



An Urgent Need For Scriptural Church Growth

If the church is to succeed in carrying our Christ's "Great Commission" to take the gospel into all the world, it is essential that there be continual scriptural church growth.

The need for church growth, as so forcefully set forth and emphasized in the New Testament, involves two important areas of growth, **in number** and in **spiritual advancement**.

That it is God's purpose that the church grow numerically is clearly set forth in the Lord's "Great Commission" (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16). A paramount objective of Paul in his missionary journeys was to bring about numerical growth of the church by conversions. There is no lack of emphasis on church growth in a number of the New Testament books. That quantity is important cannot be denied. Christ came to "*seek and to save*" the lost (Lk. 19:10), and that involves numbers in an important way.

That the church is expected to grow in the area of spiritual maturity or advancement (edification) is evident from the continual emphasis upon it in the New Testament. The apostle Peter used the following figure to emphasize the need for spiritual growth: "*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby*" (I Pet. 2:2). To the church at Corinth Paul wrote: "*...seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church*" (I Cor. 14:12). In verse 26, he said, "*Let all things be done unto edifying.*" In Ephesians 4:11-12, Paul mentions a number of gifts which were given "*for the edifying of the body of Christ.*" The Hebrew Christians were rebuked for having failed to grow. They still needed "milk" when they should have been able to take "strong meat." They were still babes spiritually when they should have become adults (Heb. 5:12-14).

One passage in which attention is called to **growth** in both areas concerns the work of Paul and Timothy as they visited congregations in various cities. Of their work it is said: "*And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily*" (Acts 16:5). It is a matter of fact that the Lord's church is not now growing as God intended. We shall now give attention to the **urgent** need for **growth** in both areas, from the standpoint of that which is **scriptural** in nature. In my almost fifty years of preaching I have never seen a time when the need for true church growth was as urgent as now!

I. THE NEED FOR GROWTH IN NUMBER

Every true conversion is a great accomplishment. Therefore, the greater the number of conversions the greater the accomplishment. The urgent need for growth in numbers in our day is seen in the fact that there is very little, if any, growth of the church numerically. It is very likely that the church has actually decreased in number within the past few years. Conversions are the exceptions rather than the rule in most gospel meetings today. A majority of the congregations with which I am acquainted are decreasing in number rather than increasing. We are reminded of the lack of growth when we see various congregations where there are few young people and virtually no small children. These congregations are literally dying out as the elderly members pass on from this life.

The congregations which are growing in number are in many cases those which have gone into the entertainment business, as they turn attention to pleasing people rather than God. Like so many of the denominational churches, some of our brethren are turning more and more to a "social gospel," where the emphasis is on the "here and now" rather than on the "hereafter." The doctrinal stance of those growing congregations is often such that the lives of the members are scarcely affected; just about anything is accepted.

A scenario which is becoming more common in many places today is that of a larger congregation in a city or small town which draws members from the surrounding smaller congregations. Some members in the small congregations may become disgruntled about something or are even involved in some error. They move to the larger congregations where they may be received with "open arms" with virtually "no questions asked." The larger congregation increases in number while the smaller ones get even smaller. This is merely a shifting of members which may not represent any spiritual growth.

Another reason given for members gravitating to larger and more liberal congregations is that "there are more things for the young people to do." These "things to do" are often various forms of entertainment provided by the church, which is not a work God has given the church to do, but is rather a responsibility of the home.

The urgent need for growth in numbers involves the true conversion of individuals. The switching of members from one place to another is not the **scriptural growth** in numbers under consideration. Neither does the increase in the number of people who are not truly converted constitute desirable growth. Though often thought of in that way, baptisms cannot always be equated with conversions. In our foreign mission work it is much more often the case than here, that a great many people are "baptized" when only a much smaller number have actually been converted. Numbers are often the goal.

Another important matter of consideration is that when there is an increase in number, but a drift by some into various forms of liberalism which constitute unfaithfulness to God, numerical growth may have actually declined when considered from a scriptural standpoint. Quantity in the absence of quality doesn't represent desirable growth.

II. THE NEED FOR GROWTH IN SPIRITUAL ADVANCEMENT

When there is a lack of spiritual growth it will often be reflected in a lack of true numerical growth. Those who continue to be "babes" cannot be counted on to convert others. They are not going to be "teachers" (Heb. 5:12-14). This should help us see the great importance of spiritual growth or edification and also encourage the same.

The need for spiritual growth is often seen today in members who are not even faithful in attending the scheduled services of the congregation where they are members. For them to attend activities at other congregations would be a most unusual thing. Another area where the lack of growth is evident (often among those mentioned above) is the failure to study God's word. In Bible classes or in other situations where the Bible is discussed, the lack of knowledge often shines through in some, even those who have been members of the church for years. This same category of church members seldom read religious publications by sound brethren and are usually in the dark as to what is happening within our own brotherhood in general.

Among the tragedies resulting from lack of spiritual growth is the susceptibility to the many errors which are being propagated today, by people both within and without the church. The prophet, Hosea, sounded a warning relating to this matter when he said: *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge"* (4:6).

The church is suffering greatly today due to a lack of qualified leadership. Brethren who meet God's qualifications for an elder (I Tim. 3; Titus 1) are few and far between. The primary reason for this is the lack of spiritual growth. There is also a serious lack of qualified Bible teachers, due to the same reason. The appetite for spiritual food (I Pet. 2:2) is definitely waning.

There is some good in pointing out the evidence of a lack of spiritual growth (which is abundant), but it is much better to also point out means by which that growth can be accomplished, and encourage the use of those means. Since God has made church growth a highest priority it stands to reason that he would supply us with instruction as to how this can be accomplished. We should be ever thankful that He has done this through His all-sufficient word (2 Tim. 3:16-17). In the following we shall give attention to some of the means by which the noble objective of church growth may be accomplished in both areas under consideration.

