

The Watchman

O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me (Ezekiel 33:7).

Volume 1, No. 8

Published Monthly At Elk City, Oklahoma

August, 2023

Six Degrees of Fellowshiping Erring Brethren: A Reminder to Stop Bidding Godspeed to Everyone

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Not again! Right? Many will huff and puff and stop reading in disgust at the idea of having to hear about the fellowship issue. Why do we have to bring this up again? someone might be thinking. Unfortunately, sin will ever be around us, one we cannot escape as long as this world exists. We must never get complacent concerning sin and those who partake in it. We must always be aware of those who partake and those who support the ones partaking in sinful activities.

Back in the 1990s, a movie by the title *Six Degrees of Separation* was released that told the story of a couple who helped a man down on his luck (or so they thought). When they discovered he had been conning them, they quickly kicked him out of their home and later discovered he had played the same con on several of the people they knew. Not long after the movie, a game was invented by three college guys, which they called “Six degrees of Kevin Bacon.” It showed that anyone in Hollywood was, at the most, six steps away from being linked to Kevin Bacon in some way or another. Kevin, at first, did not like the idea of the game, as he thought it was meant to make fun of him, when in fact it was only meant to prove the point he once made in a magazine article that he had worked with everybody in Hollywood. He later recanted his dislike for the game and even wrote in the introduction to the book the game makers created. An example of the six degrees of Kevin Bacon is as follows: George Clooney was in *Ocean’s Eleven* with Matt Damon who was in *The Departed* with Jack Nicholson, who was in *A Few Good Men* with Kevin Bacon. So, while Clooney was 3 steps away from Bacon and Nicholson was only one, all three (Clooney, Damon, and Nicholson) are associated with Kevin Bacon.

So how does the six degrees of Kevin Bacon have anything to do whatsoever with the fellowship issue? Plenty! There is in fact a direct correlation to both, as six degrees is akin to fellowship. The Greek words *koinonia*, *koinonos*, and *Metochē* denote “communion, sharing in common, partnership, a partaker.” There is no doubt that various actors associated with and were even partakers together in the same projects as Kevin Bacon. That doesn’t mean they were necessarily friends, or even close acquaintances, but they shared something in common, and although six steps separated them, they were still connected. That is what we are finding today with brother Dave Miller, our erring brother who has yet to repent of his error. The manner in which brethren are now ignoring this fact, one would think that the passing of time equaled repentance.

In April of 1990, when Brother Miller first involved himself in the unscriptural act of assisting the Brown Trail church in Euless, Texas in reaffirming their elders, brethren across the brotherhood were appalled, and rightly so. Unfortunately, they were not dismayed enough to stop supporting the school of preaching or asking Dave to conduct their gospel meetings. Then roughly ten years later, Brother Miller did it a second time, after the elders over a two-year period dared challenge one of Dave’s friends (Everett Chambers), asking him to explain his errors or leave the school. Everett chose to resign without repenting in the spring of 2000. Dave and some of the deacons met in secret to discuss how they could get a feel of the congregation toward the elders. After a couple more elders were installed that would agree with the reaffirmation, a secret meeting was held at Dave’s request with four of the seven elders and some thirty members, which included the deacons Dave had met with first. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss how to get rid of the three elders not in the secret meeting.

So many sins (the sins of rebellion, pride, strife, deceit, shedding innocent blood, among others) were committed by Dave and the over 30 other members at Brown Trail; it is hard to fathom how Christians could act in such a way to destroy the integrity of the three elders who were strong defenders of the truth. Brother Maxie Boren (now deceased) sent a letter brotherhood-wide, making excuses for their handling of the situation, a situation that was contrived by Brother Miller and the three or four deacons. This is not the only sin(s) Dave is involved in; he also believes in the false doctrine of “mental divorce,” where one can divorce their mate because they believe they never fully intended to be married to that person. This was the problem with Everett Chambers, who married his cousin for the purpose of getting in the United States and becoming a citizen. Once that occurred, the two divorced. He has never repented of this sin to my knowledge, as he would be required to turn himself in for fraud, rescind his citizenship, and possibly be sent back to his native country (those are the fruits of true repentance and restitution).

More and more brethren, who should know better but appear to care more about popularity than the truth, find themselves, at the least, six degrees from Dave Miller. In fact, entire congregations are associating themselves with his error per 2 John 9-11. John says all one needs do is “bid God’s speed” to be found guilty of partnering with Brother Miller and his error. John said it’s as if such individuals are actually teaching the error themselves. We are, of course, not concluding that the withholding of fellowship should occur no matter what the case. Personal disagreements are just that, personal, between two or more brethren; they are opinions, not doctrine. Nor are we speaking of matters of personal conscience as addressed in Romans 14. John is talking about obligatory doctrine that has been perverted, as we are (Gal. 1:6-9). Bidding Godspeed to someone denotes condoning the mission someone is on; it means to wish them success in their endeavor. It refers to one endorsement, such as congregations publicizing whether in bulletins, announcements, websites, Facebook pages, and the like certain events of other brethren, regardless of who the speaker is and who he or she is associated with. Such actions encourage members, who assume error would never be promoted in their respective congregations, to attend such gatherings. Instead, if mentioned, they should be warnings to our members not to attend and why. Whatever happened to Paul’s warning, “not to have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:11)? Apparently, it must no longer be printed in many Bibles by the way it is ignored.

Another erring brother is Phil Sanders, who believes the Disciples of Christ and First Christian Church are our brethren, and that children’s church is Scriptural, not to mention the fact that he attends one of the most unfaithful congregations in Oklahoma, the Edmond church of Christ. This congregation, for some time, has relished their participation in the social gospel, adding such “ministries” as art, athletics, vocational-technical training, golf, basketball, home repair, Jiu-Jitsu, cooking, and quilting (among other unscriptural things). Brother Sanders has no problem bidding Godspeed to fellow unfaithful congregations and brethren to raise money for Edmond’s television program *In Search of the Lord’s Way*.

He has been a regular speaker at Polishing the Pulpit, which is supposed to support truth, yet they continually invite erring brethren to be their speakers. He has been a speaker on the Affirming the Faith seminars held by North MacArthur church of Christ, Oklahoma City, a seminar that finds several erring brethren speaking each year. Brother Sanders is also a speaker and supporter of Freed-Hardeman and its lectureship, which also invites erring brethren to speak, as well as endorsing smut-filled art classes. Following is Brother Sanders six degrees of fellowshiping erring brethren: Chris McCurley regularly speaks at Affirming the Faith seminar with Wes McAdams who regularly speaks at the Red River Encampment with Jeff Jenkins who regularly speaks at Focal Point with Dan Winkler who regularly speaks at Polishing the Pulpit with Neal Pollard who regularly speaks at Feed-Hardeman with Phil Sanders. This is by no means the complete list of 2 John 9-11 violations by brother Sanders.

Next in line is B.J. Clarke, an ardent supporter and defender of Dave Miller, as are Brothers Keith Mosher, Tom Holland, Earl Edwards, Brian Kenyon, Barry Girder and Jody Apple. Brother Clarke, though an excellent speaker and writer, has chosen as dangerous a path as any who have thrown their support to brother Miller. But it doesn’t end there, as B.J. seems not to care about walking in the light as Christ is in the light (1 John 1:7). A regular speaker on the Memphis School of Preaching Lectures, an event that at one time never considered inviting the

unfaithful, has now thrown itself to the dogs. Brother Clarke also speaks at Polishing the Pulpit with other unfaithful brethren, as well as Focal Point and Standing in the Gap with other supporters of Dave Miller. Brother Clarke's six degrees of fellowshiping erring brethren is as follows: Jeff Jenkins has been a regular speaker at the Red River Encampment with Wes McAdams, who regularly speaks at the Affirming the Faith seminar with Steve Higgenbotham, who regularly speaks at Polishing the Pulpit with Hiram Kemp, who speaks regularly at Focal Point with Dan Winkler, who believes our fellowship circle is too narrow and speaks regularly at Memphis School of Preaching with none other than Brother B.J. Clarke.

Three brothers who have gained popularity in recent years are Michael Bonner, Terrance Brownlow Dindy, and Jason Rollo. These brothers gained fame when aligning themselves with erring brethren at the Memphis Lectures, Florida School of Preaching, Polishing the Pulpit, Standing in the Gap, Bear Valley, Lubbock Lectures, and Cold Springs and the BCS Men's Conference. Each of the aforementioned events would find these men extending the right hand of fellowship to Phil Sanders, Jeff Miller (Dave Miller's son), Denny Petrillo, Neal Pollard, among other erring brethren. It is one thing for a brother or sister to do so once by mistake, but to continually be found associating with the same erring brethren time and again demonstrates a complete hatred for God's Word.

