising Biblical teaching, didn't feel that his sister's being the song-leader was wrong. Of course the Bible never even mentions song-leaders, much less telling the requirements for such a ministry.

We Need to Make Distinctions

It helps to distinguish between what is *ANTI-Biblical* (contrary to Scripture), what is *NON-Biblical* (unmentioned in Scripture but not opposed to its principles), what is *Biblical-but-UNBINDING* on us today, and what is *Biblical-and-BINDING*. Think through those four classifications for a minute or two and see if you consider them valid.

Here are some examples of what I mean. A church gathering where there are prayers to Mary and other "saints" is *anti-Biblical*, for there is only one Mediator between God and man. A meeting in which, after the sermon, the listeners divide into small groups and discuss the sermon topic among themselves--this exemplifies what I mean by *non-Biblical*. Scripture doesn't require us to do it, and yet it might sometimes be a very useful activity. Examples of *Biblical-but-not-now-binding* practices would be footwashing, the holy kiss, and raising our hands in prayer or praise. The earliest disciples engaged in these practices sometimes, if not regularly (1 Tim 5:10 & 2:8, 1 Cor. 16:20), but most Christians feel they are optional today because our culture differs from the first century. Examples of *Biblical-and-binding* practices would be loving one another deeply, and yet on the otherhand expelling from the congregation any Christian brother or sister who persists in clearly wicked activities after being warned (1 Thes. 4:9-10, 2 Thes. 3:6-15, 1 Cor. 5:1-13).

To tease us into thinking more about this, here's a quiz. Classify the following as either AB (anti-Biblical), NB (non-Biblical), BU (Biblical but unbinding) or BB (Biblical and binding):

1. A church which always stands during the Scripture reading, out of respect for God's Word.

2. Churches in Zimbabwe where after the meeting the first member to leave the building waits outside the door to shake hands, then the second one out does the same, followed by all the rest--until each member shakes hands with every other person there.

3. A military chapel in Manila where the chaplain was expected to lead the opening prayer, the main prayer later on, the prayer at the Lord's Supper and the closing prayer, plus giving the Scripture-reading, sermon and announcements!

4. A church where, instead of a sermon, several men may share some lessons from the Bible, perhaps or perhaps not on a pre-arranged subject.

5. A church which held a youth-emphasis Sunday during which young men led the singing and prayers, and also preached and led the Lord's Supper meditation; but young ladies took up the offering and passed the Lord's Supper emblems.

6. Some churches in Africa where before singing a hymn they always hum the first verse. (Robert Boyd told about that tradition, and David McReynolds asked how he knew it was the first verse they hummed--maybe it was the third verse, which often gets omitted!)

7. A prayer meeting where folks pray so softly that most other people can't hear them

8. A church which sponsors a Boy Scout and/or Girl Scout troop.

All the above are actual cases, not imaginary. I wonder if we would all agree on our classifications of those practices? Maybe not, but that's o-k. Here are some others to think about: An annual church budget. Hymnals. Baptismal robes and pools. Lord's Supper trays and cups. Sunday school. Church buildings. Church schools. Church camps. Revival meetings. Monthly magazines (hey--don't go to meddling!). Obviously all the items in this paragraph are non-Biblical. You can't find chapter and verse for them. They are not required--but neither are they necessarily wrong. Yet it is wise to evaluate them periodically, and maybe make adjustments. They are human traditions rather than divine requirements, but that doesn't mean they are harmful. Yet it's possible that some of them might outlive their usefulness and need to be changed or eliminated.

Here then are valuable guidelines: **1. Don't be afraid to change**, so long as you do so within Biblical guidelines. **2. Don't insist on change without strong reasons**, unless you are opposing something which is definitely anti-Scriptural. **3. Make love your emphasis**, because that's the most important of Christian virtues.

Innovative "Services"

Most of this issue develops the themes mentioned here. But I fear this editorial has been one-sided. Almost all the examples mentioned are related to church *meetings*--different ways of doing things when disciples gather together. But we also need creativity in *out-reach*, thinking of fresh, improved ways of serving folks around us. That's definitely Biblical! So we close with two examples mentioned in a *Wineskins* magazine article entitled "Liberated to be Creative":

In congregations all over the world Christians are constructing new wineskins as they discover the joys of creating much broader ways to seek first the purposes of God in their lives and congregations. A congregation in Texas has "adopted" a public school in a poverty-stricken neighborhood. Christians provide food and manpower for a pantry at the school to minister to the neighborhood. A physician provides a free "well baby" clinic at the school every Thursday afternoon. A pharmacist provides prescription drugs at cost for the parents who use the clinic. Every Christmas the entire congregation throws a party for the school, complete with Christmas dinner, clothing, toys, and bedding.

In Tennessee a creative congregation is sewing new wineskins by using its facilities to help the homeless. Christians provide dinner and breakfast for the indigent men and women who come to spend the night. Most care-givers at the congregation minister side-by-side with their entire families as they prepare meals and then spend the night at the building. Children are experiencing first-hand what Matthew meant when he said to provide "cups of cold water."

May our Lord enable us too to be imaginative, bold, visionary and Biblical, both when we gather to praise Him and when we scatter to proclaim Him and serve others.

Services As Usual

Randy Fenter
(written years ago)

My three year old and I follow the same routine every night. After I bundle her into bed, she says, "Daddy, tell me a story." Then follow three songs—all invariably the same—"Jesus Loves Me," "Jesus Loves The Little Children" and "The Wise Man" (enthusiastic hand motions must accompany "The Wise Man"). Next comes a drink of water and a prayer. It's not hard to remember the order as Marta is quick to correct if a song is sung out of order or if I offer the drink of water at the wrong time. Three year olds. I love 'em. I hope we learn some new songs, though, by the time she's four.

I sometimes grin to myself wondering if Marta or some other three year old designs most church services. Predictable is a kind of adjective. The only thing missing is the drink of water. After graduating from college I served as an associate minister. My first Sunday I was asked to lead singing. Immediately following the closing prayer one of the elders grasped my arm and led me to a classroom just off the auditorium. His first words to me went something like this: "I know you're new here so we'll let it go this time, but you led two songs instead of three before the prayer. Then you failed to have us stand for the prayer but made us stand up for the song before the sermon. When you do things like that you just confuse people. So don't ever let it happen again." I never did.

As the years have gone by that experience has become less acrid but profoundly sadder. What joy we missed in that church! Already damp services were constantly gloomed by the dull lowering clouds of sameness.

Chuck Swindoll writes, "We are witnesses and spokesmen for the God of infinite variety, boundless creativity, indescribable majesty and beauty. We hold in our possession a white-hot message of hope, a pulsating invitation to approach a living Savior. Can we justify garbing this hope in faded sackcloth, delivering it in a predictable monotone?"

I love three year olds; but let's find someone else to plan worship services.

Can Worship be *Improved* and Still be *Biblical*?

Bailey McBride

In an era when there seems to be a great push to change only for the sake of being different or making a change, I am really making an appeal that we focus our attention on the *purpose* of worship and its *value* to those who are worshipping.

I have friends and family who worship in Churches of Christ which seldom use song books. The songs are projected onto a screen so that the whole audience can see the words without looking at a book. I really like that process, because it lets the church sing two or three additional songs in the time that would have been spent in looking up numbers in the hymnal. Furthermore, not having the book in front of them encourages most people to sing enthusiastically.