III. ENCOURAGING GROWTH IN NUMBERS

The only way the church can grow in number is by the true conversion of souls. Conversion can be effected only by the power of God's word, the gospel (Rom. 1:16-17). This means that all other ways are counterfeit. When a study is made of the conversions recorded in Acts (The book of conversions), and other scriptures relating to that important subject, a clear pattern emerges. Notwithstanding the fact that some would ridicule such, a number of steps must be taken before conversion becomes a reality. Those steps are found to be as follows:

- ◆ 1. Faith in God (Heb. 11:6) and belief in Jesus Christ (Jno. 8:24).
- ◆ 2. Repentance (Lk. 13:3; Acts 17:30-31).
- ◆ 3. Confession of faith in Christ (Rom. 10:10).
- ◆ 4. Baptism into Christ (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:27).

When people have not taken the above steps they have not gone far enough to be Christians. Though in some instances people may be counted in an increase in numbers when they have not in accordance with truth taken all these steps, they are not added to the number of Christians by the Lord (Acts 2:47). Numbers look good on reports, and they are good when for real, but no numerical growth has taken place when conversions are not for real.

In poverty stricken countries it is not uncommon for people to "get baptized" because of the lure of the *"loaves"* (Jno. 6:26). But, oh! This makes for a glowing report to people back home. God knows the facts and it is He who registers true scriptural growth in numbers. It

appears that in some instances some brethren "back home" are overly impressed with numbers and evaluate a mission effort as either good or bad, solely on the basis of the "number baptized."

True growth in numbers is the result of evangelistic efforts both at home and in the mission field. Christians cannot control the results of their evangelistic efforts even when those efforts are strictly in harmony with God's will. However, we are accountable for putting forth evangelistic efforts. Our dismal failure, in view of our potential, to engage in evangelism accounts, in a large measure, for the serious lack of growth in numbers.

There is not the willingness on the part of a great many congregations to use the Lord's money to reach the lost. Though I'm indeed thankful for the good response I have received from a number of brethren over the years in supplying needed funds for mission efforts, some brethren are not going to have much part in mission efforts at home or anywhere else. From a personal standpoint, the financial support for me and my wife has diminished this year, and it is taking of my time to find support.

I am dismayed at the actions of many brethren today who are apparently taken in by the quest for numbers. I speak of the various gimmicks and gadgets which are being employed to attract people. They are too many in variety to name here. Some of these things may draw some people, just like the "loaves" drew some people in the time of Christ (John 6:26), but they don't convert; only the gospel can do that (Rom. 1:16-17). There are two things about the above practice which are of great concern. One, these things are not authorized as a work of the church or as a "means" to a good "end." Two, this practice suggests a lack of faith in God's word to accomplish its God-given purpose of conversion. Brethren must think they need to help God out, at least just a little, if not much more.

IV. ENCOURAGING GROWTH IN SPIRITUAL ADVANCEMENT

The figure of shepherds and their flocks is used in the New Testament to represent congregations of the Lord's people, Christians. Of course, Christ is the "*chief Shepherd*" (I Pet. 5:4). On the local congregational level, the elders (also called "pastors") are pictured as shepherds overseeing the flock (congregation). When Paul addressed the Ephesian elders at Miletus he charged them: "*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...*" (Acts 20:28-31). Peter wrote the elders: "*Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock*" (I Pet. 5:2-3).

One does not have to be a sheep farmer (a rancher) to understand how important it is for a flock of sheep to be fed properly, tended or cared for in various ways, and protected from the "*wolves*" if they are to thrive and do well. In fact, the growth and well-being of those sheep will depend upon the care of the shepherds more than upon anyone else.

Now, the New Testament, though it has quite a bit to say about shepherds and sheep, was not designed by God as a manual on sheep raising. Its purpose is much higher. It is a book which includes instructions on how to care for Christians (sheep) from the time of their birth (conversion) until their death, including the part the elders (shepherds) are to play in the process.

Many Christians (sheep) are not growing today because they are not being fed nourishing food. Some are being fed contaminated food which is bringing about spiritual diseases, which if not cured will result in their spiritual death. Sadly, once one accepts a diet of contaminated food there is little likelihood there will ever be a return to a healthy diet of *"all the counsel of God"* (Acts 20:27), and that alone. Some seem to like contaminated food.

In more and more cases, even here in the "Bible Belt," the shepherds are not only failing to protect their flocks (*"the flock of God"*) from the *"wolves,"* they are actually inviting the wolves into the midst of their flocks, giving them free access to all the sheep, even the innocent, easily influenced lambs.

The shepherds, if true to the *"chief Shepherd,"* will not allow any wolves to have access to the flock. Neither will they stand back on *"mark[ing]"* those wolves so that the sheep will be warned of danger (Rom. 16:17-18). The faithful shepherds will keep close watch on their sheep. If one needs attention they are there to give it. They are *"watch[ing]"* for their souls (Heb. 13:17).

When a sheep becomes unruly and gets into trouble the faithful shepherds will give attention to the problem. If the sheep cannot, through repentance, be brought back to faithfulness within the flock, the shepherds will take the lead in *"Purge[ing] out the old leaven,"* delivering the offender *"unto Satan,"* no longer keeping company with that offending sheep (I Cor. 5:5-11). Paul calls this action *"Withdraw[ing] yourselves from every brother who walketh disorderly"* (2 Thess. 3:6).

Another important way in which shepherds can encourage spiritual growth is by keeping the flock fully informed in every way which relates to spiritual development of the flock. This includes the present as well as plans for the future and urging the flock to have a part in those plans. The most active and effective Christians are not those who are uninformed.

The greatest responsibility for encouraging scriptural church growth within the flock falls upon the elders. They are to see that the flock is fed the proper spiritual food. This involves Bible teachers, preachers and/or individuals who might teach other members. This responsibility involves the purity of the flock and keeping it free from the evil influence of those who are in sin and cannot be brought to repentance. When the elders' responsibility is fulfilled as God intended, then they are free from the blood of those who go into sin. Neither elders or anyone else, can force people to live according to God's revealed will for man.