Brother Dindy worked with the Florida School of Preaching as an instructor from 2016-2021 and on the board of directors from 2018-2021 before relocating to Texas to help start the Texas School of Preaching, where he presently is Director and Dean of Academics. Working with Brother Dindy at FSOP was Brian Kenyon and Hiram Kemp, both unfaithful brothers who ignore what God says about extending the right hand of fellowship. Brother Dindy's six degrees of fellowshiping erring brethren is as follows: Brother Richard Massey, though a beloved brother, speaker, and writer, has found himself speaking regularly at the 39th Street congregation in Independence, Missouri with Rick Popejoy who regularly speaks at the BCS Men's Conference with Michael Bonner, a regular speaker at Polishing the Pulpit with Dan Winkler, an avid supporter of FHU's use of nudes in their art classes along with fellow supporter of the same Jeff Jenkins, a regular speaker at the Florida School of Preaching during the time Brother Dindy worked at that school. As far as I know, no one has yet to hear a word from Brother Dindy concerning repentance or rebuke of those he spoke with.

Brother Michael Bonner is not as outgoing in his fellowshiping of error as Brother Dindy and Rollo have been, yet he is still guilty of violating God's law on the subject. Brother Bonner is guilty of the six degrees of fellowshiping erring brethren as follows: Brother Tim Kidwell preacher for the Branson church of Christ in Missouri, who holds an annual lectureship and invites such erring brethren as Jeff Miller, Steve Higgenbotham, Kirk Brothers, and Dan Winkler, and also invites Don Blackwell, who regularly speaks at the Memphis School of Preaching Lectures with B.J. Clarke, who has spoken at the Freed-Hardeman Lectures with Dan Winkler, who also supports the use of nudes in their art classes, and has spoken with Brother Dindy at the Memphis School of Preaching Lectures, who regularly speaks with Brother Bonner at the BCS Men's Conference.

Brother Jason Rollo is an excellent speaker, which caused many brethren to invite him to conduct their gospel meetings without checking his openness with the fellowship issue. He has been a regular at the Polishing the Pulpit, along with brothers Phil Sanders, B.J. Clarke, Dan Winkler, Jeff Miller, Wade Webster, Neal Pollard, Steve Higgenbotham, Billy Bland, and Keith Mosher. As a speaker at the Spiritual Sword Lectures, Brother Rollo has found himself in partnership with Paul Sain, Keith Mosher, Billy Bland, Wade Webster, Tom Wacaster, David Shannon, President of Freed-Hardeman University and avid supporter of nudity in their art classes. Brother Rollo also found himself endorsing Dave Miller and his reaffirmation of elders error, and Dave's defender, B.J. Clarke, at the Spiritual Sword Lectures. Brother Rollo now finds himself as Assistant Director of the Texas School of Preaching alongside Brother Dindy, and taking part in their annual BCS Men's Conference, inviting such erring brethren as Wade Webster, B.J. Clarke, Michael Shepherd, Michael Bonner, Tom Wacaster, and Johnie Scaggs as their speakers.

Men I once respected such as Mike Vestal, Tom Wacaster, Richard Massey, and Toney Smith now find themselves bidding Godspeed to error. When will it end? When will brethren stop supporting error and stand boldly for the truth as they once did, rather than setting it aside? It's

like the nation of Israel all over again, and we have not learned one lesson from their poor choices (Jer. 7:24; 15:6). I have known Brother Wacaster for some time, having worked together when he preached in Mt. Pleasant, Texas and I in Clarksville, Texas. Brother Massey's family and ours attended Bible Quizzes together in the Dallas area for several years. The same can be said for brother Rick Popejoy, who held a gospel meeting for us in Dubuque, Iowa, as well as speaking on our lectureship and weekly TV program. Brothers Vestal and Smith were my teachers in preaching school. It deeply saddens me that these brothers have chosen to cast their lot with those in error. As I said before, doing so once unknowingly is one thing, but to continually do so demonstrates an unwillingness to obey God.

Brothers Vestal and Wacaster are heavily involved with the Bear Valley School in Denver and the Memphis School of Preaching, where brethren support such errors as (1) Reaffirmation of elders, (2) Requiring Holy Spirit baptism for salvation, (3) Mental divorce, (4) Praying to Jesus and the Holy Spirit, (5) Denying Matthew 19:9, and (6) Support of porn in art classes. Brothers Massey and Smith have been regular speakers at the 39th Street church in Independence, Missouri. At one time, this lectureship was viewed as a defender of the faith, but in the last several years has joined the fray of those redacting or at the very least straddling the fence concerning 2 John 9-11. Bidding Godspeed to those, Jack Williams invites such speakers as Tim Kidwell, who speaks at the MSOP Lectures with Dan Winkler, Hiram Kemp, Glenn Hitchcock, and Denny Petrillo. Then, of course, there is Rick Popejoy having no problem extending the right hand of fellowship to Dave Miller, David Shannon, Paul Sain, Billy Bland, Keith Mosher, all supporters of David Miller, and brother Dindy, who ignores what God has said about fellowship.

In 2021, brother Tom Wacaster accepted the opportunity to speak at the 23rd Annual Lubbock Lectures. This particular lectureship exposed an error now making its way through the brotherhood, known as the "Renovated Earth" doctrine. Brother Wacaster spoke on the subject "Promoters of the Heaven on Earth Doctrine," promoters such as Jacob Rutledge, Clint and Veronica Brown, Matthew Benfield and Wes McAdams. This writer has recently learned that this error has made its way to Africa, where the brethren are having to fight against its further promotion. Other speakers at this particular lectureship and speaking out against this most venomous doctrine were Glenn Hitchcock, Brian Kenyon, Jason Rollo, Daniel Stearsman, and Terrance Dindy. I make mention of this because I find it odd that these hypocrites take part in a lectureship to expose this particular error yet have no problem whatsoever in fellowshipping those promoting it. Yes, believe it or not, in many cases there are at least six steps between these supposed defenders of the truth and the blasphemers, sometimes fewer than six steps. Let's see how true this is.

Brother Tom Wacaster has been a frequent speaker at the Memphis School of Preaching lectures with brother Dan Winkler, who believes our fellowship circle should encompass the whole world (a little hyperbole there), often speaks at Affirming the Faith in Oklahoma with brother Jeff Jenkins, who doesn't care who he fellowships and speaks regularly at Focal Point with brother Neal Pollard, who supports Mac Deaver and the necessity of Holy Spirit baptism. Brother Pollard is a regular at Polishing the Pulpit, as are many other erring brethren, but he has been found in fellowship with Phil Sanders, who believes children's church is authorized and that the members of the First Christian Church are brethren among other things. He has spoken with Wes McAdams at Freed-Hardeman University Lectures and supports their nudity in art. Wes McAdams, if you were not aware, is a proud supporter of the "Renovated Earth" doctrine. So, there you have it. Brother Wacaster, who preached against the heaven-on-earth doctrine, is only six fellowshipping steps away from one of its promoters.

Again, Brother Tom Wacaster spoke at the Lubbock Lectures against the "Renovated Earth" doctrine with Glenn Hitchcock, who regularly speaks at the Spiritual Sword Lectures with B.J. Clarke, who spoke at the Arise Workshop with Wade Webster, who spoke in 2017 at "Discipleship University" with Jacob Rutledge and Clint Brown, defenders of the heaven-on-earth doctrine, along with Mike Vestal, who has spoken at Focal Point with Wes McAdams and a staunch promoter of this radical error. We could go on and on to show how several of the speakers at the 23rd Annual Lubbock Lectures are hypocrites, speaking out of both sides of their mouths, saying the doctrine is false, while having no problem fellowshipping those involved and promoting the error. When will brethren stop this nonsense, thinking brethren will not recognize their hypocrisy and continue to treat them as unwavering defenders of the truth?

Apparently, it won't stop, not as long as brethren continue to look the other way. The Lord's army has far too many soldiers guilty of dereliction of duty, AWOL as well as deserters.

What is truly disturbing is the number of brethren who look the other way and continue to invite these and other men for gospel meetings, lectures, seminars, and the like. The only way to put a stop to the blatant violation of 2 John 9-11 is for brethren to get "woke" concerning the issue of who God authorizes us to fellowship and who He does not. At one time the majority of Christians and congregations wouldn't touch an erring brother with a 39-1/2-foot pole. It seems since the support and defense of brother Dave Miller by the Memphis School of Preaching that fellowship has become a non-issue; it's disparaged the torpedoes and full speed ahead. It doesn't matter what others believe and teach; I can still fellowship them while I myself may disagree. Talk about **situation ethics**. Paul reminds us, or least those who care about the truth, a brother can become "a heretic" later in life and therefore being subverted, sins, thereby condemning himself (Titus 3:10-11).

This writer is by no means articulating that each brother named within the pages of this article believes, teaches, or even practices error. There are some that actually teach error, such as Brothers Phil Sanders (Members of the Christian Church are brethren), Dan Winkler (Our fellowship circle is too narrow), Denny Petrillo (Reaffirmation of Elders), David Shannon (Nudity is approved of God for artistic purposes), while most believe it and teach simply by their bidding Godspeed to those who literally do teach error. Isn't that what John said? "For he that bideth him Godspeed is **partaker** of his evil deeds" (2 John 11, Emph. MSD). It's as if the one doing so actually teaches the error himself.