Not long ago, I worshiped with a church in Tennessee where the evening service was devoted to reading aloud the book of Philipians. The church stood and read together from the text as it was flashed on the screen. Several times the audience sat down and sang songs related to the ideas in the reading. There was tremendous power in the communal reading of the Word. I saw and heard things in this familiar text that I had not thought about in years. I was reminded again that there is power in the Word. At my congregation in Oklahoma City, a minister has started asking the church to read aloud with him key passages which he has printed on the work sheet he distributes when he preaches. It has been thrilling to hear voices in unison affirm the testimony of the Holy Spirit in great passages.

A lot of discussion has been taking place about people clapping their hands in church. I confess that I belong to the generation which never thought we'd see the day when "the church would be desecrated" by applauding people. Yet, when I examine the arguments I hear against clapping hands, I am not convinced. The most common argument is that applause is used in response to entertainment. And that is true. But we use applause in many other ways, as well. Last year I was in a crowd meeting the President. As he made his entrance, he was greeted by thunderous applause, from Democrats as well as Republicans. The people were using their hands to honor the President of the United States. In our society, people clap their hands to show approval, respect, love and appreciation and to honor people or achievements.

The church I attend does not have applause, and that is alright with most of the members. When new members are introduced, the person making the introduction says, "If you are glad to have the Browns as part of this church, say 'Amen.'" Everyone shows approval with a loud amen. The church commonly sings, "We love you with the love of the Lord" to those who have been of special service, or to couples who have been married a long time. We simply use verbal affirmation. It would certainly not be wrong for us to applaud them.

Public worship is an important aspect of life for any church. I am happy that we live in an era when creative people are thinking about helping us worship more effectively. I certainly do not want to trivialize our tribute to our Creator and our Savior. I don't want to practice anything just because it is novel or different. I want as little distraction from the heart of my communion as possible. In conclusion, we all need to remind ourselves that we are worshipers before God. If we think of the theater as an analogy, we are the actors and God is the audience. We come to worship God, and it is He alone whom we must please. "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." As worshipers, we must give the best of our heart, our minds, our words and our spirits.

--Christian Chronicle, Feb. 1993 (condensed).

UNITY REQUIRES *SENSITIVITY*

Charles Moore in IMAGE Magazine

Countless churches have been torn apart because members with different opinions were insensitive to each other. Paul condemned the "overbearing" attitude that led to such divisions. As Saul of Tarsus, he had been extremely overbearing himself, but his daily walk with Christ produced a caring, loving, sensitive person.

When Paul came to Jerusalem following his third missionary journey, he was greeted by James and the elders (Acts 21: 17f). They reminded him that there were many thousands of Jewish believers who were zealous for the law. These believers were understandably suspicious of this man who had spent so much of his time among the Greeks. They had heard that he was teaching Jews to abandon their customs. In order to counteract this false report, the elders urged Paul to involve himself in certain Jewish rites along with four of their men who had taken a vow. Paul willingly complied. Among the Jews, he functioned as a Jew; among the Greeks, he functioned as a Greek.

The Jews and the Greeks did things very differently when they assembled together. Greek assemblies were so informal that they sometimes became disorganized and unruly. Paul had to encourage them to be sensitive toward everyone in the assembly (1 Cor. 11:17-22) and to do things in a "fitting and orderly way" (1 Cor. 14:40). In contrast, gatherings of Jewish Christians were very structured and controlled, with elders ("rulers") in firm control, patterned after the synagogue service. It is significant that Paul did not feel it necessary to force changes on either group. There were far more important issues to be considered.

One of the great tragedies facing the church today is the division that has resulted over differences in opinions, procedures and methods. Advocates of change and opponents of change frequently talk past each other. Sometimes our agenda for change becomes stronger than our sensitivity for people, and we attempt to force others to abandon their customs and the way they feel about certain things "for their own good." We can resist change by digging in our heels and refusing to give an inch, or we can attempt to force change by agitation or by "surprising" the congregation with an abrupt change from traditional patterns. Staunch resistance to change will likely lose many of our younger members who do not feel bound to the way we have always done things. And rashly pushing through unwanted changes will at the very least result in confusion and discomfort, and the worst scenario may produce a split in the fellowship. Either way, bad feelings are almost certain to result, and the two (or more) factions will eye each other suspiciously.

Helpful changes can take place only in an atmosphere of love and sensitivity. Much time and personal involvement are prerequisite to suggesting change. Only after I have met with a body of people over a period of time; after I understand how they feel about things and just where they are in their thinking; after I have come to really know them (not just a few of them, but also those quiet ones who have little to say) and they have come to know and trust me; after I have been involved with them in Bible studies, assemblies and service projects so that they know I value the things they did before I even came on the scene--only then am I in a position to recommend changes. And *recommend* is the operative word. I never have the right to try to force change on others. This was not Paul's way and it was not Jesus' way. It is not the way of love and sensitivity.

The devil must be pleased when he can harden our hearts and dry up our sensitivity and disrupt our fellowship over an issue as relatively insignificant as how we do things in the church assembly. There are far too many truly important issues that ought to occupy our attention and energy: How can we effectively communicate the

message of the cross to a materialistic society? How can we learn to embrace the "unattractive" in our society and treat them as Jesus treated lepers, beggars, tax collectors and even prostitutes? How can we learn to love each other with such a love that opinion differences cannot possibly disrupt our fellowship? How can we show the love of Christ to the starving people of the world? These are absolutely vital issues. *We must not allow ourselves to be sidetracked by things of lesser importance.*

If we are to be a living, vital force in our communities, it is certainly true that *changes in our ways of doing things must take place.* Culture does not remain static, and the church must not. If it does, it will die. We must understand that while truth is absolute, methods of communicating truth and relating it to our lives are not. And changes can be refreshing and stimulating. *But change for the sake of change, forced change and overemphasis on how we do things in the assembly tend to confuse and frighten people and obscure more important concerns.* We must remain sensitive to every segment of our fellowship.

May God give us the wisdom and the sensitivity to focus on the real issues facing the church today. We must realize that the true mark of followers of Jesus Christ is our love for one another. When the love of Christ controls our hearts, issues based on tradition and opinion cannot divide us and destroy our fellowship. Rather, we will "in honor give preference to one another."

ARE CHANGES UNCOMFORTABLE?

(The following is adapted from a bulletin of a Church of Christ in Kentucky.)

The normal Christian will grow, and growth necessitates change. We see our children grow and they acquire new abilities and need larger clothing. Their interests change, and their motivations, while not particularly better or worse, are changing, too. So it is with Christians. Our Father wants us to grow. We want to grow. In His love, however, let us be sure that we do not let something new become an arbitrary "growth chart" that pronounces that somebody else has not grown as much as we have.

For example, some of us here love the use of heart songs in worship. Some prefer the hymnals. Over the last year or two we have moved more and more toward freer use of the heart songs, but

notice that we have not in any way abandoned the hymnals. Please, dear brother or sister, don't fear such changes.

The key word here is "freedom," and it is a very scriptural and spiritual concept. Our spiritual leaders have talked much about the direction of our congregation's progress, and every precaution is being taken not to do anything that hurts anyone. We seek freedom to "stretch" as much as the Lord leads us to stretch. But the freedom to stretch does not force me to stretch if, for some reason, I can't stretch today.