V. THE INDIVIDUAL'S RESPONSIBILITY IN CHURCH GROWTH

Ultimately, the responsibility for church growth devolves upon every individual member of the church to a certain degree. Apart from the individual there can be no church growth. But each person has a responsibility to grow spiritually, and this will be reflected in numbers as people are converted.

Though the elders have a great and fearsome responsibility to feed and care for the flock, they cannot "force feed" the sheep. Some members will not *"obey them that have the rule"* over them, that is, the elders (Heb. 13:17).

There are many instances in which those who are serving as shepherds are failing in their responsibilities, as we have pointed out. In such cases, the members of the flock would go to their own destruction if they did not see to their own needs, feeding themselves as best they could. Scriptural elders can be of great help to the individual members, but there are still many things the individual must do for self. There are so many instances in the New Testament where

the individual is taught to do for self things related to spiritual growth which others cannot do for one. Godly elders are helpful but they cannot live a life of service for others.

As individuals: teachers, preachers, elders and members in general, we are faced with a great challenge in living the Christian life and playing our part in the spiritual growth which God intended.

We are faced with error within the church as never before in our entire lives. We must be loyal servants in "*contend[ing] for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints*" (Jude 3). We must take heed to Paul's advice: "*Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong*" (I Cor. 16:13). But at the same time we must not forget our responsibility (and opportunity) to grow "*strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*" (Eph. 6:10) as individuals, thereby helping to fill the **Urgent Need For Scriptural Church Growth** as God intended that we should.

- - Walter W. Pigg

Editor's Note:

The above, with a few minor changes, was written and carried in *Banner of Truth* in 1996. Looking back and comparing the present condition of the church with that of almost five years ago, the need for **Scriptural Church Growth** is just as urgent today, if not more so, than it was then. If ever there was a time for **Soldiers of Christ** to **arise and put their armor on**, it is NOW!

Right Choices

Marvin L. Weir

Hezekiah was the son of wicked king, Ahaz, and yet he is known as one of Judah's godly kings. His name means "Jehovah is strength," and this 13th king of Judah courageously initiated religious reforms to remove the idolatry that had permeated the kingdom. Hezekiah was committed to doing the right and godly thing—something all Christians should do today.

Hezekiah chose the right motive in that "*he did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah...*" (2 Kings 18:3). He did not trust in his own feelings, nor was he influenced by the traditions of his father. Hezekiah chose to do right because it was the right thing to do. Joshua made the same choice years earlier when he said, "*And if it seem evil unto you to serve Jehovah, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell, but as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah*" (Josh. 24:15).

Christians must also choose the right motive—worshipping and serving God because it is the right thing to do. Faithfulness to the Lord and His church should not be dependent upon one's good health and financial prosperity. God's warning is clear that one should "*not follow a multitude to do evil...*" (Exo. 23:2). Any weak and sickly fish can drift with the current.

Hezekiah put things in their right place! *"He removed the high places, and brake the pillars, and cut down the Asherah: and he brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made; for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it..."* (2 Kings 18:4). Hezekiah knew that the things that pleased God had to be established, and the things that dishonored God had to be removed.

Brethren, worldly things belong in the world—not in the Lord's church! Denominations have attempted for years to entice folks to "join them" by offering worldly gimmicks as bait. Now the Lord's church in many areas is doing its very best to imitate the denominations. Entertainment and drama are two worldly idols being used today to attract people, and they need to be torn down and cast out as they belong to the world—not in the church!

Hezekiah called things by their right name! He called the brazen serpent he broke into pieces *"Nehustan,"* a mere piece of brass. The brazen serpent had served its purpose years before (Num. 21:9), but there people set it up as an idol and burned incense to it. This mere piece of brass was not an object of worship, and did not now need to be exalted or honored in a religious way.

Instead of the attempt today at trying to pass off worldly gimmicks and gadgets as objects of worship, wouldn't it be great if people would just call them what they are? The Lord's church is not a recreational center or a social club. The Lord did not intend for people to assemble together on the first day of the week to be entertained, but rather to worship the true and living God in spirit and truth.

Hezekiah placed his confidence in the right person. *"He trusted in Jehovah, the God of Israel..."*(2 Kings 18:5). So many are trusting in either themselves or some man. The Bible warns, *"He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool..."* (Prov. 28:26).

Think about the "church" of which you may be a member. Who established or founded it? A mere man is not our Savior (Tit. 2:13), and neither did a mere man shed his blood to purchase the Lord's church (Acts 20:28). If you desire to go to heaven, you must make sure your confidence is in the right person.

Hezekiah walked in the right path. The Scriptures declare, *"For he clave to Jehovah; he departed not from following him, but kept his commandments which Jehovah commanded Moses"* (2 Kings 18:6). Regardless of what some believe, there can be no cleaving unto Christ without following Him (I Pet. 2:21). To love and follow Christ is to obey His every command (Jno. 14:15; I Jno. 5:3).

It is true that *"his servants ye are to whom ye obey"* (Rom. 6:16). May we put away sinful objects and idols and strive to be *"servants of righteousness"* (Rom. 6:18).

5810 Liberty Grove Rd.
Rowlett, TX 75030

Moving??? Send address change!

Evidence Of God In A Butterfly

Have you ever wondered WHY, concerning the life and flight of the Monarch butterfly? My wife and I were driving from Arkansas to a city in Missouri in late September. Fall was in the air. As we drove along the countryside we saw thousands of the beautiful Monarch butterflies. None was flying north, east, or west, except in a few rare instances where something had interfered with the flight. With the few exceptions, all were flying in a southwesterly direction. It was very evident that by some means they knew where they were going.

The common Monarch butterfly, black and orange in color, is a native of North America, and may be found from Florida and Mexico even unto Canada. The Monarch is migratory, traveling as far as Canada in summer and as far south as the mountains of central Mexico, where literally millions of them spend the winter, resting and conserving energy for their journey northward in the spring. In migration some travel as much as 2,000 miles one way.

