A History of the Church of Christ from 1840 to the Present

PREFACE

The elders have asked me to prepare a study on the history of churches of Christ from World War II until the present. While I believe that such studies can be very instructive, I am in no sense a "church historian." I have little expertise in the historical details and sociological nuances of the "Restoration Movement." While my life has been spent in the period under consideration, I have dealt with past issues only when forced by necessity. It has been my habit to concentrate my efforts upon studying the Scriptures, not what brethren have historically thought about them. That having been said, the trends, movements, tendencies, and relative weaknesses and strengths of society at large or a subset thereof can help us evaluate ourselves more clearly. History does have a way of repeating itself.

Further, a danger lurks within this type of study and we must be aware of it. To consider the "churches of Christ" as a unit over a definite historical period lends itself to a denominational outlook. When we speak of "non-institutional" churches doing this or that, we are by the very nature of our language considering the Lord's body as a collection of churches. Further, we are putting our "stamp of approval" on various congregations solely on the basis of how they stood/stand on institutional or other singular issues. The faithfulness of a congregation of the Lord's people is much more complex than its stance on a particular issue. To so treat this subject makes me admittedly uncomfortable.

Those who are relatively new Christians or not reared by parents who were aware of these issues will find some parts of this curriculum novel and, perhaps, uninteresting. Names, papers, schools and other historical references will be unfamiliar. However, if one can focus on the underlying principles, there is wisdom to be found in such an examination of history. Those who are older will look nostalgically, if not fondly, on the battles and controversies that they have lived through.

Sadly, this history is one of rancor, debate and division. Some of it was unavoidable, and some of it was unnecessary and ungodly. When we find ourselves in a dispute of Bible principle, may we always remember that God's cause is never served by ugliness of spirit. We may win the argument and lose our soul in the process.

Finally, please refer to the Bibliography for works that I have cited in the notes.

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Lesson 1: The Roots of the Restoration Movement

1. The Campbellites Are Coming!

So declared *Time* magazine in its February 15, 1963 edition in an article on a new congregation being established on Long Island (Hughes, RAF, p. 334). It is not uncommon even today to hear the term "Campbellite" used as a slur against a member of the church of Christ.

2. Religious Restlessness

In the late 1700's to early 1800's there was a yearning for religious freedom which paralleled push for political freedom in a very young United States. The abuses and excesses of Protestantism were creating a similar backlash to the one against Catholicism which began in the 1400's (the Protestant Reformation). Scattered and disconnected pockets developed where men began exploring simple faith without denominational affiliation. For example, a young man from Connecticut named Elias Smith reflected:

> When in my twenty-fourth year, I believed there would be a people bearing a name different from all the denominations then in this country; but what would they be called, I then could not tell. In the spring of 1802, having rejected the doctrine of Calvin and universalism, to search the scriptures to find the truth, I found the name which the followers of Christ ought to wear; which was *Christians.* (Acts 11:26) My mind being fixed upon this as the right name, to the exclusion of all the popular names in the world, in the month of May, at a man's house in Epping, N.H. by the name of Laurence, where I held a meeting and spoke upon the text, Acts 11:26, I ventured for the first time, softly to tell the people, that the name, *Christian* was enough for the followers of Christ without addition of the words, *Baptist, Methodist,* etc. (West, *Search for the Ancient Order,* Vol. 1, p. 13).

In the euphoria of newfound political liberty, and in a spirit of independence against civil and religious oppression, spiritual revivals began to smolder, especially in the rugged western frontier of Kentucky. "Kentucky at the turn of the century, was on the verge of a great revival, and Stone (Barton W. Stone, jj) felt it coming. One thing which led to this conviction was the work of James McGready in Logan County" (ibid, p. 22).

3. Barton W. Stone

Barton W. Stone began his religious search as a Presbyterian, but it was not long before he began struggling with the Calvinistic notion of total depravity. He listened to such dynamic orators as James McGready preach eloquently on hellfire and brimstone and then urge his troubled audiences to repent and believe. But "the Calvinism of the day declared that a man was depraved and man could do nothing to be saved; he had to wait and if God saw fit to call him, He would do so, but if God didn't see fit, the man was lost to the glory of God" (ibid, p. 24). "Why preach to men to believe if they were totally depraved and couldn't? For the next few years this dilemma was to cause Stone no little anxiety" (ibid, p. 22).

As late as 1821, "Stone's mind was unsettled on the whole subject of baptism" (ibid, p. 30). In a meeting at Millersburg, Kentucky, "the audiences were large and interest at a high pitch. After laboring with the mourners until late at night, Stone arose and said, Brethren, something must be wrong; we have been laboring with these mourners earnestly, and they are deeply penitent; why have they not found relief? We all know that God is willing to pardon them, and certainly they are anxious to receive it. The cause must be that we do not preach as the apostles did. On the day of Pentecost those who were 'pierced to the heart,' were promptly told what to do for the remission of sins. And 'they gladly received the word and were baptized; and the same day about three thousand were added unto them" (ibid, p. 30-31).

As Stone's views gradually began to take shape, he experienced increasing conflict with the doctrines of the Presbyterian Church embodied in the Confession of Faith. Finally, unable to abide teaching he felt unscriptural, Barton Stone and several other maverick Presbyterian preachers withdrew themselves from the Synod of Kentucky and established their own presbytery, the Springfield Presbytery. However, in less than a year's time the group realized that their own association was not according to the Bible and inherently sectarian. They moved to dismantle it, and on June 28, 1804 they issued **"The Last Will and Testament of The Springfield Presbytery,"** "one of the classical documents coming out of the restoration movement" (ibid, p. 25). It stated, in part:

> Their reasons for dissolving that body were the following: With deep concern they viewed the divisions, and party spirit among professing Christians, principally owing to the adoption of human creeds and forms of government. While they were united under the name of a Presbytery, they endeavored to cultivate a spirit of love and unity with all Christians; but found it extremely difficult to suppress the idea that they themselves were a party separate from others… They soon found that there was neither precept nor example in the New Testament for such confederacies as modern Church Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods, General Assemblies, etc. Hence they concluded, that while they continued in the connection in which they then stood, they were off the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, of which Christ himself is the chief corner stone…Therefore, from a principle of love to Christians of every name, the precious cause of Jesus, and dying sinners who are kept from the Lord by the existence of sects and parties in the church, they have cheerfully consented to retire from the din and fury of conflicting parties" (ibid, p. 27-28).

Thus Barton W. Stone became a central figure in the effort to restore pure, New Testament Christianity in a nation just taking its first steps of liberty and self-governance.

4. Alexander Campbell

The questions of baptism were not alone in Stone's mind, but were found in the minds of brethren everywhere who were looking toward the ancient order. B.F. Hall, who was ordained to preach by Stone, on May 14, 1825, was one to have such conflict. During the summer of 1825, Hall held many camp meetings. Very often meetings would close, without the mourner's having found relief. Hall became dissatisfied and felt that something was wrong with the way of preaching. A year later, Hall found the conviction that he wanted. He went to the home of a

Brother Guess on Line Creek, which divided Kentucky and Tennessee. In the cabin he found the first copy of the Campbell-McCalla debate he had ever seen. He read quickly, but took the time to follow carefully Campbell's speech on the design of baptism. Suddenly he sprang to his feet, dropped the book to the floor, and cried: "Eureka! Eureka! I have found it, I have found it!!" (ibid, p. 31).

Alexander Campbell, and his father Thomas, were originally members of the Seceder branch of the Presbyterian Church of Northern Ireland. Thomas Campbell left his family behind and arrived in America in 1807. During the next two years he kept preaching appointments in western Pennsylvania under the oversight of the Chartiers Presbytery. As a studious and inquisitive man, Thomas Campbell increasingly found himself in conflict with Presbyterian doctrine. The two years were increasingly stormy until finally Thomas was expelled in September, 1808.

Alexander and the rest of the family joined Thomas in America in October, 1809. Alexander had been studying at Glasgow University (Scotland) before coming to America. There he had been exposed to Scottish reform movements led by James and Robert Haldane, John Glas and Robert Sandeman. Like his father, Thomas, Alexander was beginning to question elements of Seceder Presbyterianism and its underlying Calvinistic tenets. When the two of them were reunited in America, they began to compare their notes of increasing religious independence.

Shortly before being reunited with his family, the excommunicated Thomas Campbell and several sympathetic associates created their own independent society, the "Christian Association of Washington" (Pennsylvania). Thomas penned his famous **"Declaration and Address"** in August/September, 1809 to explain the nature of this association. While we may bristle at such actions, we must remember "these men were coming out of the darkness of partyism and stepping forth into the glorious light of revealed truth, and they staggered for a moment to get their bearings" (ibid, p. 48). Thomas and Alexander Campbell thus enlisted together in the battle to renounce all man-made religious authority and abandon all practices not grounded in holy writ. It was at the house of Abraham Altars between Mt. Pleasant and Washington, PA, that Thomas Campbell first preached "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent" (ibid, p. 47). A slogan now taken for granted was truly revolutionary when it then fell upon human ears. A movement away from denominational corruption and back to divine authority was beginning to take shape. But there was much rethinking to do, and change would not come easily for either the reformers or those who staunchly defended the status quo.

5. Stone vs. Campbell

It is inevitable that Barton W. Stone should come in contact with Alexander Campbell, for unquestionably the two were the foremost religious thinkers of their times. Stone and Campbell first met at Georgetown, Kentucky in 1824, and each received favorably the views of the other…Up to now Stone's group had insisted upon the name, Christian, to the exclusion of all others. Followers of Alexander Campbell took the name, Reformers or Reformed Baptists. The two groups would exist side by side in various towns, especially in Kentucky, and slowly understanding and agreement would be reached between them bringing about a union of forces…(ibid, pp. 31-32).

While the two groups had more in common than they had differences in the early days of the 19th century, the differences that did exist in the mindsets of the two groups would eventually provide fertile ground for division.

The Stoneites formally united with the followers of Alexander Campbell in Lexington, Kentucky, in 1832, chiefly because the two movements shared a deep commitment to Christian union based on a restoration of primitive Christianity. Yet, in spite of the obvious similarities between the two traditions, there also were deep and far-reaching differences (Hughes, p. 99).

Broadly speaking, Campbell's vision of Christianity emphasized the rational, analytic investigation of the Scriptures to arrive at the form and pattern of worship, organizational structure, doctrinal guidelines, etc. Campbell was wealthy and was a man of national stature by virtue of his eloquence, intellect and political visibility. Stone, on the other hand, was of more humble origin and saw fraternization with the world in any significant degree to be incompatible with spiritual principles. He and his followers were not rigidly logical but retained an emotional, subjective element to their faith. B.F. Hall, a follower of Stone, reported in his autobiography:

> The religion of those days consisted principally of *feeling;* and those who shouted the loudest and made the greatest ado, were looked upon as the best Christians. Hence our preaching, our prayers, and songs we adapted to excite the emotions. We would clap and rub our hands, stamp with our feet, slam down and tear up the Bible, speak as loud as possible and scream at the top of our voice, to get up an excitement. I often blistered my hands by clapping and rubbing them together; and my feet were made sore by repeated stamping" (ibid, p. 100).

Richard T. Hughes further notes:

> Whereas the Campbell reform was primarily rational and cognitive, focusing on the forms and structures of primitive Christianity, Stone's reform was primarily ethical and spiritual, focusing on inner piety and outward holiness…he and many of his coworkers lived their lives in the shadow of the second coming and thought of themselves as pilgrims who affirmed their allegiance to the kingdom of God rather than to the popular values of the world…He also downplayed material concerns and oriented his life toward supernatural and ethical interests. He called on his followers to open their lives to the Holy Spirit and, in the power of the Spirit, to abandon self for the sake of others, to render aid to those in need, and to stand with those who suffered. This was the sort of thing he had in mind when he called his followers to cultivate "godliness, piety, and brotherly love" (ibid, pp. 92-93).

Finally,

> The difference between Stone and Campbell lay in what the two men found in Scripture. Campbell primarily found models for the worship and organization of the church, whereas Stone primarily found models for holy living. Stone agreed with Campbell that Christians should separate themselves from fallen denominational structures, but he believed that denominational structures had fallen because they represented the values of

this world rather than the values of the kingdom of God. In time this fundamental difference between the world-views of Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell helped produce basic theological differences between Churches of Christ and Disciples of Christ and in this way contributed to the division that finally fractured the movement later in the nineteenth century (ibid, pp. 94-95).

In a Nutshell …

During the early 1800's there were many independent strands of restoration thought developing both in Scotland and America. Thomas and Alexander Campbell immigrated to America and continued to develop and pursue their ideas of scriptural authority and simple Christianity without man-made corruption.

Those who agreed with the Campbell's denouncement of denominational abuses and who were determined to be Christians only and reject human creeds, confessions and other extrabiblical standards of authority were derisively labeled "Campbellites."

The Campbells had no intention of starting another denomination under the name "Church of Christ." Rather, it was the opposite. They were sickened and distraught by the sectarianism of their day which was fostered by denominational hierarchies. Their only desire was to conform to divine patterns and laws at the expense of the innovations of man.

Questions:

1. What text had an impact on Elias Smith?
2. What was Barton W. Stone's original religious affiliation?
3. Why did Stone conclude that he was not preaching the gospel as the apostles did?
4. What was the Springfield Presbytery? Why did it die?
5. When and why was Thomas Campbell expelled from the Chartiers Presbytery?
6. What was the Declaration and Address and why is it significant?
7. Who were originally known as the Reformed Baptists?
8. T/F Stone was more rational and logical in his approach to the Scriptures than Campbell.
9. T/F Campbell emphasized more the outward structure of Christianity while Stone emphasized more the inward, spiritual dimension of faith.
10. Discuss how you would answer the assertion that you are merely a Campbellite, a member of a denomination started by Alexander Campbell.

Lesson 2: The Division of 1906

1. Missionary Societies

Ed Harrell notes that "the chief irony and tragedy of all church history is that non-sectarian Christianity…inevitably produces sects. Quite obviously the church of New Testament days was not very old before it gave birth to warring sects. The Restoration Movement quickly became a mirror of sectarian pressures within a non-sectarian movement" (*FC Lectures—1976,* p. 193).

Harrell continues:

> Scores of other collections of power tended to unify and divide the movement. Orphan schools, colleges, and papers became symbols of denominational unity both within and without the church. While colleges and orphan schools exerted considerable local influences, religious papers quickly became the most important symbols of denominational unity. Winfred Garrison, well-known Disciples historian, noted years ago that editors played the role of denominational bishops in the Restoration Movement (ibid, p. 194).

A divisive element of this sectarian pressure was the establishment of missionary societies. In 1849, the **American Christian Missionary Society** was formed at a convention in Cincinnati, OH, thus becoming the first institution supported by Restoration churches. Its first president was none other than Alexander Campbell, who had used his paper, the *Millennial Harbinger*, to press for a centralized organization among churches for several years prior to 1849. Campbell stated:

> There is now heard from the East and from the West, from the North and from the South, one general, if not universal, call for a more efficient organization of our churches. Experience…decides and promulgates that our present cooperative system is comparatively inefficient and inadequate to the exigencies of the times and the cause we plead (West, p. 167).

Missionary societies were seen by Campbell and others to be a necessary institution for coordinating and overseeing evangelism efforts. W.K. Pendleton, a close associate of Campbell, thus notes in his report of the Cincinnati convention in 1849:

> We met, not for the purpose of enacting ecclesiastic laws, not to interfere with the true and scriptural independence of the churches, but to consult about the best ways for giving efficiency to our power, and to devise such methods of cooperation, in the great work of converting and sanctifying the world, as our combined counsels, under the guidance of Providence, might suggest and approve. There are some duties of the church which a single congregation cannot, by her unaided strength, discharge…A primary object being to devise some scheme for a more effectual proclamation of the gospel in destitute places, both at home and abroad, the Convention took under consideration the organization of a Missionary Society (West, p. 173).

How Campbell could have supported such a mechanism of concentrating power in the very midst of a movement which owed its existence to fighting the same in Protestantism is due in part to his millennial thinking. Earl Kimbrough notes:

> Millennialists tend to fall into two camps: (1) postmillennialists who hold that Christ will return after the millennium; (2) Premillennialists who believe the Lord's return will precede the thousand-year period. Postmillennial presuppositions figured prominently in Restoration ideology in the beginning years. This is not surprising for frontier America was dominated by the belief that "the kingdom of God" was about to be established in the land. This belief took both religious and secular forms. Many thought a political utopia was an imminent possibility. Evangelical Protestants widely believed that the golden age of the church, preceded by the conquest of the world by the Gospel, was at hand. Thus, postmillennial fervor was part of the influential cultural climate in which the Restoration was spawned (*FC Lectures—1976,* p. 62).

Alexander Campbell's motives must not be couched only in terms of establishing a non-sectarian brand of Christianity, for this ignores the larger picture. In their euphoria of a free country casting off the shackles of political and religious oppression, Campbell and other restorers thought that Christianity would sweep the world and establish the kingdom of Christ universally. This, they felt, would usher in the glorious return of the Lord. When Campbell's millennial visions began to be dimmed by the disarray and discord among restorers, and when it became apparent that Protestantism was not going to embrace restoration with open arms, Campbell's millennial idealism persuaded him to abandon his former opposition to centralizing agencies and both promote the formation and accept the presidency of the American Christian Missionary Society.

But all did not accept the ACMS unreservedly. Throughout the latter half of the 1800's the debate over missionary societies intensified. It gradually became clear that a deep rift was developing among brethren in how the Bible should be used as a standard of authority.

2. Instrumental Music

Following the Civil War, social and economic diversity between North and South accelerated the widening of this rift. Northern churches were more wealthy and had fallen under a more ecumenical influence. Emphasis was placed upon modern, opulent, purpose-built church buildings. College-educated orators were replacing the rough-cut, self-educated pioneer preachers of the past. Developments gradually led to the introduction of mechanical instruments of music, the first occasion being in 1860. West notes:

> The church at Midway (Kentucky, jj) is the first congregation *on record* to use the instrument. It is not entirely accurate, however, to say that it was the first congregation among the pioneers to do so. It is evident that as early as 1851 some churches had put in the instrument to cause the flare-up to which allusion has already been made. Just which congregations these were remains unknown. To the church at Midway, then, must go the distinction—if it is a distinction—of being the first of the congregations on record to adopt the use of the instrument (West, p. 312).

Hughes observes:

> While the movement had been moving toward division for many years for the variety of reasons we have surveyed thus far, the instrumental music controversy did more than any other factor to bring the division to a head. Fractures opened up in congregation after congregation, slowly at first during the 1870s and then at an accelerating rate during the 1880s and 1890s…Finally, it became apparent to S.N.D. North, director of the 1906 Federal Census, that there were now two denominations rather than one, and he listed them separately that year as Disciples of Christ and Churches of Christ (pp. 87-88).

Robert E. Hooper makes a more encompassing observation:

> For fifty years a breach had been forming within the Restoration movement. The emphasis upon organization, the introduction of instrumental music into worship, the involvement of women in leading public worship, and the acceptance of higher criticism by a large segment of Disciples caused the break (Hooper, p. 47).

Disciples of Christ congregations were clustered around larger cities of northern states while Churches of Christ were centered primarily in rural areas throughout the southern states of Tennessee, southern Kentucky, northern Alabama, Arkansas, Texas and Oklahoma. Census figures are as follows:

Christian Church/Disciples of Christ churches of Christ

	Individuals	Congregations	Individuals	Congregations
1906	982,701	8260	159,658	2649
1926	1,337,595	7648	433,714	6226

3. The Occurrence of Division

Division among those who were once in spiritual fellowship usually develops gradually and is often not the result of a singular disagreement. To acknowledge that one can no longer count another as a legitimate brother in Christ and worthy of endorsement should be considered with utmost gravity. The truth is that many disagreements and conflicting views are often tolerated among brethren, but they can reach a "critical mass" where breach of fellowship becomes unavoidable. Ed Harrell offers this assessment:

> Formal divisions within the restoration movement have always involved differences far more profound than the specific doctrinal issues that were the focus of theological debating; indeed the movement typically existed for long periods when considerable differences in practice and belief were tolerated. Schisms became formal only when leaders on the conflicting sides implicitly or explicitly decided that they no longer had the same understanding of the restoration plea, that they were no longer of the same mind. By the late nineteenth century the movement clearly included people with different theological understandings and different religious agendas (*The Churches of Christ in the Twentieth Century,* p. 6-7).

The basic difference involved how the Bible authorized Christians to act. Disciples of Christ had a looser or more liberal view: that the silence of the Scriptures authorized them to utilize instruments, which they merely considered to be an expediency to singing. Churches of Christ followed a more rigid view: that a thing must be expressly authorized or must expedite something authorized without itself violating law. On this ground instrumental music and missionary societies were considered *unauthorized additions* to the worship and organization of the church.

The total picture of Restoration history is, of course, more complicated than this. Myriad influences of men, papers, conventions, colleges, debates and preaching all combined to make the issues cloudy and complex. It is only in historical hindsight and dispassionate distance that trends and shifts become clearer. This is the challenge of every Christian in any age: to examine his/her own cultural surroundings and bring into focus the way that Jesus would have them go.

In a Nutshell …

Alexander Campbell held unscriptural and unrealistic visions of millennial grandeur. He envisioned the Restoration Movement sweeping the civilized world and, as one unified body, welcoming Jesus' return.

A desire to pool congregational resources for greater efficiency in preaching the gospel resulted in the establishment of missionary societies in the latter half of the 1800's. Other trends, particularly the use of instrumental music, continued to divide brethren along ideological lines. Finally, in 1906, the breach was formally documented by the U.S. Census.

Questions:

1. What was the name of the first missionary society among Christian restorers?
2. When did it begin?
3. Who was its first president?
4. What is the difference between a postmillennialist and a premillennialism?
5. In what state did the first recorded use of instrumental music occur?
6. In what year did the formal division occur among restoration churches?
7. What were the two groups officially called by the U.S. Census Bureau?
8. Which group was larger? Which was wealthier?
9. T/F The Disciples of Christ see the silence of the Scriptures as permissive.
10. T/F Churches of Christ consider the silence of the Scriptures to be prohibitive.

Lesson 3: Pre-World War II Issues

1. The General State of Affairs

Following the division with the Disciples of Christ/Christian Churches (formally, in 1906), churches of Christ entered a thirty-year period of relative peace. Perhaps this was due in part to the after-effects of the split: few wanted to go through another such gut-wrenching, debilitating experience. Perhaps economic woes and a general malaise which troubled the country contributed to a muted period. Sketchy statistical evidence indicates a moderate amount of growth in membership among churches.

Yet on a more local and individualized level, controversy over one issue or another continued to flare up. Ed Harrell observes:

> During the "golden age" of the 1920s and 1930s, the periodicals read by the members of the churches of Christ teemed with impassioned debates about a bewildering array of issues. These disputes often turned uncivil, and they frequently ebbed and flowed for decades. While one issue was being heatedly debated, causing clusters of churches and preachers to coalesce around contrasting positions, the heat of that skirmish would momentarily overshadow equally serious disagreements that cut along different lines…Schism was inevitable in such an atmosphere of debate and conflict; typically, in the first half of the twentieth century, divisions within the churches of Christ were congregational. By the 1930s, local churches splintered with astounding regularity. In the absence of a denominational organization to declare a congregation either in or out of fellowship with others, splinter congregations continued to relate loosely with some churches of Christ and remain aloof from others. After a decade or two, feuding churches often reconciled, although sometimes peace was restored only with the passing of a generation, giving rise to the adage that most church squabbles were solved by funerals (Harrell, *History,* p. 41,44).

There was, during this time, a deep-seated suspicion of formal education, and preachers who fully devoted themselves to evangelistic work for compensation and who were college educated were looked upon by many with disdain. The days of rough-hewn, pioneer preachers who abandoned their families for weeks and months at a time and who were paid in barter (if paid at all) were fading fast. Perhaps some of these concerns were valid, for it seems that the more time preachers had on hand to write and promulgate their views, the more trivial many issues became. Another preacher, Will J. Cullum, protesting a spread of "hobby riding" that was "very hurtful to the cause of Christ," listed some issues that had caused schisms:

- Objections to a baptistery, [some] insisting that we should have running water, because Christ was baptized in the River Jordan
- Objections to the use of individual cups in observing the Lord's Supper
- Objections to having a plate for the bread
- Objections to the preacher extending a gospel invitation [instead of waiting] for sinners to ask what they should do as on Pentecost

- Objections to members who claimed that it is un-scriptural to have elders in the church, taking the position that all elders were in the days of inspiration
- Objections to singing any song that is not addressed 'in words' to The Lord
- And, "most ridiculous," Cullum concluded, brethren objecting to "a word formula in baptizing, or in a marriage. And to having a funeral service" (ibid, p. 45).

Churches of Christ were somewhat schizophrenic over the issue of educated preachers, for while there was historic wariness of formal schooling, the Restoration Movement was characterized by the establishment of schools. *Lots* of schools. Indeed, it would be difficult to list all the small, struggling schools that were begun among early restorers. Of particular note is Bethany College, "the mother of colleges," begun by Alexander Campbell in 1841. Note the following short list of prominent schools among churches of Christ:

> David Lipscomb University, Nashville, TN, established 1891 (as Nashville Bible School)
> Abilene Christian University, Abilene, TX, established 1906
> Freed-Hardeman University, Henderson, TN, established 1919
> Harding University, Searcy, AR, established 1924
> Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA, established 1937

Sadly, it seems that harmful argumentation and unnecessary division has been the legacy of churches of Christ. Reactionary thinking, emotional arguments, unfounded prejudices and other ignoble attitudes have clouded judgment and promoted perpetual warfare. Yet the combatants always seem to justify themselves as "defending the truth."

2. The No Bible Class/One Cup Division

The most serious and lasting division of this period occurred in 1925 when a group of churches (Harrell estimates 5%, ibid, p. 46) splintered off over, mainly, Bible classes. The major contention was that it was unscriptural to divide the assembly for study. Other peripheral issues which came to the fore in this dispute included the number of cups used in the Lord's Supper, the use of fermented or unfermented juice, the use of "located preachers," and the propriety of women speaking or teaching in churches. Harrell notes:

> "These non-class and one-cup congregations, numbering more than one thousand in the 1990s, were often alienated from one another, but they did develop limited networks in the 1920s and 1930s that survived into the 1990s" (ibid, p. 46). Robert Hooper reports that most one-cup churches are in California and Texas while non-class groups are concentrated in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Indiana, California and Oregon (p. 292).

3. The Pacifism Controversy

Given the abundance of military conflicts in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century, one of the more significant and emotional debates among brethren in this period concerned fighting in war. The pacifistic position was not concerned with the taking of life, per se, but was an outgrowth of a larger view. Many restorers, David Lipscomb in particular, viewed all governmental participation as evil, including voting, holding office, serving in the

military, etc. Lipscomb "believed government existed for those who refuse the rule of God" (ibid, p. 109). "Arguing that a Christian's 'citizenship is in heaven' and that he or she has no legal relationship with the 'kingdoms of the world,' Lipscomb believed that it was thoroughly misguided, indeed sinful, for Christians to become embroiled in politics" (Harrell, p. 52).

While there were strong pacifist sentiments among churches of Christ, primarily through the influential writings of David Lipscomb (and his book advocating his non-involvement views, *Civil Government*) and other graduates of the Nashville Bible School (later David Lipscomb University), the patriotism of WW I made it very difficult on those of this persuasion. Of 64,693 applicants for noncombatant status nationwide, only 31 were members of the church of Christ.

By WW II, the tide had turned completely and washed out almost all pacifistic sentiment. While the *Gospel Advocate,* the leading publication among churches of Christ, advocated pacifism, brethren as a whole supported the war and young Christian men enlisted by the thousands. The most vociferous opponent of pacifism was Foy E. Wallace, Jr. Himself a former pacifist, Wallace scathingly rebuked the "slackers" who would not support the country's fight against Nazi aggression. His main line of opposition connected pacifism with premillennialism, a doctrine that blazed into intense controversy in the 1930's.

Hughes notes that "Wallace had sufficient insight to see that pacifism and premillennialism in this movement were often connected" (p. 164), and he moved to destroy the pre-millennial root that nourished the branches of pacifism. Foy Wallace was defined as a leading light among churches of Christ by the premillennial debate. He used the capital he accrued from that struggle to steer churches of Christ in the direction of patriotic fervor and support of WW II.

4. The Premillennial Controversy

It may surprise those who are not students of history to learn that a significant premillenial controversy raged among churches of Christ from 1915 into the 1940's. Many restorers possessed what Richard T. Hughes calls an apocalyptic vision of the church; that is, they saw themselves separate from all other man-made kingdoms and governments by virtue of their citizenship in the kingdom of Christ. Hughes notes that James A. Harding represented the epitome of the apocalyptic tradition that had flourished in the Mid-South for a hundred years. He refused to place faith in human institutions, human schemes, or human progress, trusting instead not only that God would triumph over all the earth in the last days but also that God would care for his children in the here and now, removing any need to rely on human accomplishments. Perhaps more than any other person in this tradition, Harding made it clear that premillennial eschatology was merely a facet—an expression—of a worldview defined chiefly by faith in the overarching providence and kingdom of God (Hughes, p. 138).

In the early 1900's this worldview began to develop into a more complex and overt premillennialism than before. This was due in large measure to the influence of R.H. Boll, whose teaching became increasingly speculative. Prophetic books of the Bible were loosely construed so as to support such chief premillennial tenets as "the establishment of a millennial kingdom on earth at Christ's return, the restoration of the Jews to Palestine, and the personal reign of Christ from Jerusalem for a thousand years" (Kimbrough, *FC Lectures—1976,* p. 70).