Some among us lift hands in praise to the Lord. Fine. Some do not. Fine. No precedent is being set that you must conform to. Precedents are important in courts of law and in churches that are legalistic. Jesus came to set us free within Himself. You are free to worship with uplifted hands here if you want to. If the Lord is not leading you to do so, no one will look down on you for not doing so. Love the Lord as He loves us. Let us keep our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith. He is Lord.

Abilene Mission Exemplifies Efforts to Reach 'Unchurched'

Jack Welch in *Christian Chronicle* 2/93

A new congregation recently begun in Abilene, Texas, is built on a perceived need for the church everywhere in the United States.

"If we were reaching our children," says Kent Smith, a specialist in domestic missions at Abilene Christian University and one of the leaders of the Abilene mission church, "we would have grown 15 or 20 percent over this past decade, but the growth has been flat." Smith is eager to use this congregation to experiment with ways of strengthening the church, which he sees as having an identity crisis. He also wants to give students a chance to try out evangelistic techniques, so that they, themselves, may go out and plant new churches. The Abilene Mission church meets Sunday morning in a room of the Abilene Civic Center. Upon walking in from the parking lot, one is greeted by several people who introduce themselves and provide an informal brochure about the church. Inside there is more greeting and people are encouraged to have refreshments.

The service begins when five song leaders invite everyone to join in praise. The words of the devotional-type songs are flashed on a screen by an overhead projector. Reg Cox, graduate student and

part-time counselor at ACU, gives the announcements, and there is loud applause at the news of the birth of a baby whose mother has had complications over the past few weeks. Cox encourages people to join in the worship at their own comfort level. Most of the nearly 250 people remain standing during the half-hour or so of singing and dramatic Scripture reading.

The 30 or so children present are then assembled for a lesson on the "seed" and the "word," and each child is given a seed. The high point of the lesson comes after the seeds have been planted and a seven-foot canvas is raised on which a tree and fruit have been painted. The children then go to a Bible class.

A Nigerian family tells about how the mother was cured of cancer following prayer and fasting. She was provided money by the President of Nigeria for a trip to a London hospital where prayer turned her near death condition into one of health. Then Smith brings a lesson from Mark 1-3 in which Jesus is shown acting in the lives of people who acknowledge that they are helpless before him. (Passages of Scripture and this message will be discussed during small group sessions on Sunday evening where communion also will be served.) No invitation concludes the sermon, but families are stationed in all corners of the building, so that people may go there for prayer after services. If anyone is interested in knowing more, he or she is invited to Sunday evening sessions at someone's home.

'Seeker-sensitive,' is how Cox describes the congregation. He believes that the unchurched in Abilene do not feel comfortable in a traditional church setting, or even with a traditional church name. He wants this Sunday service to be a bridge to the unchurched, so that a deeper relationship with God can follow. "I'm excited that we can do real live evangelism in Abilene, Texas," says Cox. The church has met since May and has had several baptisms.

Noting too, that people had been praying for a year concerning this work, Cox says, "This church is about prayer. Every day from 5 to 7 a.m. a group prays. This is the missing link in most church work. "

A seven-generation descendant of the Restoration Movement and the son of a preacher in the Middle West, Smith emphasizes that he is working "to restore wholeness to a broken world by the power of Jesus Christ." He believes that in North America, authentic community is almost unknown.

One of the innovations in the church concerns the use of women. The five-member group of song leaders are made up of three men

and two women. The teacher of children's class before the congregation is a woman, and the reader of the Scriptures over the public address system is a woman. Smith believes that in North America in the 20th century for women to read Scriptures or help with the singing is not usurping authority.

The Minter Lane church, Abilene, planted the Mission church. Its leaders meet once a month with the Minter Lane elders to discuss the work and pray together.

The Abilene Mission church tries different strategies and abandons those which do not work. At the heart of this effort is an attempt to provide some ideas for *congregations wanting something more than they presently have, but without violating Scripture.*

Oneness does not mean sameness--

Some Churches Are Leading the Way

Leroy Garrett

[Over a decade ago, Leroy Garrett brought his magazine *Restoration Review* to a conclusion with a series of thought-provoking articles entitled "What Must the Church of Christ Do to be Saved?" He meant "saved" from deadness, irrelevance, futility and fruitlessness. Here are some excerpts from his final article. He described at least six churches, of which we include three. -a.v.w.]

The Richardson East Church of Christ [in Dallas] shares in special services with other churches. In one instance, a number of their members went across town to worship with a small black Baptist church. This congregation has attracted city-wide attention, being written up in the press, for its outreach to the disenfranchised, including AIDS patients.

Then there is the minister who recently applied for a job at the Southern Hills Church of Christ in Tulsa and brought a "Position Paper" along with him, which he passed out to the congregation. In it he stated that he favored a cappella singing, but if hired he would not be preaching against instrumental music, that "It is not a biblical subject and certainly not a matter of fellowship." There were also disclaimers to a legalistic position on baptism, the ministry of women, and the Holy Spirit. He also stated that he was open to fellowship with other churches. He said he is proud of his Restoration roots and wants to stay with Churches of Christ but not be controlled by them. He wants to help lead our people out of "the paralysis of

sectarianism.” I tell you all this to tell you the big news. He was hired!

If I named but one church that exemplifies the changes I’ve pled for in this series, it might be the Lake Highlands Church of Christ in Dallas, particularly in terms of its Sunday worship service. It has made impressive strides toward the kind of Body life that the Scriptures call for, such as creating an environment where people feel free to share.

They have a sharing time of some 10-15 minutes where people move about the congregation praying, confessing and praising God together. One can see small huddles of people, circled arm in arm, all across the auditorium that seats about 600, which, by the way, they are filling. The minister explains to the visitors that this is not a time for small talk or Cowboy talk, but a time for spiritual fellowship.

A "praise team" made up of two men and two women lead the singing while the congregation stands. An overhead is used rather than hymnals. There is a choir and solos by both men and women. Testimonials are often deeply moving. Prompted by the sad news that one of his children was getting a divorce, a longtime prominent Church of Christ preacher, one of 18 former ministers in that church who are burned out and now doing other things, got up and confessed that he had been an absentee-father and had failed his family. It was one more emotional moment for a congregation that is learning to be a confessing church, one that is learning to be compassionate. Our churches must cultivate this kind of Body life if we are to be saved.

Lake Highlands is able to move in these new directions because it has leaders who are shepherd-like and have learned to pray together. The elders gather an hour beforehand to pray for the service they will be leading. The church takes time with its rather long prayer list, with an elder leading the prayers. The church sees its elders, not as business men who are running the church or like a corporate board that hands down decisions, but as *spiritual* leaders. The minister, who teaches more than preaches, goes through the Bible, a book at a time, relating what it says to present day needs. Aware of the great diversity in his congregation, he avoids controversial "issues," allowing the Bible itself to speak to the people.

Their position on instrumental music is that a cappella singing, which they do very well, is their tradition, one to be prized, but not a biblical injunction, and they do not make it an issue. In fact they

use instruments in special praise services, as well as instrumental recordings with solos.

Lake Highlands is an outreach church. Due to a large contingency of Cambodians in Dallas, it supports a separate church of these people. They have a "children's church" during their main assembly. *They encourage their people to come up with their own ministries with the church helping out.* One sister, a former airline attendant, came up with the idea of persuading American Airlines to send one of their out-of-service planes to Croatia full of food. It was done, with the church filling the plane with food! A child in the church thought it would be a good idea to give gloves to homeless children in Dallas. They soon had 700 pairs to distribute!