With the coming of spring these Monarchs which winter in Mexico, begin to move northward. On their journey the mating of the male and female takes place, after which the male soon dies. The female begins the four stages of development of her offspring by the laying of her eggs. The eggs soon hatch and the larva feed on milkweed, from which a toxin is derived and stored in the larva. This will serve a very useful purpose in that it makes the adult undesirable as food for birds; the toxin makes birds vomit. After some time in the pupa stage a new adult Monarch comes forth and begins a northeastward journey to the land from whence its parents came. But this new Monarch has never been to the land where it is going for the summer, nor has it been to Mexico where it will be going when fall arrives in the north, that is, unless something befalls it somewhere along the way in the course of its journey.

The life and flight of the Monarch butterfly, as briefly described above, provokes a number of interesting questions for those who trust in man and his wisdom of the world rather than in God. One might do well to consider the following: 1. How does the Monarch know that it should head for the mountains of Mexico with the approach of autumn? It has never done such a thing before. 2. How does this ordinary butterfly know which direction to take to get to Mexico? It has certainly never been to Mexico and its parents are now dead. 3. What keeps the Monarch from flying north into Canada? East into the Atlantic Ocean? Or, west into the Pacific? 4. Does this butterfly somehow know that flying to the north, east or west would put an end to its kind? 5. How does the adult female know to lay her eggs on a particular kind of milkweed, which is suitable food for the larva, but which also produces a toxin which prevents her offspring from becoming "bird food" during a one way journey of up to 2,000 miles?

How long have monarch butterflies been going to Mexico? I don't know the answer to that question, but I would imagine they have been doing this for a long time and will continue to do so, if time stands. But, then, I don't claim to be an authority on butterflies. Some who do so claim, admit that they **do not know** why those butterflies do all the things they do. But one does not have to be an authority on many of the complex subjects which have baffled the wise of this world in order to explain a great many "WHY'S," including that of the butterfly. In the case under consideration, unless one is like the "fool" who said in his heart, "there is no God" (Ps. 14:1), the answer to those complex questions is simple — THERE IS EVIDENCE OF GOD IN A BUTTERFLY!

Back Issues of *Banner of Truth*

We have now been publishing *Banner of Truth* for about ten years. During that time we accumulated quite a variety of back issues. Of some issues we have several and others only a few. If you would like some back issues, let us know. - *Editor*

"...And Sometimes The Bear Gets You"

Alan Adams, Assistant Editor

And he went up from thence to Bethel; and as he was going up by the way, there came forth young lads out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, "Go up, thou baldhead; go up, thou baldhead." And he looked behind him and saw them, and cursed them in the name of Jehovah. And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two lads of them. And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and thence he returned to Samaria (2 Kings 2:23-25).

A visceral response to this scene might be, "Don't you think that's just a bit harsh"? Scoffers view such scenes of violence as grounds for laughing at the idea of a God which is at once Omniscient, Omnipotent, and Omnibenevolent. Some professed Bible believers simplistically pass it off by saying, "Oh, that's just the Old Testament. As an example of this, note some comments from *The Pulpit Commentary*,

The action cannot be defended from a Christian point of view — Christians have no right to curse any one. But we can well understand that, under the old covenant, a prophet newly installed in office, and commencing his ministry, might deem it right to vindicate the honor of his office by visiting such conduct as that of these misguided youths with a malediction. Under the Law God's ministers were required to curse the dishonest (Deut. 27:14-26). Elisha could not tell what would be the effect of his curse. It could have no effect at all excepting though the will and by the action of God (Vol. 5, 11 Kings, P. 24).

It is so hard to disabuse people of the notion that there has been some kind of *moral evolution* of God from the Old Testament to the New Testament; that we now serve a kinder and gentler God. I reject both the view of the scoffer, as well as the "Times — and God — have changed" view.

Let us examine this fascinating Scripture with a view toward understanding all that is entailed therein, a harmonious understanding of the passage with the rest of the Bible, and gleanings from it some crucial and pertinent applications.

A NEW AND IMPROVED GOD?

Whereas it is reasonable and needful for us to *harmonize* this part of Scripture with that part, or our interpretation of a passage with clear and fundamental principles, yet, let us never imagine that the harmony is of our creation. The harmony has always been there. Inspiration needs no tuning fork; sometime men just sing off key.

God needs **no** vindication. Paul reckons this to be so when he cites Psalm 51:4 to refute those who would place God in a moral quandary: "That thou mightest be justified in thy words, and mightest prevail when thou comest into judgment? (Ro. 3:4).

The irony of those who perceive some moral discrepancy between God's nature and His actions is that moral discussion can **only** begin at the point of God. Any notion of transcendent moral obligation becomes absurd without the axiomatic premise that it flows from a transcendent moral standard; a law, if you will. And the existence of such moral Law implies the same of the Law Giver, God. God, the Creator, is obviously **prior** to that which he created, Man (Cf. Rom. 1:25).

The "creature," in his effort to understand the actions of the "creator," must ever guard himself against presumption. In machine gun fashion, God helped Job and all of us to see the folly of man taking God to court: "Who is this...Where wast thou...Who determined...Hast thou...Canst thou..." (Job 38). "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God" (Rom. 9:20). When the "thing formed" sets out to understand the actions of "him that formed it" (Rom. (:20), he will reasonably start from the premise that "The Rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity. Just and right is he" (Deut. 32:4).

Consequently, neither can we accept the oft heard notion of "moral then, but immoral now." This is essentially the tack taken by the commentator mentioned above: "...cannot be defended from a Christian point of view." Granted, that in the Old Testament are recorded some immoral actions which God *tolerated* (polygamy, drunkenness, lying, concubinage, *et al.*) — that is, tolerated in the sense that He did not immediately punish or eradicate them — yet, to say that He approved them is another thing.

An arbitrary view of morality is objectionable. That is, the notion that "lying is wrong because God says it is wrong; but God could have chosen to say that telling the truth is wrong had he so desired." "God is love" (I Jno. 4:8), "God is "good" (Lk. 18:19), God is "just" (Deut. 32:4), God is "righteous" (Ex. 9:27). Right and Wrong, Good and Bad — morality — are the natural expressions of the "divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4), **not** matters of arbitration, nor even things that vary from one age to another.