In response to premillennial heresy, Earl Kimbrough also observed that "more effort was expended, perhaps necessarily under the circumstances, in showing what prophecy does not mean than in showing what it does mean" (ibid, p. 71). Unfortunately, this is often the case when teaching springs from the defense of the truth rather than educating brethren in a balanced way.

Hughes observes that "the ouster of Boll from the staff of the *Gospel Advocate* (in December, 1915, jj) marked the beginning of a great war on premillennialism that preoccupied and sapped the energies of preachers and editors in the emerging mainstream of Churches of Christ until well into the 1940s" (p. 143). Eventually, under the leadership of Foy E. Wallace, Jr., "premillennialism was gradually driven into the enclaves and shorn of respectability in the church at large" (Kimbrough, p. 71).

5. The Church of Christ: Ripe for Denominational Status

It is at this point in history that churches of Christ, considered as a whole, become susceptible to denominational identification. By "churches of Christ" I refer to the entire mainstream movement, not individual congregations that remain loyal to New Testament pattern and doctrine. The term "mainstream" refers to that core of majority churches that have sloughed off the liberal Disciples of Christ, the sectarian one-cup/no Bible class groups and the radical Premillennialists. In the aftermath of WW II, social forces will conspire to push these churches in the direction of denominational cohesiveness and respectability. Looking back from our present-day vantage point, this is precisely what has happened. All that is left to propel the mainstream churches in this direction is to jettison the anti-institutional objectors which will arise in the next twenty or so years. Those anti-institutional objectors are…us.

In a Nutshell …

After the split with the Disciples of Christ in 1906, churches endured several decades of infighting and controversy but no great issue that entirely divided the brotherhood. Debates over the related issues of pacifism and premillennialism suppressed false doctrines but also served to move churches more toward the mainstream ideals of society. By WW II the churches of Christ are ripe for another fellowship-wide split.

Questions:

1. T/F During the 1920's-1930's division was mostly local and congregational as opposed to brotherhood-wide.
2. What changes in preachers disturbed many brethren in the early 1900's?
3. What school was called the "mother of colleges"? Who started it?
4. Discuss this proposition: The more formal education a preacher has, the more likely he is to become unfaithful in his teaching.
5. When did the no Bible class division occur?
6. What percentage of churches left the mainstream over these issues?
7. What proponent of pacifism spread his ideas through the book *Civil Government?*
8. Do you believe a Christian can kill another human being in the context of warfare? Cite two passages that you feel sustains your position.

9. Who was R.H. Boll and why was he significant?

10. Who was the most effective and vigorous opponent of R.H. Boll?

Lesson 4: Post WW II: The Rise of Institutionalism

1. A Catalyst for Change

Mainstream churches of Christ had been undergoing subtle changes in outlook for several decades before WW II. Such gradual changes are insidious; they often go unrecognized until a trigger of some sort causes them to burst forth seemingly all at once. Such a trigger was the Second World War. Hughes observes:

> While a more moderate, progressive theology created a climate in which institutionalization could thrive, World War II proved to be the single most decisive factor prompting Churches of Christ toward greater modernization and efficiency and toward the expansive program of institution building that took place in the 1940s and 1950s. During the postwar period, Churches of Christ identified ever more closely with the values of the dominant culture; by 1960 they had practically completed their long…journey toward full-fledged denominational status. World War II prompted Churches of Christ toward institutionalization in three distinct areas: education, world missions, and general acculturation (p. 223).

Hughes summarizes a vital turning point in the history of churches of Christ in the twentieth century. This turning point involved the schools that had so long dotted the Restoration landscape:

> The massive influx of students after the war, coupled with the postwar religious revival, implicitly raised the question of the extent to which the colleges could promote the growth and maintenance of Churches of Christ, both in the United States and abroad. That question, in turn, raised the critical question of support for these colleges. Should they be funded solely by individual contributions, or should they be supported by congregations? The former option would inevitably hobble their growth; the latter option would, in effect, render the colleges institutional agencies of the congregations that provided support—a situation that would clearly run counter to the radically democratic and individualistic traditions that had defined Churches of Christ since the early nineteenth century (ibid, p. 223).

Indeed, Alexander Campbell early in the nineteenth century stated his suspicion of both the clergy and their institutions. Hooper notes:

> "The clergy, claimed Campbell, have always been the perpetrators of extrabiblical organizations. All organizations, including missionary societies, eventually become tools of the clergy" (p. 5).

Personal ambitions among many in the churches of Christ clouded judgment. The desire for newer, bigger, better, and more legitimate in the eyes of the world opened the door for innovative changes that not only changed the complexion of the brotherhood but polluted it with rancor, spite and resentment.

2. The Nature of Institutions

Earl West insightfully notes:

> "The history of the restoration movement shows that the less devotion men have to Christ the more they stand in need of human organizations" (p. 212). This was true of the missionary societies of the nineteenth century. When Alexander Campbell felt that the church in its autonomous, congregational form was inadequate to the task of evangelizing the world and preparing the way for Christ's return, even he resorted to an institution—the American Christian Missionary Society. Men invariably turn to institutions by convincing themselves they are good and necessary implements of kingdom work.

But Ed Harrell reveals a more sinister side of Institutionalism:

> It is apparent that most institutions in Restoration History were formed for admirable purposes. But it is difficult for such collections of men, as it is difficult for men alone, not to become self-serving. Institutions seek to escape poverty and they fear death as much as individuals. Acting in their own self-interest, they seek a loyal, dependable clientele. The leaders of institutions within the Restoration Movement have tended to think of the church as a denominational unit and have sought to win the doctrinal and financial loyalty of segments of that group. Church treasuries were the pot at the end of the rainbow which lured institutions to promote sectarian loyalties in order to insure their own financial well-being (*FC Lectures—1976,* p. 195).

In other words, institutions take on a life of their own. And in an effort to sustain that life, college presidents and other supportive machinery can become intimidating, manipulative and meddlesome in the affairs of churches to which they are attached. Hughes adds:

> "Churches of Christ often claimed that because they possessed no organizational structure over and above the local congregation, they therefore had no power structure at all. The truth is that the absence of any *formalized* power structure allowed ambitious leaders to seize power they likely could not have claimed otherwise" (p. 161).

This is often accomplished through some institution: a school, a paper, a sponsoring church, etc.

We might also note that major shifts of policy or practice among churches usually develop gradually. This is true of the Institutionalism of the 1950's. Institutional practices had been engaged in long before then, but they lacked scrutiny and criticism because, in part, they had not become a threat. Note the following observation by Ed Harrell:

> In the early years of the restoration movement, some churches financially supported educational and benevolent organizations, including Alexander Campbell's Bethany College and David Lipscomb's Nashville Bible School. In 1936, Foy E. Wallace, Jr., observed that an institutional framework had evolved in the churches of Christ more or less without notice. As the institutions grew in size and number, Wallace became more alarmed:

"The institutional idea is no longer a trend—we are institutional already. No week passes that churches are not circularized by 'our institutions.' True, 'we' did not start them but they were left on our doorstep for adoption, tagged, 'your institution, support it.' As a doorstep child, the only alternative is adoption or death. Too kindhearted to let any of them die, the 'brotherhood' adopts them all" (*Churches of Christ in the Twentieth Century,* p. 74).

3. The Rationale for Supporting Schools

Richard Hughes again gives an honest assessment of the rationale for diverting church funds for schools:

> Proponents of institutionalization allowed themselves to believe that whatever they did by way of modernization might be justified entirely by the primitive mode. Those who sought to move Churches of Christ toward greater institutionalization consistently did so in the name of primitive Christianity and with regular appeals to the New Testament pattern. Typically, they manifested no awareness at all of the ever-widening gap that separated progressive, mainstream Churches of Christ in the mid-twentieth century from their nineteenth-century primitivism foundations (pp. 225-226).

In other words, progressive brethren were not willing to overtly jettison their allegiance to Bible authority. Therefore, they had to find their rationale on the pages of holy writ—even if they had to wrest the Scriptures to do it.

G.C. Brewer's name is synonymous with persuading mainstream churches to support schools out of church budgets. Hooper notes:

> Evangelism, at home and abroad, was needed. Concern increased for orphans and the elderly. Education at all levels, with a Christian perspective, became more widely recognized as a needed extension for the home. Therefore, the large middle supported the Christian school. Churches began planning for greater growth through larger and more comfortable buildings and through innovative methods of reaching their neighborhoods. G.C. Brewer represented the broad middle among churches of Christ (p. 293).

In 1931, 1933, and again in 1936, Brewer used the Abilene Christian College lectureship to make impassioned pleas for congregations to include ACC in their church budgets. This prompted rethinking and reassessment of a principle upon which many had remained ambivalent:

> "(Foy E.) Wallace repeatedly stated during the 1930s that he considered the question of church support to colleges 'debatable,' refusing to come down firmly on one side or another" (Harrell, *Churches…in the Twentieth Century,* p. 79). Before this time many articles denounced any connection between churches and man-made institutions. On the other hand, churches occasionally did send financial support to colleges, if not on a regular basis. "Generally, college administrators tried to straddle the fence, offering assurances that they did not solicit funds from churches, but acknowledging that 'when the elders and members of a local congregation desire to contribute to the college, the

college does not attempt to dictate to the elders how these finances should be handled'" (ibid).

Supporting schools/colleges received such strong support following World War II because of a strong desire to evangelize among countries of the world ravaged by war. Many brethren felt that Christian colleges were a necessary part of that evangelization process as preachers needed to be trained and other missionary workers prepared for their assignments.

4. Colleges vs. Orphan Homes

Probably the most emotionally inflammatory issue of the disagreement involved the support of orphan homes. Churches from the early 1920's had been building and supporting orphan homes with little debate as to the Scriptural authority for doing so. Some of the more prominent ones:

Boles Orphan Home, Greenville, TX. "Finally, the work was completed, and on Thanksgiving Day, 1924, the home opened its doors 'for the reception of destitute and orphan children.' It was widely supported by churches of Christ over the nation…When Teddlie arrived in 1927 to take over the superintendence…he found it remarkable that in three years 'it has gradually grown into a prominent institution known and supported by the churches of Christ throughout the nation'" (West, Vol. 4, p. 119-120).

Tipton Orphan Home, Tipton, OK. "At the close of 1922…S.T. Tipton gave seventy acres for a home. This one would be placed under the elders of the church…Superintendent Price Brookland…thought 'this home is by far the largest orphanage attempted by the Church of Christ'" (ibid, p. 121).

Tennessee Orphan Home, Columbia, TN. "The…benevolent enterprise was nearing its tenth anniversary at the beginning of 1920…twenty-five congregations had contributed regularly to assist this work…There was always the need for funds, so a special board was appointed in the spring of 1925 to consider a plan to connect Potter Orphan Home, Fanning Orphan Home, and the Tennessee Orphan Home in a 'cooperative working capacity'" (ibid, p. 122-123).

Potter Orphan Home, Kentucky. "(In 1923) Potter offered to deed more land to the home provided the brethren would raise $10,000 for an endowment, which money would be loaned out for 6% to support the institution. H.C. Shoulders agreed to travel among the churches to seek the funds …" (ibid, p. 123).

West summarizes:

> "Thus, the energies and finances of a large segment of the brother-hood came to be turned toward benevolent and educational enterprises. Some were to be 'modest, little' schools or projects while others reached out as large institutions that would extend through many years" (ibid, p. 138).

Ed Harrell describes what next unfolded as brethren sought a way to fund schools:

Colleges had long been suspect in the anti-intellectual atmosphere of the churches of Christ, but before World War II few people questioned the right of churches to support the handful of orphan homes then in existence…In his 1933 defense of church support for colleges, G.C. Brewer sensed that a linkage between colleges and orphan homes provided a powerful defense…In his 1947 defense of church contributions to colleges, N.B. Hardeman seized the orphan home argument, noting that support for colleges and the homes "must stand or fall together"…Increasingly, those who favored church support for colleges tried to shift the battleground to the orphan homes, understanding quite well that there was much broader sympathy in the churches for orphan homes than for colleges (*Churches of Christ in the Twentieth Century,* pp. 90-91).

The debate quickly took on more ominous tones as rhetoric and invective began to be hurled between the opposing camps. Brethren favoring institutionalization pressed the issue and demanded that their opponents accept the schools or denounce supporting the "poor little orphans." Reasoned discussion and study was often derailed from its tracks by emotional fervor. "Those opposing contributions from churches to colleges were derisively termed 'antis,' and many progressive leaders were unwilling to let an unreasonable and obstreperous minority block the advancement of the churches of Christ" (ibid, p. 89). When an unstoppable force meets an immovable object, something has to give.

In a Nutshell …

Brethren saw schools/colleges as necessary to the growth of the church after WW II.

Churches were needed to financially underwrite such expensive undertaking.

Justification was found for churches to financially support any institution by comparing them with orphan homes.

Questions:

1. List the three ways that WW II propelled churches of Christ toward Institutionalism.
2. What did Campbell believe would become "tools of the clergy"?
3. Why do men tend to fall back on institutions?
4. T/F Major shifts of practice or policy among churches tend to occur gradually.
5. Who repeatedly urged at the Abilene Lectures for churches to support schools?
6. Who was famous for equating the funding of schools and orphan homes saying, "They must stand or fall together"? In what year?
7. What does the term "anti" mean? Who applied it to whom?

Lesson 5: Post WW II: Growing Church Cooperation

1. The Rise of Sponsoring Churches

Ed Harrell states:

> "War-time prosperity boosted both the financial capabilities and the social aspirations of many members of the churches of Christ; by 1945, they were better able to support large projects and were more ambitious to gain the respect of their friends and neighbors" (*Churches of Christ in the Twentieth Century,* p. 81).

Harrell adds:

> "It was the potential to evangelize the world that most fired the imagination of church leaders in the 1940s and 1950s" (ibid). Ironically, Alexander Campbell was driven by the same goal but for a different reason. The global vision of churches of Christ in the '40's and '50's was devoid of millennial aspirations, replaced by the desire for legitimacy and prominence as a world player on the religious stage. Nevertheless, both the aspirations of Campbell and the post WW II mainstream churches led to the same place: Institutionalism and church cooperation. Once again, it is G.C. Brewer who spearheaded the drive toward congregational cooperation in world evangelism.

In February 1943, Brewer wrote a landmark article entitled "Evangelizing the World in the Post War Period." The article announced that the Broadway Church of Christ in Lubbock, Texas, where Brewer was preaching, would "sponsor" the evangelization of Europe in the wake of the war…Month after month, support built for Brewer's missionary vision…While some preachers cautioned that the proposed schemes would pool power in the hands of large congregations and violate biblical patterns, others scorned such concerns:

> "We have grown so accustomed to fighting any organization larger than the local congregation until the thought of congregational cooperation is as dead as faith without works." By the end of 1945, scores of churches and individuals had become clearing houses for contributions to various missions and benevolent enterprises abroad (ibid, p. 82).

Brethren displayed either shocking naivete or deliberate deception as they stumbled headlong down the path of centralized cooperation even while denying it. "The center of the postwar missions thrust was the Broadway Church of Christ in Lubbock" (ibid, p. 82). First under the guidance of G.C. Brewer, and then accelerated by his successor, M. Norvel Young, the Broadway church whipped the brotherhood into an evangelistic frenzy.

Harrell continues:

> In 1946, the Broadway Church hosted a lectureship on missions; the meeting turned into a bandwagon campaign promoting sponsoring churches and congregational cooperation. Several speakers complained about past anti-institutional prejudices and called for more

"centralization of church work," noting that "our brethren have been so afraid in some cases of two or more churches working together. Brethren, that is one thing that has hindered our mission program."

By the end of 1946 the rush toward concentrating funds in the hands of large congregations to sponsor missions had become a stampede (ibid, p. 83).

Gradually, opposition toward the "Broadway plan" of receiving, overseeing and distributing funds of numerous churches grew. Hughes notes:

> Though arrangements of this sort were not altogether new, it was obvious that those who seized the initiative in postwar missions would inevitably build a significant power base among Churches of Christ. For that reason, the "plan" drew immediate criticism from the *Bible Banner*. "Just what authority does…[the Broadway congregation] have to 'sponsor' a 'Plan' for somebody else?" asked Cled Wallace. But the criticism did not grow to serious proportions for several years (p. 234).

Hughes continues his analysis:

> In the meantime…people within the anti-institutional movement grew more and more wary of the mission methods employed by mainstream Churches of Christ. Their concern was not with missions per se but with what they viewed as the mushrooming institutional machinery through which mission work now was accomplished. They objected as well to what they saw as a corresponding interest among many for standing, status, and prestige, both at home and abroad, for a "denomination" come of age (ibid, p. 235).

In an article that exposed the heart of the matter, Roy Cogdill claimed:

> Many have…overlooked the question that is of real importance in the matter…[which] is, "Does our work in foreign countries rest upon a scriptural basis?" Cogdill and his colleagues were convinced that it did not. "We would propose the question," wrote Cogdill, "If the Broadway elders at Lubbock can supervise the 'mission' work in Germany for two congregations could they not supervise it for two hundred? Or for all the churches throughout the world? Why don't we just elect them our 'missionary society'…and let Lubbock be our denominational headquarters?" (Hughes, p. 236). "It was only a matter of time before the mainstream would effectively expel the anti-institutional people from their ranks, just as they had expelled the premillennial people some years before" (ibid, p. 237).

2. The Herald of Truth

The drive to do things in a big way was not limited to foreign fields. At home, two young preachers, James Walter Nichols and James D. Willeford, conceived the idea of a national radio broadcast sponsored by churches of Christ. Thus began the "Herald of Truth" radio program in 1952. In 1954 it expanded into television. "[They] believed that a project of that magnitude would clearly require a 'sponsoring congregation' arrangement. The Highland Church of Christ

in Abilene, Texas, assumed oversight of the project from its inception" (ibid, p. 239). Robert Hooper describes the initial hoopla over the "Herald of Truth":

> Within a matter of weeks, the [Highland] church contacted sister churches and individuals by mail, telling of plans for the national radio program. In just three months, Highland raised $250,000 for the first year's efforts. This tremendous undertaking could only have happened through the cooperation of thousands of congregations and individuals throughout the United States (pp. 187-188).

Richard Hughes addresses the reaction to the "Herald of Truth":

> Predictably, the anti-institutional wing of the movement registered strong opposition to the prospect of a single congregation controlling both the finances and the content of a project that represented Churches of Christ worldwide. Such an arrangement, they thought, presented the same problems as a nineteenth-century missionary society, deceptively cloaked in the garb of congregational autonomy. The battles over the "Herald of Truth" raged furiously for the remainder of that decade and helped solidify the division between mainstream Churches of Christ and their anti-institutional antagonists (ibid, p. 240).

Hughes continues in his book to criticize the "Herald of Truth" program on other grounds. He charges that the "electronic bishops" of the "Herald of Truth" gradually watered down the gospel to make it palatable to a diverse national audience.

> The late 1950s…brought subtle changes in sermon content. To understand those shifts, one must recall the kind of piety that dominated American religion throughout the 1950s. During that decade, practically all major denominations promoted the role religion could play in fostering peace of mind…In such a climate, messages that extolled the "true church" and that condemned "the denominations" for their "false doctrine" were not likely to develop a significant following beyond the ranks of the faithful…And so as the "electronic bishops" increasingly focused on issues pertaining to self-esteem, anxiety, marriage and the family, and the like, pulpit preachers throughout the fellowship of Churches of Christ quickly followed suit. By the late 1970s, especially in large congregations in urban centers, one could listen to preachers in Churches of Christ for weeks and months on end and never hear anything remotely approaching the traditional sectarian message that had defined the tradition for a century and a half (pp. 241, 243).

To go beyond Scriptural authority in any area invites unanticipated changes. Those who vociferously defended the pooling of funds for such projects as the "Herald of Truth" never envisioned that such a "policy decision" would eventually have an impact on the *content* of what was preached. To reach as many people as possible with the gospel is a good thing; to do so on a scale that surpasses the resources of a local church becomes its own evil.

3. Seeking A Denominational Niche

While ambitious plans were pursued in the 1950's, undoubtedly advertised in the noblest spiritual terms, several decades of reflection have made it clear that what was really happening was a denominational transformation. Hughes observes:

> By the early 1950s, Churches of Christ were not only establishing institutions to serve a variety of causes but were establishing the church itself as a formidable institution on the religious landscape of its geographic heartland. For most of their history, Churches of Christ had been poor and socially marginal, standing over against other Christian denominations as well as the larger culture and typically viewing themselves as sojourners in a strange and foreign land, but by the 1950s all that had changed—or was rapidly changing. The theme of "sojourner" rapidly gave way to the theme of "settler," as Churches of Christ settled into their cultural environment and felt increasingly at home in the world…(p. 224).

Note the following insightful assessment by Allen, Hughes and Weed in *The Worldly Church:*

> Today secularization is clearly at the gates of Churches of Christ and, in some instances, well within the city walls. One hardly could find irony and paradox set in more striking relief. How is it that a church which claims to model itself after primitive Christianity, which prizes ancient norms and apostolic practices, which prides itself on being a people of the Book—how is it that the Churches of Christ, in these waning years of the twentieth century, can be so thoroughly at home in this modern, secular world?
>
> …The forces of secularization did not arrive yesterday or the day before. Instead, while our brotherhood concerned itself with defending the old paths against liberalism and then humanism, secularization stalked our blind side. It seduced us when we were least aware. Ironically, we often succumbed to its seductions in our own well-meaning attempts to expand the borders of the kingdom …

We see evidence of secularization…in congregations whose first concern in evangelism and edification is to gauge the market place and meet current needs. We see evidence of secularization in congregations more concerned with growth and numerical success than with preaching the gospel in its purity and simplicity. We see evidence of secularization when we hear church leaders speak of "making churches grow," as if they were the ones to give the increase. We see evidence of secularization when we hear church leaders seriously defend the construction of exercise facilities and basketball courts as absolutely necessary to evangelism, as if God could not work apart from these facilities. We see evidence of secularization when we hear ministers, who should know better, contend that the church cannot reach the lost in this modern age through serious Bible study but only through "meeting needs," as if the Word of God alone is impotent. Thus, they defend as central to evangelism such classes as "Coping with Anxiety," "Dealing with Drugs," "Building Better Families," "Planning for Retirement," and "Building Self-Esteem" (p. 38-40).

Let it be noted that these authors are ***not*** "antis"; they are located on the *left* of the mainstream, institutional churches of Christ. And while they clearly and accurately assess the current state of those churches, I don't think they fully appreciate the developments of the 1950's and what they contributed to the church's present state.

In a Nutshell …

Following WW II ambitious evangelism projects which could not be financed by one congregation were undertaken by "sponsoring churches." These churches received funds from smaller groups and oversaw projects that violated congregational autonomy.

Cooperative projects such as the radio/television show "Herald of Truth" subtly changed the content of what was being preached among churches of Christ. In time, doctrinal distinctiveness was compromised and institutional churches slowly became secularized.

Questions

1. What was significant about G.C. Brewer's article entitled "Evangelizing the World in the Post War Period"?
2. Briefly describe the "Broadway Plan."
3. What was Cogdill's main objection to the "Broadway Plan"?
4. For what is the Highland church in Abilene best known?
5. What was the "Herald of Truth" and when did it begin?
6. What characterized the preaching of the "electronic bishops"?
7. To what arrangement from the 1800's did non-institutional brethren liken sponsoring church cooperation?

Lesson 6: The '50's and '60's: Debate and Division

1. Disagreement Intensifies

Much of the debate that occurred surrounding the issues of the mid-1900's was carried on in papers circulated among the brethren. The major players in this crucial period were:

Noninstitutional:

Gospel Guardian (1950), published by Roy Cogdill and edited by Fanning Yater Tant. This was the main publication which opposed sponsoring churches and Institutionalism. "The *Gospel Guardian* remained the major vehicle for noninstitutional ideas throughout the 1950s. The paper featured brusque and ponderous onslaughts by Roy E. Cogdill, studious and detailed attacks from James W. Adams, cutting sallies by Cecil B. Douthitt, and a steady diet of noninstitutional argument written by scores of other preachers. The paper's most widely read author was unquestionably editor Yater Tant" (Harrell, *The Churches of Christ in the Twentieth Century,* p. 123).

Preceptor (1951), published by James R. Cope, Clinton D. Hamilton, Pat Hardeman, Bill Humble, and Homer Hailey. "Cope was the leader of the group…Less combative than the *Gospel Guardian,* the *Preceptor* added a dimension of serious discussion to the controversy" (ibid).

Truth Magazine (1956), edited by Bryan Vinson, Jr. "The paper was needed, Vinson wrote, because 'we need a paper allowing Christ-like controversy.' It was unfortunate, he wrote, that 'other publications have swerved to the…extreme of controversy filled with bitterness, slander, and jealousy.' During its early years, Vinson tried to position *Truth Magazine* in 'the middle of the road,' refusing to 'appease those who make the current issues a personal hobby'" (ibid, p. 124).

Institutional:

Gospel Advocate (1855), published by J.C. McQuiddy and edited by B.C. Goodpasture. This was the main publication which favored sponsoring churches and Institutionalism. "Benton Cordell Goodpasture was, according to many on all sides of the issues, the most powerful person within churches of Christ from the late 1940s until his death in 1977" (Hooper, p. 212). *Firm Foundation* (1884), edited by Reuel Lemmons, 1955-1983. "Lemmons consciously sought a middle ground in the increasingly intense atmosphere of the fifties" (Harrell, ibid, p. 134).

After a near breach with the *Gospel Advocate* on conflicting issues, "the *Firm Foundation* writers continued to display a softer attitude toward their noninstitutional brethren, holding out hopes for a compromise that would diminish tensions…In 1958, Lemmons wrote to Yater Tant, 'I am interested in doing everything within my power to alleviate the hard feelings that have arisen in the immediate past. The heat of controversy, I feel, has produced extremes as dangerous as any of the issues involved. It is high time for something constructive…Lemmons allowed a number of noninstitutional preachers, including Bryan Vinson, Sr., Robert F. Turner, and Harry

W. Pickup, Jr., to argue their cases in the *Firm Foundation* long after the *Gospel Advocate* had closed its pages to noninstitutional writers" (ibid, p. 135-136).

Spiritual Sword (1958), edited by Thomas B. Warren. In its first issue, Thomas Warren stated the purpose of the paper:

> "At the present time, the *Spiritual Sword* is especially concerned with the creed-making being done by various brethren in the realm of church cooperation and orphan homes. The staff of this paper is vitally concerned with the way men have divided churches, alienated brethren, and sought to hinder good works of churches helping one another in the preaching of the Gospel and of churches sending funds to orphan homes so that the needs of children might be adequately supplied" (Harrell, ibid, p. 143-144).

B.C. Goodpasture heartily endorsed the *Spiritual Sword:*

> "Congregations would do well to buy a supply of each issue of the *Sword,* especially if they are being disturbed by the 'Antis'" (ibid). [Interestingly, the *Spiritual Sword* has for a number of years now been fighting against the ultra-liberal movement among mainstream, institutional churches; i.e., *they* have become *the Antis!*]

2. The Degeneration of Attitudes

Regardless of the issues involved and the Scriptural basis or lack thereof for either side, calm, level-headed debate quickly gave way to carnal tactics which served to obscure the true issues and assassinate the character of good, conscientious men.

"Whether the combatants wished it or not, the discussions quickly degenerated into personality conflicts and vicious name calling. G.C. Brewer referred to the *Guardian* writers as a 'kingdom of crankdom,' and more specifically, he called Tant, Cogdill, and their friends 'quibblers,' even using the word 'demagogues' to describe the leaders of the non-institutional movement" (Hooper, p. 210). "B.C. Goodpasture cautioned in 1950 that 'seldom in modern times has the church been more jeopardized by "partisans, cliques, quarrels, critics, and self-righteous snobs," reactionaries and radicals than at the present time'" (Harrell, *CC20thC,* p. 126).

William Wallace, son of Foy E. Wallace, Jr., later reflected:

> Careless, reckless, inconsiderate, reactionary journalistic excesses, though not engaged in by all, nor by any at all times, appeared frequently enough to taint the images of writers and cloud the issues involved…The *Gospel Guardian* fell more and more into disrepute because of the image created by unfortunate journalistic behavior, the Lufkin church split, and the strategy of opponents. In the estimation of this author, truth suffered and a good cause floundered because malevolent factors were much too prominent in journalistic and congregational affairs (Hooper, p. 218).

Reuel Lemmons commented:

> "Extreme brethren seem to think that the way to fight other extremes is to cancel meetings, advise elderships against those on the other side, pack college lectureships with handpicked extremists of a given persuasion, and brand everybody not on their extreme as being with the other extreme, and fit for nothing but to be marked, branded, and if possible annihilated. Such is sheer gangsterism—not Christianity" (Harrell, *CC20thC,* p. 137- 138).

The personal attacks and acrimony displayed in brotherhood journals helped solidify the two respective positions rather rapidly. Ed Harrell notes:

> "By 1952, no paper offered more than one point of view on Institutionalism" (ibid, p. 126). Sides had been taken, and now efforts were being made to destroy the other side rather than rationally and conscientiously explore the merits of each other's argument. More and more, such language as "dividing the brotherhood" peppered harsh exchanges. The die was cast, and the separation would be bloody indeed.

3. The Quarantine

Looking back on these issues from fifty years down the road, I find particularly disturbing the raw political power garnered by brotherhood publications. One may argue the doctrinal correctness of a private enterprise providing written teaching via magazines and papers, but at the same time one must also admit the potential misuse of such a vehicle for destructive ends. When a publication steps across the line of edification and becomes a de facto denominational platform, it has become an instrument of evil.

