

Seek The Old Paths

"Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths... and walk therein."
(Jeremiah 6:16)

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People Change, Times Change, But The Lord's Church Will Never Change!

Jerry Pence

This article is written for members of the Lord's church so they may see how the "Unity In Diversity" philosophy moved into one congregation in North Carolina and how the "Change Agents" behaved during the process.

THE SEQUENCE OF CHANGE

Our family worshipped at a congregation in Durham, North Carolina from May of 1983 until December of 1996. During this time, I served as a deacon for 3 years and as an elder for 6 years. Many times during those thirteen years, even while I served as an elder, our family compromised our faith for the matter of unity in the church. We were wrong! During 1996, the elders made it impossible for us to continue worshipping with the church family that we loved and continue to love. The Scriptures tell us to worship in both spirit and truth (John 4:24). The elders maintained the spirit, but they failed to follow the truth that has been given to all.

In April of 1993, I resigned as an elder due to extensive business travel. About the same time, one of the other more conservative elders, moved to Texas, and one of the most liberal brothers of the congregation joined the already liberal contingent of existing elders. The Sunday that I resigned as an elder, and the day the new elder was appointed, I commented to my wife on the way home

from church, "I wonder if we will be able to worship there three years from today." Three years and three months later, we had no choice but to leave.

During the first quarter of 1996, the elders and the elder/minister, began making subtle changes to the worship services. These changes included: changing bulletin weekly, changing the order of worship constantly, adding responsive readings between the minister and the congregation, occasionally deleting closing prayers on occasion and at times not offering an invitation. Some of the faithful members expressed their concerns to the elders about these changes but it had no effect. The elders even provided one family the names of congregations in the area where they might be able to attend in greater comfort.

During the second quarter the elder/minister and some of his supporters, attended the Pepperdine lectures in California. They returned with great enthusiasm to aggressively continue the change process in the coming months. Suggestions were made that we should equip certain members of the congregation with microphones to enhance the singing.

Women were given new roles as "ministry leaders," since only males could be called "deacons." Women began co-teaching with men in the adult Bible classes.

In the fourth quarter of 1996, the elders presented a thirteen week series in Sunday morning Bible classes entitled "God's Eternal Kingdom" for the teens and adults. The sermons on Sunday mornings supported the lessons that were taught by the elders. The elders stated that the purpose of their lessons were to encourage everyone to examine their faith and to determine were they were spiritually. That is exactly what occurred. Christians who wanted to believe in diversity of the scriptures were pleased, Christians who were not well grounded in the scriptures were confused, and Christians who knew the scriptures had to leave because the congregation no longer represented the church Jesus established. Many meetings were held with the elders during the closing months of 1996, but nothing could be done to convince them of

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**The Lord's Church
Will Never Change...**

Editorial...

THE BIBLE Versus "CHANGE AGENTS"

#1

Garland M. Robinson

We invite you to focus your attention on the front page article by brother Jerry Pence. It is a heart rending commentary on what happens when brethren cease loving the Truth and are content to believe the lies of the Devil. He outlines several points which serve as "warning signs" of the vast and sweeping movement now current among us. If these things are happening where you worship, then beware! So many are swept up into this insidious program of "change." The calls and correspondence we receive from all across the nation verify just how deeply these things are entrenched in congregations. If you worship at such a place, we encourage you to fight it with the Truth (1 Tim. 6:12)! Don't stand still and let Satan have his way. Love the Truth, nothing but the Truth and uphold it with all your being. It is the only means of salvation (John 8:32; 1 Cor. 1:18; Rom. 1:16).

Found below is the beginning of a series of articles on the current "Change Agents" conspiracy and deadly movement among us today.

It certainly is no news to you to know that we are living in an age of change. More changes have taken place in the last 50-75 years than perhaps any time in history. Many of you have been witness of the change from horse and buggy days to space flight. So many of these things have provided welcomed changes in human comforts, technology, medicine and travel.

All changes, however, are not good. There are things that *should not change* and *must not change*. Anything that changes from the right to the wrong is an improper

change. We cannot change things just for the sake of change! We must *"...continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven..."* (Col. 1:23).

There is a vast and widespread movement in the brotherhood across our land and the world to change the church and everything we know about the church. Many claim they are tired of the "old ways" we have always known to be true. Promoters of these changes insist that the church must change if it is to remain relevant to society and appealing to the public.