There are three distinct Laws or systems spoken of in the Bible. The one which began with Adam and under which the world was judged and punished by the Flood, and, of course, continuing thereafter. The one which began on Mt. Sinai and was only for the Jews. And, finally, the one under which all men now live, "the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2).

Each system is distinct and unique; yet, running through each is a common moral core. Thus, Paul speaks of the Gentiles, though not under the Law of Moses, doing "by nature the things of the law" (Rom. 2:14). Contextually, it is seen that by "things of the law" Paul did not mean such as observing the Passover, Nazarite vows, etc.; rather he had in mind that moral core which was the same for the Gentile as it was for the Jew. Compare that list of sins of the Gentiles in Romans 1:18-31. Paul said that they "knew" in some sense that these things were matters of the "ordinance of God" (v. 32). Yet, he immediately commences to condemn the Jews for "practic[ing]" the same things." (2:1). This common moral thread is what Jesus had in mind when he cited the "great commandment" to "love God," and the "second" one to "love thy neighbor." He concluded by saying, "On these two commandments the whole law hangeth, and the prophets" (Matt. 22:36-40). Long, long after the beginning of "the law of Christ," Paul said,

Owe no man anything, save to love one another: for he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is summed up in this word,

namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor, love therefore is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:8-10).

No. Our God is not a New and Improved model. He is "the God of our Fathers": the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob" (Acts 3:13). He has not changed. He is not one whit kinder now than when he brought the "she-bears out of the wood." With this foundation set, let's return to Elisha.

ELIJAH'S DEPARTURE

Elijah, the great "man of God," was known to all of his time — both friend and foe. The foes of Elijah learned that to oppose a prophet was to oppose God. Through the mighty power that Jehovah exercised through this great man, many of his opposers met with horrible violent punishment. Elijah was a persistent preacher. Even with the spread of idol worship within his land he kept doing his job. He covered a lot of territory in his preaching work; regularly traveling to certain places where lived "sons of the prophets" (Cf. 11 Kings 2:3). These were those whom Jezebel set out to destroy. Obadiah had to hide a hundred of them from her. Later Obadiah met Elijah and addressed him as "lord" or master (I Kings 18). Elijah was the teacher and "the sons of the prophets" the disciples. Edward J. Young says of the "sons of the prophets,"

They appear as the background against which the great prophets, Elijah and Elisha, carry on their work. In the light of what is revealed in Numbers 11, we may assume that they were assistants in making known the will of God at this particular time to the nation (*My Servants of the Prophets, p. 94*).

Like only Enoch before, Elijah was allowed to bypass death when "Jehovah...[took him up] by a whirlwind into heaven" (II Kings 2:1).

MANTEL OF MASTER FALLS UPON ELISHA

Elijah made one last tour from Gilgal to Bethel, to Jericho where lived the "sons of the prophets." He and Elijah crossed the Jordan where Elijah was taken up and after which Elisha received "a double portion" of that which had been Elijah's power. He also took up the mantle of Elijah which was the symbol of his new role as "master." Like Elijah before him, Elisha strikes the waters of the Jordan with the prophet's mantle causing the waters to divide. He crosses and returns through the cities they had initially passed through, that the "sons of the prophets" might know of their new master. Finally, he makes it back to the city of Bethel wherein he is insulted by "young lads," thus resulting in the "curse" and the "she-bears."

WHAT HAPPENED TO BETHEL?

The Hebrew word means "house of God." Abraham, during his pilgrimage, built an altar and worshipped near here (Gen. 12). Years later Jacob pillowed his head on a stone here. He anointed the pillow as a pillar (no pun intended) and called the place "Bethel" (Gen.. 28). After the conquest, Bethel became an important center of worship (Judges 20; I Sam. 10). When the kingdom was divided, Jereboam corrupted this great place by putting there a "golden calf" for the people to "worship" (I Kings 12). Two of the northern prophets, Amos and Hosea, used some of their sharpest language in rebuke of the brazen debauchery of the people of Bethel. I cannot help thinking about and weeping over great cities and churches in the United States that have gone from being centers of "worship" to centers of apostasy and idolatry. Read about Bethel and think of Nashville, Austin, Oklahoma City.

Bethel is a place where a man like Elisha would be greeted and respected. But no....

A LOOK AT OUR TEXT

Were these miscreants or just "little children" (KJV) at play? The Hebrew word (*nahar*) is very elastic. It can be used in reference to a "young man of about twenty" (*Gesenius*, p. 555, of Gen. 34:18; 41:12). The ASV renders the word as "young lads." The context warrants this. These were folks with a purpose. "As he was going up by the way" indicates more than just a passing action. The bears "tare forty and two lads of them" indicates that this was a sizable group. They were not teasing, they "mocked" him. The Hebrew word (*kawlas*) is strong, meaning "to scoff or disparage." Haley says, "They were old enough and depraved enough to merit the terrible fate which overtook them" (*Alleged Discrepancies...* p. 270).

Do not assume that "curse" means Elisha used foul language (Cf. Neh. 13:25-27). It is rather an imprecation, an expression of righteous indignation and a call for justice "in the name of Jehovah." It is no different from Paul pronouncing "anathema" upon those who pervert the Gospel (Gal. 1:8-9), or his wish that the Judaizers would "mutilate themselves" (Gal. 5:12, NASB). Remember, "In the person of Elisha, God himself, whose servant the prophet was, was most wantonly and wickedly insulted" (*Ibid.*).

Once again, Haley,

Elisha did not slay the young reprobates, nor did he cause the bears to come forth. God sent them. The same Being who some times cuts off wild, wicked youth by disease or accident, in the present instance punished sinful parents by the violent death of their reprobate children (*Ibid.*)

A WORD TO PARENTS

These "young lads" *learned* irreverence and disdain for the Almighty and His Word from their parents, and times have not changed.