Exercising his above-mentioned power as the editor of the *Gospel Advocate,* B.C. Goodpasture brought the crisis to a head in December, 1954. Goodpasture published a letter calling for a "quarantine" of all preachers of the anti-institutional persuasion. William Wallace later assessed the effects of the quarantine thusly:

> The spirit of quarantine swept the country and the Guardian movement was subjected to the same kind of pressures which had been exerted on the premillennial movement in previous years. Churches were divided, preachers had their meetings cancelled, some left the movement making confessions of their "error" in the journals, and the Guardian movement hardened into a strong minority entity (Hughes, p. 238).

Ed Harrell's assessment of B.C. Goodpasture echoes that of Robert Hooper:

> He was "the most influential single man on the course taken by churches of Christ between 1940 and 1970" (Hughes, p. 238). But no man would have that kind of power *if not for brotherhood publications serving as a vehicle for such power.* The error is dual: it rests with men whose personal ambitions lead them to seize the power of the pen and attempt to use it divisively, and it also rests with the mindless public who look to the publications as their shepherd and "rallying point." While churches of Christ crow about

their nondenominational structure, many of them utilize informal denominational machinery. When a journal, school, eldership, preacher or any other entity wields undue political power over the Lord's people, they occupy a sinful position. And the results are predictable.

4. Debating the Issues

It appears upon reflection that the most substantive debates on the issues occurred *after* the respective sides had hardened. Harrell observes:

> Debating was a long and respected tradition in the restoration movement, and the institutional issues triggered a number of large and small debates on a variety of propositions. The first debate was held in Indianapolis in 1954 between Charles A. Holt and W.L. Totty. It was followed by a flurry of others. The Harper-Tant debates in 1954 and 1955 were auspicious occasions. "I fear the outcome of this debate," wrote Reuel Lemmons in the *Firm Foundation* before the 1955 discussion. "I believe we are seeing history made in the church right now.…This is the time for all good men to keep their heads and their senses." The two men had an appreciation for the importance of their public discussions. Harper acknowledged that if the issues were not "settled *here,* it bids fair to rend the church of our Lord asunder." As Lemmons predicted, the debates widened rather than narrowed the chasm in the churches; Tant was so dissatisfied with the editing done on the published volume that he labeled it "an undying monument to the trickery, deceit, and dishonesty of the modern 'promoters.'"

The most noted debate on church support of orphan homes, and thus of the broader question of the relationship of congregations to independent institutions, was conducted at Phillips High School in Birmingham, Alabama, in November 1957. Roy E. Cogdill and Guy N. Woods debated both church support of orphan homes and the sponsoring church arrangement of the "Herald of Truth."…Scores of other debates on the various institutional issues took place during the decade. The most noted defenders of institutional practices were Woods, Totty, Thomas B. Warren, and G.K. Wallace, and, in addition to Holt, Tant, and Cogdill, the most prominent noninstitutional debaters were W. Curtis Porter, James P. Miller, Lloyd Moyer, and Cecil B. Douthitt.

While the debates were often attended by hundreds of people and no doubt changed the minds of some in the 1950s, for the most part, they simply demarcated and solidified the two camps (*CC20thC,* pp. 130-131).

For those of us who are under fifty, it is hard to imagine such widespread turmoil among churches and even families. Feelings ran powerful and deep—over what? How the church is structured and what a local congregation can or cannot do with its funds, and extra-congregational organizations like schools and orphanages created and sustained by congregations. On the surface these things do not seem volatile, but when personal ambitions arise, even small issues are magnified out of proportion. It is significant to note that great apostasies seem to arise from the troubled waters of organizational structure. We would do well to learn the lessons of history. ***Anything which tends to compromise the local autonomy and self-directed work of a congregation should be looked upon with great suspicion.*** If churches

would have contented themselves to operate according to their ability, these issues would not have occurred.

In A Nutshell …

The 1950's was a decade of open conflict over institutional and sponsoring church issues. These issues were largely hashed out in various brotherhood publications.

Reasoned discussion quickly degenerated into personal attacks which helped harden positions on both sides. Both articles and oral debates manifested a spirit of rancor and ugliness.

Finally, a quarantine of noninstitutional preachers was proposed by the *Gospel Advocate* in 1954 which drew a distinct line of fellowship. An entirely new segment of brethren branched off from the mainstream churches of Christ—the noninstitutional brethren who could not conscientiously support congregations who were violating the principles of church autonomy.

Questions:

1. Which paper became the main publication opposing institutional practices?
2. Describe the position and influence of B.C. Goodpasture.
3. According to Ed Harrell, what had brotherhood publications stopped doing by 1952?
4. Describe the "quarantine." When did it occur? What paper published it?
5. How can brotherhood papers and magazines become harmful?
6. What prominent debate was held in Birmingham in 1957?
7. Explain why studying the organizational structure of the New Testament church is such an important topic.

Lesson 7: A Closer Look At the Issues—Human Institutions

1. Missionary Societies, Orphan Homes and Schools

A fundamental question which needs to be resolved in the mind of every believer has to do with the sufficiency of the church. Specifically, is the Lord's body, as He designed it, capable of accomplishing its objectives? Or do special circumstances require amendments or additions to the design?

When Alexander Campbell began to argue in support of a missionary society (an organization or "institution" separate from the local church but supported by funds from churches in order to preach the gospel), he stated that there was no specific pattern of *how* evangelism was to be accomplished. Campbell said, as cited by West:

> In all things pertaining to public interest, not of Christian faith, piety, or morality, the church of Jesus Christ in its aggregate character, is left free and unshackled by any apostolic authority ... Matters of prudential arrangement for the evangelizing of the world, for the better application of our means and resources, according to the exigencies of society and the ever-varying complexion of things around us—are left without a single law, statute, ordinance, or enactment in the New Testament (pp. 168-169).

West explains:

> This is the heart of Campbell's reasoning on Church Organization. He insists upon beginning with the church in the aggregate or universal sense of the term. It is vital to his viewpoint to ignore, at least for the time being, the local character of the church. It is with the church universal that he begins. Reasoning from the point that the church in the aggregate has the responsibility of converting the world, and that since Christ has given no divine plan for the church, in this sense, to function; therefore, the church is left free to devise its own plan, according to its own wisdom, with only the law of expediency applying. To be sure, any plan the church would devise would be unauthorized in the New Testament, and it would be the height of folly to look for a New Testament example for it. To Campbell, it was expediency pure and simple and on that ground could be defended (ibid, p. 169).

In this reasoning Alexander Campbell violated his own maxim: "We speak where the Bible speaks; we are silent where the Bible is silent." Campbell was now *speaking* where the Bible was *silent.* The New Testament was silent on any extra-congregational organizations precisely because the local church was the *only* organization needed to perform collective work. West responds to Campbell's reasoning thusly:

> At the close of the apostolic age, when the last apostle had died, the church was known only by the individual congregations scattered over the world. The work of Christ through the church to evangelize the world was carried on through the influence of the local church in its community. Even in apostolic times the churches felt no need of an organization, devised by human planning, through which the church could cooperate to

evangelize the world. They had a fervency and zeal, and the history of the church has well shown that the less zeal and devotion there is in the church, the more Institutionalism and human organizations are needed (p. 169-170).

And as much as I agree with Earl West in this observation, I find it all the more strange that he was one of the ones who publicly sided with B.C. Goodpasture and the *Gospel Advocate* in the matter of sponsoring churches and their institutions. He wrote in 1957 that he could not "prove that the type of cooperation represented by the Herald of Truth violates a New Testament principle" (Harrell, *CC20thC,* p. 140).

2. The Local Church

The Individual. In the New Testament it is the individual who responds to the conditions of grace and forgiveness and becomes a member of the body of Christ (*"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized …"*—Ac 2:38; *"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*—Ph 2:12). It is the individual who spiritually matures in knowledge and faith; it is the individual who works and receives financial compensation (Eph 4:28; 2 Th 3:8-12); it is the individual who attends to his family responsibilities (1 Tim 5:8, 16). In fact, most of the obligations and duties of the Christian life are discharged in the realm of individual action, each person going about his or her business and responding as a child of God to the various circumstances which arise.

The Church. But we also observe in the New Testament individual Christians associating together in a collective. In so doing "independence is surrendered, individual decisions are forfeited to common oversight and direction, and monies pooled are no longer individually controlled but become the treasury of the collective entity. God has ordained this collectivity…it is the local church" (Frost, p. 15). The scope of this entity is far smaller than the realm of the individual. The local church is not formed to accomplish just any objective but those *specific to the spiritual relationship shared by the members of it.* It is within the realm of this collective that God's people accomplish all that He authorizes done by group cooperation.

The Supplanting Institution.

An institutional mindset begins with a basic dissatisfaction with or anxiety toward the work of God through the local church. The Lord's organization of His people into local, autonomous groups is seen to be insufficient for the task or project at hand. It is usually assumed that the objective under consideration is a *desired* objective, and to accomplish it a special institution distinct from the local church must be created. Institutions not only shift emphasis away from the local church, they also serve to consolidate local churches into a larger entity unknown to the Scriptures. Furthermore, institutions historically drain resources of time and money from the churches they supposedly help.

3. A Case in Point

As might be expected, institutions of all sorts have proliferated among brethren who opened the door to them by supporting orphan homes and schools.

For example, "Churches of Christ Disaster Relief, Inc." is a company (institution) located in Nashville, TN. This company owns a huge warehouse of supplies purchased by individuals and churches for distribution to those who have suffered catastrophic loss (tornadoes, hurricanes, etc.). The company also owns a fleet of tractor-trailers with "Churches of Christ Disaster Relief" emblazoned on the side. Contributions and disbursements from individuals and churches run in millions of dollars every year.

In this case, as in many others involving institutions, men saddle local churches with obligations beyond their scope. Churches are not charged in the New Testament with supplying the needs of the community at large. Undoubtedly, caring for the needy and unfortunate, whether Christians or not, is a good thing. *The question is: Is it the work of the local church?* Is it proper to divert resources from treasury to accomplish such? If so, *where* is it so indicated in the New Testament? Let's look at some passages used to justify an expanded role for the church:

Jas 1:27—This passage has long been a battleground as proponents of Institutionalism have cited it as permissive of church action. But it is clear even upon casual reading that James is addressing himself to matters concerning each individual Christian:

- The pursuit of wisdom (1:5- 8)
- Wealth vs. poverty (1:9-11)
- Enduring temptation (1:12-15)
- Control of anger (1:19-20)
- Being a doer of the law (1:21-25)
- Bridling the tongue (1:26).

All these things address individuals in their personal pursuit of righteousness. They have no bearing on what congregations are to do in their collective capacity. In 1:27, each individual is to practice *"pure and undefiled religion"* which involves discharging duties toward the unfortunate (orphans and widows) and *"to keep **oneself** unspotted from the world."*

Gal 6:10—Again, the matters under consideration concern individuals implementing God's laws in their personal lives:

- Restoring the sinner (6:1)
- Bearing each other's burdens (6:2)
- Self-examination (6:3-5)
- Sowing unto the flesh or Spirit (6:6-9)

As a concluding observation, Paul says: *"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith"* (6:10). Again, it is assumed that because Paul is speaking to individual Christians about their obligations to respect the common brotherhood of man and serve as opportunity arises that this activates the local church *as a collective.* Not only does this do violence to the context of the passage, it does violence to the church for it *removes any limit whatsoever on what the church can financially undertake.* If the institutional folks want to use Gal 6:10 to pry the door open enough to allow for schools, orphan homes and other social projects, then there can be no objection to church hospitals, church

family fun centers, church holiday retreats (*ala* Jim Bakker's "Heritage USA"), church tax preparation offices, church restaurants, and any other church institutions that you want (so long as they are "good"). What's the old saying about the argument that allows too much?!

Ac 4:32-35—A preacher in England used this passage to justify the church's involvement with the "Feed the Children" charity. He argued that "anyone" in Ac 4:35 meant any poor person in Jerusalem, not just poverty-stricken saints. But who is under consideration? *"Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul"* (4:32a). Then the word "anyone" is used: *"neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common"* (4:32b). Who is "anyone" and "they" in 4:32? *All* Jerusalemites? Or those who had become Christians?

The text then states, *"And great grace was upon them all"* (4:33). Who are "them all"? Was God's grace given to the *unsaved* or the *saved?* As to their material welfare, Luke adds, *"Nor was there anyone among them who lacked ..."*. To whom does "anyone" here refer? The same group of believers, that's who. The text has no reference to the general economic state of affairs in Jerusalem; only conditions among believers is under consideration. Further, if the reference to no lack is inclusive of all Jerusalem, we are led to the ridiculous conclusion that these Christians wiped out all poverty city-wide. Such is the position we put ourselves in if we wrest the Scriptures to justify our pet doctrines.

2 Cor 9:13—Similarly, the word "all" (with "men" supplied in italics, meaning that it is added by the translators) is held to include everyone regardless of their spiritual status. Paul had specifically indicated that the contributions of the Macedonians and Achaians was to supply *"the needs of the saints"* (9:12). Further, the objects of such benevolence would *"glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ"* (9:13a). Would non-Christians do this? No, but Jewish brethren who received help from the formerly despised Gentile believers would. Further, the recipients would pray and long for their benefactors—exactly the thing Paul hoped would happen by this contribution. Again, to inject general charity or benevolence into this passage does violence to the whole context. Paul is writing about brethren helping brethren so that improved relations between Jew and Gentile *believers* would result.

4. When the Local Church Cannot Support Itself

No church is responsible for doing more than it is able by its own resources. If a local church is *incapable* of airing a radio program, then the Lord does not hold it responsible for not doing so. However, circumstances may arise where a church cannot provide adequately for its own members. This happened on several occasions in the first century. In such circumstances, churches are not only authorized but obligated to lend assistance *as a collective.* So the Antioch church provided for their brethren in Judea (Ac 11:29-30), and so churches in Galatia, Macedonia and Achaia contributed to the church in Jerusalem (Rom 15:25-27). A separate institution to accomplish this was unnecessary.

Problems of Institutionalism and other aberrations of the New Testament pattern arise when churches *willfully take upon themselves tasks* that are beyond their means and outside the scope of the local church and then solicit support from other churches to fund them. We must learn to

be content with accomplishing God's work and accept the limitations which He has put in place for our good. God knows we are ambitious and proud and that we will remake the church in our own image if given the opportunity.

In a Nutshell …

The creation of institutions is usually an attempt to mobilize the universal church into action. But the only group in which God wants His collective work to be done is the local church.

Individuals and congregations have differing spheres of responsibility and work. It is erroneous to take any statement directed to an individual Christian and arbitrarily apply it to collective action.

There is no Scriptural mandate for collective involvement in "good works." The church has specific goals and objectives which are connected to its spiritual nature. Therefore, the benevolence it is to render is to its own members.

Questions:

1. Alexander Campbell justified the missionary society on the basis of _____.
2. Where do most duties of the believer lie—in individual action or collective action?
3. List three negative qualities of church-supported institutions.
4. If Gal 6:10 authorizes collective activity, what institutions could a church support?
5. What is pure and undefiled religion? In what context does James define it?
6. Why would it be right for an individual Christian to aid a non-Christian financially but wrong for the church to do so?
7. To whom does "anyone" in Ac 4:35 refer? What are limiting factors found in the passage?
8. When can one local church send financial aid to another church? Give an example from the NT.
9. What is "Churches of Christ Disaster Relief, Inc."?
10. Can a church buy a service or a product from an organization (such as an air conditioner or class material)? Differentiate this from "Institutionalism."

Lesson 8: A Closer Look at the Issues—Sponsoring Churches

1. What Is a "Sponsoring Church"?

The term "sponsoring church" has been coined to describe a form of inter-congregational cooperation that is foreign to the principle of congregational independence and autonomy. A sponsoring church is a congregation that *willfully* and *voluntarily* assumes a task or objective that is beyond its resources. It purports to "oversee" or "sponsor" a special project that will be funded by other congregations. This is justified on the basis that if churches *voluntarily* participate in such cooperative efforts, autonomy has not been violated.

Critics assert that such an arrangement is nothing more than Institutionalism cloaked in the garb of the local church. In other words, instead of creating and funding a separate institution through which churches work (e.g., the "Herald of Truth"), the local church itself becomes the centralized institution. Gene Frost explains:

> Though presented in the form of churches aiding a church, in reality the elders of the sponsoring church constituted a human society through which the churches functioned. Parading under the guise of a church, they actually constituted a distinct entity which became an agency of both the contributing churches and the church of which they supposedly were a part. They thus assumed a dual role, acting as elders of the church among them and as agents for the same church and others that contributed to them. What would have been readily recognized as a society had the overseers identified themselves separate from the church was obscured by the fact that they assumed the title of "elders" in both roles and often conducted business through the treasury of the local church. However, in some instances the guise broke down as separate treasuries, offices, records, etc. were maintained (p. 27).

What may have appeared "harmless" and even beneficial at one point has become a full-blown denominational superstructure among institutional churches.

2. The Practical Functioning of a Sponsoring Church

The collection of funds from elsewhere. A sponsoring church solicits and accepts funds from other churches to support its project. For example, the Union Avenue church in Memphis took upon itself the coordination of evangelism in Japan following WW II. In order to investigate the situation, plan the work, acquire personnel and other resources for evangelism, Union Avenue had to collect hundreds of thousands of dollars for funding. Rather than merely making collection from its own members on the Lord's day, Union Avenue solicited and accepted contributions from across the brotherhood (on the first day of the week, or as the mail ran??), from individuals and congregations alike, in order to "sponsor" the Japanese work. This pattern has been repeated over and over by sponsoring churches.

Decision-making and expenditure of funds by other elders. On the one hand, sponsoring churches have historically included contributing churches by calling their projects "your work." On the other hand, they make unilateral decisions regarding the operation of the project. That is, they

oversee and *administer* the funds of other churches. This is unscriptural centralization. It is no different in principle than the appointment of an area-wide bishop to make decisions for subordinate churches. *The fact that a church **voluntarily** agrees to such oversight is immaterial.* It violates the self-rule and self-determination of the contributing church. At the same time the sponsoring church oversteps its bounds in controlling the resources of other congregations. *The perpetuity of need.* When a sponsoring church takes on an ambitious project which it can never alone support, the created need will never be satisfied (unless the project is abandoned at some point). In the New Testament the needs toward which other congregations provided funds were *temporary* and *circumstantial* and *were eventually fulfilled.* There was a lack of *necessities* which was supplied by contributing churches. Paul even states that the situation might some day become vice-versa, that the contributing churches might eventually become the receiving churches: *"For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality"* (2 Cor 8:13-14). Clearly the sharing of funds among brethren in the New Testament to supply life's necessities cannot stand as precedent for one church to deliberately create a perpetual need beyond its resources and solicit funding from other churches. One is attributed to *famine,* the other to *foolishness.*

3. Some Dangers of the Sponsoring Church

1) The sponsoring church dictates the affairs of other churches. When a church invests tremendous energy and financial resource in the work of another congregation, it is a powerful temptation for its elders to meddle in or flagrantly determine the affairs of the supported church. Instead of simply supporting an evangelist, the sponsoring church oversees a whole program of evangelistic work. Eventually, it comes to feel it has the right to dictate various aspects of the program which it oversees. It has happened in various places that sponsoring churches hold the deeds of "supported churches" and use those instruments to control policy.

Lest this be denied, consider the following real-life example which occurred a number of years ago in South Africa. The "sponsoring church," the Memorial church of Houston, TX, tried to forcibly take over a supported South African church. This attempt was a slap in the face to the preacher, Conrad Steyn, and awakened him to the abuses inherent within such a system. Conrad Steyn publicly repented of being involved in such a corrupt system and wrote letters exposing the power-grabbing tactics of the Memorial church. Excerpts of his letter, dated May 30, 1987, are as follows:

> The straw which broke the camel's back for me and some 30 other brethren here in Cape Town was when the elders of the Memorial church in Houston presented the men of the River View congregation with a new constitution drawn up by the Memorial elders. This constitution listed 5 trustees, three of them resident in America (two being elders of the Memorial church), and the remaining two resident in South Africa. I was listed as one of the new trustees. The River View church had a constitution of their own. The first I knew of this new constitution was when the elder showed it to me in his hotel room, February 10th, 1987. He asked to meet with all of the men of the congregation the following evening to present it to them. The elder who brought this document to Cape Town, a good friend of mine and one I looked up to for many years, explained that the Memorial church

wanted to help us, and protect the congregation and the property against infiltration and possible takeover by the Boston/Crossroads church of Christ (even though there was not a crossroader in the city).

There were a number of things that perturbed me, and I knew would also be a problem with the men of the church. Firstly the new constitution was so designed to where all of the assets of the church, whether immovable, movable or personal, be vested in the (5) trustees, and that these trustees were to be self-perpetuating…as it was stated in the constitution…"The Trustees shall hold office, for such a period as may be decided by the Majority of the Trustees for the time being, voting at any duly convened meeting of the Trustees, or until the Trustees by majority vote, elect any other, or additional Trustees, in place of, or in addition to the above mentioned, or Trustees for the time being." Note, our congregation has NO say in the matter, nor were they consulted about all of this.

We were also told by the elder that this is what they had done with the church in Scotland, and that someday when we had faithful and strong elders, Memorial may deed the property back to us. This was ridiculous, because it belonged to River View already. We were also told that they were taking over the trusteeship and property of the Southern Africa Bible School in Benoni. They have the oversight and sponsorship of that Institution, its president and teaching staff.

We had a lot of money invested in the property, and we all believed that it was ours. At a meeting with the men, the elder was asked the question how they envisioned the church at River View should take care of their affairs (buildings, etc.). We were told that the had brought signed PROXIES giving the church permission to take care of these matters. The men also were told that a congregation becomes autonomous only when elders are appointed and that, until then, the sponsoring church had the oversight of the work. Consider further the following exchange in a business meeting on February 15, 1987. In this meeting, Delbert Burkhart, an elder from the Memorial church, tried to forcibly take over the River View church. Norbert Kursten and Conrad Steyn are members of River View, and Conrad Steyn had been the "supported missionary" until this time:

>   *Norbert Kursten:* Can I ask a question? Oversight, you mentioned the Memorial church…
>
>   *Delbert Burkhart:* We've had oversight of this congregation since its beginning.
>
>   *Norbert Kursten:* Yes, I just want to have a better understanding of the concept of oversight. Could you elaborate on that? Oversight, what does this mean? In what aspects does the Memorial church have responsibility.
>
>   *Delbert Burkhart:* Oversight always with congregations has meant that the church that has the oversight pretty well has the control of the physical and the things and the preacher. We can support the preacher, I mean we can send the preacher in until such time that you become strong, and have a good eldership, then oversight ceases. One eldership cannot oversee another eldership, and that's when you start interfering with autonomy of the church, when there is an eldership and you start interfering with it.

Conrad Steyn: Del, are you saying the church is only autonomous when it has an eldership?

Delbert Burkhart: Yes, as long as it has another church that is helping it financially and has…

Conrad Steyn: What happens if ten churches are helping financially?

Delbert Burkhart: We would have letters in our files from all those congregations giving us the complete oversight of the work.

READ THE ABOVE VERY CAREFULLY. Do you see the error beneath the politics and the strong arm tactics of the elder from the Memorial church? For all the years Conrad Steyn was supported by and advocated such a system, *he could not see its dangers until it personally affected him.* Thankfully, his experience concluded with repentance, but it provides a lesson to us all. We must learn to judge things by the teaching of the Scriptures and not by "what works" or "what I can live with because it has not personally injured me as of yet."

2) The sponsoring church becomes a powerful political agency. This can clearly be seen in the above real-life example. In fact, Conrad Steyn's letter went on to tell of a South African attorney that was flown to Houston by the Memorial church and retained for the express purpose of returning to South Africa and legally expelling Conrad Steyn and other dissenters from the property. When such large amounts of money exchange hands, when decisions are made on such a scope, when power and prestige enter the picture, brotherly love, patience and kindness will often yield to political maneuvering. The local church is to be a community of loving people with common interests, not a business venture with assets to protect and a bottom line to turn a profit. An elder is not to be *"a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil"* (1 Tim 3:6). Brother Burkhart should have memorized that qualification.

3) The potential for harm is increased by sponsoring churches. One benefit of congregational autonomy is that damage is limited when a church becomes unsound. If one church has no influence and control over another, then it can do no material harm if it folds, splits or digresses. While brethren have justified sponsoring churches on the basis of greater good that can be accomplished, the opposite holds true: *Greater harm can be done when such a domineering church goes bad.* When men implement institutions or other mechanisms which bind congregations together, even loosely (as in the case of loyalty to brotherhood publications, popular preachers, etc.), that network can suffer greater fallout when something (or someone) goes awry.

In a Nutshell …

A sponsoring church is one that willfully assumed a work beyond its ability to sustain. It then solicits support from other churches to execute its mission.

Such an arrangement violates the autonomous nature of the local church. It creates an artificial, perpetual need that will never be satisfied, thus continuing to burden and drain churches of their funds.

The overstepping of congregational bounds gives rise to political behavior. Spirituality is subverted by the desire to control policy and dictate outcomes.

Questions:

1. Explain the difference between a created need and a circumstantial need.
2. Describe how a sponsoring church is a form of Institutionalism.
3. For what reason did the elders of the church in Jerusalem receive funds from the church in Antioch (cf. Acts 11:30)?
4. Under what circumstances might the supplying churches of Macedonia and Achaia become receiving churches from the brethren in Jerusalem (cf. 2 Cor 8:13-14)?
5. Why might a sponsoring church feel a need to dictate the affairs of the churches they "oversee"?
6. Answer Delbert Burkhart's contention that a church is not autonomous until it has elders. What abuses can arise from this erroneous idea?

Lesson 9: A Closer Look at the Issues—Collective Action

1. The Local Church and the Individual Christian

Much error that is propagated by men finds its roots in a misunderstanding or misapplication of the nature of the local church. Whether it is an emotional appeal to support the "poor orphans," to educate young adults in a spiritual environment, or to jump on a world-wide evangelistic bandwagon, the post-WW II issues, like so many before, found a common denominator in the corruption of the organization and purpose of the church.

A common area of confusion involves the failure to distinguish between the Christian's life of responsibility and obligation as an individual and his collective duties and objectives as a member of the local church. Indeed, this distinction is intentionally blurred by those who advocate a larger role for the local church than the one assigned it in the New Testament. In the early 1960's, Batsell Barrett Baxter preached a series of lessons at the Hillsboro church in Nashville in which he attempted to erase all lines of distinction between the individual and the church:

> Any "good work" which the individual as a Christian, is obligated to support financially, the church is equally obligated to support financially…If it is a good work, which the Lord wants done, the obligation falls equally upon individuals and upon the church, for individuals are the church (*Questions and Issues of the Day*, p. 23).

The implication of this view is obvious. If one is free to transfer any individual obligation to the local church (or even beyond to a "network" of churches via a sponsoring church), then he does not have to produce specific authority from the Scriptures for congregational involvement.

As we have previously referred to Jas 1:27 and Gal 6:10 in this regard, note how the passages are used to expand individual matters into a congregational role. Alan Highers states his view (and that of the institutional persuasion as a whole) in *The Arlington Meeting:*

> I am not denying that this (Jas 1:27, jj) is individual; I am not denying that Gal. 6:10 is individual, neither am I denying that the Lord's supper is individual or the contribution is individual. But I do not believe that it is individual *only* and that the collective action is thereby excluded…Here we have the individual application, but these are individual duties discharged collectively just as is true with the Lord's supper. Each individual has the responsibility, but when we come together that responsibility is discharged. It is done in a collective manner even though it is an individual responsibility. It is true with the Lord's supper, it is true with the contribution, and I believe it is true with James 1:27. We have the same kind of terminology here that we have in the other, and it is also true in Gal. 6:10 (p. 220).

Gaston Cogdell, in his written debate with Robert Turner, is more blunt in presenting his case:

> The mandate, "as we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to them of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10), applies to the church collectively as well as

to the church individually, and means that the church is to render every help that it is able to render to men and women who cannot help themselves, whether they are members of the church or not. Of course, our first and primary obligation is to those who are of the household of faith (*Cogdell-Turner Discussion,* p. 90).

Cogdell further boldly asserts:

There are no instructions in the scriptures as to how the church is to carry on its work of evangelization and benevolence. Yet in spite of the fact that the Lord has left the means, methods, techniques, procedures, tools and aids, completely up to the discretion of the various congregations of his body, we find deep division in the church today over the question of exactly *how* the work of the church is to be carried on (ibid, p. 95).

Notice how this line of thinking has progressed:

- Christians are to be involved in good works.

- Anything an individual Christian is directed to do can be transferred to the church, because the individual *is* the church.

- God has left the area of benevolence and evangelism *unregulated;* therefore, the church can do *anything* without restriction to further these ends.

Of course, such arguments were used in the '50's and '60's to allow for orphan homes, colleges and cooperative efforts like the Herald of Truth, but successive generations have not been content to stop there. According to this reasoning, there is literally *no limitation* on what a church can build or fund in the name of evangelism or benevolence: hospitals, vacation retreats, amusement parks, etc. The *Christian Chronicle* (a "Church of Christ" publication) recently documented the building of a water tower for an impoverished community in Honduras (see p. 49). There is simply no stopping place for the implications of this view of the individual/church.