For our illustration, we used the example of the "six degrees of Kevin Bacon" to hopefully bring home the seriousness of the fellowship matter. It could be taken further out to the 20 degrees of fellowshipping erring brethren, but any rational person should get the idea without taking it that far. Every year when the various lectureships, encampments, seminars, and gospel meetings are announced, I stand in amazement that brethren choose to be so careless in their invitations, choosing not to vet their speakers, rather using popularity as the determining factor. As Brother Dan Winkler once stated (paraphrased), "If we choose not to widen our circle of fellowship, one day we in the church will find our circle so small, we will barely be able to stand in it ourselves." The problem with such thinking is that it does not demonstrate a hard headedness of the faithful but the attitude of others willing to join hands with the ungodly. I believe there is a lesson to be learned in the books of Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Ezekiel (Rom. 15:4), particularly the Valley of Dry Bones.

Crickets are Chirping While Russell Earl, OABS, and Jack Williams Sing Their Rendition of "The Sound of Silence"

Jerry C. Brewer

"Mainstream" preachers and elders are afflicted with terminal lockjaw. Some of those are Russell Earl, Jack Williams and the OABS overseers. In the January 2023 issue of this publication, Harrell Davidson wrote about Russell Earl's lecture on the Midwestern Lectureship in Independence, Missouri last Sept. when he slandered Guy N. Woods. It has been 7 months since brother Davidson wrote his article and not a peep has come from any of those men—only the sounds of chirping crickets. It could be that they are busy like Baal on Mount Carmel. "...Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he *is* a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, *or* peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked" (1 Ki. 18:27). Whatever the problem is, they are mute concerning the charges of brother Davidson.

In his lecture, brother Earl publicly slandered brother Guy N. Woods. Earl charged brother Woods with **1)** permitting alcoholic wine on the Lord's table **2)** speaking in meetings for congregations that used instrumental music and **3)** lied about brother Woods sermon on the topic of the "**Security of the Believer.**" Brother Davidson wrote,

...Even the lectureship director, Jack Williams, asked at **least twice** for all the vast audience worldwide through YouTube, to listen to your lesson. I cannot doubt your word or his but to listen and hear are two different things and then to misrepresent what was said is a terrible

observation and is sin in the sight of God.

Brother Davidson wrote to brother Earl in his January article: “I asked you in an email dated **October 6, 2022** the following question:

What church did he preach where the instrument was used and under what circumstances did he do so?” Your replied to me on **October 13, 2022**, saying: “It was a pattern he had that some of his day told me about. I do not know of the specific locations but such accounts have been told numerous times by honest brethren. Men who admired him, so why lie? Some other men of his day did the same but later in life stated it was not the thing to do.

Brother Davidson continued in his January article:

Brethren Earl and Williams, does it not seem strange to you that the sermon that brother Woods presented many years ago, and had preached it over 500 times that no one—**not one** solitary soul of the thousands who heard it—saw any error nor even a hint of false doctrine. But now he is suddenly a false teacher in 2022—**29 years after he died** and is **falsely charged** by brother **Earl**. Moreover, he was **falsely charged** by brother **Williams** who was the director of the 40th Midwest Lectureship who sanctioned brother Earl's lecture. I urge you brethren to consider your ways and repent of these false accusations.

Like an assassin under cover of night, brother Earl, took aim, assassinated brother Woods' character, then sped away like a drive-by shooter with Jack Williams in the driver's seat. He, Jack Williams, the overseers of OABS, Bill Goring, Mike Thompson and Ron Johnson are as culpable as Russell Earl. If Earl does not repent, they have a scriptural obligation to remove him from his position in OABS. Or, will those men continue singing their version of *The Sound of Silence* and remain as mute idols as Jeremiah described?

For the customs of the people *are* vain: for *one* cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They *are* upright as the palm tree, but speak not” (Jer. 10:3-5).

If a man does not have the courage to defend what he preaches, he should never mount the pulpit.

Protectors of the Flock Need Backbone

Jerry C. Brewer

When Luke penned Paul's last words to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, the Holy Spirit guided his hand in selecting a single word that graphically sums up and illustrates the work of elders. That word is, *poimaino*. According to McClintock and Strong, this word means, “to tend as a shepherd (or fig. supervisor) :- feed (cattle), rule” (Greek Dictionary of The New Testament, p. 59). The root word for *poimaino* is *poimen*, which McClintock and Strong define as, “shepherd, pastor” (ibid). The word *pastor* occurs only once in the New Testament in Ephesians 4:11, but it is the English rendition of the Latin term, *pastor*, which means *shepherd* and is also translated from *poimaino*. In both instances, the words *feed* and *pastor* should have been translated, *shepherd*. Elders are shepherds of the flocks over which they have the oversight and that word, selected by Divine genius in its simplicity, carries a depth and richness that fully describes the work of elders. After discussing the titles *episcopos* (bishop) and *elder* that belong to that office, J.W. McGarvey wrote,

The title Shepherd is still more significant than either of the other two. The Jewish shepherd was at once the ruler, the guide, the protector, and the companion of his flock. Often...he slept upon the ground beside his sheep at night. Sometimes, when prowling wolves came near to rend and scatter the flock, his courage was put to the test (John 10:12); and even the lion and the bear in early ages rose up against the brave defender of the sheep (1 Sam. 17:34-36). He did not drive them to water and to pasturage; but he called his own sheep by name, so familiar was he with every one of them, and he led them out, and went before them, and the sheep followed him, for they knew his voice (John 10:3-4) (*A Treatise on The Eldership*, 1962, DeHoff Publications, Murfreesboro, Tenn., p. 21, 22).

The significance of Paul's final charge to the Ephesian elders has been often overlooked by many who serve as elders in our time—some who are ignorant of their grave responsibilities and others who are not qualified to be elders in the first place. Here is what he said:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears (Acts 20:28-31).

Paul's charge requires elders to lead the flock to pasture and water and know them intimately. But above all, the shepherds are to guard the flock against the ravening wolves who come to rend the flock with false and divisive doctrines. That is the paramount responsibility that rests upon an elder's shoulders. Brother McGarvey again wrote,

This apostolic command, has failed to make its due impression on the English reader, because of the very inadequate translation of *poimaino*. Let it be noted, then, and never be forgotten, that the term employed in these passages **expressed the entire work of a shepherd**, of which feeding was very seldom even a part in the country where this use of the term originated. The shepherds of Judea, and those of Asia Minor, pastured their sheep throughout the entire year. Their duty was to guide them from place to place, to protect them from wild beasts, and to keep them from straying; but not to feed them. Here, then, are two specifications under the general idea of acting the shepherd, and they are strictly analogous to the work of the literal shepherd. It is made the duty of the eldership, first, to protect the congregation from false teachers from abroad; second, to guard carefully against the influence of schismatics within the congregation; third, to keep watch both within and without, like a shepherd night and day watching his flock, so as to be ready to act on the first appearance of danger from either direction (ibid, pp. 25, 26).

When Paul commanded the elders to **shepherd** the flock, they understood what the work of a shepherd was. The significance of his charge in Acts 20 was that he dwelt upon one particular aspect of a shepherd's work—**protecting the flock** from dangers within and without. The fitness of a shepherd to provide such protection was addressed by Paul when he gave the elder's qualifications to Titus as one who is, "holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Titus 1:9). The charge Paul gave included not only "ravening wolves" who would enter from without, but also those within, "from among your own selves."

As fallible humans, elders are no more immune from false teaching than the members they oversee. The church's apostasy in the centuries immediately following the death of the apostles was fueled by a change in the government of local congregations ("of your own selves") that resulted in the rise of the papacy and even in the apostolic era, false teachers sought to subvert the church ("shall grievous wolves enter in, not sparing the flock"). Paul dealt with Judaizers, especially among the Galatian churches, and John opposed the Gnostics in Asia Minor. The profound tragedy in our age is that far too many men who serve as elders have not the faintest idea of what it means to, "shepherd the flock." Many elders today consider themselves as some sort of "Board of Directors" who make policy and decide financial matters for the congregation. Others see themselves as political "representatives" selected by the congregation to carry out the will of the members, and others see themselves as figureheads, but none want to "shepherd the flock" and guard it against false teachers from without and within.

Among the qualities every Christian must possess is "virtue", set forth by Peter in these words: "And beside all this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue" (2 Pet. 1:5). This quality is indispensable to the Christian character and, certainly, no less so in the elder. **Virtue** is translated from the Greek, *arete*, which McClintock and Strong define as, "manliness (valor)." Its root word is *arrhen*, meaning "male (as stronger for lifting):-male, man." Since Peter says all Christians must possess this quality, it does not apply only to men, but is the quality of valor and courage to fight the good fight of faith. That quality must never be lacking in an elder. It is not enough for an elder to possess qualifications set forth in the New Testament for that office. He must also have the **valor**, or **courage**, to rule in the church. Paul said an elder must be, "One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for is a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)" (1 Tim. 3:4-5). Elders often fail to rule their own houses and, consequently, the church because they lack the courage to do so.