When parents don't see that their children are in Bible classes and worship; when they don't read the Bible to and pray with their children, they are paving the way for future destruction. When children see and hear their parents' disdain for the church, elders, and preachers, they are raising little "mockers." When parents fail to teach respect and reverence to their children, when they smile at their "smart lip," they are setting the stage for bad things to come.

Here's a sobering thought: There's something a whole lot worse than being mauled by a bear (Matt. 10:28).

103 South Willow Street
Cowan, TN 37318

Make Plans Now! To attend the *Banner of Truth* Lectures – June 4 - 7.

BANNER OF TRUTH LECTURES

Murray, Kentucky June 4 - 7

Theme: *Christ and His Church in the 21st Century*

Sponsored by: Dexter and Hickory Grove Churches of Christ

Location: Curris Center, Murray State University, Chestnut St.

Banquet Room 2, Third Floor

Monday, June 4th

11:00 a.m. God's Role for Women in the Church

Joe Ruiz

12:00 - 1:30 Lunch Break

1:30 p.m. The Militancy of God's People

Garland Robinson

2:30 p.m. God's Law on Marriage and

Divorce - *Gilbert Gough*

3:30 p.m. The Moral Obligation to Obey

the "Laws of Thought"

Alan Adams

4:30 - 7:00 p.m. Meal Break

7:00 p.m. The Great Commission

Joe Ruiz

8:00 p.m. God's Law on Fellowship

Gilbert Gough

Tuesday, June 5th

11:00 a.m. Preach The Word

Ken Burleson

1:30 p.m. The Preacher and His Work

Lindon Ferguson

2:30 p.m. Abortion - Legal Murder

Freddie Clayton

3:30 p.m. Preaching the Truth in Love

Joe Spangler

7:00 p.m. The Danger of Denominationalism - *Ken Burleson*

8:00 p.m. The Sin of Sexual Perversion

Freddie Clayton

Wednesday, June 6th

11:00 a.m. The Sin of Worldliness - *Tim Hester*

1:30 p.m. Changes in the Lord's Church

Walter W. Pigg

2:30 p.m. The Holy Spirit – How He Operates

Today - *Virgil Hale*

3:30 p.m. Should the Church be Supplanted by
para-church Organization?

Richard Guill

7:00 p.m. The Dangers and Destructiveness of

being condemned. (3) If it is "judging" to believe someone is lost, it would also be "judging" to believe someone is saved. Yet, I can't remember a single instance when one was accused of "judging" to believe someone was saved. (4) Most accusations of "judging" are made only when a statement is made (even though true) with which the accuser disagrees. People are seldom accused of "judging" when they say what people want to hear.

"JUDGING" DEFINED. Since a Bible word may be used to mean different things in some instances, it is essential that such words be used only in their correct sense, in order for the biblical truth to be set forth. Otherwise, that which is not true may be stated, influencing people to believe error rather than truth. A good example of this is the word "judge." It is true that "judging" is prohibited and therefore sinful. But it is equally true that "judging" is not only permitted, but even commanded. No, there is no contradiction. It is simply the case that some judging is wrong and some judging is right. Christ said "judge not" but He also said "judge" (John 7:24). We need to learn which judging is wrong and which is right.

The Greek word *krino*," which is translated "judge" in both Matt. 7:1 and John 7:24, is defined: "Primarily denotes to separate, select, choose; hence to determine, so as to judge, pronounce judgment" (*W.E. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, p. 620). It is clear that all judging is not is not alike, and that explains why some judging is sinful and why some judging is not only right but a duty as well.

JUDGING WHICH IS CONDEMNED. The judging which Christ condemns in Matthew 7:1 is clearly: hypocritical, unfair, and inconsistent judgment. This can be seen clearly when the whole passage (vv. 1-5) is considered. To set one's self up as a judge to pronounce judgment in the sense of passing sentence is an act of sin without question. This would be to take the place of the Lord as the "righteous judge" who makes no mistakes in "determining" right and wrong, guilt or innocence, and who has the authority to do so (Acts 17:30-31; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:8).

JUDGING WHICH IS COMMANDED. While man can never take the place of our Savior as Judge, there is a sense in which Christians must judge. The same Christ who said "judge not" also said, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). It is necessary for man to "separate, select, choose" in order to make determinations or judgments. In the same chapter where Christ said "judge not" (Mt. 7) he warns of "false prophets" and tells how one can know them. "Whereby by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:15-20). One would have to "judge" as to the "fruits" or else Christ's statement would be meaningless.

The "righteous judgment" which is commanded, is judgment which is **right**. It is fair, consistent, considerate, factual and always according to God's truth. To "select" or "choose" is to judge; this is a continual duty for the Christian. To fail to judge between right and wrong, truth and error, is to disobey God and invite spiritual disaster! This judging, which is right, also involves the deeds of other people as well as our own deeds. Since we all face the same truth, we are able to judge between right and wrong in the lives of others, according to their deeds (fruits). Bro. Marshal Keeble said, in response to criticism that he was judging, "I'm a fruit inspector." Jesus teaches us to be such (Matt. 7:16).

Let us consider the example of "drunkenness," which is one of the "works of the flesh" enumerated in Galatians 5:19-21. Those who engage in those sins will be lost unless they repent. If one makes a judgment that the drunkard is lost, his judgment is right, it is according to truth. To be afraid to say a drunkard is lost is to make a judgment which rejects God's word, and shows disbelief in it. Any judging which rejects God's word is sinful!

"JUDGING" AS IT RELATES TO BAPTISM AND "SPRINKLING." In this case judgment must be made as to whether or not "sprinkling" is baptism, and whether or not baptism is essential to salvation. But what is the basis upon which this judgment must be made? This will determine whether the judging is right or wrong. If the judgment is made upon the basis of the wisdom of men, creeds, traditions, doctrines of men, or feelings, it will be wrong! If the judgment is made in accordance with the all-sufficient scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16-17), the "doctrine of Christ" (2 John 9), and the truth which "makes men free" (John 8:32) it will be right, and cannot be wrong.