2. Are the Individual and the Church the Same Thing?

From my perspective it does not appear that anyone would have ever confused this issue if he would not have been looking for something to justify. It is not difficult to establish that groups are comprised of individuals and operate through individuals, but that *not all actions of an individual pertain to the group.* For example, the United States Supreme Court is comprised of nine individuals. Those individuals, as a group, hear and decide cases. They each individually hear evidence, consider past judgments, and render their individual assessment. Those individual assessments are compiled and the majority view becomes law. Suppose a particular case merits a 5-4 split decision in its favor. A news report might say, "The Supreme Court today decided in favor of the Smith case …". In fact, *only five* justices decided in favor and *four* dissented. But *the group* (majority) decision became the decision of the court *as a whole.* **The individual justice IS NOT the Supreme Court; he/she is a MEMBER of that Court.** Further, suppose a Supreme Court justice appears on a news program and is asked to state his view on a current controversial issue. When he renders his opinion, is he speaking for the entire Court? Of course not. But is he

not *a member of* the Supreme Court? Yes, he is; but being a member of the group does not *activate* the group when one of the justices is acting in an individual capacity. *Official court action must take place within the confines of the rules and regulations which apply to the group.* It would be a criminal offense for a Supreme Court justice to impose the authority of the High Court in a private, individual matter. He is a Supreme Court justice twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, but *he does not always act in that capacity.* This principle applies to the Christian and the local church of which he is a member. Most of the New Testament is addressed to and regulates the Christian in his individual life. This is because the local church is comprised of individuals, and its effectiveness as a group will be directly traced to the quality of the members who comprise it. Christians function in society as family members (mother, father, son, daughter, etc.), employers/employees, neighbors, humanitarians, students and a variety of other roles. In each of these roles they must reflect the character and principles upon which Jesus expects His disciples to possess. Each Christian (if circumstances allow) will be a member of a local church, one of the group of likeminded individuals. Each Christian is a member of the local church twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, *but he/she does not operate in that collective capacity at all times.*

When "the church" (group) observes the Lord's supper (*"when you come together as a church"*—1 Cor 11:18), the collective is functioning through the individual members who participate. [The collective is still functioning even if a percentage of the group is absent]. Thus the church is authorized to provide whatever is necessary and expedient in the discharge of this collective activity: a building, elements of the supper, instruments of distribution (plates, cups, etc.), a table to set them on, etc. This is group/congregational activity because the New Testament instructs individual Christians *as a group* to engage in the practice.

The same thing is true in regard to benevolence. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the **churches** of Galatia, so **you must do also:** On the first day of the week let **each one of you** lay something aside ..."* (1 Cor 16:1-2). The collective (group) is here being activated in the work of supporting needy brethren, but this is only accomplished as each Christian gives his share. But once the individual relinquishes control of his resources for the objectives of the group, he no longer acts as an individual but in a collective capacity (*"While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control?"*—Ac 5:4). Thus the offering to the destitute brethren in Jerusalem is called *"the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia"* (2 Cor 8:1), and those who accompanied Paul on his mission to deliver the funds were *"messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ"* (2 Cor 8:23). In regard to benevolence, *every* reference to collective action in the New Testament *specifies that Christians or saints were the recipients of the benevolence.* Whether the needs met were local (Ac 4:32-35), regional (Ac 11:29-30) or afar (Rom 15:25-26), *when churches acted in their collective capacity, they **always** relieved the needs of saints* as opposed to the needs of non- Christians.

It should not be thought strange that individual Christians have obligations and duties which have no bearing whatsoever on the local church as a whole. Indeed, it wouldn't be thought strange by anyone who did not have an ax to grind on this subject. Individual Christians have obligations to pay taxes, but no one would think to transfer this duty to the local church, though he is a member of it. An individual Christian may decide to join a civic club, but it would be

ridiculous for him to send the bill for his membership dues to the church treasurer. An individual Christian has the right (yea, even the obligation) to engage in gainful employment, but such does not grant permission for the church to establish a business. The fact is, the argument that "the church can do what the individual can do" is a specious argument designed to justify whatever one chooses to justify. But when pressed to the extreme, it is exposed as a ludicrous doctrine that opens a floodgate of corruption.

3. Why the Distinction?

The short answer is, "It doesn't matter why." That is, if we find that this is what the New Testament authorizes, then this is what must be followed. We might just as well wonder, "Why wouldn't God allow a moral and good Moabite or Ammonite to dwell among the congregation of Israel?" though it is clear that God forbade such (Dt 23:3; Neh 13: 1). But I believe there is a reason why God does not permit churches to supply the needs of non-Christians even though individual Christians may. Simply, the local church is the collective of those who have spiritual fellowship. As an outgrowth of that fellowship these people who share a common faith worship together, edify one another, work to broaden that fellowship to the lost, and supply the periodic needs that arise among themselves. *The group exists in direct correlation to those who comprise it.*

Let's look at this "backward." Why shouldn't the church of the Lord solicit contributions and funding from unbelievers? Because they have *no relation, no fellowship* with the spiritual collective. God expects His people to join together and attend to the duties and obligations that will arise in relation to the peculiar relation shared by the group. We must not leave this point without this clarification. Those who honor this distinction between individual and collective action are not "orphan haters"; they do not lack compassion on the suffering; they sustain obligations as members of the "human collective" or human society to minister to those who are distressed, diseased, despondent and otherwise disaffected. *The issue is the degree to which those in specific spiritual relation have collective responsibilities.* I contend that the local church has clearly defined parameters which are revealed in the New Testament. Others advocate no limits on what the church can fund, purchase, build or otherwise provide in the name of evangelism or benevolence. This second view has proven itself over the last five decades to have disastrous consequences and has made a common denomination out of those who have implemented it.

In a Nutshell …

Those who have sought to broaden the work of the church beyond the scope of the New Testament have done so by asserting that obligations and duties which are directed to the individual may rightly be transferred to the local church.

This idea misunderstands the principle of individual/group relations and corrupts the peculiar identity and work of the local church.

If God has left the work of the church unregulated, then there is no end to what the church can be involved in.

1. What assertion did Batsell Baxter make concerning good works?
2. T/F Alan Highers denied that Jas 1:27 and Gal 6:10 had any individual application.
3. Is it individual or group (church) action when:

   a) The treasurer writes a check for support to a preacher?
   b) An elder directs an action of withdrawal against an unfaithful brother?
   c) A Christian contributes to the American Lung Association?
   d) Christians rent a mountain chalet on a group vacation?
   e) The preacher writes a newspaper article paid for by the church?

4. Who is always specified in the New Testament as receiving aid from churches?
5. Discuss: If an individual Christian can join the Red Cross, an agency which provides good and benevolent service, can local churches contribute to the Red Cross? Why?

Lesson 10: Into the 1960's

1. The Hardening of Positions on Institutionalism

The battle lines were drawn and brought into clear focus during the 1950's. While there were some editors and journals which wanted to keep lines of communication open as long as possible, institutional ambitions were a juggernaut not to be stopped. The "antis" were increasingly portrayed as fanatics, divisive and sowers of discord. As early as September, 1955, Bill L. Rogers wrote in the *Gospel Advocate:*

> In the *Gospel Advocate* of November 18, 1954, there appeared a letter written by an elder dealing with the subject of *church-splitting* preachers. On December 9 there appeared a number of commendatory statements about the article on the editorial page…One preacher commended the letter stating that it would be well to "quarantine" those preachers who today "are *sowing the seeds of discord* among the brotherhood.…" Immediately this was seized upon by the writers of the *Gospel Guardian* and their guilt complex has been evident by their continual quibbling in almost every issue of that paper since the statement appeared.

The first effort was to show how many factions would result if everyone were to "quarantine" everybody else who did not agree perfectly with him on the caring of orphans and the cooperation efforts being practiced today. No one has ever recommended "quarantining" everyone whose position differs from his. But it has been recommended that we mark those who *divide* the church and *sow discord…*

In such intense controversies as this, charges and counter-charges are wildly flung about as to who is responsible for the breach. The innovators cite history to "prove" that they are not innovators and try to claim the high moral ground of precedence. They then accuse those who differ with them of being "obstructionists" and causing unnecessary discord. The "obstructionists" will also cite history and claim that the innovators are introducing new practices and thus becoming modernists. The "obstructionists" claim to be merely defending the truth and will often do so without compromise. Thus the unstoppable force meets the immovable object and something has to give. Though each side will interpret these historical events to justify his/her own position, one thing must be admitted up front: involving church treasuries in projects that violated the conscience of some **forced** them to go elsewhere. Here's the rub: institutionalists always maintained that the obligations under consideration *could have been discharged individually.* But they insisted on doing so congregationally, thus threatening the consciences of those who thought otherwise. **No consideration was given to the sensitive consciences of those who objected to congregational action but were entirely in favor of independent, individual action.** The rejoinder from the pro-institutionalists was usually akin to, "No one is going to dictate how this work is to be done." The fact is, their ambitions were not going to be interfered with, even by the legitimate conscientious objections of their brethren.

Thus, in most cases, the "antis" were made to hit the road, give up buildings, start over from scratch. Preachers had meetings cancelled and were blacklisted; some business meetings turned into fisticuffs; many families divided as brother opposed brother and parents opposed their

children. It was a dark and ugly time which left deep scars which affect brethren's thinking even until today.

2. The Modernization of the Mainstream

We refer to the institutional movement as the mainline church of Christ simply because the majority of the brethren remained identified with such groups. It is estimated that about one-tenth of the brotherhood adopted an anti-institutional position, a significant number in comparison to the one-cup and premillennial offshoots of the early 1900's.

In retrospect it is easy to see what motivated the movers and shakers of Institutionalism. Of course, we must be careful not to attribute all of the ambitions of the leaders to the rank and file. It is not uncommon to see a variety of agendas within a broad-based movement. Some were genuinely moved by the plight of "orphans." (**Note:** As a matter of record, a large percentage of children in the various homes were not orphans at all; such institutions became a convenient dumping ground for parents who suffered domestic discord and no longer wanted the burden of children.) But emotional pleas of "help the orphans" or "save the lost" were merely financial siphons jammed into congregational pockets. The deeper agenda was BIG, BIGGER, ***BIGGEST!*** Many among the institutionalists coveted a place in the national consciousness as a religious group to be reckoned with. Much in evidence was the weakness of the Jews of long ago: *"that we also may be like all the nations"* (1 Sam 8:20).

Euphoric and perhaps deceived by the surge of numeric growth in the 1950's, main-stream institutionalists pressed for buildings after the denominational model. Hughes notes:

> Given this rate of growth, it was inevitable that Churches of Christ would have to build new, expanded facilities. Since they would have to build anyway, (M. Norvel) Young encouraged congregations to construct facilities that would be not only serviceable but also substantial, attractive, and prominently located. No one among Churches of Christ played a more significant role in this regard than he. (Young urged) congregations to plan buildings that would accommodate babies with "cry rooms," professional preachers with a centrally located "minister's study," support staff with a secretary's office, congregational fellowship with "a large fellowship room" and "cooking facilities near this room," benevolent activities with a storeroom that would house "food and clothing for…the poor," educational needs with significant classroom space and a church library, and media needs with a "mimeograph room" and "electric outlets in each classroom, so that visual aids may be used."

Further, Young urged, "the building should be designed so that it 'looks like a church.'…The exterior should be attractive, though simple, without unnecessary ornamentation, but with good lines of architecture." More than that, "it would be wise to have enough ground to permit attractive landscaping." It would be especially important, he argued, to "locate the new building on a prominent site—one that will advertise the meetings of the church…Do not tuck it away in a secluded spot." Further, Young implicitly suggested that Churches of Christ take seriously the religious architecture of various denominations (pp. 247248).

Church buildings boomed not only in number but in size. As reported in 1956 in *The Church is Building,* by Norvel Young and James Marvin Powell, Churches of Christ had built 1000 buildings representing assets of more than $147,000,000 between 1940 and 1956 (Hughes, p. 248). Under Norvel Young's leadership, the Broadway church in Lubbock, TX, built a massive church complex, the auditorium alone capable of seating 2,100 worshipers.

In 1957, Young became president of George Pepperdine College in Los Angeles, CA. In the early 1970's, Young and William S. Banowsky worked together to build a new campus for the school in the upscale community of Malibu, CA. Hughes writes:

The very idea that Churches of Christ might be connected in a significant way to such an enterprise would have boggled the minds of most in nineteenth-century Churches of Christ, and it no doubt startled many even in the 1970s. But the new Malibu campus, which would become famous as one of the most beautiful university campuses in the world, simply symbolized the extent to which many in Churches of Christ now felt at home in the world their forebears had rejected.

In truth, Pepperdine's Malibu campus symbolized trends and transitions that had come to dominate the cultural landscape of Churches of Christ…Through the process of modernization and the development of various parachurch institutions, the Church of Christ developed almost everywhere in the United States into a well-established *institution* in its own right. Put another way, the Church of Christ was no longer a sect, much less an informal movement; it had become instead a full-blown denomination, at least in terms of its social standing in the context of American culture. This was the issue to which leaders in the anti-institutional movement had pointed all along (p. 252).

3. Turbulent Waters in the Mainstream

Even while mainstream institutional churches were basking in the glow of "progress" and savoring their victory over the hated "antis," the mid-1960's stirred the waters again into a muddy, turbulent flow. The doors that had been opened wide enough to allow institutional and denominational elements now began letting in theologically liberal influences. With the noninstitutional issues no longer a major concern in the late 1960s, insurgency emerged from both the conservative and liberal positions. The in-house conflicts over sponsoring churches, cooperation, support of orphan homes and homes for the elderly, and the Herald of Truth caused deep hurts not easily healed. Reacting to this internal bloodletting, a number of younger men and women moved toward more liberal positions—even to insurgency. The 1960s saw, for the first time, open criticism of churches of Christ by a left-leaning constituency.

In response, some of the leading advocates of cooperation and sponsoring churches became strong defenders of a conservative position, attacking both middle-of-the-roaders and theological liberals. Because of this stance, a number of these men must be classified as insurgents (Hooper, p. 295).

We can chart this development as follows:

- Theological Liberals
- Institutional 1960's Middle-of-the-Roaders
- 1950's Ultra-conservative
- Institutionalists
- Non-institutional

Theological Liberalism and the Schools. The very schools that wormed their way into church budgets, the very schools that institutional brethren felt they couldn't do without, became a pipeline of liberal theology into the mainstream churches. Hughes writes:

> The progressive movement in Churches of Christ could never have arisen apart from the institutions of higher learning that Churches of Christ established earlier in the century. It is ironic, but scarcely unprecedented, that these colleges should have helped to produce a movement that in many significant ways undermined their original aims and intentions. As a rule, these colleges were founded to promote and even institutionalize the orthodox agenda of Churches of Christ. Once established, however, they effectively promoted genuine education rather than simple indoctrination …

The progressive movement in Churches of Christ was also shaped significantly by the graduate theological education that began in earnest among Churches of Christ in the 1950s…In order to offer graduate programs in religion, these colleges had to secure significant numbers of professors with doctoral degrees in biblical and related studies. Of pivotal importance in this regard was LeMoine G. Lewis, who, after earning his doctorate from Harvard, returned to his alma mater, Abilene Christian College, as professor of church history in 1949…Lewis successfully encouraged scores of his students over the years to pursue doctoral studies in religion at Harvard and similar institutions…(pp. 310-311).

These men eventually filtered back into schools such as Abilene, Pepperdine, Lipscomb and Freed-Hardeman as these schools increased their levels of accreditation and, therefore, found themselves in need of Ph.D's. Already conditioned by the liberal drift of the mainstream churches of Christ, these men drank deeply of the wells of ecumenicism (*ecumenical:* 2b—promoting or tending toward worldwide Christian unity or cooperation, *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*). They aimed to take the institutional churches further into the denominational mainstream. Hooper says of them:

> "Insurgency from the left was new in churches of Christ. Until the 1960s, most who accepted liberal theological positions quietly left the fellowship. But in the 1960s, many chose to stay and attempted to change what they perceived as an emerging bitter legalistic spirit" (pp. 298-299).

In a Nutshell …

As positions hardened on institutional issues, the non-institutionalists were unable to fellowship error via congregational treasuries.

The institutional mainstream flourished with building projects and programs.

The accelerated growth brought with it other liberal elements which threatened traditional mainstream views. The very schools over which the non-institutional division occurred became a main source of liberal insurgency. Theological liberals infiltrated graduate schools and began to undermine sound views of the Scriptures.

Questions:

1. How was the "quarantine" viewed by the institutional brethren?
2. Approximately what percentage of brethren adopted a "non-institutional" outlook?
3. What was the deeper motive behind cooperative efforts and supporting institutions?
4. According to Richard Hughes, institutional churches swiftly became a full-blown _____ in the context of American culture.
5. The institutional churches in the 1960's divided into what three branches?
6. Who was LeMoine G. Lewis and what role did he play in liberalizing schools?
7. What does "ecumenical" mean? Do "we" use it in a positive or negative sense?

Lesson 11: The Troubled Waters of the Mainstream in the 1960's

1. The 1960's: A Period of Social Unrest

There were various factors which combined to produce trouble among mainstream churches in the decade of the '60's. We have already mentioned the theological liberalism introduced by secular-trained professors among brotherhood schools. Additionally, the increased social consciousness of the '60's, embodied in the racial issues and the opposition to the Vietnam war of that decade, had a significant impact upon the younger generation of institutionals. Some new papers began to be published with a militantly liberal flavor. It is interesting to note the "trickle-down effect" from the academia to the "lay Christians" via these magazines. Regarding the impact of *Restoration Quarterly,* Hughes notes:

> The scholars contributing to the journal had been taught to look at the bible and the world in ways that ranged well beyond the confines of the comparatively insular vision of the Churches of Christ at that time. Indeed, these scholars began to grapple with theological questions that far transcended the premillennial and anti-institutional controversies… Still, the *Restoration Quarterly's* new vision remained largely restricted to the scholarly community within Churches of Christ. It was not until the late 1960s that scholars began disseminating the results of biblical and theological scholarship to a broader, largely lay audience. Two journals undertook that task (p. 317).

The two journals were *Integrity* and *Mission.* Hughes describes *Mission* thusly: From the beginning, the contributors to *Mission* aimed its message directly at the pulpit and the pew and sought to redirect the theological interests of Churches of Christ away from what they viewed as the provincial battles of the past toward what they viewed as more pressing ethical and biblical concerns, largely inspired by the ferment of the 1960s. More than this, they sought to make *Mission* an open forum in which voices from a variety of perspectives could be heard—a genuine alternative to the lockstep orthodoxy that had characterized the *Gospel Advocate* and, to a lesser extent, the *Firm Foundation* for many years. For these reasons, *Mission* provides a unique window on the variety of concerns that divided Churches of Christ in that period (p. 318).

Men from the younger generation were extremely critical of the institutional mainstream (and by extension the non-institutional group, though little attention was paid directly to them in these journals) for what they considered to be "majoring in minors." They condemned the church as out of step with the true needs of society. (Of course, it must be noted that these young critics retained a highly institutionalized concept of the church. They saw the churches as social agencies which should have been more involved in relieving the social inequities of the day.) Hughes further observes:

> *Mission* writers typically had little patience with suburban congregations that had built elaborate and comfortable facilities in the postwar period to serve an essentially middleclass and suburban membership and that often turned a deaf ear to the problems of the inner city…*Mission* emerged as a radically sectarian publication critiquing a church that had traded its sectarian birthright for a bowl of denominational porridge…few if any *Mission* writers shared all the biases of the anti-institutional movement of the 1950s, and

yet many of them called on Churches of Christ to abandon their preoccupation with institutional maintenance, especially when that maintenance drowned out the cries of the off cast and the poor and obscured the need for racial and economic justice (pp. 322-323).

2. From Carl Ketcherside to Ira Rice, Jr.

Voices of dissent had already been heard prior to this time from two men whose names are often spoken in the same breath: Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett. Hughes notes: There is a sense in which the progressive tradition among Churches of Christ in the context of the 1960s was founded by Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett, two men who, on the eve of that decade, called Churches of Christ to abandon both legalism and exclusivism, to cultivate a greater appreciation for the grace of God, and to manifest a greater tolerance for Christians of other traditions (p. 313).

Ketcherside and Garrett pushed the concept of "unity in diversity." In their view, churches of Christ were bogged down in legalism, unnecessarily estranged from the larger denominational world which likewise recognized Jesus as the Savior. They felt that the restoration spirit of Campbell had been lost. Wherein Campbell had sought unity among believers by abandoning creeds and doctrines of men, Garrett and Ketcherside felt that churches of Christ had abandoned any notion or objective of unifying with others and were content in their sectarian aloofness. Hooper observes:

> Leroy Garrett called for a "separated but not divided" stance. He quickly rejected the separatism he viewed in churches of Christ—"Unless you see and do as I see and do I will not accept you as equal." He added: "Separatism is exclusivism." Instead of this view, Garrett suggested:

> Separated but not divided recognizes that because of tradition, race, social status, personal preference, or longstanding theological differences "they" are there and "we" are here, and that this is not likely to change in the foreseeable future. But still, because of our common loyalty to Christ (Can there really be any other test?), we can recognize and treat each other as equals in Christ and perhaps do some things together (p. 296).

Ketcherside is famous for his "gospel/doctrine" distinction wherein he identified certain core elements as "gospel" and all other covenant aspects as "doctrine." The gospel, said Ketcherside, "consisted of the life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, coronation and glorification of Jesus" (*Mission Messenger,* December 1972, p. 180; via *Neo-Calvinism in the Church of Christ,* p. 53). Spiritual fellowship could be established on agreement with these core gospel planks; any other differences (instrumental music, centralized cooperation, observance of the Lord's supper, etc.) were matters of doctrine and were unimportant distinctions. Garrett concurred:

> "But it is imperative that we keep straight the distinction that the Holy Spirit has made. The gospel makes us one; the doctrine sweetens that oneness. Just as sure as we allow our opinions in reference to doctrine become the test for unity, we are just that sure to create a sect and separate brothers" (*Neo-Calvinism in the Church of Christ,* p. 55).

When Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett first started peddling their doctrines of unity and ecumenism in the late 1950's and early 1960's they were treated as fringe radicals unworthy of attention. But Ed Harrell labels them "prophets before their time," (*CC20thC,* p. 179), for it was not until the late '60's and even into the 1970's that the ecumenical movement of the theological liberals seized upon their concepts and further embellished them to their own purposes.

All of this pressure from the left provoked a counter-attack from the extreme right. Ira Y. Rice, Jr. fired return salvos through his three editions of *Axe at the Root* and publication of *Contending for the Faith* magazine. He was joined by Thomas Warren and the *Spiritual Sword.* Both were committed to militantly defending "the truth" (the institutional truth, as they saw it) against the encroaching forces of liberalism. Hooper observes:

> The inevitable happened. With positions drawn on either side of the great middle-of-the-stream fellowship, those in the middle were often the ones harmed by the volleys. If anyone in the middle suggested solutions, he became branded—liberal or legalist (p. 301).

The efforts of these men and other "consiberals" (as someone has conveniently labeled them—"conservative/liberals") helped crystallize the institutional mainstream into the three distinct courses noted in lesson ten.

3. The Forming of New Institutions

The new conservatives did not just establish new papers; they also established new schools—specifically, preacher-training schools…Conservatives had largely lost faith in the ability of colleges related to Churches of Christ—especially Abilene Christian—to produce *acceptable* pulpit preachers. The conservatives were convinced that such institutions had become hotbeds of the sort of biblical and theological scholarship that characterized the progressive movement and that as a result they were now producing scholars rather than preachers …

A variety of congregations determined to establish their own "schools of preaching" to train new preachers. Schools that grew from this sort of motivation included the Memphis School of Preaching, the Brown Trail School of Preaching in Fort Worth, and, to a lesser degree, the Bear Valley School of Preaching in Denver…Batsell Barrett Baxter identified ten schools of preaching operating within the United States in 1970. According to Baxter's statistics, these schools trained over 25 percent of all the students studying to preach among Churches of Christ. And of course many of these schools were established by people who stood squarely in the conservative wing of the tradition (Hughes, pp. 330, 332).

Note the sense of dependence among the institutional mainstream on official training of preachers and the effort to establish some institution to accomplish it—whether a separate organization or one formed within the local church itself. Having started down the road of Institutionalism, they cannot bring themselves to see the conceptual error involved even when faced with the abuses of the system. Note Ira Rice's chagrin expressed in 1970 over the proliferation of preacher-training schools:

What most of our *supposed*-to-be *Christian* colleges cannot seem to comprehend is that if they had been faithfully performing their function—training both the *number* and the *kind* of men required as ministers to the churches—in all likelihood this present "school-of-preaching" phenomenon…never would have arisen at all! (ibid, p. 332-333). Glen Wallace wrote in 1968:

The growing number of preacher training schools [reflects a] *deficiency* among us. Our Bible departments—in some colleges—are being overloaded with Harvard specialists…Many are tainted with sectarian philosophy and are totally ignorant of the sickness in our land. They speak—not in a relevant message—but in intellectual nothingness or just plain denominational terms (ibid, p. 333).

4. What About Preacher Training?

These developments and other cultural factors have produced an anti-intellectual bias in the minds of many Christians. The impression left is that education is necessarily evil. Knowledge, however, is neutral, and ignorance is not virtuous. Things learned may be false and therefore are to be rejected. Everything true is of some benefit and can bring new perspectives and ideas. The real problems faced by institutional brethren relative to the encroachment of theological liberalism were 1) abandoning basic principles of Scriptural authority to allow for Institutionalism, and 2) depending on those institutions to do their work for them; viz., training preachers.

There is nothing wrong with any Christian, preacher or otherwise, studying religious matters on a graduate level. However, there must be a greater degree of scrutiny, skepticism and discrimination while studying at seminaries. The student must be aware that critical thinking at such academic levels is fundamentally flawed where the Scriptures are concerned. Invalid assumptions are made about the biblical text; an ecumenical spirit prevails; curriculum is laced with Calvinistic presuppositions. Add to these things the immense social pressure of the academic environment, the insular nature of campus and classroom existence, the pride of studying at such advanced levels and the result can be disorienting for the strongest Christian. The church should not be dependent upon any institution for developing and sustaining itself. The New Testament recognizes no official training or program required for one to work as an evangelist. This is not to say that any particular congregation cannot provide Scriptural instruction on advanced levels for teachers and any others, including would-be preachers. In fact, more of this should be done. Unfortunately, many "faithful" (meaning "noninstitutional") churches have become stagnant and unable to teach the Bible on such levels. No effort is made on the part of the vast majority of congregations to train men to preach or to even develop their own in-house teachers.

As a result, many brethren have nurtured their ambitions to preach by attending Florida College for advanced studies. While the institutional mainstream built their colleges and universities through church treasuries and influence, Florida College, established in 1946, has to the present day remained officially unattached to the churches. But brethren should resist every temptation to rely on FC for preacher training, for that is not God's intent for His people. There are inherent dangers in such institutions, and it has been observed by many that all man-made institutions will

eventually fall by the wayside. If one institution goes astray, it can have a profound impact upon a wide area where it has sent preachers. Such is less likely to happen if congregations attend to their own business of educating young men adequately to begin the work of evangelism.

In a Nutshell …

Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett introduced a more ecumenical outlook which embraced denominations and extend fellowship to them.

Their efforts fueled younger radicals who began exerting influence on institutional churches to raise their social consciousness and become more active in liberal causes.

This produced a backlash of ultra-conservatism which resulted in the establishment of preacher training schools among the congregations. This was a virtual boycott of the traditional church-supported schools which had succumbed to the influence of theological liberalism.

Questions:

1. Which two liberal journals brought wider attention to theologically liberal ideas?
2. Why did these young radicals call for an abandonment of Institutionalism? How did they view suburban, middle-class churches?
3. Explain briefly Carl Ketcherside's view of gospel and doctrine.
4. Why were schools like the Memphis School of Preaching started?
5. What makes Florida College unique among other biblically oriented schools?

Lesson 12: The Identity Crisis of the Seventies

1. The Search for Identity

In Richard Hughes' analysis, the late 1960's found the mainstream institutional churches in the midst of an identity crisis. The progressives wanted more modernism; the ultra-conservatives were suspicious and combative; and the middle-of-the-roaders just wanted everyone to quit fighting. Hughes' view of the situation:

> By the close of the 1960s, it had become apparent to those who had eyes to see how thoroughly the "nondenominational" Churches of Christ had become a denomination, standing in nearlockstep formation with the conservative interests of the larger culture…increased acculturation coupled with doubts regarding the tradition's validity led many to abandon evangelistic activity. Churches of Christ thus entered the 1970s experiencing minimal growth and anxiety over their institutional identity.

Churches of Christ increasingly behaved like a denomination that had made its peace with the larger culture even though they continued to employ the sectarian, counter cultural language of primitive Christianity to define their basic identity…Churches of Christ could not decide if they constituted a sect or a denomination—though they resisted both labels. In the midst of their indecision and confusion, the restoration vision grew blurred.

Highlighting these disjunctions was the widespread perception that Churches of Christ, which had experienced such rapid growth in the post-World War II era, were now merely holding their own numerically, or perhaps even declining. The malaise was only compounded by suggestions that the total membership of Churches of Christ might be less than half of previous estimates— down from earlier estimates of some 2,500,000 to perhaps between 1,000,000 and 1,250,000 (pp. 351-353). In the 1970's Flavil Yeakley, a student of church-growth trends, made some dire predictions. Hooper notes:

> Yeakley predicted that churches of Christ would be only half the current size by the year 2000 if the 1977 growth trends continued. The next generation would see the demise of churches of Christ as a distinguishable group. Yeakley gave as the major reason for the declining growth rate the changing conditions of the world over the previous fifteen years and the failure of churches of Christ to adapt to these changes.