Much of the church's solidarity comes through their more intimate home gatherings, cell groups, which they have two Sunday evenings a month. They are trying to get away from their building more in their ministry and outreach.

While they do all this, they do not want their congregation to be "a neat church" where Church of Christ folk can go who are bored with where they are. They are not interested in entertaining the dissatisfied. They want to be the church, serving, witnessing, meeting people's needs, including those beyond their four walls....

Conclusion These are but a few of the changing churches among us. What does all this mean? It means that we can all change for the better if we have the will. It also means that the Churches of Christ are a beautiful people with lots of creative diversity. It means that we should recognize our diversity and accept the liberating truth that *oneness does not mean sameness.*

We can have churches that have Sunday School and those that do not; those that support Herald of Truth and those that do not; those that have instrumental music and those that do not; churches that are premillennial and those that are not, etc., and yet be united in the essentials of the faith and doing at least some things together. And no one has to compromise any truth or violate his or her conscience! If we are to be saved as a people and recapture our heritage as a unity movement, we have no choice but to get with it.

TRADITION and CHANGE

[A member of a "Brethren" assembly sent this letter to the faculty question-and-answer column of Journey magazine. See this month's inside front cover for an explanation. And don't be disturbed if you can't agree with everything here. Many of us will disagree with one sentence in the reply to the following question! But the article is very valuable anyway.]

"I am afraid that too many assemblies have become so enamored with the way they do things that they have forgotten the One who made the Way in a real sense. Grateful for my upbringing, but shamed by the continuing pattern of legalistic dogma, I wonder where the 'assembly movement' is heading. In some places it is heading down the tubes as more and more Christians are turned off by 'meeting in the Lord's own appointed way'--which cannot, by the way, be confirmed from Scripture as pertains to pattern, place, time or method. In the name of defending the purity and sanctity of the Lord's Supper we have built shrines unto ourselves ('only we do it the right way'). For shame!....

"The bigger question is: At what point do we dare change our methods in order to remain relevant in this present day? We are thankful for another assembly in our city that we can attend. After 23 years (me) and 39+ years (my wife), we finally had to leave our beloved assembly because 'the liturgy could not be disturbed. For that, what has been gained?'"

—Anonymous

Reply by Faculty Member Jack Fish

TRADITION AND CHANGE

A number of years ago a mid-western assembly was discussing whether they should change the time of the Lord's Supper from the morning to the evening. One of the men became very upset and threatened to leave the assembly if such a change was made. This change "would be a radical departure from the truth."

This same story could be repeated over and over again with just the specific issue being different. *We hold our traditions as if they were the Word of God, and any change would be a departure from the faith.* In regard to the Lord's Supper it has been almost universally agreed in the history of the church that this is an ordinance of the church which was commanded by Christ and is, therefore, obligatory for believers. But where in Scripture does it say when it

should be celebrated? We might infer that the Lord's Supper should be observed at least weekly. In Acts 20:7 the Christians were gathered together on the first day of the week to break bread, and in 1 Corinthians 11:20 the Corinthians should have been meeting to eat the Lord's Supper (but were not because of their abuse of the occasion). But in Acts 2:46 they were day by day "breaking bread from house to house." Whether that was to be the normative practice for us is not the issue here. We would simply note that none of the passages mention whether they observed the Lord's Supper in the morning or the evening. We might even ask ourselves whether the Lord's Supper was a supper or a breakfast. The fact is that the time of day when we meet to celebrate the Lord's Supper is part of our individual church's local tradition.

TRADITION and The BIBLE

Not all traditions are bad. In fact Scripture uses the word tradition in two or perhaps three senses. One is positive, one negative, and the third sense is neutral.

Positive Tradition

In 2 Thessalonians 2:15 Paul commands the believers to "stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us." In 3:6 they were to "keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us." In 1 Corinthians 11:2 Paul commends the Christians because they "hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you." Here the word *tradition* is used positively to refer to the authoritative teaching received from the apostles. The word itself simply means "what is handed over or passed down." It was used of the teaching passed on from a teacher to his disciples. In these verses Paul is referring to the teachings of the apostles which had been delivered over to the churches. Since the apostles were the authorized representatives of Christ, their teaching had his authority. This is the teaching that we have in the New Testament. It is inspired and authoritative. This is the tradition that refers to the unchangeable truth of the New Testament. This refers to the essential truths of the Christian faith which are universally accepted. It also refers to truths such as eternal security which some Christians have disputed, but which are still the teaching of Scripture. We may examine these truths like the Bereans to see if they are so (Acts 17:11), but we are not at liberty to accept or reject them on the basis of our personal preference.

Negative Tradition

In Mark 7 Christ opposed the traditions of the Jewish elders which he said was simply the tradition of men (7:8). In the period

between the Old Testament and the New Testament there had developed a body of teaching by the rabbis in which they explained and applied the Scriptures. This oral teaching had assumed an authority equal with Scripture. The authority of this oral tradition is rejected in this passage when it comes to ritual washing before meals. It is specifically condemned when it is contrary to the teaching of Scripture. The Pharisees set aside the commandment of God in order to keep their tradition (Mark 7:9).

Neutral Tradition

Not all human traditions are contrary to Scripture. Paul had grown up zealous for the Jewish traditions (Gal. 1:14). When he trusted Christ, he became free of the law as well as the traditions of the Jews. In Galatians he strongly defended and insisted on that freedom (5:1). At the same time he was free to use his freedom to adapt himself to the traditions of Jews or Gentiles which were neutral, i.e. not contrary to the Word of God. "To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law" (1 Cor. 9:20-21). Paul was unchangeable when contending for the truth, but very willing to change and adapt to different circumstances if it would further the Gospel.

TRADITION and CHANGE in The CHURCH

Every church has its own traditions. We are free to change any of those traditions which are in the neutral category. The problem sometimes comes in distinguishing between those "authoritative scriptural traditions" and our own traditions. This can especially be a problem for those who strive to have a New Testament assembly. Because we want to follow the New Testament in areas relating to the church (e.g. the headship of Christ, the priesthood of all believers, the plurality of elders, the centrality of the Lord's Supper), we may think that everything we do and the way we do it is the teaching of the New Testament. In reality, we all do many things simply because that is the way we have always done them. There is nothing wrong with that. You have to do it some way. The problem comes when we think that our way is the only scriptural way when Scripture is silent on the subject.

There is another problem which may develop when the principle is held that we may only do what the New Testament authorizes us to do. Some have opposed Sunday school, youth groups, or Christian concerts on that principle. The problem with this principle is that it is too restrictive and it does not have the authority of Scripture. In-

stead of restricting us to those things that are specifically *commanded*, the Bible gives us great freedom to do anything that will help us glorify God and is *not specifically contrary* to the principles of his Word.

We live in a changing world. The fundamentals of church truth will remain the same in each generation, but the face or appearance of the church will continually change as we seek to adapt to changing times. Our task is to determine how we can best do the things as Christians which the church is commanded to do (the apostle's doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread, prayer--Acts 2:42) and how we can best reach the non-Christian world.

It would be impossible in our limited space to list all of the areas of freedom, but let me mention a few.