IS "SPRINKLING" BAPTISM? Baptism is a "burial" in water (Rom. 6:34; Col. 2:12). Immersion is the meaning of "baptism" and was so understood by first century people, and by Greek scholars. "Sprinkling" in the place of baptism was not practiced by the New Testament church, and is not taught in the New Testament. It is, therefore, a practice of men. It is not a part of the "truth" of God's word. The person who has only been "sprinkled" **has not been baptized**. This is true, regardless of what people may say or believe about it. It is nowhere to be found in "the doctrine of Christ" (2 John 9).

IS BAPTISM ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION? Christ said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; that he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mk. 16:15-16). Saul was told to be "baptized, and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16). The Pentecostians were told to be baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..." (Acts 2:38). Baptism is the means by which one gets "into Christ" (Gal. 3:27), where salvation is found (2 Tim. 2:10). God's word being true, baptism is indeed essential to salvation.

In view of the fact that baptism is essential to salvation, and that "sprinkling" is not scriptural baptism, we may rightly conclude (judge) that one who has not been baptized will not be saved. This is making a judgment on the basis of truth. To say that God may save those who have not obeyed His will (gospel) is to make a "judgment" which is not based on truth. This kind of "judging" is wrong, because it is not according to the truth of the gospel. Those who "obey not the gospel" will be lost; this we know from the Bible, as stated in 2 Thess. 1:7-9: "...the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

In reply to our reader's comments, as sad as the case is, he has judged according to the clear teaching of God's word. Christ is the "author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9). If we are to have a "living hope" of salvation, it is essential that we submit ourselves wholly and fully to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ as He has revealed His will. We must, therefore, respect His teaching on the subject of **Judging**, as well as other things.

- - *Walter W. Pigg*

"Wayne Kilpatrick Announces Transition"

The above is the headline of a column on page 14, of the Jan. Feb., 2001, *Magnolia Messenger*. We shall note a portion of what is said in the article:

On May 28, 2000, after 27 years, J. Wayne Kilpatrick resigned as pulpit minister of the Homewood Church of Christ in Birmingham, Alabama. When Kilpatrick first began his work with Homewood, the membership was slightly over 250 members. When he announced his intentions to transition out of Homewood in July of 1999, the membership was just under 1500.

In addition to the above, the article says Wayne is "now affiliated with *Onward Rejoicing Ministries*." "He will be available for a variety of lectures, seminars, retreats, revivals, church consulting, as well as interim preaching for churches that are making pulpit changes." "He will remain on staff at Homewood, serving as Senior Minister."

With regard to the above numbers now at Homewood, that is not "a drop in the bucket" when compared with the numbers attracted by Billy Graham or the numbers at the Willow Creek Church in the Chicago area. Numbers do not necessarily represent true accomplishment. In the area of spiritual things, success is not in numbers alone, but the spiritual growth which has taken place as well.

I first knew bro. J. Wayne Kilpatrick well over thirty years ago. At that time I was not aware of any error which he openly advocated. Things sure have change in the more than 30 years. It was near the mid-1980s that Wayne's drift to the left became apparent. That drift has become much stronger since.

In 1984, Wayne Kilpatrick participated in the "Restoration Summit" at Joplin, MO. In that summit, which was designed to unite the Independent Christian churches with churches of Christ, Wayne suggested the following to encourage unity: "I wonder too, if bringing Christian Church preachers into our class like this might be a good thing." ... "I think you can ease from the class to the pulpit." Someone wrote an apology for Wayne, for the above, but in 1985 Wayne preached at, Ashwood, after Rubel Shelly went astray.

In 1992, Wayne spoke at the opening session of "Jubilee," in Nashville, stating that he saw Jubilee as a positive thing. Jubilee was a cavalcade of error from beginning to its end. No Jubilee this year!

Homewood bulletin, June 11, 1991. Dale Vernon writes: "...Yes, you are gifted! Although they may not be utilizing it at present, every Homewood member has a spiritual gift provided by our Lord. A spiritual gift is, in fact, **a supernatural capacity** for service in God's kingdom....Another spiritual gift which God provides to some within His Body is the gift of **prophecy**."

In 1992, Homewood hosted the Southeast Singles Seminar. Speakers included Jerry Jones and Philip Bradley. Cost: \$10.00 Pre-register, \$15.00 at door.

"Lift 92" at Homewood featured: Jeff Walling, Fred McClure, and Acappella. "COST \$ 5.00..."

J. Wayne Kilpatrick, enamored with the Willow Creek Community Church, encourages others. In a letter, dated Feb. 20, 1992, addressed to Dear Fellow Preacher, he said, in part, the following:

"Gary Bradley, Sr. and I recently attended a Leadership Seminar in a northern state that excited and challenged us as ministers of the Gospel. We came back more committed than ever to

reaching people for Jesus. The seminar was attended by ministers from 47 states and four foreign countries. It was so valuable and I thank God that we were able to attend....

"We want to share with you some of the things we learned in this seminar....That is why I'm urging you, yea, pleading with you, to attend the Seventh Annual Leadership and Church Growth Seminar to be conducted at the Home wood church on March 6 and 7....

"...Come and let us tell you about a church where the members arrive one hour early in order to find parking places and a seat in the auditorium. Let us tell you about a church that has grown from no members to over 17,000 in just 17 years. Let us tell you about a church that has 80% growth rate by conversion...."

What the above letter did not reveal was that this fabulous church was the **Willow Creek Community Church**, near Chicago, a conglomeration of denominational people. By Wayne's reference to 80 % by **conversion**, one might conclude that this is an affirmation that these people are Christians.

"Lift '93! August 6 & 7, Featuring: Jeff Walling & Straight Company." This was at Homewood.

In 1999, a "Ladies Conference" was held at Homewood. Four of the five women scheduled to speak were denominational people. Though one report stated that "Wayne Kilpatrick... along with many on his staff. In addition, many of the elders were opposed to it." A majority of the elders went along with the "Conference" and it did take place.