Of special importance are the two directions churches of Christ are moving. One will stunt growth; the other will leave churches with little substance of life. Said Yeakley:

> "The declining growth rate in the church of Christ over the past 15 years has been caused, at least in part, by a trend in the opposite direction—a trend to become conservative in matters of opinion and liberal in matters of faith." Both extremes will eventually destroy the church. The conservatives "make their customs into a law in which they bind all others in the church." On the other hand, the liberals "treat the word of God as though it had no more authority than the word of man." Even the large mainstream of churches of

Christ is turning to a more devotional literature. This is the type of literature currently popular with the publishing houses among churches of Christ (pp. 302-303).[1]

Institutional churches were suffering a predictable crisis. Society had dramatically changed from its post-WW II spirituality to a more cynical, free-spirited, me-centered outlook that wanted little to do with traditional forms of religion. But locked into at least a verbal commitment to the authority of the New Testament, there was only so much change that the institutional churches could implement in order to appeal to the multitudes. Something was going to have to give if the mainstream churches were going to recover the numerical growth they had previously enjoyed. But rather than remaining firmly committed to the principles of divine truth and letting the "chips fall where they may" in terms of popularity, institutional churches began a gradual transformation, the results of which can be seen today.

2. The Crossroads/Boston Movement

Crossroads Beginnings. The most significant reactionary offshoot to this mainstream identity crisis was the formation of the Crossroads/Boston discipling movement. Hughes well summarizes the philosophical underpinnings of this movement:

> The most visible expression of protest and the most significant effort to revitalize Churches of Christ along specifically sectarian lines occurred in a University of Florida campus ministry led by Charles H. (Chuck) Lucas under the oversight of the Crossroads Church of Christ in Gainesville…Lucas brought to his campus ministry a dimension lacking in the larger Campus Evangelism movement. He combined the sectarian, exclusivist heritage of Churches of Christ with discipling methods he claimed he found in the ministry of Jesus. Lucas maintained that the method of evangelism employed by Jesus himself called on each disciple to make disciples of others on a one-to-one basis. He argued that modern churches were in decline because they were not following that simple strategy; instead, they had set up programs and devised institutional strategies that allowed individual Christians to avoid the task of confronting others directly with the gospel.

But Lucas added another key dimension to his discipling strategies. He insisted that discipling another person entailed a good deal more than simply winning that person as a convert; it entailed entering into a relationship with the convert, monitoring his or her behavior, and calling each convert to nothing less than "total commitment." This total commitment required, first of all, that each convert dedicate his or her life to converting others, who in turn would convert others, and so on. Anything short of this kind of commitment, said Lucas, should be grounds for discipline.

Using these strategies, Lucas achieved results on the campus of the University of Florida that were truly startling. The Crossroads congregation grew from a total membership of 275 in 1970 to over 1,000 by 1977, with most of that growth coming from student converts (pp. 358-359).

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[1] I have personally witnessed this latter trend in my periodic visits to the Gospel Advocate Bookstore in Nashville over the last eighteen years. There has been a sharp decline in textual study materials and a proliferation of pop-religion, feel good "fluff."

It might be fair to say, in hindsight, that the Crossroads church, and Chuck Lucas in particular, didn't realize what they were getting themselves into. As often happens, the master trains a student who takes his concepts far beyond what the master envisioned. When Chuck Lucas trained Kip McKean, and McKean moved to Boston to revitalize that church, Lucas surely couldn't foresee that his Crossroads philosophies were about to be eclipsed and left in the dust by McKean.

The Shift to Boston. Kip McKean devised an authoritarian system which emphasized rigid structure to the degree that charges of "cultism" soon became attached to the Boston movement. While enjoying phenomenal numerical success, a cloud of suspicion was soon raised over the movement even on a national scale. Some elements of Boston methodology are briefly outlined below:

Evangelist rule: The Boston movement emphasized the rule and authority of evangelists over elders. As evangelists were trained in Boston methodology, they would fan out and take over various local works, even ones in which elders already existed. Elders were held to have only local church rule while evangelists had inter-congregational rule. Further, husband/wife evangelistic teams were seen as joint rulers.

Pyramidal authoritarian structure: All authority was embodied in Kip McKean, and the Boston church was in every sense the "mother church" of the movement. All cues came from Boston; nothing happened without an approving nod from McKean. "Submission" became a key word in the movement. Every member was assigned a senior "prayer partner" who had de facto authority in the life of his subordinate. Daily confession of improper actions and even thoughts helped reinforce a sense of dependency and control.

Social regimentation: New converts were separated from their unbelieving families and housed in common living quarters. Every hour of every day was scheduled including work, Bible study, prayer partner sessions, evangelism activities, even dating (approval for whom one wished to date, where one wished to go, etc.). Financial contributions to the church were regimented to the point that if members couldn't meet their obligations, they were expected to sell personal possessions to make up for the shortfall.

City congregations: The Boston movement emphasized one citywide church with a common Lord's day meeting. For example, so many people assembled in the Boston church that they worshiped in the Boston Garden. The London church met in the Odeon Theater at Leicester Square, a facility big enough to accommodate the hundreds of converts who flocked to the movement from a highly secularized and skeptical society. With so many people in each congregation, "house churches" became the focus of control. Each city was divided into zones, and house churches would be implemented in each zone. These subgroups with their zone leaders, house church leaders, Bible Talk leaders and prayer partners enabled each church to maintain regimented control over its membership.

Focus upon the young: Those who are ripest for such a rigid implementation of authority are the young. College-age students, many living away from home for the first time and experiencing the throes of forming a self-identity and lacking self-discipline, thrived on the personal attention

and structure lavished upon them by the Boston hierarchy. The older Christians who weren't as pliable were unceremoniously shoved aside as obstructionists. This youth movement was on the march, and no one was going to stop them.

Pillar churches: As the Boston movement changed its form and mission time and again, the concept of pillar churches emerged. First, McKean envisioned pillar churches throughout the U.S., regional churches which would oversee evangelism and church plantings throughout entire regions. When this vision proved too narrow for his ambitions, McKean concocted global pillar churches and eventually cast himself in the role of the apostle Paul and became the "roving leader" of what has come to be known as the International Church of Christ (see the Boston Ten-Year Report on following pages). As you can see, McKean took the sponsoring church concept to its logical end.

The Significance of the Boston Movement. The Boston movement became a serious threat to mainstream churches as well as, to a lesser extent, noninstitutional churches. The aura of fervor, commitment and success was exhilarating, and many churches opened their doors to the Boston influence. Many preachers went to Boston for "training" (indoctrination would be more accurate). Young people especially were moved by the apparent work of God being manifested via Kip McKean. Some churches were forcibly taken over by the Boston groups. But as the methods and practices of Boston drifted further from the New Testament pattern and began to resemble Catholicism in its power structure, institutional churches mounted a vigorous defense against what was increasingly held to be an apostate cult. Many who had been caught up in the euphoria repented and publicly distanced themselves from Boston/McKean. The Crossroads church in Gainesville, FL even publicly repudiated the Boston movement in 1988, confessed its own errors of the "discipling philosophy" and made a formal effort to reestablish ties with the mainstream institutional churches in 1990.

We should also note a common ambition behind the Boston movement that was previously seen in the missionary society of the 1800's and the sponsoring church of the 1900's: *In each case, brethren were convinced that the whole world could be converted if the gospel was broadcast enough.* On the surface, this appears to be the most noble of enterprises, and those who criticize it run the risk of sounding anti-evangelistic and even anti-spiritual. But while we acknowledge that a primary function of the Lord's church on both the level of the individual member and the collective is to preach the gospel, we must also acknowledge that "the end doesn't justify the means." It is not given to any one congregation to reach the whole world; each congregation is expected to responsibly expend its resources and do what it can within the realm of divine authority in reaching the lost. So much "how dare you" rhetoric was slung at the "antis" in the 1950's because of their opposition to unscriptural practices:

- "How dare you refuse aid to orphans!"
- "How dare you oppose a good work like the 'Herald of Truth'!"
- "How dare you criticize us for our efforts while you do nothing!" (A common phrase ran akin to: "I like it the way we do it better than the way you *don't* do it".)

The euphoria of "convert the world" drowned out all desire to examine the propriety of how things were being done. "That's unimportant!" was often the answer. But the Boston movement, a quasi-Catholic structure, came out of that mindset of apathy.

In a Nutshell …

A malaise gripped the institutional mainstream in the 1970's. Confusion existed on the exact identity of the church. Many still used sectarian terminology even in the midst of denominational assumptions about the nature of the church.

A younger, more militant group split from the mainstream becoming known as the Crossroads/Boston movement. This movement was radical, regimented and zealously evangelistic. It has enjoyed a great deal of numerical success on a worldwide scale from the late 1970's through the present day.

Again, a common mistake is repeated in the Boston movement: Brethren exhibited a desire to convert the world without respect to God's limitations on the structure and resources of the local church.

Questions:

1. Flavil Yeakley noted a trend among institutional churches to become _____ in matters of opinion and _____ in matters of faith.
2. Who started the Crossroads movement? Who started the Boston movement?
3. What is a "pillar church"? A "house church"?
4. Why does a cult-type movement like Boston tend to appeal to young people?
5. What did Kip McKean call "the Jerusalem of God's modern-day movement" (p. 67)?

Lesson 13: The New Hermeneutic

1. What's a Hermeneutic?

Mainstream institutional churches have been abuzz with the phrase "a new hermeneutic" for several years. I first heard the term at the Nashville Meeting in 1988. This was a forum for institutionalists and non-institutionalists to discuss the differences of the past forty years. Among the institutional speakers were a number of ultra-liberal brethren (some of whom are no longer identified with the mainstream churches) and professors from church-related universities. It was declared in these meetings over and over again that a new hermeneutic was needed for today. While many details of that forum have faded from memory, one thing made a clear impression: the institutional speakers were divided amongst themselves on this point. Some who spoke renounced assertions made by earlier speakers. Little did I understand what was really going on behind the scenes among mainstream churches.

First, let us define "hermeneutics." Technically, hermeneutics is "the study of the methodological principles of interpretation (as of the Bible)" (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary,* p. 566). In layman's terms, "what *hermeneutics* means for our purpose is the method by which we either understand the original intent of the Scriptures or, more to the point of recent controversy, how we decide which things we read about in the Bible are important for us to practice as Christians today" (Smith, p. 15).

The cultural influences which have pressed heavily upon the institutional mainstream through the past five decades have consistently met with opposition. That opposition is how churches of Christ have traditionally evaluated the authority of the Scriptures, even if not always consistently applied. But this constant pressure, coupled with the theological liberalism mentioned earlier, combined over time to create such stress that the call gradually began to be heard for a new way to understand the Scriptures. What began as a timid whisper has grown into a belligerent demand: the progressives (or ultra-liberals) are vociferously lobbying for a "new hermeneutic" which would permit their un-scriptural practices.

2. The New Hermeneutic: "A vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."

Several men have sought to define the call for a new hermeneutic, but the message is sometimes slippery. Dave Miller suggests:

> Those at the forefront of the discussion within churches of Christ are extremely vague when it comes to identifying precisely the "new hermeneutic." One proponent admitted that the "ramifications of this new model…have not been worked out systematically."

The primary concern of those clamoring for a "new hermeneutic" appears to be the dismantling of the "old hermeneutic." Much of their effort has been spent criticizing what is deemed to be the shortcomings of the hermeneutic practices of the past, specifically the "command, example, necessary inference" triad. Little energy has been expended on their part in proposing a legitimate alternative (because there isn't one) (p. 114).

F. LaGard Smith concurs with Miller's assessment:

> What lies behind the call for a new hermeneutic is not always easy to grasp. Sometimes, it is a label that is put on a wide-ranging list of concerns loosely associated with perceived abuses of the "old hermeneutic." These concerns range from scriptures taken out of context, to an overemphasis on church organization and function, to the need for expressing greater spirituality in our lives and in our mutual worship together…If only that could summarize the issue. Unfortunately, however, it appears that the call for a new hermeneutic has a very real potential for not only getting rid of the "old hermeneutic" but, more particularly, the authority of Scriptures which it represents (Smith, p. 16).

Discontentment lies at the heart of the "new hermeneutic." Forces that wish to drag churches of Christ down the path of modernism, but are hindered by the "old hermeneutic" of Biblical patterns and "thus saith the Lord" stubbornness, are looking for ways to undermine that stubbornness. Rather than just abandon the churches of Christ altogether, they want to change those churches to fit their presuppositions—much as the Boston movement forcibly "reconstructed" many churches across the U.S.

3. A "Better Felt than Told" Religion

At the heart of the "new hermeneutic" lies the broader liberal agenda that controls many of the mainstream institutions in America: the press, universities, Hollywood entertainment media, the judicial system, etc. The bottom line is that modern culture has made inroads among the brethren and they are unaware of it. LaGard Smith observes:

> In the event you have not already heard about it, there is a nation-wide frenzy on college campuses to insure what is known as "political correctness"…[which is] nothing more than a benign catch-phrase for "the liberal agenda." In other words, you and I have to tow the liberal line on issues like abortion, gay rights, and radical feminism, or else be reported to the sensitivity police for being intolerant …

The call for a new hermeneutic does not arise in a vacuum. It is part of a larger, cultural ultimatum. Whether or not we are aware of it, political correctness is as much a part of the cultural church as it is the college campus. And heaven help us when what we have is the cultural church *on* a college campus! No prizes for guessing why the call for a new hermeneutic comes most aggressively from some of our own church-related universities, nor that it has its greatest appeal among those of the campus generation (p. 77, 79).

So much of the liberal agenda in our country is tied to what is *felt* rather than what is arrived at by *reason.* Of course, this opens the door to believing and practicing whatever one wishes regardless of the facts or the demonstrable impact upon society. It is the ultimate form of self-worship. Dave Miller states:

> "The 'new hermeneutic' is rooted in subjectivity and relativism in its approach to Scriptures. It seeks to give man more say in his religious pursuits, while attributing such subjective inclination to the Holy Spirit" (p. 117). We have heard the language of

denominationalists peppered with phrases like, "the Holy Spirit led me to…", "the Spirit spoke to my heart…", etc., but now we hear such from those who formerly respected the written word of God. This development should not surprise us given the denominational drift of the mainstream we have previously examined in this study.

4. The "New Hermeneutics" and Attack upon Reason

The charge is being widely made in academic circles that churches of Christ have followed improper methodology in interpreting the Bible. That methodology, it is claimed, was inherited from 15th and 16th century rationalists such as Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and John Locke (1632- 1704). Without undertaking a philosophical discussion of English Enlightenment, we do need to recognize that a major shift in how men came to view their world occurred in this time period. The rational, scientific observations that we have come to take for granted were developed by such men as John Locke. F. LaGard Smith explains:

> (Locke) was a British philosopher whose work spanned religion, politics, education, science, and psychology…Locke's most significant contribution to Enlightenment rationalism resulted from his attempt to refute a widely held belief that when children are born they have imprinted in their minds "the whole of God's truth" from which they gradually deduce rules of morality. By this view, morality was thought to be innate, or inborn. Of course, it was the age-old *nature* versus *nurture* argument. Are we shaped by our basic nature, or do we develop according to the way we are nurtured?…Locke took the side of *nurture,* saying that children are born with clean slates knowing virtually nothing. Through tutoring by parents and teachers, and by personal experience, children eventually make use of their own gradually-developing powers of reason to discover the rules of morality that are apparent everywhere in nature and revealed more precisely in Scripture.

But look what a sharp contrast that made with the kind of thinking that was contemporary to Locke's time. Pre-Enlightenment thinking moved from general assumptions about life—usually theological in nature—to more particular conclusions (the deductive method). Science prior to Copernicus and Galileo, for example, had almost blindly accepted the theory that the earth was the center of the universe. Instead of looking at the available physical evidence, theologians had deduced from the idea of Creation that the planet on which man (God's highest creation) lived simply *had to be* the center of the universe. By contrast, Locke's thinking moved from particular observations to more abstract ideas and general assumptions (the inductive method). And with that, the modern era of scientific method was born. Scientific method using inductive reasoning was a revolutionary way of thinking, albeit consistent with the achievements of seventeenth century science itself, through which the world had finally come to know that the earth revolved around the sun, and not vice versa (pp. 116-117).

The charge is made that Thomas and Alexander Campbell, who were originally from Scotland, were merely products of the Enlightenment. Thus their view of the Scriptures was flawed by an overemphasis upon rational, factual detail. Note the claims of Richard Hughes in this regard:

(Alexander Campbell) urged people to reject the authority and traditions of their churches and to read and interpret the Bible for themselves. Further, thanks to his Baconian outlook, which assured him that all Christians could read and understand the Bible alike, Campbell imagined that once the people took matters into their own hands, Christian unity could not be far away.

But the story is more complex than this, for Campbell, like his father before him, embraced an Enlightenment model for achieving that unity. This model was mediated to Campbell through John Locke, who had somewhat Christianized the thought of the father of the English Enlightenment, Lord Herbert of Cherbury (p. 26). Hughes continues his characterization of Campbell:

> Fascinated as he was with scientific facts, it is hardly surprising that Campbell would view the Bible precisely in these terms. "The Bible is a book of facts," he declared, "not of opinions, theories, abstract generalities, nor of verbal definitions…The meaning of the Bible facts is the true biblical doctrine." Further, in good Baconian fashion, Campbell considered the meaning of these facts to be self-evident, requiring no human interpretation …

In Campbell's view, the Bible was not so much a book of theology as a kind of scientific manual or technical blueprint, laying out in precise, factual detail the outlines both of primitive theology (what he called the "ancient gospel") and the primitive church (what he called "the ancient order") (p. 32).

This attack upon Baconian rationalism sets the stage for introducing a "new hermeneutic," a new way of looking at the Scriptures, a way that de-emphasizes logic and reason and enthrones emotion and intuition. F. LaGard Smith counters this attack upon Campbell's Baconian thinking:

> For many people in the church today, that view of Scripture (Campbell's Baconian rationalism—jj) has become offensive. To their thinking, it robs Scripture of its mystery and reduces man's quest for God to the rigidity of a scientific formula. But Campbell's call for a "divine science of religion" must be taken in its historical context. What Campbell was confronting in his day (much like Locke himself) was a travesty of burdensome church tradition and bitter denominational schism resulting from centuries of abuse in which basic biblical teaching had largely been ignored.

Campbell's fascination with inductive reasoning was its potential for getting back to the unadulterated simplicity of the Bible. For Campbell, there was no allure in knowing biblical facts merely for facts' sake…For him, it was a matter of biblical facts as opposed to *human opinion.* Divinely inspired facts in contrast to *speculative theories.* First-Century facts in their superiority over the embellishment of *church tradition.* Should we ever want it otherwise? (p. 118).

5. Why Is This Important?

Have you ever wondered how otherwise intelligent, religious people could begin accepting homosexual marriage, even ordaining homosexual clergymen, in spite of the clear teaching in the

Bible on homosexuality? Have you ever wondered how charismatics could believe in miracles and the gifts of the Holy Spirit in today's world when the Scripture clearly teaches that such was limited by time and purpose to the early days of the church? Have you ever wondered how "Churches of Christ" could now embrace women preachers, instrumental music, interdenominational worship, partaking of the Lord's supper on Saturday and other digressive practices? The answer lies in the discussion of philosophy presented above. These people have adopted a completely different way of looking at the Bible, a way that allows them to ignore plain words leading to logical conclusions.

The call for a "new hermeneutic" is simply a call for no limits, no stifling doctrines, no view of the Scriptures that is objective enough to condemn desired practices. It is indicative of the degree to which the subjective reasoning of our culture has infiltrated groups who compromised on the meaning of Scripture when the subject was supporting institutions. F. LaGard Smith perceptively notes:

> The widespread call for a new hermeneutic is almost invariably accompanied, not by growth in spiritual transcendence, but by moral slippage. Following a now-familiar story line of liberty becoming license, it starts out innocently enough with such concerns as a wider role for women, but quickly degenerates into the legitimizing of such immoral activities as homosexuality. The anchor for church doctrine is the same as for personal immorality. Leave Scripture behind in one area and you've left it behind in all areas (p. 106).

Smith warns the proponents of the "new hermeneutic," and us by extension:

> In the cultural church's call for a new hermeneutic, the story is the same, but with a sinister twist. The story is still one of dethroning reasonably understood revelation and replacing it with individual subjectivity. The sinister twist is that the "old hermeneutic" is being vilified as the product of Enlightenment rationality, when what it does best is to elevate the objective truth of divine revelation over the subjectivity of human reason!…It is not the rational approach of the "old hermeneutic" that we should fear, but rather the kind of intuitive self-will by which all things—including God's revelation—are judged. Therein lay the hidden idolatry of Enlightenment rationalism. And therein lies the disguised idolatry of any "new hermeneutic" which allow us to replace the authority of Scripture with our own intuitive idea about what is right and wrong for the church at the end of the twentieth century (p. 128).

In a Nutshell …

In order to justify practices for which no Biblical authority exists, some brethren among institutional churches have called for a "new hermeneutic," a broader way of interpreting the Bible that would allow for those practices.

In order to implement such a change in thinking, they have attacked the "old hermeneutic," the process of drawing certain conclusions from a rational examination of passages.

The "old hermeneutic," it is claimed, is merely a philosophical approach inherited from the Age of Enlightenment, in England represented primarily by John Locke.

Questions:

1. What does the term "hermeneutics" mean?
2. Why is the term "new hermeneutics" hard to define?
3. What is the relationship between "new hermeneutics" and political correctness?
4. Who was John Locke? How did he influence the thinking of Alexander Campbell?
5. Why did Campbell stress human reasoning in understanding the Scriptures. What was he fighting against?

Lesson 14: The "Old Hermeneutic"

1. What Is the "Old Hermeneutic"?

The old methodology of establishing Scriptural authority so abhorrent to the proponents of the "new hermeneutic" is embodied in the threefold 1) direct command, 2) approved apostolic example, and 3) necessary inference. This approach to the Scriptures is based upon the principle that the NT revelation is objective and eternal rather than subjective and situational. That is, the NT constitutes a pattern for all things relevant to our individual and corporate activities. While the OT is not a viable judicial document today, it also contains valuable insight into God's character, nature and expectations.

2. Is the "Old Hermeneutic" a System Devised by Man?

The charge is made by progressive thinkers that the "old hermeneutic" was just a product of enlightenment rationality, a scheme devised by man to make the Bible what it was never intended to be—a rigid rule book. Instead, they say, the NT should be viewed as "love letters," stories of early saints working out their own basic convictions in the context of their culture. We are told that truth is "fluid," that it can be shaped and molded to fit contemporary culture and society. The "new hermeneutic" advocates speak the lingo of psychobabble: we need a Biblical hermeneutic that is more relevant to today's needs; we need to stress an understanding of God that speaks to the heart and not the head; we need to emphasize the relationship aspects of the NT; we need a contemporary worship that stresses the motives rather than the form. All of this is an effort to shed the confining skin of Bible doctrine.

A Closer Look at Acts 15

When a crisis situation arose over the terms of accepting Gentiles into fellowship, a meeting was convened in Jerusalem in order to reach a consensus understanding. **This meeting was not to decide church policy; that had already been decided in heaven!** The meeting was to help fallible, prejudiced and tradition-bound men come to an understanding of what God's will was. How did these men proceed? Did they just follow their heart? Did they decide to love the Gentiles into the fellowship? Upon what grounds did they decide this most crucial issue? **Command.** Peter begins by affirming that *"God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe"* (15:7). How did Peter find himself in this position? The Holy Spirit had commanded him: *"Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them"* (Ac 10:20). A command issued assumes a rational mind able to comprehend and process the directives given. This Peter did, and thus this evidence is considered among the brethren at Jerusalem.

Approved Apostolic Example. Paul adds to the testimony of Peter by citing *"the miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles"* (Ac 15:12). And Paul had such success even though he did not circumcise the Gentiles as a prerequisite for salvation. In fact, Titus had been brought on this occasion as a "test case," an uncircumcised Gentile, regarding whom Paul later said, *"Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised…to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel*

might continue" (Gal 2:3, 5). Through this approved example, the brethren in Jerusalem *"saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me"* (Gal 2:7). Paul's work had been substantiated from heaven by the accompanying signs. Following someone's example is one of the easiest ways for human beings to learn: *"Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ"* (Paul, 1 Cor 11:1).

Necessary Inference. This principle is particularly slammed by "new hermeneutics" advocates. They hold that this places far too much stress on human reasoning and is too arbitrary as a basis of unity. But necessary inference is in abundance in the controversy of Ac 15. Note first that James considers the testimony of Peter and Paul, then weighs the impact of OT prophecy (Amos—Ac 15:16-17/Amos 9:11-12), and then draws the proper **inference**, *"**I judge** that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God"* (Ac 15:19). God *could* have just said this in so many words, but He didn't. He let men use their own faculties, *reasoning* faculties, to arrive at the proper conclusion. *And they did so.* Further, God appealed to Peter on the basis of necessary inference in regard to Peter's prejudice against Gentiles. After showing Peter a vision of *animals* being let down from heaven in a sheet (Ac 10:11-16), Peter later said to Cornelius, *"God has shown me that I should not call any **man** common or unclean"* (Ac 10:28). Peter *necessarily concluded* that God was teaching a lesson about men, not animals. Peter goes on to say, *"In truth, **I perceive** that God shows no partiality"* (Ac 10: 34).

The fact is that God communicates with man in the same way we communicate with each other, and that includes implications and inferences. In fact, our entire judicial system is based upon necessary inference: judges and juries are constantly deciding the fate of the accused by drawing inferences from what is implied by the evidence. Such a process is not without difficulty, but that doesn't invalidate it.

3. Jesus' Use of Implication

Jesus implies existence beyond the grave. In responding to the Sadducees, who did not believe in the continuance of the soul beyond death, Jesus quoted Scripture and drew an inference: *"Concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living"* (Mt 22:31-32). "Have you not read" implies that they could have understood this truth had they applied themselves. (Note further that what had originally been said to Moses some 1500 years earlier was "spoken to **you** by God," again a conclusion that is inferred, and rightly so.)

Jesus implies his Messiahship to John. When the great prophet was languishing in prison, he sent messengers to Jesus inquiring *"Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"* (Mt 11:3). Jesus' answer is indirect, but the implication leads to one inescapable conclusion: *"Go and tell John the things which you hear and see ..."* (Mt 11:4-6). Jesus did not say, "Yes, John, I am the One," at least not in so many words. He pointed John to the evidence and expected him to draw the proper conclusion. And further, John was expected to infer that he, himself, would be blessed if he was not offended by Jesus.

Jesus implies the resurrection by speaking of a temple. After cleansing the temple because of its corruption with business practices, Jesus told the offended multitudes: *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"* (Jn 2:19). Though the spiritually dull crowd did not get the point, the Jewish authorities admitted later that Jesus had promised to rise on the third day (Mt 27:63). They apparently drew the proper inference.

Many other examples could be cited, but these indicate that God communicates with us as rational beings that can consider evidence, process the information and draw conclusions. Dave Miller summarizes this process:

In attempting to understand the Bible, the procedure is, very simply, to gather all the relevant data concerning the direct statements, accounts of action, and implied statements. This data includes: grammatical, lexical, syntactical, analogical, and historical information, as well as attention to literary genre. Once all data pertaining to the Bible's explicit and implicit teaching has been gathered, the interpreter must then draw only those conclusions that are warranted by the data (pp. 123-124).

4. The Silence of the Scriptures

The "old hermeneutic" also seeks to respect the silence of the Scriptures. By this it is meant that what we do in work and worship is based upon a positive precept, and we are not at liberty to improvise or innovate where there is no Biblical authority for action.

This principle is variously misunderstood. First, it is not uncommon to hear unauthorized practices defended upon the basis of, "The Bible doesn't say you can't." This outlook seeks permission in the "gaps" where God hasn't addressed an issue. Granted, God didn't speak to every specific issue; He expects us to consider basic principles and make applications where appropriate. For example, many observe Christmas, Easter and other religious days when the NT says nothing about doing so. But the NT *does* authorize the memorial of Christ's death as an eternal observance (1 Cor 11:26). This positive precept precludes all other competing observances. And the NT *does* say, *"You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain…for I have doubts about you"* (Gal 4:10-11, 20). The observance of special religious days, Jewish or pagan, was a mark of spiritual weakness, for it was unauthorized activity.

God's method in dealing with man always has been, regardless of the covenant, to give instruction, make it clear, allow expeditious flexibility in its implementation, and then expect men to obey it without addition or subtraction.

Secondly, brethren are sometimes heard to say, "Well, the Bible doesn't say anything about church buildings, and we have church buildings. The Bible doesn't say anything about song books, and we have song books. The Bible doesn't say anything about pews, trays for the Lord's supper, children's classes, overhead projectors, etc., so we must not need authority for *everything* we do." This line of thinking confuses the command and the things allowed in implementing the command. God does stipulate some things very specifically, and they cannot be altered. The elements to be used in the Lord's supper are very specific and cannot be changed without going

beyond Scripture. But the table, trays and servers utilized to *implement* the supper are flexible. They merely *expedite* the execution of the command. The same goes for overhead projectors, song books, buildings and other items that aid in implementing a particular instruction *without changing the nature of the command.* Organs, orchestras, soloists and choirs are fundamental alterations to the command to sing. For a thing to be an expedient, it has to be materially connected to something authorized, and that which is utilized as an expedient must itself be lawful.

This is not a petty issue. The division that occurred between churches of Christ and Christian churches in 1906 was on the basis of how the silence of the Scriptures was to be considered. The advocates of instrumental music saw silence to be *permissive,* while those opposed to such innovations held Scriptural silence to be *restrictive.* F. LaGard Smith makes this observation concerning the permissive or restrictive force of silence:

> The point is that the effect of "silence," whether in law or in Scripture, rests in the stated or clear *purpose* of the text. Before making an argument based on the silence of Scripture, therefore, we must 1) first make sure that the particular passage addresses the particular question being asked, and 2) determine whether the passage intends its silence to be prohibitive of any other practice (p. 196).