1. The order of our church services. Many are only familiar with the Sunday morning breaking of bread, followed by the family Bible hour, along with a Sunday evening preaching service and a mid-week prayer meeting and Bible study. There are some around who will remember when the only meeting on Sunday morning was the breaking of bread. Sunday evening was a gospel meeting and the Bible teaching was during the week. We are free to make variations here according to what works best for our congregation. We tried a year ago to begin with the preaching on Sunday morning and have the breaking of bread at 11 o'clock. We thought that that would give more prominence to the Lord's Supper. After four months we went back to our old way because the new schedule didn't work. But we were free to try.

2. Procedural matters at the Lord's Supper. Who opens the meeting (an undesignated person or someone who is assigned that task)? Is there a theme assigned for the meeting relating to the person and work of Christ or not? Who gives thanks for the bread (anyone, an elder, someone appointed to do so)? Who breaks the bread (anyone, an elder, the person who gave thanks)? I have seen all these practices in different "New Testament" assemblies around the country.

3. Evangelism. I remember when the Sunday evening service was an evangelistic meeting and we also had special gospel campaigns which would last one or more weeks. Christians would invite their non-Christian friends to come and hear the gospel, and they often did come. Why don't we have these kinds of meetings anymore? It isn't because we have lost interest in evangelism. Rather we are living in a society where non-Christians just don't come to church to hear the gospel. If all we do today is announce that we are

having a gospel meeting to which no non-Christians come, we have not fulfilled our responsibility. In fact we are being disobedient to the command to go into all the world and make disciples of all men (Matt. 28:19).

4. Music. Perhaps the area where we have more problems and more discomfort today is in the area of music. There are some styles of music that many of us just don't like. Particularly, there tends to be a generational gap in this area. Some insist on only the grand old hymns, and they drive away the young people. Some insist on only new choruses with a rock band accompaniment, and they alienate the old. We need to adapt our music in the church in a way that edifies the whole church and follows Scripture. There are some things that I am against--choruses with endless repetitions, mindless drivel, or unscriptural teachings.

I am also against insisting on one style of music so that the church is divided into a youth church, a young couples with children church, and an old folks church. This destroys the unity of the body of Christ. All of us, young and old, need to stretch and adapt so that we use the best of the old and the best of the new without alienating any by insisting on the extremes of either end.

Change is necessary and change is inevitable. We recognize the need for missionaries to adapt themselves and the churches they plant in the different cultures of the world. (I have heard of two or three hour preaching services in some areas of the world, and as a preacher I say, "Amen." But as a listener in the pew, I groan.) We also in the United States live in the midst of a changing culture and society. Our task is to hold to the foundations and at the same time adapt to our changing world. That task is not always easy. It involves having a knowledge of the Bible and having discernment--particularly discernment as to what is the unchanging truth of Scripture and what are our own traditions which we are free to change. It also requires a flexible mentality which is willing to do some things in different ways in order to best meet the needs of the saints and to reach out to the non-Christian world.

God too may "do things differently"

Why Does God Choose the Younger over the Older?

Nick Boone

"Because he wants to!" This is the answer I've sometimes received to the title question above. Of course, it is the right answer, but perhaps we can get more specific. We might ask, "Why does God *want* to choose the younger over the older?" First, I suppose, we must establish the fact that God, indeed, does make a habit of elevating one of the younger siblings in a family over the elder one into a place of prominence.

This practice begins early in the book of Genesis, when Abel's sacrifice was chosen over Cain's. Seth then becomes the chosen son of Adam and Eve. The same strange practice recurs with Shem being elevated over Japheth, Abraham over Haran, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Rachel over Leah (in a sense), Joseph over Reuben, and Ephraim over Manasseh. And this is just Genesis. Other prominent younger sons include David and Solomon. There are probably more that I could have mentioned, but I think this sample suffices for evidence that God, throughout the Bible, often chooses a younger sibling instead of choosing the one everyone would expect, the eldest.

But the question remains: What is the significance of this counter-cultural practice? It doesn't seem right to simply answer that the purpose lies purely in the counter-cultural nature of this practice. If God really wanted to shake things up just for the sake of being "different" he could have chosen women as the inheritors of property and such. I believe that there are at least three aspects of God's decision to promote the younger siblings that have important theological significance for Christians.

First, the stories of topsy-turvy primogeniture in Genesis teach us that we cannot fully know the purposes God has in store for our lives. We like to plan our lives out. We have expectations and goals—all of which can be good things, as long as we don't hold on to them so tightly that we cannot change in response to God's will. Isaac favored Esau, but God favored Jacob. Joseph's brothers desperately wanted to hang on to their rewards as older sons, and therefore were blinded to God's plans for Joseph and the family as a whole. Most stunning is God's choice of Ephraim over Manasseh. Joseph doesn't understand this seemingly arbitrary decision. We are

than Manasseh. Sometimes God's purposes for our lives seems arbitrary. Cain cannot understand why God chooses the younger Abel's sacrifice over his. We often cannot see what God is doing when life throws us a curve. Genesis teaches us that, while we *can* know what God's purposes are in terms of service, faith, and devotion to his will, we *cannot* know what God has planned for each and every detail of our lives. We have to trust him when things seemingly go awry, as well as when things are going great.

The second lesson we can learn from God's preference for younger siblings is stated nicely in 1 Samuel 16:7. When Samuel is looking for the man God will ask him to anoint as King of Israel, Samuel is led to the house of Jesse and his seven sons. Everyone is stunned by God's choice of David, the youngest son. But God's response is telling: "The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." By outward appearances, Haran would have been chosen over Abraham, Esau over Jacob, Reuben over Joseph. Certainly David would not have been chosen. But God chooses on the basis of the heart. This is one reason why we cannot fully know the purposes of God: we cannot see into people's hearts as accurately as God can. No right-minded Christian would have chosen Paul to be an apostle after what he did to the Church on the basis of outward appearance alone. But, thankfully, there were indeed right-minded Christians, (like Ananias in Paul's case and Samuel in David's case) who could be humble enough to heed the will of God and not stand in the way of God's plans for these men. David is described as "a man after God's own heart." And from God's choices of younger siblings we learn that we are to seek after such a heart—a heart that in humility seeks after God's own heart of love, forgiveness, and faithfulness.

Finally, the choice of the younger sibling becomes applicable in New Testament explanations of the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. In the largely Gentile churches of North America, this teaching of Paul's is mostly ignored, but we shouldn't so quickly sweep this teaching under the rug. In Romans chapter 9, Paul describes God's choice of the Gentiles in terms of God's choice of the younger Jacob over the older Esau (Rom. 9:6-13). Paul continues to lament the unbelief of his Jewish brethren through chapter eleven. In this chapter he pictures Israel as a tree and the Gentiles as a branch grafted onto the tree. Israel's branches are being broken off since they are failing to produce fruit. So Paul warns the Gentiles, "Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you also will be cut off" (Rom. 11:22).

The lesson for us, from Paul, is humility. Even though God chooses the younger sibling (in this case, the Gentiles), that doesn't absolve the younger sibling of duty. The younger sibling must still seek God's heart, must still carry out God's will, if he is to continue to be God's chosen vessel. Pride over being chosen could be the mistake that causes the chosen one to fall. In the case of David, a man who mostly sought "after God's own heart," we see that in the few instances when he failed, it was his pride in his kingship that corrupted him. But God chose David for the spirit expressed in David's psalm in which he proclaims, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; / a broken and contrite heart, O God, / you will not despise" (Psalm 51:17).