In view of Wayne's "Transition," and that he will now be engaged in "seminars, lectures, retreats, revivals, church consulting," etc. those who want to be indoctrinated in the Willow Creek philosophy, Jeff Wallingism, and other left wing things, have access to one who has these things and "will travel." I do not know, but I would imagine that this left wing indoctrination would come at some cost. One would think that Satan's "devices" would be free, but that isn't always the case. Some will gladly pay for error.

- - Walter W. Pigg

READERS' RESPONSE

"The first day I was given BOT I read it many times and I am still keeping the issue. It is a very old issue of August 1999, but to me it will never expire. I am a member of Vosloorus Church of Christ here in South Africa and will be happy if you put me in your books to send BOT every month - **Mudau Vhonani.**" - **South Africa.** "Please put me on your mailing list for 'Banner of Truth.' Two sample copies came to our congregation and I am impressed with your publication as you seem to be anxious to teach the Bible as it is written. Also put ... on the

mailing list as they believe in contending 'for the faith that was once delivered to the saints,'" - **Sarah E. Bell.**" - **British Columbia.** (*We're adding your name and the others. If you could use a bundle of 10 - 15, let me know and I'll send them - Editor.*)

"We, the elders at the Mt. Zion congregation, appreciate very much the work you and others are doing with the publication **Banner of Truth.** We wanted to have a part in the continuation of this good work. We are sending you a check in the amount of \$500 to help with this work. Some of our members already receive **Banner of Truth.**....Please keep up the good

work and we pray for you and sister Pigg to have many more useful years in the service to our Lord. Please encourage bro. Alan Adams to write as much as possible. He is a very good writer with such a keen intellect and a grasp of issues as well as the Truth of God's Word. Many others yet to come our way could be influenced by his writing as well as yours - **The Elders, Mt. Zion church of Christ, Sammy Briley, Brodie Johnson.**" - TN. *(We sincerely appreciate your favorable remarks about BOT, and for the generous contribution to help with the work. I, too, wish our "favorite son-in-law," Alan Adams, would write more - Editor).*

"I found your web-site by surfin' around, looking for hints to finding the true church. Your argumentation is very interesting. But how can we get assurance? I think it's only possible to ask God for answering this question. This does not mean, we don't have to read, study and pray. But if we've done that, the only way to get assurance, which church is true, is to kneel down and ask the father. He knows everything and would not leave his children in darkness. I've done so. Please take a few minutes to read my testimony - **Roland Kaiser.**" - Germany. *(Roland, if your "testimony" is your statement: "I know this is the truth, that Joseph Smith was a profit and he established the true church in 1830," you have some serious problems. God's word says the church was purchased by Christ's blood (Acts 20:28). The New Testament reveals that the church did exist in the first century. The Father would not have given you the information about Joseph Smith and thereby contradicted himself. It is evident that you "know" some things which are not according to fact. It is through God's word that we can learn about the true church, and not through a false prophet, of which Christ warns in Matthew 7:15 - Editor).*

"We really enjoy Banner of Truth. A friend asked us to send his name and address to be added to your mailing list - **David & Twila Dozier.**" - TN.

"Thank you for Banner of Truth. I appreciate receiving it, and for your stand for the truth. Please accept the enclosed donation to help in the publishing of Banner of Truth. Keep up the good work - **Jimmy L. Clark.**" - TX. *(Thanks for the donation. Friends like you make our work possible - Editor).*

"I enjoy your publication very much and really appreciate your stand for the truth. Keep up the Good Work - **Bill Foster.**" - TN. *(Thanks for your encouragement. The generous contribution is greatly appreciated - Ed.).*

"Enclosed is a contribution for B.O.T. I believe that many Christians and congregations could have been saved from apostasy if they had been reading BOT. Continue to Contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 3) and declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) - **Denny Durigan.**" - AR. *(It is a matter of fact that some have not studied God's word as they should. Another equally serious matter is that some do not respect what they know of God's word. Thank you for your generous contribution to help keep our work going - Editor). (See next page)*

"I commend you on your stand for the truth, as presented in God's word. I enjoy reading *Banner of Truth*, and believe you do a good work in publishing it. We receive a bundle of the paper each month here at the Rowlett church. Marvin L. Weir is now in his seventeenth year with us, preaching solidly the truth of God's word. My reason for writing you: My daughter, Bonnie Lemon, and daughter Judith, and husband, Lyndall Jackson, plus my wife, Bess, and I wish to make a donation to Banner of Truth in memory of Graham L. Cain, a dear friend of 58 years, who passed away two weeks ago. He was a stalwart soldier of the cross and the church can ill afford to lose Christians such as he who speaks where the Bible speaks and is silent where it is silent. And especially since so many liberals are trying to water down the word ... Keep up the good work you are doing! - **Fred C. Johnson.**" - TX. *(It is indeed a great loss to lose a faithful*

soldier of the cross. We sincerely thank you for the gift to help with Banner of Truth. That will help us to get the truth out to a great many people - Editor).

"Jack and I have really appreciated getting your paper for quite a while now. We have also shared it with others. We need more people willing to speak the truth and keep God's people informed. Thank you. We are sending a check to help with this good work - **Jack and June Bassett.**" - CA. *(We appreciate you sharing BOT with others. This helps us increase our mailing list to those who will benefit by the paper. Thanks for the check to help with BOT. People like you make our work possible. We are ever thankful for their concern - Editor).*

"Unfortunately I did not receive the July issue of BOT and I would appreciate it very much if you could send me a copy of that issue. I am happy to receive each copy of it...Enclosed is a small donation to help in your effort to spread the gospel - **R. D. Lawson.**" - FL. *(Sorry you didn't receive that issue. Some times a piece of mail gets lost. Thanks for the check - Editor).*

Welcome New Readers - Editor

Editor's e-mail: < wpiggbot@apex.net >

View BOT on bro. David Lemmons' web at:

<http://www.hcis.net/users/dlemmons/BOTlist.htm>

Readers may get on David's **LemmonsAid e-mail**

by sending an e-mail to the address below:

< LemmonsAid-Subscribe@ListBot.com >