How we deal with this issue of what the Scripture authorizes either implicitly or explicitly and how we handle the silence of the Scriptures may reveal something about our basic attitudes. Are we intent on doing what God permits and wishes, or do we look at the Bible for loopholes to allow what *we* want to do?

5. The Effort to Discover Truth

"Have you not read …?" This rebuke is often offered to those encountered by the Lord or the apostles who had missed a fundamental truth. When questioned on divorce, Jesus replied: *"Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female …?"* (Mt 19:4). When the chief priests objected to the praise given to Jesus, the Lord answered: *"Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise'?"* (Mt 21:16). He further chastised the Jews for their blindness in fulfilling the OT prophecy concerning the rejection of the Messiah: *"Did you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone …'?"* (Mt 21:42). *"Do you not know …?"* Paul uses this phrase repeatedly in his remedial books of Romans and 1 Corinthians (Rom 6:3, 16; 7:1; 1 Cor 3:16; 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:13, 24). In doing so, he chides them for violating things well within the sphere of their knowledge. Further, Jesus rebuked the Sadducees who questioned Him on marriage in the afterlife: *"You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God"* (Mt 22:29). He had earlier challenged those who criticized Him for eating with tax collectors and sinners: *"But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'"* (Mt 9:13). Apparently, what Hosea had said hundreds of years previously was understandable and applicable to the present situation, had they but paid attention to his words.

Jesus affirmed that man lives *"by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"* (Mt 4:4). Abraham told the rich man what the key was to his brothers avoiding torment: *"They have Moses*

and the prophets; let them hear them" (Lk 16:29). Paul exhorted the Ephesians: *"Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is"* (Eph 5:17). Jesus said, *"You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,"* and *"everyone who is of the truth hears My voice"* (Jn 8:32; 18:37).

These passages, and so many others, uphold the objective nature of God's revelation and the ability and *responsibility* that men have in understanding that revelation. When men become stressed with religious fragmentation and spiritual malaise, the tendency is to alter the word of God to alleviate the strain. But this is a fatal step. We cannot compromise the word of God for any ulterior cause. If the whole world rejects the word of God, we must remain committed to the truth of that word and let God take care of the consequences.

In a Nutshell …

"Progressive" thinkers see the "old hermeneutic"—command, apostolic example and necessary inference—to be a humanly devised scheme of logic that misses the "spirit" or the intuitive insight into the Scriptures.

However, evidence is abundant that God's revealed word can be rationally and objectively understood. Christ and His apostles so urge men to comprehend the Scriptures and hold them accountable for failing to do so.

Questions:

1. What was the meeting in Ac 15 designed to do/not do?
2. How did the vision of animals in a sheet appeal to Peter's ability to infer a conclusion?
3. What do you think Jesus is saying in Mt 10:29-31? How does He make His point?
4. Does the silence of the Scriptures authorize or prohibit? Explain your answer.
5. How did the rich man's brothers have Moses and the prophets? What does this mean?

Lesson 15: Charismatic Inroads

1. The Holy Spirit on Center Stage

When a religious movement takes a turn away from the objective, rational understanding of God's word, it will not be long until attention becomes focused on the Holy Spirit. As we have seen in the charismatic movement over the past decades, men intent on legitimizing their feelings, desires and intuition and elevating them over Scriptural precept often turn to the Holy Spirit. Their mistaken views of the Spirit give them the leverage they need to circumvent rational conclusions that would condemn their practices. This tendency began to be evidenced among institutional churches of Christ in the 1960's and has now flowered in the climate of subjectivism. Richard Hughes observes:

> Progressives and conservatives battled seriously over the identity of Churches of Christ, biblical hermeneutics, and issues relating to social justice, but arguably no issue raised in the 1960s generated more heat among all segments of the movement than that of the Holy Spirit…To some extent, at least, this change in perspective on the Holy Spirit can be attributed to the subjectivism of the counterculture movement in the 1960s.…This is the context in which the controversy over the Holy Spirit occurred among Churches of Christ. If the counterculture at large found absurd the focus on rational objectivity enshrined in science and technology, many young people among Churches of Christ found absurd the focus on rational objectivity enshrined in the biblical text. They moved toward the belief that lashing the Holy Spirit of God to an objective book of paper and ink—or, indeed, circumscribing the Spirit with any kind of rational constraints—ultimately impoverished the soul and drained life of its meaning" (p. 333-334).

2. Pat Boone Takes the Plunge

In the late 1950's-early 1960's Pat and Shirley Boone were the darlings of the institutional movement. Pat had become a singing star and had begun making movies. Hughes notes:

> Through it all, however, Boone maintained close ties with Churches of Christ. More than that, his moral and religious scruples quickly earned him a national reputation as a fundamentally wholesome and clean-cut kid—something unique in the world of Hollywood. Needless to say, Churches of Christ prized Boone as an important symbol of their own rapid ascent to middle-class social respectability (p. 338).

What a shock it was when the fair-haired boy claimed in 1969 that he and Shirley had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and had spoken in tongues! Hughes continues:

> News of Boone's charismatic reliance on the Holy Spirit spread quickly within Churches of Christ. For those who doubted, partial proof appeared on their television screens late in the summer of 1969, when Boone appeared on the nationally broadcast programs of Pentecostal preachers Rex Humbard and Oral Roberts (p. 339).

Partly through the Boone's magnetic influence, several churches in southern California soon reported tongue speaking and miracles among them. Finally, after much pressure throughout the brotherhood, the Boone's home congregation of Inglewood, California withdrew from them in 1971. Hughes pursues the charismatic influence further:

> That same year, halfway across the country in Nashville, events were set in motion that soon would involve Boone's parents…in similar ways. In 1971, Nashville's Belmont Church of Christ, long a staid congregation, invited Don Finto to serve as its preacher…Deeply moved by the spiritual and ethical concerns of the countercultural generation, Finto led the Belmont church in outreach to the poor, the disenfranchised, and the alienated. Soon, the character of the congregation dramatically changed. Worshipers embraced the power of the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. By 1979, the congregation's elders voted to allow musical instruments in the worship. That action effectively ended Belmont's standing as an orthodox Church of Christ (p. 340).[2]

3. Modern Leanings Toward the Spirit

In his 1996 book *Piloting the Strait,* in which he decries the denominational drift of the institutional churches, Dave Miller warns:

> Both of these streams of thought—Calvinism and Pentecostalism—are exerting a considerable influence upon churches of Christ today. The heavy emphasis in the past upon knowing the bible and relying upon the objective nature of Scripture has insulated us from the subjective, irrational tendencies of Pentecostalism. But as more and more of our younger men have exposed themselves to Calvinistic theology (e.g., Charles Swindoll) and Pentecostal practice (e.g., Willow Creek in Chicago), churches of Christ have become victimized targets of spiritual contamination. A rash of books, seminars, and sermons have been unleashed upon the brotherhood that promote Pentecostal propaganda (p. 372).

Miller continues by citing excerpts from church bulletins, among which are these (p. 373-374):

> I am so thankful to see the growing passion in this church…I know the Spirit is moving us and will strengthen us for the work ahead…I expect many more people will be utilizing our assembly times to share great decisions in their lives with Christ. As this occurs, I want to encourage family members and special friends of those responding to join them down front…If the Spirit urges you to join someone who is responding, don't fight it, do it. Do you sense God's renewing presence in our church?…Be open to the Holy Spirit's guidance in your life.

 I love to tell stories like this because they highlight what can be done if we follow through on the leading of God's spirit within our hearts. Pray that I keep the Spirit alive in my soul; I ask for prayers for me to have a revival of the Holy Spirit; The flame of the Holy Spirit burns bright

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[2] Several years ago Don Finto claimed the role of apostle for himself. Truly there is no stopping place once one compromises the objectivity of God's word.

within my soul and now I am ready to allow the Holy Spirit to guide me. Pray that I might focus on what he can do through me and that I will follow his "nudge" to do what he wants.

Miller cites the experience of a Dallas/Ft. Worth area preacher and his wife who recently "got the Spirit." Note the sentiments of the preacher's wife regarding her experience: There were heart things going on at the same time as head things and, for me, I think in my walk with the Lord I wanted a touch from Him more than just knowing about Him—I knew all about Him, I grew up in a minister's family. I wanted a touch from the Lord; I wanted to know without a doubt that He loved me, that there was affection on me from Him; and I knew that had to come, not just from the head, it had to come from the heart and it had to be a supernatural touch (pp. 375-376).

Note the woman's differentiation between "head" and "heart"; i.e., rational thought and subjective feelings. This lady states her dissatisfaction with "knowing about" God; what the Scriptures say about Him—His character, promises, love, etc.—are simply not enough for her. This is a classic example of not walking by faith but by sight, and the "sight" is her affirming touch from God that she so desperately craved.

4. The Holy Spirit and Contemporary Worship

A significant factor in the trend toward a subjective connection with the Holy Spirit is preoccupation with contemporary worship styles. The following quasi-charismatic practices have become commonplace among many institutional churches:

Music: Instrumental music, praise teams, choirs and soloists, hired worship leaders, drama productions and other "entertainment" activities have emphasized the emotional.

Raised hands: As these performances unfold, it is more and more common to see the audience closing their eyes and raising their hands as if to "commune" with the Spirit during worship. Someone may respond, "What's wrong with that? Paul directs men to *"pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands …"* (1 Tim 2:8). This is one of several postures and gestures mentioned in the Scriptures in conjunction with prayer. All depict holiness, purity and reverence as one approaches God. This is **not** the nature of Pentecostal raising of the hands, which is nothing more than emotional euphoria.

Applause: To show approval of the entertainment offered, applause now permeates their gatherings. The reverent "Amen," a word of agreement with and encouragement of what has been said (1 Cor 14:16), has been reduced to a cultural practice found from football games to political speeches to Broadway plays.

Testimonials: As the drift away from a sound examination of the Scriptures continues, the vacuum is increasingly filled by stories and anecdotes designed to titillate and stir the emotions. This, of course, becomes a self-sustaining cycle before long. The lack of textual preaching breeds ignorance; ignorance allows for unscriptural beliefs and practices; the beliefs and practices are substantiated by more stories and subjective testimonials. One's experiences become the basis of belief, rather than the other way around.

5. The Irresponsible Use of the Holy Spirit

One would think that men and women would have more respect—yea, even *fear!*—of abusing the Spirit of God in such a self-serving way. But, obviously, they don't see their behavior that way. Could this possibly be a manifestation of the principle Paul mentions in 2 Th 2:11-12: *"And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness"*? To turn the Holy Spirit into some vague feeling inside, to confuse Him with nothing more than personal desire or inclination, is the ultimate act of idolatry. The Holy Spirit is **never so depicted** in the Scriptures.

The influence of the Holy Spirit, when directly applied to men in a miraculous way, most always helped man accomplish a task that he couldn't do within his own power. The Holy Spirit revealed things men did not know or could not foresee (1 Pet 1:11); He increased physical skills (Ex 31:2-3; Jud 14:6, 19; 15:14); He imparted miraculous power (Heb 2:4; 1 Cor 12:7-11). The Holy Spirit did not incite emotional, irrational behavior. To the contrary, Paul explicitly says that *"the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets"* (1 Cor 14:32) and corrects the lack of orderliness in the assembly in Corinth (1 Cor 14:33; 40).

Further, speaking in tongues was never some sort of personal validation of faith or a re-affirming "touch" from God. Tongue speaking was *"for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers ..."* (1 Cor 14:22). That which passes for utterances in unstudied foreign language today is nothing more than meaningless gibberish that makes one feel as if he/she is under some divine influence. This is nothing more than a cheap counterfeit of the truly miraculous and a shameless use of God for one's personal gratification.

6. Do We Know Where We Are Going?

We must take a lesson from this turn of events! If we lose our interest in the pure preaching of the gospel, if we become intellectually dull, if we want a preacher who has a better sense of humor than a sense of hermeneutics, if we want to be comforted and entertained instead of confronted and exhorted, *God may give us what we wish for.* I firmly believe that the ambitions and cravings of the institutional mindset have been gratified. They wanted to be more mainstream; they wanted to blend in with the larger denominational world. And that is exactly what has happened. It's just that the older generation is horrified by the degree to which the younger ones have taken it.

Note F. LaGard Smith's pointed questioning of his liberally minded brethren:

> Someone has suggested that what being non-denominational usually means to us is simply being ten years behind the denominations. How true! Remember when we bought everyone else's *used* "Joy Buses"? And do you not find it interesting that we are only now beginning to raise our hands during praise songs and to punctuate the worship with clapping?

As one who uncomfortably finds himself in the midst of other fellowships on frequent occasions, I must share with you the other striking implication of the ten-year time lag between us and the denominational world. Just look around and see where our trendiness is likely to lead us. In the churches around us, "more meaningful worship services" have already evolved into thinly disguised entertainment. (Some among their own circles are now beginning to openly lament the almost-unnoticed transition from sacred to secular.) It started innocently enough with their choruses, solos, and music ministry teams, then became the focal point in which worship leaders (particularly music leaders) stole the show and left the audience applauding the weekly worship "concert." Is that where we really want to go? (p. 209).

In a Nutshell …

As a rational approach to the Scriptures has declined, more emphasis has been placed upon the Holy Spirit and emotionalism.

This preoccupation with the Spirit is seen among institutional churches in their growing emphasis upon entertainment rather than reverent worship.

Questions:

1. How did institutional churches react to Pat Boone's charismatic interests?
2. Why do people often desire emotional experiences supposedly produced by the Spirit?
3. How does Paul indicate that a man under the Spirit's influence retains self control?
4. What is LaGard Smith's view of the influence of denominationalism upon the church? What is the "ten-year time lag"?

Lesson 16: The Non-Institutional Churches After the Split

1. The Pains of Separation: The 1960's-1970's

When it finally came, the non-institutional sector of the brotherhood bore the brunt of separation. Being the minority, it was usually the "antis" who left the buildings and property behind to start over from scratch. Blacklisted preachers had fewer places to preach. "The Issues," as many older brethren still refer to them, separated friends, rent families asunder, created suspicion, animosity and ugliness of spirit. Only now in my forties am I able to look back and see just how fresh the division was in my teens (the early-mid 70's).

My parents went through a split in 1961 that was repeated in thousands of communities across the land. Those who had sympathy with the Mt. Dora (FL) Children's Home began meddling in the affairs of the church in New Smyrna Beach, Florida. They were intent on getting the church to "line up" with the institutional position. In fact, my mother reported that she and others initially provided hand-made clothes and other supplies at the solicitation of the Mt. Dora Children's Home. But when the church, over my father's objection, hired a preacher who advocated the institutional position, when they subsequently began sending money to Mt. Dora out of the church treasury (a token $10 per month), and when they engineered the appointment of two pro-institutional men as elders who were not qualified to serve, division was inevitable. My parents and several other families left to form a congregation in which they could conscientiously worship and carry on the work of the Lord. Of course, they had to buy property, build facilities and provide teaching with just a handful of like-minded brethren. How this all came together makes for an interesting story, but it is a story that could be told over and over again by those who found themselves in similar circumstances.

These hardships may have been a blessing in disguise, however, as brethren found themselves in common cause, pulling together, and enjoying unity of spirit. For the most part, the "antis" were not greatly challenged over the next couple of decades by strife and division. Their energies were directed toward establishing themselves and carving out an identity apart from their former ties. It gradually became apparent that the breach was permanent, that there would be no broad-scale reconciliation. Thus, "… the noninstitutional churches of Christ in the 1960s and 1970s displayed a strong camaraderie as they went about the task of building new churches. They enjoyed two decades of uncommon unity and good will" (Harrell, p. 175)

In his *The Churches of Christ in the 20th Century,* which incorporates a biography of Homer Hailey, Ed Harrell notes in the context of Florida College:

> Once Florida College became clearly identified with the noninstitutional position, opportunities for preaching overseas were virtually nonexistent because of a lack of funding. The mentality of the 1950s in noninstitutional churches was one of survival. All across the country, noninstitutional people were forced to build new congregations made up of people estranged from other churches (p. 303).

Harrell gives further insight in relation to Homer Hailey's gospel meetings after the split:

The institutional controversy had an impact on Hailey's meeting schedule, but, despite cancellations, he never missed a full summer schedule. Providentially, he believed, each cancellation was followed by a request for a meeting from a newly formed noninstitutional congregation…The nature of Hailey's meetings changed during these years, as the character of meetings changed throughout churches of Christ…After the institutional division, most of Hailey's meetings were in smaller congregations that were building anew after church splits, and more often than not his sermons were directed toward building up a local church (p. 307-308).

It is an oversimplification to say that the division occurred over a technicality, like supporting an institution. Rather, it gradually became apparent that the two sides no longer looked at the Bible the same way. Passages were being cited to defend certain positions that had no real bearing on the issue. Hermeneutic principles were being stretched to the breaking point to justify practices. Division ultimately comes when brethren lose confidence that the other is sincerely seeking to know the truth and do what is right. There was no consideration given to the conscience of the "antis"; no compromise or alternative was allowed. These churches were going to support their beloved institutions regardless, and those who didn't agree could leave. And they did.

2. Negative Fallout

When a person or group undergoes the kind of traumatic experience, as did the noninstitutional brethren, it is only natural that the experience colors one's outlook for a very long time. The outward manifestations of peace and camaraderie concealed latent flaws that weakened the noninstitutional churches. For years, Bible study had one main objective: to clarify and reinforce the issues which had brought division. Articles in magazines rehashed the issues over and over again. Lesson books were published exploring the issues or examining passages only from the standpoint of the issues. Conversations were threaded (and many still are forty years later) with the events that had transpired like it was yesterday.

While this is understandable to a degree, it can also present problems of its own. I believe many noninstitutional brethren became guilty of dwelling on the issues to the point of paralysis. Rather than put the controversies and hurts behind and carry on with the present, many sunk into the mire of unhealthy reflection and inactivity. As noted above, there was little effort made in foreign evangelism among noninstitutional churches and preachers during the '60's and '70's. True, some of this may be attributable to financial deficiency and a focus on rebuilding congregations, but some of it undoubtedly had a psychological cause.

A further danger in such circumstances is that a church may come to define itself on the basis of what it is *against* or what it *doesn't do* rather than what it promotes and accomplishes. Over time a "sound" church came to mean one that didn't support institutions or a sponsoring church arrangement, regardless of its possible unsoundness in other areas. This constitutes a sectarian outlook where "we" comes to mean all of us who do not support orphan homes or the Herald of Truth. A church, like Sardis, may have a name that it is alive because of its opposition to that which is prohibited when in actuality it is dead because it is quarrelsome, apathetic or deviant in some other fundamental way.

Additionally, issue-oriented Bible study, over time, produces illiteracy. Brethren learn to answer certain arguments or use passages after a proof-text fashion, but a steady diet of this kind of study eventually undermines a thorough, comprehensive grasp of the Scriptures. Too, such a mindset encourages the manipulation of passages to suit one's argument. This not only distorts the Scriptures, it is dishonest.

Another negative effect of such controversies is the exaltation of individuals. Brethren are drawn to their "heroes" or "champions" who had the knowledge and/or courage to stand up and fight for their cause. While some people genuinely studied through the issues and came to their own informed conclusions, there were many more who simply latched on to their favorite preacher, esteemed editor or pugnacious debater and hung on for dear life. When people turn over their thinking to someone else, such personal loyalty obscures rational analysis. To prove this point, all one has to do is read various reviews of a debate. For example, in the institutional reviews of the Cogdill/Woods debate, Woods presented a flawless case, brilliantly answered all of Cogdill's charges, and made the "anti" look positively foolish and inept. The noninstitutional reviews, on the other hand, are just as biased. They portrayed Woods as a contradictory and evasive nincompoop. Cogdill was the master logician, skewering the hapless Woods at every turn and putting the coward to flight. It makes one wonder: Did these reviewers attend the same debate? Of course they did, but they viewed the events subjectively and saw their champion in the light of their prejudices.

Such fellowship-splitting controversies create a "ripple effect" of related problems that can be problematic long after the pebble has hit the water. Noninstitutional brethren have often failed to notice the lingering, detrimental effects of the division. This has been costly, for it is not until a problem is diagnosed that it can be cured.

3. Looking Inward: The Church in the 1980's-1990's

If the '60's-'70's cloaked for a time inner strife among noninstitutional brethren, it gradually surfaced as time went on and institutional consciousness began to fade. The '80's-'90's saw a proliferation of skirmishes among brethren, usually incited by one brotherhood paper or another. Such infighting is often an outgrowth of malaise and listlessness. Homer Hailey lamented to Yater Tant in a 1983 letter:

> Yater, I don't know what is wrong with our people; I have tried to figure it out—maybe they are like I am, just so busy doing this and that…Most of our brethren are not doing anything in most places…Well, let's keep on trying to get the old fire going again (Harrell, p. 367).

It has been my observation in the past twenty five years that most noninstitutional churches are doing very little. Perhaps my experiences are limited and thus distorted, but I don't think so. Many churches, it seems, simply react to what happens around them; they do not have an aggressive, goal-oriented outlook in their work and teaching. Little planning goes into curriculum; evangelism amounts to the perfunctory two gospel meetings a year; benevolent care for needy Christians is almost nonexistent. Negative thinking pervades: "We can't do that; we'll end up 'going liberal.'" "No need to try that; we did it twenty years ago and it didn't work."

"We've never done it that way before." "Let's not do that; it costs too much money." "I just don't know why we need to study this." "I put in my time; let somebody else do it." "I can't." "I'm scared." "What will people think?" "The preacher preaches too long." "Nobody wants the truth anyway." "It's too hot." "It's too cold." "Nobody's going to tell **me** where to sit." "You're sitting in *my* pew." "Oh, dear, the preacher's growing a *beard!*"

It seems there is no issue to small or insignificant for many brethren to criticize or carp about. Excuses for not doing more abound. Some have become masters at ducking responsibility, hiding behind others so that they do as little as possible. Not all these attitudes plague all congregations equally, *but they are characteristic of many noninstitutionalal churches of Christ.*

In zeal, initiative and genuine concern for others, many denominations outshine noninstitutional churches of Christ. This doesn't make them acceptable in their error, but what does it say about us if we, as we think, "have the truth" on a number of issues wherein others are in error? Should not our zeal and service *surpass* those who are doctrinally misguided? It is no wonder that we often do not present an attractive alternative to the world around us. What is wrong with many of us who claim to be the "true church"?

4. A Bitter, Fighting Spirit

While many preachers fancy themselves to be stalwart "defenders of the faith," the truth, as I see it, is that some of them simply thrive on controversy and discord—enough of them to keep one issue or another stirred up, that is. The ultra-conservative outlook which defines unity almost as enforced uniformity, which sees every deviation as apostasy, which attacks and impugns first and then asks questions and considers character later, has proven a detriment to the overall health and well-being of the Lord's cause.

It is with a self-conscious chuckle that we speak of preachers being "written up" or of statements that begin with an ominous, "I say this in love, but …". Our own brethren can be so caustic, opinionated and abusive that we often find our wounds to be inflicted by those from the inside rather than the outside. Some of this stress grows out of a genuine, conscientious desire to be *right;* we want so badly to be right, and everyone else to be right, that we inappropriately inject ourselves into a situation where we do not belong. Some things, indeed, are worth fighting for, but we had better make sure that in the midst of battle the issue we are defending is solid and our tactics are godly.

5. In Defense of Congregational Autonomy

As I noted at the beginning of this study, the nature of the study lends itself to a denominational outlook upon the church of the Lord. While we do recognize and communicate with other local bodies of believers, the Lord's church *is not a network of churches* woven together through unwritten traditions and dogma, policed by editors and publications, guided by "our school," served by the priesthood of illustrious preachers and compiled in the latest edition of the "Directory of Churches." It is almost impossible for some to divorce themselves from the notion that the body of Christ is the noninstitutional churches of Christ considered as a whole. This

mentality was fostered by the institutional split that caused Christians to reach out for each other and psychologically band together as a persecuted minority.

Actually, the Hueytown church of Christ (or Podunkville church of Christ or Megalopolis church of Christ) is nothing more than a group of individuals with a common faith and purpose independent from every other group of Christians everywhere else. Independent does not mean unconcerned, but it does mean that local issues are faced together, local questions of fellowship are settled on-site, local decisions are made solely with the interests and expediencies of our members in mind. While we certainly hope and pray for the faith of brethren everywhere, we are not to overstep our bounds of autonomy and localized interest and meddle in the affairs of other churches. Let us be concerned with one thing: doing our own work as zealously and fruitfully as possible, intensively studying the word of God for personal growth and faithfully defending the truth of God in our community. If every local congregation would concentrate on that goal, there would be no need for papers, editors, churches withdrawing from churches, brotherhood-wide marking and other detrimental practices.

In a Nutshell …

After the institutional split, noninstitutional churches embarked on a process of rebuilding both their buildings and their psyches. Generally speaking, the 1960's-1970's was a time of peace and unity as brethren pulled together against the common foe of Institutionalism. As the 1980's and 1990's unfolded, however, some of the old tensions and rancor began to surface in a variety of smaller-scale skirmishes. There remains today an underlying climate of instability as churches wrestle with unsettling issues.

Questions:

1. What suppressed many potentially harmful issues during the '60's-'70's?
2. After such a traumatic episode, what negative tendencies arose among brethren?
3. What tends to promote a spirit of discord and criticism among conservative brethren?

Lesson 17: Disruptive Issues among Noninstitutional Churches

1. The Emergence of Intra-Fellowship Strife

Ed Harrell observes:

> By the 1980s much had changed in noninstitutional churches of Christ that rendered the group ripe for internal bickering and controversy. Those who had opposed Institutionalism had lived with an illusion of unity for two decades, even though they disagreed with one another about many significant doctrinal issues. So long as they kept all of their guns trained on the dangers of Institutionalism, other differences rarely became targets. Once the institutional division had become a relic of history, as it had by the 1980s, and a new post-division generation filled the churches, the fighting tradition reappeared, intent on purifying the ranks of the noninstitutional churches of Christ (p. 352-353).

While conservative churches seemed relatively impervious to the varieties of institutional apostasy, there were other waters agitated by brethren who could not seem to be content with peace and harmony. For the most part, these upsets were local and isolated. They were often made bigger than they actually were by publications which both inflamed and magnified the issues.

2. Neo-Calvinism

This label was attached to some tendencies in the 1970's-1980's to broaden the bounds of fellowship to include those devout people among the denominations. This roughly paralleled the Ketcherside-Garrett movement among the institutional brethren mentioned in Lesson 11. In this controversy arguments were advanced which sought to sustain a level of fellowship on the broader grounds of the deity and atoning sacrifice of Christ and to downplay other doctrinal distinctions as insignificant.

Perhaps this ecumenical tendency arose as a reaction to what was perceived to be a legalistic, pugilistic atmosphere created by the institutional controversy. These brethren often spoke of the loveless and lifeless noninstitutional churches and sought some sort of basis for reaching out to the denominations. Part of this reaction was pure naïveté, for it assumed that denominational groups were somehow above the foibles plaguing their noninstitutional brethren. Some noninstitutional preachers left the faith and joined denominational groups, but I would dare say that if they were honest with themselves, they eventually encountered some of the same attitudes that they left behind.

While there was cause for concern regarding the teaching of men like Edward Fudge, some overzealous "heresy hunters" targeted sound and faithful brethren for being soft or vague in their convictions. Herein lies one of the dangers of ultra-conservatism. The overly zealous press their expectations beyond what a brother teaches to *how* he teaches it, how he reasons out his conclusions, how he expresses himself, etc. Before long, a rigid orthodoxy is formed wherein few others meet up to the standards imposed by the self-righteous. In their zeal to mark "false

teachers," some brethren cap their Sharpies and begin to paint with rollers. Often, but not always, these zealots seem to be the younger preachers who have no qualms whatsoever about castigating an older preacher who has spent a lifetime building a trustworthy reputation and influence.

3. Elders and Located Preachers

In the late 1970's-early 1980's a controversy arose mainly at the instigation of Charles Holt wherein the authority of elders was challenged along with the practice of "located preachers." This seemed to be a reaction against heavy-handed elders or elders who fancied themselves as nothing more than ivory-tower decision-makers. The trouble with reactionary thinking is that it often flees to the opposite extreme instead of the solid foundation of Biblical teaching. The adage "throw the baby out with the bath water" is fitting in this regard. The anti-elder advocates tied themselves up in knots trying to prove that "elders" in the NT were nothing more than older members with no special position or "office."

Again, one wonders if those who left faithful churches and started their own "mutual ministry" congregations found out in due time that such circumstances breed chaos and anarchy. Granted, some elders may not rule very conscientiously, and they may be lacking in some vital abilities. But an eldership shot through with imperfection is often more desirable than an open-forum government. This is not to advocate the appointing of unqualified men as elders; it just merely illustrates the truth that God's way, even in flawed implementation, is better than man's best offering.

4. The Deity of Christ

One of the most frivolous arguments, in my opinion, of the past several decades has centered upon the deity/humanity of Christ. Another adage comes to mind in this regard: *Fools rush in where angels fear to tread*. Brethren have debated and argued over the past ten years over the nature of Christ's earthly existence. One side claims he was only a man and divested himself of all power and privilege of deity while upon the earth. The other argues that He retained His deity in all respects and acted from His own resources. While these questions are certainly worthy of thought, study and meditation, they are hardly worth rancorous debates and inflated pontifications as if the nature of the Son of God can be documented in three easy steps. This issue is a prime example of the tendency of conservative brethren to bicker, debate and argue over issues that should have been left alone. This probably would have withered away in short order if editors and debaters hadn't jumped into the fray.