In our first citation from brother McGarvey, he referred to David's courage as the shepherd of

his father's flock.

And David said unto Saul, thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock. And I went after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth; and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him (1 Sam. 17:34-35).

Had David possessed the **kind** of valor many elders today possess, he would have turned tail and run at the appearance of those beasts threatening his father's flock. That is the reaction of many elders today when ravening wolves threaten the flock they are supposed to shepherd.

About 25 years ago, I preached in a congregation which had three elders. One of them had stirred trouble in the church for 17 years. Both he and his wife were divisive tongue-waggers, and proudly boasted that their **daughter** was an "**elder**" in the First Christian Church. The man had absolutely no qualifications for the eldership, but the church had made him one, anyway. Shortly after we moved there, his divisive actions brought matters to a head and one of the elders determined that we must do something about the situation. He took me with him and consulted with the third elder. Throughout the meeting, the third elder never committed himself to any course of action, but simply listened in silence. We left the meeting without any commitment from him and the next day I received his letter of resignation in the mail. He didn't even tell the congregation, but quietly slunk away by telling **me** by letter. His refusal to do what was right is a classic example of a cowardly elder who had no business being a shepherd of God's flock.

Later in the week, we had a congregational meeting in which we asked the divisive elder to repent. He arrogantly replied, "I have nothing to repent of" and his wife cursed a member of the church. At that point, the church withdrew fellowship from him. In the wake of that action, sympathizers with the disfellowshipped elder left the congregation and I was promptly fired for "tearing up the church." That's the result of a cowardly, virtueless, man being selected to "shepherd the flock". The church is in shambles today from denominational attitudes and practices that have infected it and been sanctioned by hireling shepherds.

Mechanical instruments of music have been introduced in congregations without virtuous shepherds. Parachurch organizations are supported by gutless elders, compromising the nature of the blood bought church of Christ. Every problem of fellowship and the teaching of error in the church could be stopped dead in its tracks by courageous shepherds. The elders of congregations in Central Oklahoma have been wringing their hands over the Pauls Valley church of Christ's sponsorship of their high school prom, but they do not have the **courage** to withdraw **fellowship from** and **mark Pauls Valley as apostate** (Rom. 16:17-18) and that's the plain truth.

There were false prophets among ancient Israel, in the days of the apostles and in the present day. "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction" (2 Pet. 2:1). Jesus said, "beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matt. 7:15) and Paul said, "...grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29).

How much clearer must a warning be before elders understand their grave responsibility to recognize wolves who tear and rend the flock of God? Every responsibility they have pales in comparison with this one, and those who allow such wolves to have free access to members of their congregations will go to judgment with the blood of those sheep on their hands, as much as if David had run away from the beasts of prey who attacked his father's flock. False teachers in our day are spiritual beasts of prey. As the lion and bear wanted to feed their own bellies on Jesse's sheep, today's wolves who have crept into the church want to feed on the sheep of Jesus Christ. Paul said they serve not God, but their own bellies (Rom. 16:17). Elders who refuse to protect the flock are complicit in the destruction of it—as much so as Eli was complicit in the wickedness of his sons (1 Sam. 2)—and God will not hold them guiltless.

“Youth Ministries” of Mainstream Churches of Christ

Jerry C. Brewer

Denominations have always been experts at attracting youth. Central to that are their special “youth groups” identified by catchy acronyms like the MYF (Methodist Youth Fellowship) or CYO (Catholic Youth Organization). In The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) it is the CYF (Christian Youth Fellowship). In recent years, mainstream churches of Christ have had to play “catch-up” to their sister denominations’ youth-baiting efforts. That led to an explosion of youth ministers on their payrolls.

Additionally, mainstream “Christian” colleges found a new market by adding “Youth & Family Ministry” to their degree programs. Thus, a new office was added to the church that neither Jesus, Peter, Paul, Titus, nor Timothy ever knew—“The Youth Minister.” Of course, they never knew about youth ministry because it was borrowed from denominations—a program first initiated in the 1800s:

The beginnings of youth ministry were in the mid-19th century, in the wake of the industrial revolution. Churches took note of all the young men who moved into central urban areas to work in factories. Laypersons who noticed these young adults working six days a week and gallivanting about town on Sundays, aspired to educate them.

After World War I, the focus of many youth ministries began to shift from outreach and conversion to education and understanding of faith. It was during this time that teenagers began to think theologically as well as gain a social awareness of the world around them. From the 1930s to the 1960s, the churches emphasized fellowship and theological understanding.

The 1940s was also the beginning of parachurch ministries. Young Life was founded by Jim Rayburn in 1941. The Young Life parachurch model proved to be effective at reaching young people and by the early 1950s, parachurch youth ministries with full-time staff flourished. Billy Graham was the first full-time parachurch worker for Youth for Christ (YfC) in the USA. This movement spread quickly around the world.

During the 1950s, parachurch ministries grew rapidly in most Christianized countries, and the focus of activity was on large events, known as Rallies, and stadium events, known as Crusades. The emphasis was on promoting inter-church activities (between local denominational churches)—mainly in the format of youth rallies—the type of stadium events made popular by YfC.

Denominations stopped publishing youth group (Sunday School) resources and large group gatherings dwindled down into small meetings and then into nothing. Then specific church-based activities for youth emerged, as Friday night youth groups began.

During the 1970s, many denominations implemented strategies for modernizing existing youth ministry in the hopes of reviving it. This is the point where differences in youth ministry started to emerge on a denominational basis instead of organization to organization.

During the early 1980s, the counseling revolution hit the church with its emphasis on honesty and openness. Professional counselors began to be employed in churches. This influenced youth groups and the Bible study meetings became “fellowship groups” or “home groups” with an emphasis on caring and meeting people. It was also during the 1980s that a large number of local church youth pastors began expressing the desire to stay in youth ministry as a lifelong career (Wikipedia).

“Youth Ministry” is a growing and lucrative component of mainstream churches who are being fed by colleges with graduates sporting degrees in “Youth and Family Ministry.” A mainstream church that does not have a “Youth Minister,” either on its payroll or as a volunteer, is a rarity and many of them are women. Here is a small sampling of mainstream churches’ youth programs and youth ministers from their websites:

Muskogee, Oklahoma Church of Christ

We want every student at MCC to know Jesus, live for him daily and invite their friends to know Jesus with them. Our desire is to grow in faith and love for one another. There are plenty of opportunities to get involved during both the school year and the summer, including small group Bible study, devotionals, weekend activities, retreats, summer camp, mission projects, and much more (www.mccweb.org)

Dripping Springs, Texas church of Christ

Parker LaGrange is a 2018 graduate of the Bear Valley Bible Institute in Denver, Colorado. Parker has had a heart for Youth and Family Ministry for a very long time now and is excited to be working to do everything he can to bring souls to Christ and strengthen the faith of our young people. Parker is married to Amanda LaGrange and the two of them are very passionate about making Youth Ministry as Biblical and fun as it can... (www.dschurchofchrist.com)

Cabot, Arkansas Church of Christ

T.J. Davidson is our Minister to Families with Teenagers. T.J and his wife, Tessa, have been married since 2006 and have two daughters, Eden and Hannah. He graduated from Harding University in 2006 and began working at the Cabot Church of Christ in 2008. “This is not just my church family, this is my family. I love the people here and it is amazing to see the work that God is doing here.” (www.cabotchurch.com).

Clear Creek Church of Christ, Hixson, Tennessee

Mitchell Halstead—Middle School Minister. Mitchell was born north of Houston, TX and considers himself blessed to have spent his first nineteen years living in the same community and attending the same church where his father ministered for over 25 years. He and his eventual wife Kayla met in youth group and later attended Abilene Christian University, where he earned a degree in Biblical Studies with a focus on Youth Ministry (www.clearcreekcoc.org).

Niceville, Florida Church of Christ

Under “Children’s Ministry” We are committed to embracing all children individually, nurturing their spirit and guiding them toward discovering and creating a personal relationship with God (www.nicevillechurchofchrist.org)

Leander, Texas Church of Christ

Alan Gower—Youth Minister I began serving the Leander Church of Christ as the Youth Minister in March of 2012. Prior to coming to Leander, I served as the Youth Minister at the Elliott Street Church of Christ in Breckenridge, TX as I continued my studies at Abilene Christian University. I graduated from ACU in 2008 with a Bachelor’s Degree in Youth and Family Ministry and then again in 2011 with the Master of Divinity degree (www.leanderchurchofchrist.org).