The main theme running through each of these three lessons regarding God's choice of the younger over the older is humility: 1) We need humility to understand that we cannot know what purposes God has in store for our lives. 2) We need to seek to have the heart of those that God chooses; from the evidence, it looks as if he chooses those who are humble in spirit, like David. And 3) Paul warns us that we are the chosen children of God ("the children of the promise"—cf. Rom. 9:8), and that we could meet disaster like the original children (i.e. Israel) if we let pride stand in the way of our humble submission to God's will.

GRACE IN ACTION

Edward Fudge

GracEmail subscriber Foree Grove, preaching minister of A&M Church of Christ in College Station, Texas, shared the following heart-warming story of grace in action following Hurricane Rita last week.

"Friday morning a member of St Thomas Catholic Church called to say they were over-flowing with evacuees from the south due to Rita. We opened our building at 8:30 a.m. and by noon we had 500 people sleeping in our building -- all over it. We had two showers for them. We put out an email to our membership and by noon we had fed them hamburgers cooked on the grill and all the meals went just like that. The good part is that we had a spiritual feast with our 500. There was no complaining by anyone -- just thanksgiving. We all gathered on Friday and Saturday night for devotionals where we sang in Spanish and English and prayed together. We stood in a huge circle in our auditorium and sang 'We love you with the love of the Lord' to one another. The evacuees vacuumed, cleaned rest rooms and showers, mopped floors, served food and hauled trash. They sang with us and prayed with us and embraced us when they left.

They even gathered up a contribution of \$380.00 dollars for 'the church.' They made it clear they were not trying to pay for anything but that they were praising God with their contribution. Every person in the group was kind, considerate, compassionate and open to God's use of the intemperate weather. We were all moved to tears as we said goodbye on Sunday morning. It was not just a weekend of helping others it was a weekend of our holding hands with others with our Father. It was wonderful."

VOICES From The FIELDS

Cecil & Betsy Garrett
Sept. 21, 2005

St. Petersburg, Russia

We have been here a month and are getting plenty of exercise. The tiny refrigerator, whose freezing compartment barely works up a little frost, works well enough to keep the milk cold, but there is so little room that we shop for groceries almost every day. Some of the groceries are cheaper than in Winchester. A few stores that cater to Americans with a fondness for home-style food stuffs have humongous prices on some items. A 3/4-pound box of cereal flakes is labeled at more than \$5.00. U.S. We are not that hard up.

Our three girls are all taking classes in school somewhere. The twins, Eliza and Nellie, are in a university, and their enrollment entitles them to room and board in a dormitory. Since they are living with us, they only eat lunch at the university, so they were this week given a lot of foodstuffs from the school pantry to support their morning and evening meals. That helps our budget here a little bit. The other girl, Sasha, has a job at McDonalds two days a week, so she can contribute with cash to our home's budget. When she cleans the kitchen here, you can tell she has been trained well by McDonalds. She is also taking classes, including English, but not at the university. One of the twins, Eliza, has a part-time job, but her sister Nellie is still looking. This week they were twice able to pick big sacks of apples from the orchard of a friend of theirs. That helps, too.

We continue reading the Bible with the girls every night. We went to two churches this past Sunday, one of which is attended by our girls. We had our second Saturday Bible class.

Two young ladies from Wisconsin had spent time in summer camps here near St. Petersburg, and have committed to serving for a school year as counselors in the girls' transitional homes. One, Joanna, is the oldest of nine children in a home-schooling family. She has graduated from training her younger siblings to helping a

couple of Russian girls mature. The other girl, Pam, has been assigned to help a different home, also with two Russian children, one, Katyah, barely thirteen. Katyah was allowed to enter the transitional home at such a young age because the dorm conditions in her orphanage are so deplorable (socially, morally) and the administration agreed to let Marina have her (on probation). Both American girls are beautiful and dedicated to serving Christ. They met in connection with Dan Wilson's work of helping teams to spend time in Russian summer camps.

An idea for promoting assistance to these orphan projects came from Pam, who suggested making bookmarks with the kid's pictures on them and a scripture on one side, and a statement about the work on the other. We will make some in Russian and some in English. Be watching for it.

Dan Wilson Colorado Springs Sept. 29, 2005

As of today 16 schools have already made commitments to send teams in our 2006 season! We have never before had this much interest so early in the year: we've not even sent out our first promotional mailer yet! Pray that God will provide finances/ cheap flights for our teams!

God is good, and has been helping me to adjust to life where the high plains meet the Rocky Mountains, but I must say that the adjustment has been difficult so far. Actually, it's been more like a battle, and I have been a weary soldier. The first adjustment was getting used to the relative lack of oxygen up here. I am proud to say that I can now walk up a flight of stairs without feeling like I've just run a couple of hard miles uphill! The second adjustment has been more difficult. For several years I have suffered from sleep apnea, a disorder that leaves one low on energy regardless of the number of hours spent sleeping. My apnea was not severe, however, until I arrived here, where the altitude made it much worse. In His mercy, God heard my cries (as He did my snoring!). A couple of weeks ago I began to receive the treatment which is slowly allowing me to sleep soundly again. For the first time in months I have slept for three nights in a row and awakened feeling like I've actually slept for most of the night. I would appreciate your prayers for continued improvement in this area. Three months of continual exhaustion have made it difficult to get much done at work or to make new friends.
www.acsi.org/~stm

Michiya Nakahara Shizuoka City, Japan August, 2005

As I prepare this letter, I am recalling wonderful memories when my family came to the States several years ago. I praise the Lord

for your faithfulness and partnering with us in this much needed mission work in Shizuoka. Thank you for your faithful prayers and financial support and your interest and commitment in this mission work. We seek to honor our Lord Jesus Christ in all that we do.

Let me summarize some of the ministry activities from the past year: 1. August, 2004 - Church-wide summer camp. 2. November, 2004 - Special Thanksgiving worship service. Child dedication. 3. December, 2004 - Children's Christmas Program. Many neighborhood children were able to attend Christmas Worship Service. We handed out many tracts and invitations to the surrounding community prior to the service.

4. June, 2005 - Special "Flower Sunday" Service. Members and Sunday School Children come to church with bundles of flowers and deliver the flowers after the service to retirement homes, hospitals, etc. visiting and sharing the gospel with those in need. 5. August, 2005 - Church-wide summer camp. 6. Monthly potluck/fellowship time during which we incorporate short Bible studies and a time for sharing testimonies, singing and worship.

Please remember these special prayer requests: 1. A future plan to purchase the land adjacent to our building for additional parking. 2. For the salvation of several new people that God has graciously led to our fellowship. 3. For children in our Church School program—for their salvation and commitment to our Lord. Also pray for our Sunday School teachers as they present the gospel. 4. For shut-ins as we visit with them. 5. For the salvation of those with whom we share the message of Jesus.

6. I have shared in the past about a new false religious group purchasing a property in the same block. The construction has just begun and people in the community are very suspicious. May God use this to bring more people to the truth and that we would seize opportunities to present the truth in love. 7. Osaka Bible Seminary is beginning the satellite course and I will be responsible for a class from September through December. Pray that I will be a faithful and humble servant as I take this small part in raising future ministers in Japan.