5. False Teachers

Another smoldering fire that has recently been sparked afresh is a disagreement on what constitutes a false teacher. Militant brethren strenuously hold that anyone who teaches wrongly, no matter the intent, stands guilty as a false teacher and deserves censure of the strongest degree. Others are more tolerant and longsuffering, noting that various references to false teachers in the NT carry a qualitative element of unscrupulous motive. While they would not countenance error and let it go uncorrected, they are reluctant to denounce those who may simply be immature,

careless or possibly even inept in a particular matter. While this may seem to be another frivolous fuss, the practical effects are being felt by preachers across the brotherhood. Preachers who have otherwise been staunch defenders of the truth and intolerant of open transgression are being branded as "soft on sin" when they don't respond to pet issues as the ultra-orthodox think they should. There is a growing climate of suspicion and in increasing tendency toward character assassination. These developments have become increasingly disturbing as electronic mail has made it ever easier to engage in slander, gossip and discord.

6. Sunday Evening Observance of the Lord's Supper

This is a subject that periodically rears its head and causes trouble due to the congregational nature of the practice. Some brethren conscientiously feel that the Lord's supper is the central purpose for the assembly of the church on Sunday. That this is the case more so on Sunday morning than Sunday evening is evident by the percentage of brethren who partake of it on those respective occasions. These brethren feel that the purpose of the assembly on Sunday evening is not for the congregation to partake but for the exclusive few that were hindered from attending in the morning. Those on the other side of the controversy insist that it is still the first day of the week, and it would not be right to *refuse* another Christian the opportunity to partake due to the fact that it is still the authorized day of observance. Thus one side emphasizes the purpose of the assembly; the other side emphasizes the day of the observance.

I have recently heard of congregations dividing over their disagreements in this regard. Some churches have tried to resolve the issue by having a separate assembly after the regular worship comprised only of those intending to take the Lord's supper. Other churches have decided that *all* who are present should partake at each service, thus fulfilling the central purpose of the assembly on the Lord's day. This can be a sticky issue for it involves congregational *practice*, not merely a conceptual understanding as in the case of the deity of Christ. When the congregation is engaged in something a member conscientiously opposes, then it can be difficult to resolve the issue satisfactorily.

7. The Head-covering

This has been mostly a localized issue among noninstitutional churches appearing in areas (predominantly central and northern Alabama) where strenuous teaching has been done by the advocates of the covering. Proponents of the head-covering assert that 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 speaks of an eternal practice to be observed by female Christians in the worship assembly.

Others have held that the circumstances alluded to by Paul are not applicable beyond the time of miraculous gifts, or that the principles of submission address a custom not observed in western societies. Though some have militantly pushed for the covering to the point of disfellowship, many covering advocates tolerate divergent practices on the grounds of private conscience.

8. Indwelling of the Holy Spirit

Another issue that occasionally thrusts itself to the fore is the nature of the Holy Spirit's indwelling. Is it a personal, literal residence of the Spirit within the heart/mind of the believer?

Or does the Spirit indwell representatively through the influence of His word? Apart from a conclusion that may allow for direct influences in the heart of the believer via indwelling, this question provokes intriguing discussions and spirited disagreements that hardly justify branding one's opponent a false teacher and worthy of disfellowship.

In a Nutshell …

After the intensity of the institutional debate subsided, noninstitutional churches began arguing among themselves over a variety of issues. For the most part these issues have flared up for a few years only to disappear and often reemerge later.

Disagreements have resulted in alienation among some brethren and local church splits but no major division as in the '50's and '60's.

Questions:

1. According to Ed Harrell, what illusion were noninstitutional brethren under during the 1960's and 1970's?
2. The neo-Calvinism movement paralleled what similar trend among the institutional?
3. What was produced by reactionary thinking against ineffective or domineering elders?
4. What are the basic positions in the argument over the deity of Christ?
5. Which controversial issues discussed in this lesson involve practices and which involve a mere idea?
6. The head-covering has been a predominantly regional issue. Why do you think some controversies/disagreements are often regional? What factor(s) contribute to this?

Lesson 18: The Problem of Divorce and Remarriage

1. Divorce: A Contemporary, Pervasive Threat

Perhaps the issue of greatest danger among faithful Christians and congregations today involves the epidemic of divorce. It is obvious that failure to keep marriage vows is rampant in our society, and the effect it has on crime, poverty, juvenile delinquency and other social ills is significant. Not only have most congregations felt the impact, nearly every family has been touched by divorce among its immediate members.

In addition to the moral and social ills caused by divorce, another more insidious problem is raised: How does divorce affect brethren doctrinally, and what threat is it to unity and fellowship?

2. The Desire to Remarry

Rare is the divorced individual who has no desire to remarry. Paul acknowledged that not all shared his celibate outlook (1 Cor 7:7-9). The natural urge of the human being is for marital companionship. The problem lies in the fact that Jesus gave some rigorous restrictions regarding a divorced person's right to remarry. Whereas civil law liberally allows for multiple marriages regardless of fault, and even Mosaic Law permitted remarriage more freely than God's original intent, the law of Christ reaffirms the permanent nature of the marital covenant. *Furthermore it has been said, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce." But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.* {Mt. 5:31-32)

So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate. They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her way?" He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery. {Mt 19:6-9}

The strong desire for marital companionship and the strict prohibition of divorce except in the case of sexual unfaithfulness creates a considerable amount of stress. Granted, the law of Christ regarding remarriage occasionally raises some genuinely tragic and unfortunate circumstances. However, most of the difficulties created in this regard are self-inflicted. The willful ignorance of Jesus' teaching leads to violations of His law, and as a consequence adulterous marriages are established. People in such marriages, who have formed bonded family structures with people they have no right to be married to, find the price of repentance too costly.

3. The Battlefields of Divorce and Remarriage

To ease this tension, a variety of alternative views have been advanced through the centuries over which brethren have argued and debated. Some of these, briefly, are:

Remarriage of an abandoned spouse: This view, sometimes termed the "Pauline Privilege," rests upon the phrase "not under bondage" in 1 Cor 7:15. The argument is made that a Christian abandoned by an unbelieving spouse is not under bondage to that marriage and is thus free to remarry. Whether or not the unbeliever committed adultery is of no consequence. This view is held as a justification for remarriage in addition to Jesus' exception in Matthew.

Christ's marriage law not for unbelievers: Some believe that Christ's teaching in Matthew is applicable only to covenant people. That is, non-Christians are not amenable to the law of Christ regarding divorce and remarriage; hence, unbelievers who marry and divorce multiple times are not truly guilty of adultery. The consequence of this position is that when one becomes a Christian, he may remain with his current spouse regardless of the number of previous marriages or the circumstances of the divorces.

Death the only cause for remarriage: Some people reject Jesus' exception entirely and say that all remarriage is sinful. Only when a spouse dies can one remarry lawfully. This position is based upon the belief that Jesus was clarifying Mosaic law in Mt 5 and 19 rather than establishing precepts of the new covenant. An alternative view states that one can divorce for the cause of fornication but still is not free to remarry, at least until the adulterous spouse dies. *The adulterous spouse (guilty party) may remarry:* This position holds that the adulterer who is divorced by the innocent party is no longer bound to the marriage covenant. Thus, upon repentance, he is free to remarry and stay with the second spouse.

Adultery is covenant breaking, not an illicit sexual relationship: The advocates of this position seek to alter the definition of "adultery." They assert that it refers to the sin of breaking a covenant rather than sustaining an unlawful sexual relationship. Therefore, one may divorce his mate, repent of "breaking a marriage covenant," be forgiven, and then be free to marry again without continuing as an adulterer.

Baptism justifies a current marriage: This view contends that baptism completely nullifies all former marital situations and allows the current marriage to continue. Regardless of how many times one has unlawfully divorced and remarried, forgiveness at conversion supposedly wipes away the past entirely along with all its consequences. *Divorce must be legally "for" fornication and the offended (innocent) party must initiate the process:* Some insist that the divorce decree must stipulate that adultery was the circumstance precipitating the divorce, and the innocent party must be the one to file. If the guilty party files for divorce first, this position holds that the innocent party must counter sue to make the separation valid in the sight of God.

Each of these ideas involve lengthy analysis that is beyond the scope of this study. We must be aware of the various approaches men take in order to nullify the teaching of God on this crucial subject. While the teaching of Jesus is straightforward regarding the permanence of marriage and the single exception for divorce, the arguments of men can become quite convoluted and difficult to follow.

4. Emotional vs. Rational Issues

We have seen already in this study how emotionalism affected the controversies in the 1950's. I have personally been in discussions with institutional brethren where the entire atmosphere of the study changed when the "poor little orphans" were thrust to the fore. While I have compassion upon orphaned children, I cannot allow their station in life to determine my doctrinal views. Unbridled emotions are powerful enough to short-circuit our reasoning faculties. We must dispassionately examine the Scriptures and extract from them solid conclusions concerning the will of God. *But rest assured:* While there will sometimes be temporary heartache in the implementation of God's will, there will be eternal compensation for abiding by it. And not only that, God will offset the disappointments with other blessings and benefits.

This is nowhere more true than in the area of divorce and remarriage. We are often faced with the most heart-wrenching cases when dealing with someone's marital status. All the natural feelings of love, devotion, affection, protection, nurture and other familial traits are just as present in unlawful situations as lawful ones. What a tragedy it is to realize that a family is built upon the cracked foundation of an unlawful marriage! And what a temptation it is in the face of such disappointment to loosen the teaching of the Lord just enough to allow the situation to continue.

Bill Hall wrote the following comments on searching for truth in *Is It Lawful? A Comprehensive Study of Divorce,* edited by Dennis Allan and Gary Fisher:

> Truth on any given issue may not be immediately apparent. High-sounding, but fallacious arguments, delivered in a positive, imposing manner, can make even the simplest point of truth seem difficult. Constant repetition can give such arguments a ring of authority. When they are flavored with a bit of emotion, they really become attractive and appealing. Only one who is willing to "dig below the surface" will be able to separate truth from error.

One must search for truth, *desiring truth at any cost.* He must take on the spirit of Paul expressed in Phil. 3:7: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." One's reputation in the brotherhood or present preaching "job" must not affect his thinking. His present marital state, the innocent children involved, or the depth of his love for another must not become factors. His eagerness to convert others who are in second marriages must not prejudice his mind. He must desire truth, whatever may be the consequences of truth to himself or others.

One must search for truth *in depth.* A person does not fulfill his responsibility in relation to any controversy simply by listening to his favorite preacher or reading his favorite paper and repeating a few simplistic arguments. The searcher for truth is concerned for pleasing God. He familiarizes himself with the issues; he goes to God's word for answers; he makes good use of his concordance and "word study" helps; he analyzes all that he reads in light of the scriptures; he is not afraid to investigate…While he learns from others, his thinking and ultimate conclusions are his own. When he speaks, he speaks his own conclusions based upon sound and logical deductions from scripture (p. 4).

Preachers and elders have changed their life-long convictions on these issues when their own children became involved. Preachers have been fired from congregations when their preaching pointed the fingers of condemnation at the elders' children. The time to study these issues is before they flare up into heated controversy. But even then, brethren must give themselves to honest and thorough study, focusing on the issues and not the personalities involved.

5. Homer Hailey, Divorce/Remarriage and Fellowship

In 1988 controversy erupted among noninstitutional churches over the views of Homer Hailey. What made the controversy particularly volatile was the stature of brother Hailey. As a former administrator at both Abilene Christian University and Florida College, brother Hailey enjoyed a tremendous presence and influence among brethren on both sides of the institutional divide. (Though he had been shunned by those of the institutional persuasion after his repudiation of their practices, many continued to revere him for his reputation as a Bible scholar and his tireless efforts to preach the gospel.)

Though brother Hailey had held his particular view of the applicability of Christ's law to the alien sinner for many decades, it was not until his mid-80's that he came under attack for those views. Brother Hailey's position—that a non-Christian is not amenable to Jesus' new covenant teaching on divorce and remarriage—was a minority among noninstitutional brethren and one that resulted in justifying adulterous marriages. The publication of his position apparently caused some others to adopt his views, thus causing more contention among brethren. The controversy grew more tense when Ed Harrell wrote a series of articles in *Christianity Magazine* in defense, not of Homer Hailey's doctrinal position, but of his stature as a faithful brother in spite of his aberrant views. Brother Harrell advocated a greater degree of tolerance based on his views of Romans 14 as well as the historical tradition of the restoration pioneers in regard to marital issues. Throughout the 1990's the controversy has ebbed and flowed. Of late, it has grown into a larger question of fellowship.

Some have gone so far as to implement the "Homer Hailey fellowship test": *Are you willing to condemn Homer Hailey for his views on divorce/remarriage?* From this has grown an additional test: *Are you willing to condemn those who won't condemn Homer Hailey?* There is presently a growing climate of suspicion and sectarian thinking among brethren in this regard. There is an urge to label and pigeonhole preachers and congregations as "soft on sin" and "faithful" based on responses to formal questionnaires or informal inquiries. If the present trends continue, noninstitutional churches could be heading toward a rift possibly rivaling that of the 1950's.

6. Marriage A Privilege, Not an Inalienable Right

Through the heat of various controversies and the fog of divergent views on this subject, I believe one principle is of supreme importance: Marriage is a privilege, not a right. That is, God grants this special relationship not as an unqualified right to all who wish to participate in it, but as a privilege to those who qualify for it. No man has the right to forcibly claim a mate apart from God's approval, and it would be the height of folly to enter marriage where the justification in doing so is questionable. In a situation where Christian unity may be threatened or a right to remarry is hopelessly confused, the wisest course may be *not to marry.* Eternity is a long time;

personal judgments are often biased, and human reasoning is often flawed. Is it worth eternally jeopardizing our souls to pursue a course that may be unauthorized by the Lord or, at best, of questionable legitimacy, all for a few fleeting moments of earthly gratification?

But, alas, I am confident that people will continue to push the envelope of justifiable marriage, and they will force churches to make judgments on their precarious marital situations. We must educate ourselves on this subject as thoroughly as possible according to God's will so that each case is responsibly handled on its own merits.

In a Nutshell …

Perhaps the greatest threat to noninstitutional churches today, both morally and doctrinally, is that of divorce and remarriage.

In spite of Jesus' economic and straightforward teaching on divorce, people with private agendas complicate the issue to justify that which the Lord has prohibited.

The most polarizing issue in the past twenty years has been the view of Homer Hailey, both in regard to his doctrinal view of divorce and remarriage and the question of fellowshipping one whose view is admittedly aberrant to the majority.

Questions:

1. How do some redefine the term adultery to justify remarriage for the guilty party?
2. Explain your view on whether or not baptism allows a person to stay with their current mate regardless of previous marriages or reasons for divorce.
3. Do you believe Jesus is speaking to all men in Mt 19:6-9 or just Christians? Explain.
4. Explain the difference between a privilege and a right in regard to marriage.

Lesson 19: The Spirit of Controversy

1. The Desire for Unity

Controversy—disputes culminating in disturbance and disharmony—is hurtful to the body of Christ. God's ideal is that all His children blend together as a body with each part contributing to the smooth functioning of the whole. Jesus prayed for this unity: *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me"* (Jn 17:20-21). There is a very real correlation between the unity of God's people and the influence they have upon unbelievers around them. Jesus often referred to the unity of purpose, teaching and work between Himself and His heavenly Father (Jn 5:30; 8:16-18, 28-29; 10:30).

Paul encouraged the Ephesians *"to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Eph 4:1-3).

When the Corinthians were dividing into sects without cause, Paul rebuked them and pleaded with them to *"speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"* (1 Cor 1:10). The epistle goes on to describe various elements of discord among the brethren, from personal favoritism to lawsuits to corrupt worship. Such was a travesty as these very people endeavored to speak to the unbelieving Corinthians about the oneness of faith in Christ, the unity of the Godhead, the consistency of revelation and other aspects of unity in the spiritual kingdom.

While conflict is always regrettable and unpleasant, it is sometimes necessary. The essence of Christianity is to dispel darkness with the light of truth. This will always produce strife, for evil thrives under the cover of darkness. *"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed"* (Jn 3:19-20). The difficult part is to distinguish between necessary and unnecessary controversy, and handle each appropriately without compromising principles of godliness.

2. Threats to Unity

Doctrinal corruption. God's people must always be concerned with maintaining the integrity of truth. Constant efforts are made by Satan and his forces to undermine the teaching and principles by which God would have His people live. The New Testament contains many exhortations to combat false teachers and expose erroneous doctrines. Some would be persuaded to listen to "deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim 4:1-5). Paul also warned Timothy about men or "corrupt minds" who would "resist the truth" and take advantage of others (2 Tim 3:1-9). He encouraged Timothy to *"shun profane and vain babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer"* (2 Tim 2:16-17). Peter likewise warned of those *"who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought*

them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed" (2 Pet 2:1-2).

There seems to be a qualitative difference in the New Testament between doctrines that constituted heresy and the imperfect understanding of those yet immature in the faith. It is a self-evident truth that gaining knowledge and spiritual stature is a growth process, and even those who have been Christians for many years continue to refine their thinking, correct mistaken ideas and strengthen character traits. Is there a legitimate distinction between simply having a mistaken or undeveloped concept and promoting aberrant views that can do damage to the body of Christ? Just how far can we allow disagreement to exist before we are duty-bound to breach fellowship over it?

Perhaps the *effect* of one's belief is the key. If one insistently pushes his conviction to the point of disunity, then he becomes subject to group discipline: *"Now I urge you, brethren, not those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple"* (Rom 16:17-18). Of such spirit were the Judaizers of the first century who disrupted churches across the empire. Their intent was to *"spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage"* (Gal 2:4). *"They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them"* (Gal 4: 17). *"As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these try to compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ"* (Gal 6:12). A brother of Jewish extraction may feel compelled by his conscience to circumcise his son, and a Gentile convert may see circumcision as an unnecessary vestige of a defunct law, but both strive to please God and may be unified so long as their differences do not become divisive.

Further, consider the moral implications of denying the resurrection. Paul said to the Corinthians: *"Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"* (1 Cor 15:12). The *effect* of this belief was the logical denial of Jesus' own resurrection (15:13, 16) and the erosion of moral imperative: *"If the dead do not rise, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'"* (15:32). Some erroneous views undermine morality and crack the very foundation of redemption; others are of lesser practical consequence. While some brethren are repelled by the notion of varying consequences of error, I personally see no other alternative but to endlessly divide over *every* disagreement regardless of its nature.

I believe it to be a sectarian mistake to create a dogma or a creed that represents "church of Christ teaching" as a standard by which all must be held, regardless of their background or level of spiritual growth. This is the very thing we have condemned the denominations for doing, and yet it is the tendency of some to press for a creedal conformity. Who would compile the creed? Who would be charged with implementing it and policing the brotherhood to ensure compliance? In the final analysis, each congregation will have to decide how to handle its own questions of fellowship. This is the level upon which fellowship decisions are to be made. A local church is best equipped to consider the spiritual capacity of an individual, weigh the convictions expressed, assess the element of threat to unity and harmony and evaluate motives. If a person's

doctrinal views are deemed dangerous to the well being of the congregation, then that church must act to neutralize the threat.

Violation of conscience. God wishes for believers who differ over certain matters to continue in fellowship if at all possible. Instructions are given in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8-10 regarding brethren who have a serious difference in practice and do not engage in the other's behavior. If a person is burdened with a cultural hangover like the taint of meat offered to an idol or eating foods formerly forbidden, these men were to abide within the realm which their conscience would approve. While there was a clear right and wrong on these questions, God acknowledges that not all would be able to act upon that standard without injuring their conscience. This admits a difference in maturity and knowledge which naturally exists among men. Such differences that did not lead to rancor and recrimination were to be tolerated without censure or judgment.

Individual vs. collective sin. The institutional division occurred not merely over matters of disagreement but forced participation in activities considered sinful. Within a given local church there may be individuals who disagree over matters even deemed sinful: the observance of Christmas; a Christian policeman/soldier; wearing a covering; missing services for work; a deacon/elder with questionable qualifications; etc. But these and other individual matters do not automatically make those who differ *participants* in sin. The Christian policeman who kills in the line of duty may be thought a murderer by someone who disapproves of killing under any circumstances, but the objector is not made a murderer himself by the action of the other. A Christian who believes a sister is sinning by not covering her head does not by necessity become a sinner by the other's practice. *If there are no grounds upon which a Christian may associate with another who he deems to be in sin, then no pro-covering Christian should ever worship with women who don't cover their heads.*

On the other hand, when one financially contributes to the collective treasury, and the treasury is used in a manner considered unlawful, then the contributor becomes guilty by his participation. There are very few matters in which a church truly acts as a collective. One is when it acts financially. Another is when the church expels a member for a clear break of fellowship with God. This is why brethren in the '50's and '60's pleaded for alternative arrangements whereby contributions for orphan homes and schools would not come directly from the church treasury. They were rebuffed and consequently forced to leave in order to honor their conscience.

Certain questions seem appropriate in this regard: Am I violating my conscience by *doing* what I believe to be wrong? Am I a participant in the matter in question, or am I merely observing something of which I disapprove? Brethren who cannot abide *any* behavior or convictions which differ from their own are forever congregation hopping, unable to find a group with which they unreservedly agree in all matters.

3. A Spirit of Divisiveness

It is significant that the Lord didn't consider the faithful in Sardis guilty by association: *"I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead ...you have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for*

they are worthy" (Rev 3:1, 4). Corinth, as previously noted, was plagued by various problems, but Paul's solution was not for the faithful to leave and start another congregation. *The solution was to pray and study and work to fix the problems in Corinth.* Some things couldn't be tolerated for the effect they would have upon the congregation (the incestuous brother). Some things were to be tolerated because they were matters of individual conviction (eating meat sacrificed to idols). Other things were not grounds for withdrawal but needed to be changed (uncovered prophetesses, self-promoting tongue-speakers).

But noninstitutional brethren have too often painted with a roller in this regard. They just slather the same color of paint all over everything, treating every issue (their pet issue, usually) as a matter of fellowship. The result? How often have we heard of churches splitting over petty issues? Even matters of pure opinion (the décor in the building or some such drivel) have sent some brethren packing. Small towns often have two churches that are in agreement on "the issues" but have nothing to do with one another. A short conversation reveals the depth of acrimony between the two, and it is evident that the fault is one of spiritual character rather than doctrine. Thus the influence of the gospel is blunted by the disharmony of warring Christians.

If we uphold the truth, especially in our society which is rushing headlong toward the falls of hedonism, greed and cold selfishness, then we will have enough conflict to deal with. We do not need to add to it by unnecessary fighting and criticism from within.

4. A Present Crisis

In my opinion, the most immediate crisis facing the noninstitutional churches of Christ is a growing sectarian spirit among some fairly influential preachers. Lines of fellowship are being drawn and some preachers have been attacked for no more than matters of judgment. An ultra-orthodox spirit has gradually come to the fore which quotes men out of context or even completely fabricates stories to sustain their attack. Faithful, reputable men are being slandered as "soft on sin" and "false teachers" over non-substantive issues. While we may be insulated from some of this in central Alabama, it is going on among brethren elsewhere on an ever-widening scale. If things do not change—and these ultra-orthodox men have dug a hole for themselves so deep that change will be difficult—then we are going to see a loosely constructed sect form over the next few years.

5. Can the Lord's Church Really Divide?

In a completely non-sectarian, non-denominational sense, the Lord's church cannot actually divide. If we understand the church of Christ to truly be comprised of *faithful believers,* then that body cannot divide. The true church will always be only those people who are faithful to the Lord. We understand that any given local church is an association of people who *claim* faith in Christ, but among some that claim is invalid. Therefore, when a *local congregation* divides, the true church remains intact while the "tares" are weeded out. Paul said, *"For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you"* (1 Cor 11:19). Thus, we should not be unduly disturbed by controversies and divisions when they come. We *should* be concerned about siding with the truth and remaining pure in our motives. When people divide, *someone is condemning himself.* It is not the Lord's will that disunity exist. True

Christians will love one another, submit to one another, show deference to their brothers and sisters: *"Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others"* (Ph 2:1-4). If and when divisions come, we must be found in the remnant of the faithful, which remnant is purified and identified by periodic upheavals.

In a Nutshell …

Maintaining unity among the family of God must be a high priority for Christians.

Many things threaten such unity, some of which can be resolved. However, there are some things which cannot be tolerated. Judgments based upon God's word must be carefully implemented to make sound decisions.

A chronic spirit of divisiveness has troubled noninstitutional churches in the past. Presently, an ultra-orthodox mentality is needlessly targeting faithful preachers. This trend, if it continues, could divide churches on a fairly broad scale.

Questions:

1. What did Jesus say would encourage the world to believe that God had sent Him?
2. How do those who practice evil feel about the light that exposes them?
3. Profane and vain babblings spread like _____.
4. Should spiritual immaturity and doctrinal heresy be treated alike?
5. On what level are questions of fellowship to be decided?
6. What should I do if the elders refuse to withdraw from someone I think is sinning?
7. What has been the overall effect of splintering congregations over the past 40 years?

Lesson 20: Where We've Been; Where We're Going

1. Where We've Been

The Lord's church is nothing more than Christians, wherever and whenever they may be, working distributively (as individuals) and collectively (as local churches) to do the will of Christ. The chart simply tracks the trends of those people who have at least outwardly held to the authority of the New Testament in our culture. It must be admitted that there are, for all intents and purposes, other local groups of believers who are doing the will of Christ but are "not of us"; i.e., not recognized by "us" (noninstitutional, noncharismatic, nonsocial gospel churches of Christ in the United States). The "brotherhood" has periodically been troubled by major disagreements which have culminated in schism. These issues don't happen over night. They ebb and flow, rise and subside, until brethren become finally aware that an impasse or a hardening of positions has taken place. Brethren gradually choose different agendas; they adopt certain objectives and become devoted to them. Meaningful discussion stops when one side is unwilling to examine their situation fully and objectively.

The trick is to be able to recognize these trends before they escalate into hardened factions. Elderships, preachers, teachers and members of local churches must keep studying the Scriptures and searching for fresh applications to their own circumstances. They must not naively keep looking back to past controversies and think that their soundness is secured because of things that happened 40 or 50 years ago. It is a new world, and Satan is constantly sowing fresh seeds of corruption. *"No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God"* (Lk 9:62).

We do need to look back at history, however, for the lessons that we can apply to current issues, for *"there is nothing new under the sun"* (Ecc 1:9). *"Is there anything of which it may be said, 'See, this is new'? It has already been in ancient times before us"* (9:10). Apostasy is like pop music love songs: it's the same themes and lyrics just jazzed up with some different tempos and instrumentation. But as those love songs continue to tug on the heartstrings of new generations, so the tunes of self-will and personal ambition strike the chords of apostasy.

2. Where Are We Vulnerable Today?

I believe there are several interconnected problems affecting Christians in our society to day. These things make us ripe for strife and division.

Ignorance of God's Word. The only way that Satan can raise doctrinal issues that divide brethren is if there is a climate of ignorance which allows the false notion to thrive. On a whole, though not true in every case, churches of Christ have become largely ignorant of the Bible. Many have a vague idea of *what* they believe about certain issues, but they falter when pressed to give a coherent rationale for their views. Some have confused an answer to certain false teaching with genuine, comprehensive Bible knowledge. The truth is that brethren are often too busy, too distracted, too materialistic, too disinterested to study our Bibles in any depth. And this includes preachers who waste their days on trivialities and then have nothing to feed the brethren when it is time to preach. Soft, feel-good, psychobabble preaching rather than expository, insightful and

substantive preaching may tickle the ears and provoke a few laughs, but it doesn't condition the soul and mind with the sublime truths of God. When enough Christians wallow in intellectual stupor, Satan can have a field day.

Materialism. Perhaps one of the most insidious ailments suffered by many Christians is materialistic ambition. It is insidious because people insist on measuring themselves and their station in life by other people. As long as others have more, as long as they have what we think we deserve, then we will keep our nose to the grindstone to get even. The signs of discontentment, of insatiable wants, of preoccupation with possessions abounds, yet we are often oblivious to them. Our world has become sensory: sights, sounds, entertainment, recreation, fun and leisure dominate our thinking. Meditation, prayer, study, worship are given some attention, but it is far outweighed by interest in what this world offers.

Lack of leadership. A vacuum of good leadership has developed among many churches due to these and other factors. A common lamentation heard among brethren is that they need elders but lack qualified men. Hueytown has historically been blessed in this regard, but this has not been the case in many places across the land. As was true of Ephesus, sometimes elders *become* the problem instead of solving problems (Ac 20: 30). When spiritually mature men are not fulfilling the role of vigilant shepherds, guarding the souls of men, then *no one tends to watch.* The energy and effectiveness of a church is often sapped by endless wrangling in business meetings; teaching programs lack direction and purpose; the congregation is undisciplined in many critical areas. Again, this leaves churches wide open to apostate influences which may come.

Institutional dependence. A lack of personal responsibility plagues our culture. No one wants to take responsibility for anything which obligates them or makes them accountable. Many Christians have come to see the local church as a service institution for their own benefit. They contribute very little to the overall health and functioning of the group. The church often represents a comfortable place to worship, supportive friends, a safety net in times of need or crisis, an institutional "we" through which they evangelize (through the local preacher or others supported), care for the needy or otherwise discharge personal obligations. It has always been true that the few do the most, but this ratio can increase until the few can't do it all anymore. We need to recover a sense of personal obligation to serve the Lord to the best of our abilities. The church is not an institution, per se, it is just each of us contributing our time and talents to the Lord's work.