Auburn, Alabama Church of Christ Matt Tignor, Youth Minister Matt arrived at Auburn Church of Christ as the Youth Minister in July 2008. Before his arrival in Auburn, he served as Youth Minister in Kingston, Tennessee. Matt is a graduate of Harding University with a degree in Youth and Family Ministry. Matt has served as an intern at Central Church of Christ in Athens, Alabama, Central Church of Christ in Huntsville, Alabama, and Twickenham Church of Christ, Huntsville (www.auburnchurch.org).

Del City, Oklahoma Church of Christ

Youth Minister - Jonathan “Monk” Juarez Jonathan is our Youth Minister at Del City. He grew up in the small town of Celina, Texas where his passion for ministry first started. While there, Jonathan receive the nickname “Monk”, short for monkey, for his incredible climbing skills. He then went off to attend Oklahoma Christian University where he graduated in 2017 with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Youth & Family Ministry. He works with our students in the 7th-12th grades. He loves talking about Jesus, movies, sports, and music (www.delcitychurch.org).

Elmwood Church of Christ, Layfayette, Indiana

Youth and Family Minister Phil Travis began working with Elmwood as our Youth Ministry Intern in the summer of 2006. He graduated from Rochester College with a Bachelors degree in Youth and Family Ministry and joined our staff as an Associate Minister in May 2007. He became the Campus Minister at Elmwood in May of 2008 and transitioned to our Youth and Family Minister in July of 2013. Phil has a passion for encouraging students to explore their faith and establish their own beliefs. He believes that youth and family ministry should be relational, educational, and missional (www.elmwood-church.org).

Edmond, Oklahoma Church of Christ John Frias joined the ministry team at Edmond prior to the summer of 2016. After serving as the graduate assistant in youth ministry for two years, John’s ministry expanded to a full-time role as youth minister in February 2019. In this role, John works alongside Jeremy, youth deacons & sponsors, and parents to minister to students in 7th-12th grades...John is passionate about his faith and excited to help teens grow in their faith. He enjoys watching movies, writing papers, and hanging out with his wife (not in that order!)

(www.edmondchurchofchrist.com).

Una Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee

John Green, Youth Minister John is a high school teacher and football coach at Lipscomb Academy. John is married to Jennifer and they have two boys, Daniel and Luke. Jennifer and John have a passion for teaching and leading youth (www.unachurchofchrist.com).

The woeful plaint is often heard that “The church is losing its young people.” Here is a bit of news: The church does **not have** any young people. The church did not bring them into the world and the church is not charged with rearing them. The Lord left those things to **parents**.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. and God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth...(Gen. 1:27-28).

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

The aged women likewise...that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home. good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed (Titus 2:2, 4-5).

No where in Holy Writ can be found a syllable authorizing the church to assume the God-given responsibilities of parents.

The Niceville, Florida church says, “We are committed to embracing all children individually, nurturing their spirit and guiding them toward discovering and creating a personal relationship with God.” God told fathers to “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” And the Ashdodic language, “a personal relationship with God” is not part of that. Does anyone even know what that means? From Pentecost in Acts 2 through Revelation 22, one will search in vain for any church of Christ that had a “Youth Minister.”

Let me tell you about a “youth minister” that I knew many years ago. He and his wife were good people who loved the young people in their charge. They entertained them, taking them to amusement parks, on fishing and hunting trips, to zoos, and on numerous other outings..

This youth minister had a keen sense of right and wrong and instilled that into his young people. He taught them that they should give a day’s work for a day’s pay, always tell the truth, practice common courtesy in all their relationships, and respect God, their elders, and the property of others.

His wife was his faithful co-worker. She regularly prepared meals for the young people, and she and her husband were more than willing to give the young people rides to school. In fact, they encouraged all of them to get an education and saw to it that they were in worship on Sunday morning and on Sunday evening and Wednesday evening.

But there were some unusual things about this youth minister. He never finished high school, had no degree in “Youth and Family Ministry,” and did not even begin his youth ministry until he was 30 years old—far beyond the age when he should have been able to “understand” the problems of young people. Stranger still, he was not even a member of the Lord’s church at that time. He actually administered spankings to the young people who misbehaved, but no one ever accused him of “child abuse” for meting out corporal punishment. He once spanked one of the young people for lying and told him he would receive that kind of punishment a lot more quickly for lying than he would for telling the truth. Another time, one of the young people stole some items from another person’s yard. The youth minister promptly took the young man to the house where they had been stolen, had him return them and apologize to the family from whom he took them.

His methods were admittedly unorthodox by today’s standards, but this youth minister was somewhat successful. He served in that capacity for 28 years before he was baptized into Christ at the age of 57. No church would have hired a youth minister with his credentials—even if he had been a Christian for those 28 years. He and his wife nurtured those young people into adulthood and every one of them became a Christian. One of their young people today is a song leader and another is a Gospel preacher.

Now I am sure that youth minister’s wife had a great deal of influence on his decision to become a Christian, and I know she had much influence over that group of young people.

When that youth minister died in 1979 and his young people were gathered around him with their children and watched as he slipped away from the toils of this life.

His name was Clyde, but his young people called him “Dad.” Fulfilling his duties as a father, he would have scoffed at the idea of having someone called a “Youth Minister” employed by the church to “train” his children. He took care of those matters according to Paul’s injunction (Eph. 6:4). May God give us more “youth ministers” like Clyde Brewer. (Brewer, *The Gospel Journal*, 21).

Luke recorded the Lord’s progress from a child to adulthood in these words: “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and, in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). Within this verse is a child’s proper four-fold development:

1. Mental (wisdom).
2. Physical (stature).
3. Spiritual (in favor with God).
4. Social (in favor with man).

This verse prioritizes a child’s proper development. It begins at birth, teaching and instilling wisdom in the infant. It continues in the physical development, then spiritual development and finally social relations. That formula is for **parents** to rear children—**not** the church

Too often, parents prioritize the physical, social and mental and neglect the spiritual. They shuffle kids off to athletics as soon as they can toss a ball, emphasize their popularity among peers, then hand them over to public schools to propagandize them. Then, if there is any spiritual development, kids are handed to mainstream “Youth Ministers” for a few “devos” some Bible classes, puppet shows, and food, fun, and fellowship. One wonders how Joseph and Mary were able to raise Jesus from a child without a “Youth Minister” in Nazareth.

The church owes young people the same thing it owes everyone else in the world—preaching the unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls (Rom. 1:16-17). The church is not charged with providing special programs for diverse groups, whether pre-schoolers, elementary students, high school or college groups. To create “positions” in the church to cater to different groups is not authorized in the New Testament and is denominational to the core. The church is not the home and the home is not the church. Each of those divinely established institutions has a function within its own sphere. Neither may usurp the function of the other, but the church does that when it presumes to rear and train children. Another mainstream example is the Westside Church of Christ in Norman, Okla.:

Westside Kids

Four Key Questions:

Who? Westside KIDS is geared toward children ages 0–5th grade and also their family (sic).

Why? The mission of this group is to provide the platform for growing your child’s relationship with God.

Where? The “destination”, after providing growth opportunities through Westside KIDS, is a healthy transition into the Westside Active Youth (6th-12th grade).

What? We accomplish our mission through the use of Biblical education/instruction, fun and engaging activities and service projects.

Here are some examples:

Vacation Bible School (Camp Kurios)

Summer Camp

Back to School Bash

Treat Yo Self (Parents’ Night Out)

Trunk or Treat/Fall Carnival

Westside KIDS Serve!

Westside KIDS Christmas Party

Westside KIDS Family Devotionals

...and more! (www.westsidechurchofchrist.org).

Large numbers of these youth groups’ activities center around trips, food, fun, games, and entertainment to attract young people. In Nov., 2002, the Custer Ave. church in Clinton, Okla.

sponsored a concert for area youth at their high school gymnasium by a group called *Vocal Union* and mass mailed invitations to area churches. When we received the announcement I went to *Vocal Union's* website and sent a message to singer Steve Camping. asking him about their religious affiliations. He replied by email:

Jerry,

Thanks for checking out the website! Hope you liked the music on there, we are constantly out touring the country, keep your eye on the tour schedule...we may get to your neighborhood soon. As for your question on my church. I live in Reno, NV and go to a small non-denominational community church here. To tell you the truth, we have a rather diverse church background amongst our members, we have Church of Christ, Seventh Day Adventist, CMA, Christian Reformed...its amazing what God is doing in our group and the harmony we continually find in Him. I hope this answers your questions. Keep God the main focus of your life and you will never go wrong!

In Him,

Steve C (Email message, Nov. 6, 2002)

After receiving Camping's reply, I mailed about 40 letters to area churches in Oklahoma and Texas (including the Clinton elders) warning them that Vocal Union's members were denominationalists. I did not receive a single reply in defense of that spectacle performed by Seventh Day Adventists, Mennonites and members of "The Church of Christ." What I **did** receive was criticism for not first going to the Clinton church before mailing the letters.