On a personal note, please continue to remember my health (neck condition). Having just finished an annual physical, the doctors concluded that my condition has not turned worse (Praise God!). While this may not sound like the best news, I am thankful that my problem has not declined. Pray that I will be diligent in my therapy and that God will bring complete healing to my neck.

As we look at world news, we are fully aware that evil is in this world. Please know that you are in our prayers and we ask the Lord to bless your nation and your leaders. We look forward to the day when the Prince of Peace will come and establish his reign of righteousness upon the earth. Maranatha!

WHY PRAYER GROWS TIRESOME

R. H. Boll

One thing that has made prayer irksome to many of us is the strained, unnatural attitude into which we place ourselves when praying. I am not speaking of bodily attitude, but of the spirit. I feel most comfortable in the presence of the friend who understands me; before whom I can be simply myself without fear of being unkindly criticized or misunderstood; who appreciates, sympathizes, thinks, and feels with me; and I call him "congenial." There are others in whose company I feel more or less constrained and cramped. I am, in fact, not quite myself when I am in their company, but assume, unintentionally, a more or less artificial attitude. This latter kind of association soon grows wearisome. The fault, indeed, lies with us in such a case, but the fact remains that we are burdened and bored.

Now here is the strange thing. Most of us, when we go to God in prayer, try to force ourselves into an artificial attitude of heart, and are, consequently, very glad to get through and done with it. We have an idea that we must be awfully good when speaking to God; and we "put on," forgetting the while that God knows us anyhow, and we can't "make impressions" on Him anyway. If He does not receive me "just as I am," He would of a certainty not accept me when I am in a false attitude before Him.

So it is a great thing for us to take this lesson: You can be just yourself with God, without being in the least cramped or constrained. What were the use of being otherwise? And God appreciates it. He would have us lay our hearts open before Him and show Him our unworthiest thought and tendency, that He may heal us. Go to him and say: "Lord, I have no claims to make. I am this and that. In my self-deceit I hardly know when I am sincere. I do not know even now as I pray whether I am wholly sincere; but here is my heart with all its failings, and my help is in Thee alone." Such a plea, when based on the blood of Jesus, is effectual--infinitely more so than empty profession and vain praise of God that is not from the heart.

one for in giving His people a quiet and tranquil life, the world round about will, of course, partake of the same, and that for the sake of God's praying people. (Comp. Jer. 29:7, "And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto Jehovah for it; for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.") For the sake of ten righteous persons in the middle of Sodom that city would have been spared. And because of Paul's presence on the storm-tossed ship, all that were on it, "two hundred and three score and sixteen souls," were saved alive: "God hath granted thee all them that sail with thee." (Acts 27:24, 37.) The prayers of God's people have their repercussions in the council chambers of the nations. By their supplications wars are averted, and the course of human affairs is altered.

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN?

Several years ago a very sweet Christian girl told me about an incident with a young man who had been asking to date her. He was not a member of the church and they just didn't have anything in common. She had turned him down twice and now she had said "no" to attending a rock concert with him.

In a kind of mock exasperation the young man asked, "What do you do for fun? You don't dance, you don't drink, you don't attend rock concerts.... What do you do for fun?"

Though she related her answer to me in a way that made it seem as though it was a simple response, it was actually a classic message from all Christians with conviction.

To the young man she had replied, "For fun, I get up in the morning without feeling embarrassed, ashamed and guilty about what I did the night before." The young man had nothing more to say.

It is true. That is fun! Come to think of it, there are many things in her life that are fun. She is married now to a fine Christian man. They have a little girl and are building an outstanding Christian home together. I am thrilled thinking about the fun she is having.

She is having fun every day living without the affliction of deep scars and regrets from her past. It's fun getting all prettied up each afternoon to receive a husband home from work, knowing that he won't be stopping off at a local bar for a few with the boys.

It's fun knowing that while he is away from her, his Christian conduct won't allow infidelity or even flirting. It's fun watching him hold his little girl on his lap with loving protecting arms.

It's fun knowing that her little girl will never see her father in a drunken stupor or experimenting with drugs. It's fun living with the assurance that the home will be led by a spiritual leader who will guide each family member toward heaven.

The list of fun things for Christians is endless.... What do you do for fun? [--Writer unknown. Via Linton, Ind. Church of Christ bulletin]

The above item makes a very valid point. So many popular "fun things" which people pursue have a sting to them. They are like a time bomb.

In contrast, "God...richly furnishes us with everything [good] to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17). Wholesome music, art, literature, drama, nature, family, friendships, sports, food and drink, study, travel, history, science, pets. On and on the list could go. Of course some forms of them are depraved. And even innocent things can become gods and lead us astray; let us beware. Yet Robert Louis Stephenson was correct:

The world is so full of a number of things

I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.

And our list of pleasures can and should include things most people would not consider "fun" at all: work, sacrificially serving others, worship, and fellowship with the God of the universe and His people.

So there are joys that result from sacrifice and from avoiding things which often are detrimental—the "fun" of "living without the affliction of deep scars and regrets from [the] past." And there are many positive joys as well. The committed Christian can truly say, "In Your presence there is fullness of joy." And His presence pervades the universe.

SOVEREIGNTY and RESPONSIBILITY

Edward Fudge

A gracEmail subscriber wonders why, if God controls everything, people are responsible if they go against God.

* * *

The Bible presents the sovereignty of God as a message of comfort to those who trust in him. It is not an abstract truth intended to be analyzed apart from that personal context. It is probably inevitable that believers will formulate theological systems as they try to understand various scriptural teachings and to relate those teachings to each other. The problem with theological systems is that God's thoughts are higher than ours and that no system can fully account for all that God has revealed. In almost every case, those who develop theological systems end up bending, trimming or ignoring some biblical passages in an effort to make them fit some particular line of logic. Better that we should leave room for mystery and paradox when our minds seemingly cannot sort out all that God has revealed. If we knew all that God knows, we would see the harmony that presently escapes our limited mortal understanding.

For example, Scripture says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he refused to release the Israelites from Egyptian slavery (Ex. 7:3; Rom. 9:17-18). But Scripture also says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Ex. 8:32; 9:34). We do not have to choose one statement and reject the other. In some way that we cannot fully comprehend, both statements are true. God was sovereign and Pharaoh was also responsible. It is human pride which selects either statement as true, then insists on measuring the other by the standard of personal logic. Our present inability to harmonize these two statements merely reflects that we are mortals, not gods, and that there are things we cannot now fully grasp.

When it comes to biblical paradoxes, most Christian groups have thought in terms of either/or. For example, Christians who follow the logic of John Calvin tend to affirm that God hardened Pharaoh's heart but to ignore those Scriptures that say Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Their desire is to reserve to God all credit and glory for anyone's salvation. Those Christians who follow the logic of John Wesley tend to affirm that Pharaoh hardened his own heart but to ignore those Scriptures that say that God hardened it. Their desire is to spare God any blame for those who are lost. I am determined to affirm both sets of Scriptures, to agree with Calvinists that God de-

serves all the glory for the salvation of the saved, but also to agree with Wesleyans that God deserves no blame for the damnation of the lost. Creaturely humility sometimes means simply believing God and leaving to him things that are too difficult for us to understand (Psalm 131:1-3).