3. Is It All Bad News?

These observations may seem pessimistic. I will admit that studying the history of brethren over the past 150 years, as I have done for several months now, can be a bit depressing. Frankly, men don't have a very good track record. Consider Israelite history, for example. Not many bright spots, huh? Just which of the OT books would you consult to restore your faith in humanity? Which one paints a bright, promising, optimistic picture of mankind? Oh, we get glimpses of *individuals* who lived exemplary lives of faith, but on the whole the OT reads more like the *National Enquirer* than *Reader's Digest.*

Or how about the NT? Which epistles burnish humanity to a bright luster? Philippians, perhaps. Paul doesn't have a lot of negative things to say to them. But the nature of most of the epistles is *corrective;* that is, they address things that had already gone wrong in the church's early history. The good news does not lie in the human element of the church of Christ. It lies in the fact that it is *His* church, that we belong to a spiritual body/temple/family that is ruled over from heaven. Jesus is the ultimate Overseer. He makes sure that our human foibles don't do irreversible damage. He overrides our foolishness and accomplishes His will often in spite of us rather than with our cooperation. Even when we have done the best we possibly can in a given situation, we fall short of divine standards. God be thanked that our weaknesses and frailties will not be allowed to ruin the Lord's church, and that they will not serve as the basis for our judgment. Praise God that we have redemption and remission of sins, for without grace and mercy we would be nothing.

So what is our contribution? What is our aim? What are we to do? We must be ever studying, learning, growing and endeavoring to serve the Lord obediently and humbly. If we can possibly be of use to Him, pray for open doors and discerning eyes to recognize the opportunities. We can speak kindly to one another unto edification, support and encouragement. We can search for the lost and courageously hold out hope to them in a world that so often crushes it under foot. We at Hueytown can rejoice in the multitude of blessings that we have received over the years. Many have benefited from a strong local family that some never have in a whole lifetime of service to God. Our elders have seen to it that everyone who wants to grow in knowledge can do so. The history of this church is of relative peace and unity; there have been no major exodus movements in its nearly 50 year existence. We have supported countless gospel preachers, cared for our widows, assisted the infirm, comforted the grieving. We have sung thousands of songs, prayed thousands of prayers and studied thousands of lessons. Where would each of us be without this spiritual richness?

The last thing we should allow to happen is the weakening of this church. And it will stay strong, vibrant, sound and productive only as long as each of the members devotes him/herself to that goal. The church doesn't *have* to weaken; it doesn't *have* to eventually split. Whether or not it does is up to not him, her or them but **me.** It's a legitimate question: What would this church be if everyone was like me?

Exhortation:

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. **{Ephesians 4:11-16}**

In a Nutshell …

The modern history of churches of Christ is one of periodic controversy and splintering.

We should all be concerned about various factors that have tended to weaken noninstitutional churches since the division in the 1950's.

A tremendous amount of personal responsibility rests upon each individual to contribute what he or she can to the strength of the local church. We must rid ourselves of any institutional notion of the church and realize that we all have obligations to the church's total functioning.

Questions:

1. Do major divisions among brethren usually happen swiftly or gradually?
2. Discuss how looking to the past can be beneficial.
3. Discuss how looking to the past can be harmful.
4. How does ignorance of God's word set the stage for apostasy?
5. How does a lack of mature, spiritual leadership endanger a church?
6. How can noninstitutional people sometimes have an institutional view of the church?

Take Up Your Cross: The Cost of Discipleship in the New Millennium
Florida College Lectures, February 2001 by Jim Jonas

Was ever an age in more dire need of salvation than the one among which the Son of God appeared two millennia ago? The Gentile world, long adrift in the currents of human philosophy and idolatrous mythology, was jaded and skeptical. Israel had been misled by self-serving leaders who, like their forebears, "draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Mt. 15:7-9). Raging storms of political intrigue, seismic upheavals of violence, floods of immoral sewage, and epidemics of religious ignorance sculpted a spiritual wilderness traversed by disenfranchised multitudes "weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Mt. 9:36). The sick desperately needed a physician (Mt. 9:12).

An Invitation to Discipleship

Matthew 11:28-30

So Jesus descended into this wasteland in order to reclaim His creatures and restore to them a sense of dignity and worth. To those exhausted by futility, burdened with guilt, and victimized by powers beyond their control, Jesus extended a gracious invitation: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28). Jesus did not author a novel philosophy, concoct a fresh psychological approach, or conceive a revolutionary political movement. Rather, Jesus placed Himself personally at the center of men's lives, avowing that He is the fount of refreshment and invigoration for all.

But what kind of rest does He offer? Ironically, Jesus says true rest is not a byproduct of idleness but of effort: "Take My yoke upon you…For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Mt. 11:29-30). *Yoke* metaphorically suggests work. Jesus does not call us to ease but purposeful labor based on fellowship with Him. This yoke is easy and its burden light because it is suited to our spiritual nature. It enhances the value of our essence and affirms the purpose of our existence. Consequently, Jesus promises that those who bear His yoke will "find rest for your souls" (Mt. 11:29).

Further, Jesus counsels men to "learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Mt. 11:29). Here is Jesus' call to discipleship. *Learn* is from the Greek word *manthano,* which is akin to *mathetes,* a disciple. Hence, a disciple is "a learner…indicating thought accompanied by endeavor" (Vine 1:316). Jesus again unabashedly concentrates man's hope and purpose directly upon Himself. He declares to be the source of spiritual learning, both the teacher and the example of life lived to its spiritual fullest. The disciple of Jesus comes to a gentle and patient teacher, the very antithesis of the arrogant and condescending scribes and Pharisees. His curriculum far excels that of Hillel, Shammai, or Gamaliel. Those who come to Jesus learn from the Creator, Himself, what kind of character, attitudes, and behavior establish the soul.

The Framework of Discipleship

Matthew 16:24

Though Jesus desperately covets the devotion and allegiance of all men, He never attempted to attract any on false pretenses. He did not emotionally manipulate; He did not foment groundless optimism; He did not entice with empty promises. Instead, Jesus plainly revealed the rigors of discipleship. He spoke forthrightly about what would be demanded of His followers and what price they would be asked to pay for their loyalty to Him, and He urged them to count the cost before committing themselves. Jesus does not want a mere following; He wants a fraternity. Perhaps the most succinct summary of the criteria of discipleship is found in Matthew 16:24: "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.'" Jesus clarifies the issue on this occasion because of lingering misconceptions of discipleship among the apostles. Peter had just confessed the divinely attested truth of Jesus' identity: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:16). This conviction had gradually developed as Peter and his companions witnessed Jesus' power over the natural elements (Mt. 8:23-27; 14:22-33), demons (Mt. 12:22-30), and even over death (Mt. 9:18-26). But as Jesus begins to prepare the apostles for His own death, Peter recoils: "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" (Mt. 16:21-22). Peter cannot yet conceive of the death of his Lord as a necessary component in the founding of the kingdom. Jesus rebukes Peter as not being "mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Mt. 16:23). Jesus' death does not make sense to Peter because he is analyzing the situation according to human reasoning. Jesus finds this offensive, for His whole purpose in coming to the earth was to fulfill the Father's plans. If that means sacrificing Himself for the sake of others, this Jesus is willing to do. Peter must understand this aspect of discipleship. If the apostles harbor any thoughts of earthly glory, selfish ambition, or ego gratification by alliance with Jesus, then they haven't grasped the character of the kingdom. So Jesus elaborates: *If anyone desires to come after Me …"*. Becoming a follower of Jesus begins with desire, but desire alone is not enough. Superficial interest often lacks the discipline and dedication necessary to excel (learning to play a musical instrument or obtaining a college degree, for example). The one who desires to follow the Lord must learn what true discipleship entails. We cannot come to Jesus on our own terms.

"Let him deny himself …". Human beings enter the world in a relatively helpless state; infants are totally dependent upon caregivers to survive. They instinctively and insistently broadcast their needs until they are relieved. Ideally, this self-centeredness gradually dissipates with maturity and is replaced by an appreciation for the needs of others. Unfortunately, some continue in a state of infantile fixation upon themselves—their pleasures, their needs, their desires. Self-indulgence can be so powerful that even God's laws are made subordinate to the will of the individual. But Jesus says that His disciple must fight the tendency toward self-interest. He must completely submit himself to God, trusting that God will adequately protect and sustain him.

But what, exactly, must a man deny himself? Simply, he must sacrifice anything and everything that threatens his spiritual welfare. Jesus graphically explains: And if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you

to sin, cut if off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell (Mt. 5:29-30; cf. Mt. 18:8-9).

Jesus does not suggest that sin originates in the fleshly body, for He makes it clear that "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries…These are the things which defile a man" (Mt. 15:18-20). Rather, He is emphasizing that *nothing* is worth forfeiting one's soul! He rhetorically asks, "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mt. 16:26). A disciple, then, is able to properly evaluate his spiritual essence, and he makes conscious choices to jettison whatever jeopardizes his heavenly goals.

"And Take Up His Cross …". The disciples knew exactly what Jesus meant when He used this figure of speech. They would have undoubtedly witnessed the gruesome sight of condemned men staggering to the site of their execution under the weight of their own crossbeam. Thus Jesus vividly indicates that discipleship comes with a price. He is fully aware that the principles of righteousness to which He calls men will incite evil against His followers. As it has always been, so it will always be:

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Mt. 5:10-12). But persecution is not the only cross to be born by the Christian. Satan possesses a formidable array of weaponry designed to distract, disorient, and dishearten the disciple unto dereliction of his duty. Some crosses come in the form of blessings and advantages with which we have been endowed. As Jesus would eventually bear His cross to Golgotha, so each disciple must bear his own cross. "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!" (Mt. 10:24-26). Satan will see to it that the road to heaven will be littered with landmines.

"And Follow Me." The disciple of Jesus must recognize and accept the authority invested in Him as Lord and follow Him. Peter was pointedly reminded of this when, overwhelmed by the sight of Jesus standing with the great authorities of the Law, Moses and Elijah, he suggested three tabernacles be built in honor of this illustrious triumvirate. God's voice from heaven, however, elevated Jesus above the others: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Mt. 17:5). Later, Jesus declares consequent to His resurrection from the dead: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Mt. 28:18). His disciples are thus obligated to "observe all things that I have commanded you [the apostles]" (Mt. 28:20). The Christian not only respects the authority of the Lord, he seeks to emulate His character and example as well. His entire focus is upon Jesus; he intently scrutinizes Him and seeks to mimic Him in every appropriate way. Picture a precision aviation team. The leader flies on the point and establishes the speed, direction, and movement of the formation. His airplane is the point of reference for his wingmen, and every ounce of their concentration is centered upon mirroring his movements. After all, their lives depend upon it. And the life of the disciple depends upon symmetry with his Lord.

But many wish to set their own agenda of discipleship. "Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, 'Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go'" (Mt. 8:19). This offer had the ring of sincerity, but to Jesus it apparently sounded hollow. Perhaps the man was giddy over the day's events in Capernaum: Jesus had healed the centurion's servant (Mt. 8:5-13), Peter's mother-in-law (Mt. 8:14-15), and many who were demon-possessed (Mt. 8:16-17). Jesus gently pierces the scribe's euphoria with this sharp truth: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Mt. 8:20). The implication: Following Jesus is not a stroll in the park.

As the scribe pondered Jesus' rejoinder, "Another of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father'" (Mt. 8:21). Jesus' response seems at first callous and unreasonable: "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead" (Mt. 8:22). Is this the same Jesus who had compassion upon the grieving? Jesus undoubtedly detected insincerity in the man's request. Note that the exchange does not necessarily imply that the man's father was already deceased. Perhaps he had unwittingly allowed anxiety over his ailing father's uncertain future to compromise genuine devotion to the Lord. Whatever the case, Jesus' answer stresses the priority of discipleship.

Peter, whose wayward rebuke of Jesus prompted this lesson on discipleship, was earlier asked to leave his fishing business and follow the Lord (Mt. 4:18-20). He did so. Peter followed Jesus from city to city, across the mountains, and through the sea. But now dark clouds are gathering on the horizon. The time is nearing for Jesus to take up His own cross, and Peter and the others will be challenged to follow Him through His baptism of suffering (Mt. 20:22-23). And they will falter. Are we ready to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus through the pitfalls of our own age?

Some Crosses of Discipleship In The New Millennium

The requisites of discipleship to Jesus are global and timeless. Regardless of the prevailing political, social, or economic climate, a disciple of the Lord is called upon to display unchanging values and character. It is easy to become so assimilated into one's own culture that spiritual distinctiveness dissolves. Therefore, it is incumbent upon God's people to dispassionately examine the age in which they live and evaluate its potential impact upon their faith. Where is societal drift taking us? What are the underlying philosophies that trickle down to the man on the street? What insidious forces may suddenly erupt in unexpected crisis? One thing is certain: The Adversary will wield one's prevailing cultural climate as a wedge between the disciple and his Lord.

Twenty-first century America is a land of contrasts: a robust economy, a regressive morality; an information explosion, an educational implosion; unprecedented prosperity, unparalleled debt; burgeoning ethnic diversity, festering racial unrest; freedom of speech, political in-correctness; the celebration of pluralism, the marginalizing of Christianity; aversion to censorship, the banning of prayer; adoption, abortion. Contradictions plague our nation as we continue our headlong plunge into collective schizophrenia. Never in the history of mankind has a nation so richly and uniformly blessed its citizenry. And never has a nation so swiftly abandoned its acknowledgment of God. Modern America is beginning to reap the whirlwind of its post-modern

worldview. We must be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" in confronting the challenges of our age (Mt. 10:16).

Consider the following three crosses of discipleship, the weight of which is beginning to press more heavily upon the present generation of believers:

The Cross of Personal Responsibility

"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit…A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings for the good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things" (Mt. 12:33, 35). The influence of evolutionary theory upon psychology, sociology, and other behavioral disciplines has undermined a sense of personal responsibility in our nation. The notion that man is merely a random product of impersonal forces of nature has loosened the shackles of moral accountability. We crow about our enlightenment, we bask in our achievements, we demand our rights, but no one seems willing to accept responsibility for the blights and blemishes marring our society.

As long as this mindset holds sway, our future remains bleak. Things will not get appreciably better until each individual assumes responsibility for his condition and exercises his free will to seek solutions. Human beings are not merely instinctual. We are more than a mixture of water and $1.95 in chemicals. We have volition, and this makes us accountable to our Creator for our attitudes and behavior.

The personal responsibility for our sin. No matter how heinous the crime, how reckless the judgment, or how flagrant the foolishness, no one seems guilty of anything anymore. Blame for misconduct is placed upon genetic predisposition, parental nurturing, societal shaping, or combinations thereof. While these factors may influence behavior, they are determinative only for the individual who willfully surrenders to them. Additionally, psychoanalysis has long held unresolved guilt to be a major factor in emotional instability. Man's solution: Simply deny the feeling of guilt by denying moral accountability. The nihilistic behavior displayed with disturbing frequency in our society (suicidal rampages, school shootings, etc.) is the logical outgrowth of such ideology. Unresolved guilt can be debilitating, but God has provided His own scheme for the removal of guilt. However, this remedial process hinges on one major prerequisite: *The sinner must take responsibility for his actions*. This begins with an attitude of remorse. Jesus pronounced blessing upon "those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Mt. 5:4). Paul Earnhart observes:

> This grief comes to us by choice, not necessity…the grief experienced by those who in their reverence for God are horrified by their own sins and those of their fellows, and are moved to tears of bitter shame and grief…These are the tears we must choose to shed, renouncing our stubborn pride; and out of that choice will come the unspeakable comfort of a God who forgives us all, takes us to Himself, and will ultimately wipe all tears away (8-9).

Jesus counseled His disciples to seek God's forgiveness (Mt. 6:12), and He portrayed God's eagerness to extend it (Mt. 9:2). Acknowledging our sins and taking responsibility for them is

liberating. Not only does it assuage our guilt, it allows those who have been injured by our transgressions to relinquish anger and bitterness and offer their own forgiveness. There is great healing power in the words: "I'm sorry. I was wrong. Please forgive me." This is God's remedy for mistake-prone people, not denial of culpability.

The personal responsibility of our talents. Our nation has also been sucked into the vortex of an entitlement mentality. The entitlement mentality says, "Since society is responsible for my condition, it *owes* me." Many expect more than they rightly deserve, demand compensation for every minor injury, imagined injustice, or inadvertent slight, or fritter away their income in hope of hitting the jackpot. The ideals of hard work, performance-based evaluations, and earned opportunities are dimming in our collective consciousness. We are a nation in decline in matters pertaining to a sound work ethic.

And judging from the number of the Lord's churches in decline, many Christians are also apparently suffering from a diminished work ethic. While a minority of members in local churches have historically shouldered the majority of the work, this ratio seems to have reached a critical mass. No longer are the few able to sustain the whole. Apathy and indolence are taking their toll.

Jesus holds each of His disciples individually responsible for the stewardship of their God-given resources (Mt. 25:14-30). Stewardship, of course, is commensurate with ability (Mt. 13:23). However, since God no longer issues specific commissions, who will work for Him? Answer: Those who have the spiritual insight to personally appropriate His general instructions. We must *personally* accept the Lord's invitation to come to Him. We must *personally* accede to His demands of discipleship. We must *personally* assume the work that suits our aptitudes. And we must *personally* anticipate the Lord's future evaluation of our fruitfulness on His behalf. "For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt. 25:29-30). Not until individual disciples decide to stop excusing their laziness and get busy with the Lord's work will churches begin to regain the vigor and vitality which they have lost.

The personal responsibility to serve others. "But whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave" (Mt. 20:26-27). Thus Jesus rebukes His two hot-headed apostles, James and John ("Sons of Thunder," Mk. 3:17), who have lobbied for seats of honor in the kingdom. Such brashness understandably sparked strife among the apostles and betrayed the yet immature understanding of these disciples (Mt. 20:20-24).

The ambition of the Lord's disciple is servanthood, to render assistance to those who are in distress. In fact, Jesus says that serving *Him* is inseparable from serving *those who belong to Him:* "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me" (Mt. 25:45; whole context 25:34-45). But such service begins internally, not with an attitude of superiority and entitlement, but of compassion and magnanimity. The Jewish leaders had lost that spirit. They despised the downtrodden, attributing life's misfortunes to God's disapproval. The Pharisees would rescue their sheep from the pit on the Sabbath but

condemn Jesus' effortless healing of a withered hand (Mt. 12:9-14). Their broad phylacteries obscured the fact that they were sinners like everyone else (Mt. 23:5).

Some of Jesus' disciples had been tainted with this callousness, and He repeatedly addressed their lack of humility and concern for others: "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 18:3-4); "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones" (Mt. 18:10); "But many who are first will be last, and the last first" (Mt. 19:30; 20:16). Insensitive to the plight of the unfortunate, the Pharisees accosted Jesus' disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Mt. 9:11). Jesus ate with sinners in an effort "to save that which was lost" (Mt. 18:11). This would never occur to a Pharisee, whose very appellation meant "separate."

Christians today face considerable impediments to serving others. Perhaps the biggest one is the growing isolation in which many people live their lives. Ours is a society barricaded behind security systems, answering machines, and caller ID—that is, when folks are at home at all. Harried and harassed by cell phones, beepers, sales calls, and other unwanted intrusions, people crave their privacy. Our electronic servants, designed to liberate us from the shackles of inconvenience, have imprisoned us to accessibility. The rebound effect is that we are swiftly becoming an introverted society, resistant even to the overtures of those concerned about our souls.

The frantic pace of life also impedes our ability to serve one another. Hospitality appears to be on the wane due in part to over-committed lifestyles. Funerals and weddings are often sparsely attended. Bleary-eyed brethren frequently drag themselves into Bible class unprepared to offer anything useful. The worship's final "Amen" triggers the buffet stampede, and woe to the poor preacher whose overtime sermon gives our religious neighbors the jump. Even our family can be shortchanged by our schedule. Shocking statistics indicate that the average parent only shares a few minutes of meaningful interaction with their children in the course of a week. And when Dad does make it to the soccer game, he misses Junior's goal because he is talking on the cell phone. We are a society too busy, too tired, too frazzled.

We often fail to serve adequately because we don't know each other. It takes time to build bridges of trust and communication that open new avenues of ministry. And serving doesn't take some flashy production or a boatload of talent: "And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward" (Mt. 10:42). Have we forgotten the warm glow that envelops us when we have made a meaningful contribution to someone's life? Have we no time to invest in the eternal welfare of others? Have we lost the point of belonging to a community of believers? The Lord's disciples must deny irresponsibility, take up their cross of duty and obligation, and follow Jesus who "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:28).

The Cross of Affluence

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Mt. 6:24).

The latter part of the twentieth century gave rise to a bustling economy and an unprecedented level of personal wealth. By nearly every economic standard Americans are richer per capita than at any other time in history and vastly more prosperous than most others in the world. So what is the problem? How is affluence a cross for the disciple of Jesus?

Materialism is deceptive. There is a fine line between possessing the things of this world and idolizing them. A wealthy young man once came to Jesus inquiring, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" (Mt. 19:16). The young man was confident that he had lived a godly life and that he had proper respect for the commands of God, yet he perceived that something was still amiss (Mt. 19:20). Jesus, of course, knew the man's weakness and deftly exposed it by one simple directive: "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Mt 19:21). Once again, Jesus replies to an apparently honest seeker in a way that seems overly stringent. But look again at Jesus' offer: *"… and you will have treasure in heaven."* Jesus promised eternal life in exchange for material divestiture. "But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions" (Mt. 19:22). The man chose to keep his possessions, but "he went away sorrowful." Why? Why didn't he leave Jesus joyfully? Because the allure of materialism is so powerful that men will sacrifice heaven in order to cling to their beloved possessions, even while knowing that those possessions will not bring ultimate happiness. This prompts Jesus to lament, "And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Mt. 19:24).

Prosperity produces dissatisfaction. To the person who idolizes material things, every financial increase creates a new level of want. Patience and foresight are trampled by an impulsiveness that has to have it *now.* Signs of materialism abound: The young couple who must work two jobs and bone-wearying overtime to keep pace with interest on their indebtedness, the teenager who misses worship while flipping burgers to pay for his new truck, the restless sense that everyone has gotten rich in the bull market but me, the seething envy over the good fortunes of others, accepting a lucrative promotion in an area of the country where churches are sparse (For the strong this may be an opportunity; for the weak it is disaster.). Satan is the master of the empty promise. If we are not content with a little, we would not be content with a lot.

Affluence breeds anxiety. Affluence confuses wants and needs, luxuries and necessities. The worries of the affluent are often centered not upon necessities but investments, college tuition, exorbitant house payments, buying and maintaining multiple vehicles, slow computers, and other amenities of a wealthy society. Chronic anxiety can produce a variety of negative effects from domestic discord to physical ailment to a pervasive sense of foreboding. The things that promise ease of life can rob us of peace of mind.

If we could learn to be satisfied with the staples of life and trust that God would adequately supply them, we would liberate ourselves from unnecessary anxiety. Jesus assures His disciples of what they need: Therefore do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about

tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble (Mt. 6:31-34).

Our penchant for living at the maximum limit of available resources sets off a chain reaction: Constant effort is needed to sustain a standard of living commensurate with our income. This continual struggle persuades us that we are not really *rich,* for rich connotes *effortless* wealth. This perception, in turn, causes us to exempt ourselves from the Scripture's warnings against materialism. Rich is what other people are. And when we turn a deaf ear to God, we become vulnerable to the mental agitation spawned by materialism. Affluence is mostly a state of mind. If you don't believe it, visit a third-world country and see if you don't feel a lot richer when you return home. And perhaps you will see fresh personal applications of the Lord's teaching on materialism. Such are the wiles of the devil.

Jesus' disciples must deny materialism, take up the cross of living in a society saturated with greed and covetousness, and follow Jesus who owned the universe but lived contentedly as a pauper.

The Cross of Confession

"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 10:32-33).

The first two-thirds of the twentieth century were basically favorable to the profession of Christianity in America. Though the majority may not have lived by the precepts of Christ, there was at least an acknowledgement of the fundamental connection between Judeo-Christian ethics and social well-being. Not anymore. The last third of the twentieth century saw an ominous shift from begrudging tolerance of Christianity to growing disenchantment and, lately, to open hostility against its tenets. Christians are gradually being pushed from the mainstream of society into the sandy shoals by a vociferous minority. Consider the following three challenges to those who would openly confess the name of Christ:

The Battleground Of Jesus' Identity. When Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" (Mt. 16:13), their answer reflected the controversy and confusion of the day: "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (Mt. 16:14). But when He inquired of their own conviction, Peter spoke for all disciples forever: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:16). Controversy over Jesus' true identity still rages today. Radical special interest groups co-opt Jesus for their own deviant purposes: Homosexuals make Him a queer; Mormons make Him a polygamist; feminists make Him a chauvinist; militias make Him a guerrilla; PETA makes Him a vegetarian; libertarians make Him non-judgmental. Nearly all deny His deity.

While there has always been disagreement about Jesus' identity, He is presently being impaled afresh on the cross of pluralism. So as to offend no one, His name and symbolism are methodically being expunged from the public arena. Crosses and creches are disappearing from municipal property. "In Jesus' name" has been dropped from many public prayers. School

children often cannot do reports on Him (or other Biblical characters, for that matter). Candidates in the last presidential election were roundly criticized for mentioning His name during their campaign. Even the calendar is changing: B.C. (Before Christ) is being replaced in academic circles by the more politically correct B.C.E. (Before the Christian Era).

The Lord's disciples must defend Jesus' identity. In order to do this we must know Him, *truly know Him.* We must know who He claimed to be, what credentials He displayed, what His expectations are. We must be intimately acquainted with Him, first because He is our hope of eternal life, but also because we must safeguard His true identity against those who wish to depersonalize Him.

The Flood of Immorality. It is a fatal mistake to underestimate the aggressiveness of evil. In spite of efforts to insulate our children and ourselves from exposure to wickedness, it infiltrates our homes. The music, profanity, violence, pornography, and liberalism of our culture insidiously invade through friends, toys, television (commercials are especially effective), movies, newspapers (lingerie ads in the front section?!), magazines, books, the internet, universities, and various other assault vehicles. Which of our major cultural institutions rest on a solid base of moral conservatism? The news media? Hollywood? The educational elite? The judiciary? If one concedes a grass roots conservative majority in our nation, are they the ones with the loudest voice in shaping our cultural mores? Absolutely not.

This is by design. When Jesus refuted the charge that He was casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, He observed: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?" (Mt. 12:25-26). By implication Jesus is teaching that Satan is rational, methodical, and deliberate in his quest to subvert faith. He is neither haphazard nor incompetent. He is presently eroding the levees of moral restraint and unleashing the floodwaters of ungodliness upon our society. The Lord's disciples in twenty-first century America face an onslaught of immorality like never before. Granted, other eras may have equaled or surpassed ours in evil, but never has iniquity been more ubiquitous. This flood of immorality is producing a spiritual drought. The pool of marital candidates for our children is becoming muddier. The reservoir of potential elders is shrinking. Congregations are drying up as the median age of membership rises. The devil has siphoned many from a generation which failed to detect his presence among them. And if the deluge continues unabated, Christians will eventually shoulder the cross of consequential suffering as God disciplines our nation for its excessive wickedness. We must sandbag our families and brethren against the rising tide of immorality.

The Accusation of Intolerance. To a society bent on deconstructing the family, retailing violence, drugging itself into a stupor, and otherwise plumbing the depths of depravity, Jesus and His disciples are an irritation. In fact, the current spin is that ungodliness is not harmful at all.

The harm lies in the prejudice and intolerance exhibited against such behavior. Christians are increasingly characterized as so judgmental, inflexible, and bigoted that they are considered a threat to the public welfare. Theirs is a religion of hate, it is alleged, and hate is the latest whipping boy of the less-than-loving political left. Perhaps it should be remembered that one of

the charges brought against Christians in the first century was, according to Tacitus, "hatred of the human race" (Schaff, 1:388). As the wag said: "It's déjà vu all over again." As societal drift continues in the direction of atheism and relativism, the boundaries of our convictions are increasingly violated. We are repeatedly forced to draw lines and take stands. This will inevitably produce a backlash against the Lord's people. And as that backlash becomes more severe, how shall we treat our antagonists? With yet another cross to bear: But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?…Therefore, you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect (Mt. 5:44-46, 48).

Jesus rebuked His enemies (Mt. 15:1-9), cornered them (Mt. 22:41-46), and held their feet to the fire (Mt. 23:1-36). But He also healed them (Mt. 26:51; cf. Lk. 22:51), forgave them (Lk. 23:34), taught them (Mt. 22:15-40), and loved them (Mt. 23:37-39). He ultimately died for them. Jesus was able to separate their treatment of Him from the fact that they were misguided souls in need of salvation. He exemplified His own universal ethic: "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Mt. 7:12). We must learn to do the same. Jesus' disciples must deny fear and trepidation, take up the cross of confession of their Lord, and follow Him into the tomb if such is the will of God.

Conclusion

One should not construe the above analysis as pessimism. My assignment was to evaluate the cost of discipleship, not its assets. Unless our cultural momentum changes, Christianity faces increasing hostility in the twenty-first century. If that judgment is wrong, I shall not regret my error but relish it. However, if God closes the door on our religious freedom, other doors of opportunity will open. Christians must respond to the questions of the new millennium with the ancient answers of competent elders, conscientious preachers, and courageous, committed disciples. We must rise to the occasion and let our light shine before men, that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven (Mt. 5:16).

Jesus plainly stated His expectations of discipleship: "And he who does not take up his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me" (Mt. 10:38). And what is our reward for bearing the cross of Christ? Peter inquires for us: "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" (Mt. 19:27). Jesus replies to him and to all, "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit everlasting life" (Mt. 19:29). Jesus Christ promises far more to His disciples than He asks from them.

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