"Change Agents" are the words that have been applied to those who have set as their course to change the church. When their hand is called on their desiring to change the church they often back up and say we have taken them out of context. They say, "No, that's not what I mean." They often try to relate it to changes in method such as in the order of the services — whether we partake of the Lord's supper before the preaching or afterwards — whether we take up the collection before the Lord's supper or afterwards — whether we have Bible classes before worship or after. This is simply a diversionary tactic to get us away from their real agenda.

One of the most frightening things about this movement is that many of these brethren actually think they are doing right. On the other hand, I'm convinced that many are doing what they are doing for popularity, prestige, power and/or money. Isaiah said in the long ago, *"Woe unto them that call evil good,*

and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter" (5:20)!

The changes being promoted by so many from all over come as a result of men and women doing what they want instead of having a real interest in what God wants. It is as it was in the days of Judges 21:25: *"...every man did that which was right in his own eyes."*

Let's proceed by examining some things the "change agents" seek to change.

A NEW HERMENEUTIC

Change agents seek to change the way we view and understand the Bible. They have devised a "new hermeneutic." The word hermeneutic is the word that describes the study of the process of how we interpret and understand the Bible. A "new hermeneutic," therefore, implies there is an "old hermeneutic." The old hermeneutic is the way we have always understood the Bible. We have long understood, and rightly so, that the Bible authorizes in one or more of three ways: Direct statement (command), Approved example (account of action), Implication (that which the Bible implies to be true).

A direct statement or command is simply that which the Bible explicitly states. Jesus made a clear and direct statement when he said, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved..."* (Mark 16:16). Therefore, we learn water baptism is essential for salvation.

An approved example is an account of action performed by Christians and/or congregations which meets with God's approval. The church at Troas met on the first day of the week to partake of the Lord's supper (Acts 20:7). Therefore, we partake of the Lord's supper each Lord's day.

An implication is that which the Bible implies to be true. In Matthew 19:9, Jesus said, *"And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery."* No where does the Bible explicitly say that those who have

put away their mate for fornication and marry again are not living in adultery, but such is implied in this verse. We therefore learn that those who have put away their spouse because of their fornication and marry again are lawful and acceptable marriages (provided the one they marry is also eligible to be married).

All that we say and do must be authorized in one or more of these three ways. *“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him”* (Col. 3:17).

The “new hermeneutic” is a deliberate effort to discard the old and set forth a new way of looking at the Bible. In layman’s terms, the best definition I could give of this so-called new hermeneutic is this: **“The Bible really doesn’t mean what it says!”** They say we must take a fresh look at Scripture and allow for a broader approach of viewing things. This new philosophy desires to relegate the Bible to everyone’s own interpretation. What the Bible means to you may not be what it means to me or someone else. Each one is free to interpret the Bible according to their own culture and human experience. According to this new doctrine, there is no set standard of authority. Every man becomes a law unto himself.

This philosophy is far reaching and encompasses the very fabric of our society. It is not limited simply to the church and religion in general. It has rooted itself in the political, social and educational realms around us. It has become the buzz of the 90s.

Some have styled this movement as “post-modernism.” Modernism is an old philosophy which denies anything miraculous. It denies the miracles of Jesus and the apostles. Post-modernism is the liberalistic philosophy that says the only thing for sure one can know is that no one can know anything for sure. Now, does that make any sense to you? I don’t know how you can get any more idiotic than that! That’s about as stupid as saying a dog walks with his ears instead of his legs. If no one can know anything for sure, then how do they know that? Are they sure about that? How can they be sure no one

can know anything for sure?

The only thing one cannot do under this teaching is to say that “some one” or “some thing” is wrong. It is a doctrine which says “anything goes.” It’s alright to have convictions, they say, but do not demand that others live by your convictions. There is no absolute standard of authority under post-modernism. Don’t be exclusive. You can’t say there is one right way and all other ways are wrong! You must be open to new ideas and let others express their beliefs. Never, no never, say that anyone is wrong in their religious belief.