Matt. 18:15 is a favorite sugar stick of liberals when their errors are exposed: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." If that was the basis of their criticism, they abused and misused that verse. The focus of the Lord's teaching is on a **private** matter between brethren, **not public dissemination** of error. If Matt. 18:15 meant what liberals say it means, Jesus needed to go to the Pharisees privately before condemning their errors (Matt. 23). The legs of the lame are truly unequal.

Whatever draws people (youth or otherwise) to the church is what keeps them there and entertainment gimmicks are the bait in mainstream churches.

Young people need the same thing older folks need—the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16-17). The gospel is still God's power to save and the Word of God is still bread and water for the soul—for the young as well as the old. It is still able to edify (Acts 30:32) and give life (John 6:63).

Children need homes where the word of God is revered and Christ is honored. Only in that way will they be prepared to meet the trials which shall surely come in their lives. The late G. K. Wallace painted a picture of his own youth in which spiritual matters needed no gimmicks or recreation to hold his interest:

Church life was important. We did not know that there was such a thing as an alternate plan for Sunday than to go to church. We were taught to start planning on Saturday, shining shoes, etc., for Sunday. We traveled to church in a wagon, or on horseback. The older boys rode a horse, except me, and I rode a mule named Peanut...For two years I attended church in Belcherville, Texas, and worshiped in the home of Joe Reeves. There were only six for worship. When the Lord's Supper was over, sister Reeves would clean the table and we would have lunch. I was the only young person there. I was the young people's class, and no gimmicks were needed to keep me going to church (Wallace, G.K., *Autobiography And Retirement Sermons*, 1983, High Springs, FL, Mary Lois Forrester, pp. 4, 5).

Without gimmicks or recreation provided to him by the church, G.K. Wallace matured to become a faithful gospel preacher, educator, and defender of the faith. Twenty-first century youth need the same thing youth needed when Paul penned the Ephesian epistle in the first century—**parents** who will bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

On the other hand, the home has an obligation to the local church. Parents must teach their children to love God, His Word, His Son, and the church for which Jesus died. They must teach them fidelity to the Lord and His church and the importance of worshiping and working according to the New Testament pattern.

Young people's interest in the local church mirrors that of their parents. Mothers and fathers who allow worldly things to take precedence over spiritual matters in their lives will have children who do the same. Many times families leave small churches that are sound in the faith for

larger mainstream churches, saying, “We want our kids to be with other young people.” Many of those we have known even drive several miles to a neighboring town because they believe it is the church’s responsibility to “provide something for the young people.” And mainstream churches are good at that. If having “our kids to be with other young people” is the standard for where families worship, they could as easily save the drive and attend a denominational church in their own town. Denominations are even better at entertaining youth and differ nothing from mainstream churches of Christ.

A Final “Youth Minister” Caveat

Mainstream churches and parents who employ “Youth Ministers” **may** be placing young people in dangerous hands. That warning is not capricious and parents need to heed it. Here is documentation from Steven Minor's Dec. 12, 2019 sermon at Wylie, Texas:

Back in about the year 2000, there was an event—ongoing event—for youth ministers in the churches of Christ. It started in Colorado Springs and every off-year was somewhere else, Florida, California, always coming back to Colorado Springs. This year it was in Colorado Springs and I know what happened; I know what happened first-hand because my brother called me after he left the conference. He said that, “Steve you wouldn't believe that hundreds of us, literally six to eight hundred youth ministers around the United States descended on the hotel. They took up the whole hotel. There was nobody in the hotel for the weekend, except for the youth ministers of the churches of Christ.” He said, “toward the end, the directors of the conference stopped us all at the end of the deal and said we've got to let you know some things.” The directors—there were three of them, my understanding, maybe a couple—were confronted by the General Manager of the hotel venue and said, “We need to talk. Thought you might want to know this” What? “He said, “We've never had a weekend yet like this weekend, that so many men rented so many X-Rated movies. This has been the biggest weekend we've ever had,” because all of that goes through their system and is recorded on their computer system. And we don't want to talk about it!? That's your folks. That's our people! Those are **our** leaders. Of young people. And because it's some kind of a taboo thing, we're going to just look around the elephant in the room?

To any faithful, rational Christian who is living and breathing and loves God and His pattern for the church plainly revealed in the New Testament, nothing else needs to be said. When 600-800 “Youth Ministers” from churches of Christ **set a weekend record for renting a hotel's X-Rated movies, something is dangerously wrong.** Was that incident covered up? Did anyone read about it 23 years ago? Why or why not? “Youth Ministers” are sacred cows with Mainstream churches of Christ. How long will parents stop giving their children to them?

Let the church be the church and let godly elders watch for souls as they who must give account to the Chief Shepherd at the last day. Let them shepherd the young, as well as the old, who are in their care, and let parents be what God intends for them to be. Let them lead their children in righteous ways, so that it may be said of them as it was of Abraham: “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment...” (Gen. 18:19).

EDITOR'S NOTE: Reprinted from the “The Thing That Hath Been...”, The Cycle of Apostasy Vol. 2.

Emotional Arguments are Not Valid Ones

Mike Demory

A woman wheels her husband into a lawyers office and tells the attorney she wants a divorce because her husband has Alzheimer's and this is the only way they can afford to care for him. The attorney lets them know this is fraud and that he would be liable if he proceeded. The woman then fesses up and says she has found someone else, and asks, “**shouldn't I be allowed some enjoyment in the last years of my life?**” Numerous are the arguments such as this that are meant not only to tug at the heart strings, but to substantiate making irrational and unscriptural decisions. I recall President Bush's decision not allowing new stem cell lines for research purposes. Yet the emotional call of the world tried desperately to turn people's opinions about embryonic stem cell's as the only way to cure disease; after all, since stem cell lines already exist, why not use them, right?

We hear the world crying out for the ‘civil rights’ of sodomites, and the transgendered, claiming they deserve the same ‘rights’ as everyone else; when the fact is they already do have the

same rights as everyone else. This is only a ploy to grant them extra and special rights that the rest of us do not possess, **and to legitimize ungodly behavior**. But our emotions get in the way of rational thought, as we are told how two men or women just want to love one another and be considered family for the purpose of life decisions. The reality is that English Common Law grants life decisions to anyone without being granted protected status.

Another of the emotional arguments that permeates our society concerns end of life and terminal illness decisions. I realize that the potential loss of a loved one is something that none of us wants to face, but it is a fact of life, as God never meant for this life to be a permanent one. Instead of finding ways to hold on to living in this world, we should be preparing for and earnestly desiring a blessed life in the next world at the coming of our Lord. Most emotional arguments have to do with children who are waiting for a heart, or some other life giving organ. Our hearts and sympathies are extended to these young ones who have yet to enjoy all aspects of this material world; but when our emotions run amuck to the point that rational thought refuses to consider the consequences of what is being called for we endanger not only our own souls, but the souls of all who take part. Organ donation requires the killing of another human being, just as embryonic stem cell's do.

As Christians, we need to seriously think before we react to the emotional appeals of the world, for this is only another of the multitude of devices the devil uses to capture our souls. Think about the woman wanting a divorce because her husband has Alzheimer's, and the vows she took, **"for better or worse, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer."** Not to mention that fornication is the **only** reason that God allows divorce (Matt. 19:9). Many of the emotional pleas that we fall for are nothing more than situation ethics being packaged in a different way. We hear about the plea save and protect our children from gun violence, which is a noble thing, but what about the children in abusive homes, or kidnapped for sex trafficking, or the violence in the womb caused by abortion? If the plea to protect our children was sincere, then it would not focus upon one aspect, but every type of violence.

In the past year we have heard emotionalism being used to justify stealing our liberties. One day it's wear a mask, then the next day, science proves masks do not work, then a month later its mandate masks. Now it's get the non-vaccine so you can be free to travel like you did before the **"plandemic."** Now, those having received the non-vaccine must still wear a mask that science has proved does not work. This fear mongering is all about control, and is not based in logic. **If** vaccines are for the purpose of protecting us from a virus, **then** why should it matter if others are not vaccinated? This would be akin to saying that your seat belt will not work until all people wear them!

Even the church has succumb to the world's way of thinking, when through emotional pleas it justifies instrumental music because it occurs minutes 'after' the worship "hour;" or Pentecostal songs, drama, and puppets, because it's for the kids or during VBS not worship; and lock-ins so that the youth have something to do, otherwise we might lose them. **We need more watchmen on the wall** who want the Lord's church to be recognizably different, rather than like the churches of men (Ezek. 33; 2 Cor. 6:17). No, emotional arguments are not valid arguments, but are merely other tools of the devil to make New Testament Christians blend in with the world, rather than stand out.