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NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Bennie Hill, BHill40482@aol.com

Reports from Katrina: We heard of countless downed trees (30 from the Oak Grove, LA church grounds alone), multiple and prolonged electrical outages, low or no availability of gas or food for various lengths of time . . . but we received no reports (from folks we know) of deaths, crippling injuries, or many severe damages. Thank God, but keep praying for those who did become homeless, jobless or otherwise devastated. If you can still help evacuees, send your check to the Jennings Church of Christ, 1812 N. Cutting Ave., Jennings, LA 70546. Mark the check *Hurricane Relief*. The money will be used to feed people from the New Orleans area. That church helps feed them on Mondays and Fridays, along with other churches on other days.

Results from Rita: On Sept. 27, Alex Wilson could not reach the Jennings church nor Paul Estes' home by phone. Lines may have been down. Melva LeDoux in Glenmora, LA reported no major injuries or damage sustained by church members or the chapel in their area. Electricity was restored after 4 days. Plans for the Louisiana Fellowship, Nov. 14-17, are

not affected at all. (See the schedule in Sept. W&W.) Jennings was harder hit. Melva reported some Jennings members' double-wide mobile home was destroyed, & A.J. Istre's home, among others, was damaged, but the chapel sustained only minor harm, she heard.

Other reports from Louisiana, 1st or 2nd-hand, have not mentioned any deaths or much major damage among our congregations.

Sonny Childs now has a website. It contains his schedule of meetings and activities (with pictures), and lists his books and Bible-study materials. I think he plans to have a section on "Christian evidences" (why believe in Christ, the Bible, etc.) And his son Bryson, a teenager himself, has a page for teens. Check it out. The address is sonny-childs.com

Woodland Camp's Annual Homecoming: David Pound presented the President's Annual Report. It lists 8 improvements made during the past year. Usage of the campgrounds has included 3 youth Bible-camp weeks, 1 music week, plus the senior citizens week and a marriage retreat. The Camp was

founded in 1964. The 1st year attendance was 205, and it increased every year through 1973 (742). In the 1980s the highest attendance was in 1981 (678). Beginning in 1977 retreats were held as well as camps. 1995 and 2002 were other peak years (506 and 501). A list of 651 baptisms is given, but no doubt others received Christ some time after camp was over--yet due to its influence. Our camps are valuable ministries and worthy of support with funds and labor.

Dennis Kaufman is known to many of us as a counselor, and before that as a preacher/minister. His articles and columns have appeared a number of times in W&W. Dennis now is a private counselor in the Louisville area. His specialties are "individual and relational counseling; anger management; spiritual direction; life transitions; and addictive issues." He may be reached at 502: 339-4511.

Prayer/Praise Booklets. Material from various missions around the world is being gathered and will be ready for distribution by Thanksgiving. Mission works will include both foreign and home with updated information provided to churches. The booklets are made available at NO CHARGE by the Church of Christ Worldwide in Lexington. We are happy to see them being used in promoting missions in the various churches.

Meetings, Past & Coming:

Sept. 25-28 Borden Church of Christ (IND) with Sonny Childs

Oct. 2-5 Henryville (IND) with Julius Hovan.

Oct. 10-14 LaGrange Church of Christ (KY) 7:30 p.m. Speakers:

Mon Ray Naugle

Tues Dale Offutt

Wed Ron Flora

Thurs Nathan Burks

Fri Jim Gillaspie

Oct. 23-26 Buechel Church of Christ (Louisville, KY) with Richard "Hoss" Ridgeway. Homecoming on Sunday and Youth night on Monday. Each night except Sunday will be at 7:00 p.m. Sunday night at 6:00 p.m.

Minister Needed at Pleasant Grove Church of Christ in Lyons, IND. Our focus is to be "the hands of Christ" in our area and around the world. Our beliefs are consistent with the views of the editor and contributors of the Word & Work. If anyone is interested or knows of someone who might be interested please contact:

Brad Ellis,

812) 659-2912 or 812) 847-4610

or hoover@smithville.net

Deneane Rogers, treasurer of Pleasant Grove.

[Continued from Inside Front Cover]

tionalism)—both back in the 1800s. Also Jim Elliot, Pete Fleming and Ed McCulley in 1956. (They were three of the five missionaries killed by the “Auca” Indians in Ecuador that year.) The Brethren are not among the largest church groups (the website estimates that “there are about 1,000,000 people in the world who would call themselves or be called... ‘Brethren’”). But they have produced an amazingly large number of missionaries, plus some prolific writers--Biblical scholars such as Darby, C. H. Mackintosh, William Kelly, Sir Robert Anderson, W. E. Vine--and recently F. F. Bruce and William MacDonald.

But a church history textbook written fifty-four years ago made this observation about the movement: “They are close students of God’s Word. Their great care for theological precision, however, seems to be cause for their tendency to break up into separate groups. With a total membership in the U.S. of about 30,000 [in 1951; they’ve grown lots since then], they are divided into at least 8 separate bodies.” Though many of them practice open fellowship, others are very tradition-bound and exclusive. That too sounds familiar, doesn’t it? (Sigh.) Yes, the Stone-Campbell movement in its over-emphasis on finding just exactly the right “pattern” for every detail of church life, has split and splintered repeatedly. Thankfully recent decades have seen much improvement, but more is needed.

Why mention all of this? Because through the years we and the Brethren have dealt with many identical issues: what being “New Testament Christians” means today; the relationship between heresy, error, and difference of opinion; how can we have firm convictions and yet allow diversity; when is change good and when is it harmful; how to avoid legalism on one hand and diluted discipleship on the other; how we can honor the Lord via baptism and the holy supper and yet avoid dry ritualism, etc. If our paths cross theirs, we can learn lots from them, and vice versa.

Be very sure to read “Tradition and Change”--Jack Fish’s article from that *Journey* magazine, as he replies to a reader’s question. There are good traditions as well as bad. Others are neutral; we must be discerning. You’ll find much food for thought. And by the way, in our January ’06 issue we hope to run 3 short articles on evangelism from that same issue. I’m really glad my friend gave it to me.

FYI: The Emmaus *Journey*, 2570 Asbury Rd., Dubuque, IA 52001.

Website: “Plymouth Brethren FAQ”

For serious students of church history I heartily recommend the book *The Pilgrim Church*, by E.H. Broadbent. It’s a different kind of book, centering most attention on movements which tried to follow God’s Word as closely as possible. Of its 18 chapters (400 pages), 2 are about the Brethren movement, and one about the Stone-Campbell movement.

From the History of an Old Church of Christ in New Orleans

The 7th and Camp Church began in 1845. Thank the Lord that all its members remained safe during the recent havoc, and their homes sustained only minimal damage. As for the church building, only one window was broken! The basement was flooded, but such flooding occurs every time it rains.

I heard this true story about that church only a few weeks ago. --
avw

A congregation with such a long history has naturally generated many amusing stories. One of the most revealing is Alexander Campbell's second visit in 1857, by which time he was a renowned celebrity. To accommodate the crowd, the congregation moved Campbell's lecture to Gallier Hall and charged admission. When Campbell went before the audience, the New Orleans heat and humidity got to him, and he decided to set aside his notes for the 3-hour sermon he had planned and instead to give from memory a 90-minute sermon he had preached before. At the end of it, Campbell went over to a physician's house to recuperate from near heat-stroke while the angry audience members stormed the ticket office and demanded their money back.

After all, they had paid for a 3-hour sermon, and all they got was 90 minutes!

Preachers today may have use for this story when church members complain of "long" sermons. --David Ramsey