Dangers of Church Growth

Jerry Moffitt

We hear a lot today regarding church growth, and many emphasize it, numbers, and bigness. This writer thinks there are some dangers in this attitude which seems to be sweeping through the brotherhood. But we would first state that church growth can be good. It can mean that a congregation is alive, working, and evangelizing the lost through the preaching and teaching of the gospel. This type of growth is sound and biblical (Acts 2:41; 4:4; Phi. 1:5; 1 The. 1:8). But in this article we want to stress abuses and dangers. Let us begin.

Competition in the Social and Entertainment Mode: To foster the swelling of a congregation, a swelling by additions of Christians from other congregations and false "conversions" from the denominations (which simply is not evangelistic growth), a church may generate programs which are attractive to worldly-minded people. So we see bulletins with calendars em-

phasizing parties, games, Christmas caroling, birthdays, retreats, catered meals, open houses, seminars on marriage enrichment, gymnasiums, swimming parties, jogging for Christ, singles car-tune-up days, etc.

Individual Christians may want to provide times for special groups to be together and do some things, and this is good. But is this the work of the church, as we see that work in the Scriptures? We now have ministers of youth, ministers of singles, movies nights, camp outs, all led by ministers of this and ministers of that. Is this the work of the church, or have we drifted? Why can we not have individual Christians do these things which are good, and allow the church to do its spiritual and God-given work?

But the sad fact is, all this is probably going to stay and greatly increase, because churches feel that they must compete with other churches and denominations in the social and entertainment areas or lose members. So the spirit of competition (and compromise) heats up, and like a boy running downhill, cannot stop. Yet all of this justifies itself under the philosophy of church growth, numbers, ministering to the whole man, and bigness. But when you convert and train brethren in this emphasis, you have to feed them with these things to keep them “faithful.” So what does an eldership have? They have a church full of people who must have those “needs” met in ever increasing doses, brethren and half-converted denominationalists who are not there out of love for truth, willingness to sacrifice, desire to accept denial, and a heart aching for biblical truth (Mark 8:34-35; Luke 14:26-32; 13:24). Is all this how Jesus caught the hearts of thousands, and how He mustered a vast army of disciples willing to die for Him at the drop of a hat?

Compromise: “Preacher, you are too negative. You better tone it down, or...you might actually turn someone off or run someone away!” We have a brotherhood that cannot any longer swallow that hard kind of preaching which always makes strong Christians. Elders now can only tolerate a preacher who gives pink tea, a diet of candy, and a monotonous rat-a-tattat on how to feel good, real good! Congregations are weak and susceptible to gangrene because they have a bad case of sugar diabetes. There is a lack, rather a dearth of plain old sin hating, God-fearing, distinctive, hard, doctrinal preaching. And some lament that we do not have more of the same sweet stuff. Why? We might lose someone to another congregation. Jesus was pretty rough, and the disciples were like some of our brethren: “Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?” (Mat. 15:12).

When we gather to ourselves elders and preachers who care less what the Holy Spirit said regarding marriage and divorce, modesty, morality, drunkenness, work, giving of self, and sacrifice, and care more about growth (swelling), numbers, and bigness, we, as a candlestick, are on the way toward being snuffed out.

Over Emphasis on Numbers: The “numbers-at-all-costs” philosophy will make us pay dearly in real spiritual health. It is not wrong to be small every now and then, It may indicate that a church realizes that the way is strait and narrow (Mat. 7:13-14), and that though many are called, few are chosen (Mat. 22:14). Jesus said, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:24). No, it’s not wrong to be small (Rev. 3:4). God can get along nicely with the Gideon few. In fact, vast numbers should make us lift an eyebrow or two and do some real deep soul-searching. The vast majority of people at any given time, in biblical history, were generally either lost or wrong. Take Noah’s day, Sodom and Gomorrah, and Elijah on Mount Carmel and afterward.

There is nothing wrong, in many cases, if a church loses members and dwindles in size. It may be a good indication that itching ears were not scratched (2 Tim. 4:1-4), rebellious people had the law laid down, toes were righteously stepped on, and like an evil, dark, foul spirit, droves of hypocrites and compromisers sought greener pastures back down in Egypt.

I kind of like the preacher who, when asked how his meeting went, replied, “Great! Seven people got up and walked out!” It may be that such was necessary. But we have preachers who never had antagonists throw the tiniest handful of dust in the air while they spoke (Acts 22:23). Stephen had the face of an angel and they gnashed on him with their teeth when he cut them to the heart (Acts 6:15; 7:54).

The truth is, church growth is not always an indication as to how well the congregation is doing. Congregations should probably be weighed, not counted. Numbers are rarely a sign of true

spirituality, and growth is not always a sign of the redeemed being added to the ranks of just men made perfect (Heb. 12:23). Real growth is evangelistic growth, and can be present even when numerical growth is not. Let us then emphasize spiritual growth...growth that comes only by working hard and diligently fighting for the truth (Jude 3)!



“How Long Halt Ye Between Two Opinions?”

Jerry C. Brewer

Some people think if they ignore sin it will go away, or maybe they think that God has statute of limitations on sin. That seems to be the attitude among some churches of Christ in Central Oklahoma. The Maysville, Okla. preacher, Jess Whitlock, wrote the following on May 1, 2023:

I subscribe to the *News Star*, a newspaper published in Pauls Valley that covers Garvin County, Oklahoma. I was reading the April 28 edition of the *News Star*. A large ad captured my attention on page 6. It read:

“The 2023 PV Junior class parents would like to thank the following businesses and individuals for their contributions to the Pauls Valley promenade and after prom party. These contributions were essential in making these events successful. Thank you!”

There was a list of about 100 businesses—banks, drug stores, restaurants, shops, etc., plus three churches: House church, the Compassion church, and the **Pauls Valley Church of Christ**. I could not believe my eyes! This paper covers all of Garvin County. In that list of sponsors, the very first name listed was the “**Pauls Valley Church of Christ**”! This sin was made public and has brought shame upon the name of the church for which Jesus Christ died (Matt. 16:18; Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:22-23).

I thought about it, I prayed about it, and on May 1 I sent a letter to the elders in Pauls Valley...I asked those men one question: “How can the Lord’s church promote, sponsor, and approve of the prom and the practices thereof?” Although they have my contact information, as of today’s date I have not heard one word from the eldership at Pauls Valley.

On June 24 there was still no word from the brethren at Pauls Valley. I sent a **second** letter to the elders, informing them that I knew that other brethren had now contacted them as well. I expressed my concern over their public sin and asked them to let brethren know if they would stand with the Lord or with the world.

On Sunday morning June 25, I preached a lesson at Maysville entitled “Hops and Proms and Such Like” based upon Galatians 5:19-21. On June 27 I mailed an outline of that sermon to the elders of the church at Pauls Valley. I dealt forthrightly with the sinfulness of the modern-day dance. May the Lord open their eyes.

The Pauls Valley church of Christ was included in a news report of sponsors of that city’s high school **prom** (a dance). That report was published April 28, three months ago. Pauls Valley’s elders have ignored any communication with other congregation about their sin. However, craven cowards slithered out of the woodwork and sent brother Whitlock an anonymous short article from *Gospel Minutes* (a “mainstream” periodical—the kind that Pauls Valley would read). He sent this to me on July 18:

I received an interesting bit of mail in yesterday’s mail. It was addressed to me and sent in care of the church at P.O. Box 562 here in Maysville. When I opened the envelope an old article by Clem Thurman, cut out of an old issue of *Gospel Minutes* fell out. It was in the Question & Answer section. The question asked about “Negative Preaching.” Brother Clem (Thurman, co-editor) said that it was important to point out sin; but to be careful not to hurt feelings. He thought when a sin was identified we need to show the way to help out of the sin. I agree with his basic thought. The way to get out of supporting the Prom is to repent and stop giving support to it! Not that hard to figure out.

...I cannot say for sure that this mail came from any of the elders at Pauls Valley, because the letter had no return address. There was no note or signature with the article. It was mailed from Oklahoma City, according to the postmark. It was sent by a person or persons unknown. The sender did not have the courage to give me any way in which to respond.

One would think that faithful Christians in that area would be up-in-arms over Pauls Valley’s cavalier attitude about their fellowship with denominations and sponsoring dancing. How long will area churches of Christ remain silence in the face of the shame that Pauls Valley brought upon Christ and His church? They seem to be as mute as Israel at Mount Carmel when Elijah

challenged them:

Now therefore send, *and* gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table. So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel. And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD *be* God, follow him: but if Baal, *then* follow him. And the people answered him not a word (1 Kings 18:19-21).

It has been **three months** since the report was published. What has been done? Will area elders and congregations have the backbone to withdraw from the Pauls Valley church of Christ? How long will they halt between two opinions? Will they follow Jesus Christ or slink away and follow political correctness and will they answer Him not a word? The latter will send them to hell.

Order your Digital Format of
“The Thing That Hath Been...: The Cycle of Apostasy”
By Sending Your Email Address
To jbbbbb Brewer@gmail.com

Where Are the Elders? Fast Asleep?

Little boy blue, Come blow your horn,
The sheep's in the meadow, The cow's in the corn.
But where is the boy Who looks after the sheep?
He's under a haystack, Fast asleep.

Lester Kamp

The church is under assault! False teachers are abundant! False doctrines are being accepted or ignored as matters of indifference. Many denominational doctrines once strongly opposed by brethren are now being taught and practiced by brethren. Fellowship as practiced by many is open ended; i.e., the right hand of fellowship is being extended to everyone who meets in a building with “Church of Christ” on its sign (and sometimes that is not even necessary). For some, entertainment (plays, gymnasiums, magic tricks, puppet shows, dances, choirs, and the like) has become another work of the church. The unique, Biblical nature of the church is being destroyed. Many congregations are **not** following the Biblical pattern and have become nothing more than another denomination.

What is the problem? Much of the fault for all this apostasy **lies at the feet of sleeping elders** who are not willing to fulfill their Scriptural responsibility to keep the church “holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27). Elders have the God-given responsibility to guard the congregation that they shepherd against “grievous wolves” who will cause souls to be lost (Acts 20:28-31). Elders are to be willing and able to convict the gainsayer” (i.e., those that speak against the Truth). They are to realize that those that are opposed to the Word of God must have their mouths stopped (Titus 1:9-11). This takes not only a knowledge of God’s Word but also some spiritual backbone (courage). Anything that is being taught or practiced which is “contrary to sound doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:10; Rom. 16:17) must be strongly opposed. God demands, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). Notice: “no fellowship” and “reprove them.”

Elders have a responsibility to speak out against (reprove) the unfruitful works of darkness. This means they must be willing to identify false doctrine so that the congregation can be warned and be on guard against it. It means that false teachers must be identified even by name as Paul warned brethren about Hymenaeus and Alexander who had made “shipwreck of the faith” (1 Tim. 1:19-20) and Hymenaeus and Philetus who were destroying the faith of some by teaching that the resurrection had already taken place (2 Tim. 2:16-18). The Holy Spirit guided Paul to write,

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).

“Mark them” means to identify and to eye very closely. These false teachers may be within the

congregation, or they may be in other places. Elders are to protect the souls of those that they shepherd realizing that they will give account for them—"they watch for your souls" (Heb. 13:17). They are spiritual watchmen—alert to the dangers that are present and on guard against those that bring destruction to the body of Christ.

Elders are to lead the congregation where they serve so that they do not fellowship "the unfruitful works of darkness." This obligation extends beyond the membership of the local church. It includes congregations (particularly other congregations in the same town or area). Fellowship is first and foremost with God: "truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Our obligation is to fellowship those that are in fellowship with God by walking (living) in the light of God's Word (1 John 1:7). Our obligation includes not even giving endorsement (bidding God speed) to those who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9-11). Elders are to lead the congregation where they serve in these things. Fellowship is restricted to only those who are in fellowship with God. Dub McClish correctly observed,

The local church cannot protect and preserve its own purity if it harbors rank sin in its bosom. It must lovingly but firmly make the Scriptural options clear to the apostate brother—his repentance or his expulsion from their fellowship. Neither can a faithful congregation protect and preserve its own pure reputation and identity as the Church of Christ in a community if it does not make the same Scriptural options clear to the liberal, digressive, apostate congregation that may be on the other side of town and that is still dishonestly displaying the name "Church of Christ" on its building. **Neglect or refusal of a faithful church to do this constitutes dereliction of duty to its own members, to the heretical group, and to those outside the church.** (emph. added, lk) ¹

The problem is that too many elders are not willing to stand fast in the faith, to hate every false way (Psa. 119:104, 128). Peter, in describing the presence of false teachers (and their false doctrines), stated, "And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (2 Pet. 2:2). Not only are souls within the church lost because of false teaching, but the reputation and influence of the "way of truth" is harmed by the presence (and tolerance) of false doctrines. It brings shame on the church for which Jesus died when sin is ignored, tolerated, or silently accepted.

Where are the elders who have the courage to oppose error and to keep the church pure? Where are the elders who are set for the defense of the Gospel of Christ (Phlp. 1:17)? Where are the elders who are willing to "stand in the gap" (Eze. 22:30)? Where are the elders who are willing to "watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit (live) like men, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13)? Where are the elders who are willing to protect the congregation where they serve from wolves? Where are the elders who are willing only to fellowship individuals and congregations who are in fellowship with God? Where are the elders who are "strong and of good courage" (Jos. 10:25) and are willing to stand against those who teach and practice false doctrine? Where are the elders who are willing to sacrifice of themselves if necessary to protect the "sheep" under their care (John 10:11)? Where are the elders who realize that they will report to the "chief Shepherd" one day for the way in which they have kept the church pure and protected it from those who would lead it down the broad way that ends in destruction (1 Pet. 5:4; Matt. 7:13-14)?

The church is under attack. Where are these elders? Where are the spiritual watchmen?

The watchman has to watch over and for the souls committed to his charge. We are assailed with the changeable winds of doctrine in all their force; we have the same blight of formality resting on the outward church; the same seeds of error and discord sown now as in the days of old. Against all these we must watch as we love the souls of our flock; yea, we must lift up our voice, and spare not, warning them against all the evils of sin, Satan, and the world.²

Silence is unacceptable! "When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; **but his blood will I require at thine hand.**" (Ezek. 33:8, emph. added, lk).

End Notes

1. "One Congregation May Withdraw From Another Congregation," thescripturecache.com
2. *Biblical Illustrator*, Ezekiel 33:7-9, esword.net

Women Preachers: Seeds of Apostasy Sown at OCC in 1981

W.R. Craig

The annual lectureship at Oklahoma Christian College (OCC) was held the last week in January. The student newspaper, *The Talon*, appeared on January 30th (1981, Ed.) following the lectureship. Included in this issue of *The Talon* is an editorial entitled, "Women's Role in Church Debated, Misunderstood." The editorial is a plea for women to participate in all activities of the church including female participation in the assembly and elsewhere. The old women's lib plea that to deny them this "right" is to relegate them to "second class" Christians.

The assumption is made, quote, "Those who are in favor of increased female participation in the assembly and elsewhere do so very often from a position of strong Biblical authority." The editor then says some "fundamental" authors will be presented "in favor of these new and challenging ideas." The first "fundamental author" quoted is Hoy Ledbetter editor of *Integrity* magazine! The poor misguided editor evidently does not know the difference in a **fundamentalist** and a **radical liberal**. *Integrity* is one of the most, if not the most, liberal magazine published among members of churches of Christ. The editor then quotes from a **Baptist** and a **Methodist** (Broadman and Adam Clarke) and from Burton Coffman in the Firm Foundation Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians who quotes J.W. McGarvey. Having read the last reference, both Coffman and McGarvey seem to be lifted out of context by the editor. Neither Coffman nor McGarvey approve women preaching and leading in other activities in the assemblies.

However, the part of the editorial that "takes the cake" is, this: "Also, one OCC Bible professor admitted that, even with the established views on women's role, women should be allowed to serve as usherettes or to serve on the Lord's table, except for the uneasiness that such a practice would bring on many members." Now, what can we expect if those who are supposed to be teaching the scriptures to immature students plant such unscriptural ideas in their minds in the guise of explaining the meaning of the scriptures? I don't know who the OCC Bible professor was who made this statement, but if OCC expects to have the support of Bible believing Christians, the administrators had better ferret him out and move him out. Strange, isn't it, how men of such loose convictions on the teachings of scriptures seem to be increasingly numerous in the Bible Departments of **our** "Christian" colleges?

The editor further declares, "But the discussions on this subject are often more emotional than rational." How about making them more **scriptural**! The Bible is plain on the subject, but our "women's lib" generation in the church don't "cotton" to the idea of woman's subjection to man. They just don't want to accept that Bible teaching that God made man the head of woman, and that there are some things that only man can do...preach in the assemblies, teach classes made up of both men and women...serve at the Lord's table, etc.

Our crusading editor concludes by saying, "Granted, many women are satisfied with their present duties in the church. They would rather not preach or lead singing. Fine. Many men would rather not also." Now that is a profound argument, isn't it? What has the editor proved? Well, she's proved to me, at least, that she aims to do as she pleases, regardless of what the Bible teaches. She will go on seeking preachers and editors who will agree with her in order to justify what she is determined to do. And it seems she is finding them among the Bible faculty at OCC.

The editor's final proof text is, quote: "After a recent sermon representing the traditional view [she denies scriptural authority and dismisses it as tradition, WRC] was preached at an area congregation, I asked an OCC graduate how she felt during the talk. She replied, "Second class."

The venerable and lamented J.D. Tant used to exclaim, "Brethren, we're drifting." If he were here today, he'd have to change that warning. We are no longer drifting into apostasy, we're drowning in it!

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was written in 1981. The seeds of apostasy which the article warned about, was sown by Oklahoma Christian College. Today, it is ripe and hanging on the vine in "mainstream churches of Christ."