It is easily understood that if one’s view of the Bible as the absolute blueprint for how we are to live and obey God is changed, then, all other changes they seek to make will naturally follow. Their attack, therefore, must be centered around the Bible. If they cannot get you away from the Bible, they must change the way you view and understand the Bible. This is vital to their very existence! If you keep turning to the Scriptures to answer their changes and innovations, they can’t handle it because the Truth always refutes error.

Note these clear and precise passages which command us to remain steadfast in the faith, resting upon God’s Word. *“Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong”* (1 Cor. 16:13). *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage”* (Gal. 5:1). *“Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel”* (Phil. 1:27). *“Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved”* (Phil. 4:1). *“For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord”* (1 Thess. 3:8). *“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle”* (2 Thess. 2:15).

Next month, we’ll look at another area of attack — the Biblical limits of fellowship.

The Lord’s Church Will Never Change...

(Continued from page 1)

the error they were teaching and of the souls they were leading astray.

THE EFFECTS OF CHANGE

These and other changes are introduced subtly by the “change agents” and many times in the beginning, you will only feel a small uncomfortable prick as each change occurs. After you get used to the pricks, the changes won’t seem so bad. You can rationalize that these are just small things and it really doesn’t make any difference, or you can feel guilty for believing the elders are teaching error. If you go to the leadership with your concerns, they will tell you not to be concerned, because they know what is best for your soul. And then, all of a sudden, you look around and the church that you loved, the church that Christ built, no longer exists in your congregation. Your heart will ache like you have never ached before. Then it is too late to recover. As you try to battle these changes you will be called a Pharisee, a legalist, a sectarian, and be labeled as judgmental. Being called names by these “agents of change” is immaterial compared to loosing your soul.

A list of changes instituted by the elders in 1996 are shown below. Not all of these changes are unscriptural. However, when the change process begins, changes are made for the sake of change to soften the bigger blows to come. The changes align with the “Unity In Diversity” philosophy and illustrates the types of changes that “change agents” will try to introduce.

CHANGES BLESSED BY THE ELDERS IN WORSHIP SERVICES

Responsive readings were conducted between the minister and the congregation. The minister read a passage of scripture and the congregation responded with the next passage of scripture that followed.

Recovenant services were held for the congregation to recommit their time, talent and money. The elders and deacons recommitted their services to the congregation

and the congregation signed commitment forms as to what activities they would be involved in during the coming year. The elders also intended to let the children participate in the worship services. Each child was to bring a drawing to the front during worship and tell the elders what they had drawn to illustrate what they could do for the congregation in the coming year.

Changes in bulletin format were made to resemble denominational bulletins. Bulletins were gathered from denominational churches in the area to see what they thought were pleasing to the masses.

Secular holidays were commonly used as themes for sermon delivery.

The number of sermons decreased by changing the Sunday evening worship to Bible classes, and then replacing Wednesday evening Bible classes with "Helping Hand" projects. Helping Hand Projects included: making sleeping bags for the homeless, visiting the sick and shut-in, grading World Correspondence Courses, chorus practice, and children working on play practices. All of these are worthy projects, however, the children and adults were not getting fed with sound Bible study.

The number of sermons decreased by having more praise services. Praise services included: singing songs, reading passages of scriptures assigned by the minister, and by offering multiple prayers during the service. Often, no invitation would be offered in these services.

CHANGES BLESSED BY THE ELDERS OUTSIDE OF WORSHIP SERVICES

The role of the deacons was changed to prevent them meeting together as a group to make decisions about the physical needs of the church. Each deacon reported to a specific elder, who had meetings with his deacons and "ministry leaders." Ministry leaders are women who serve in the same capacity as deacons, but without the title of deacons.

Women were allowed to co-teach and teach adult mixed gender Bible classes.

Small group ministries were formed to allow members to meet in their homes during the week instead of attending mid-week Bible study at the church. This allows each group to have more flexibility in their worship.

The church "Chorus" performed at a local Baptist church on a Sunday evening in a Christmas concert.

The elders met with Christian Churches to determine ways to fellowship together. (1997)

CHANGES IN TEACHING BLESSED BY THE ELDERS

The elders taught that the **only absolutes to salvation are "Jesus is Lord" and "Baptism."** However, when the elders were asked if "baptism for remission of sins" is the only gateway to heaven, they responded that it would be too judgmental to reach that conclusion. At least one elder stated that a person who believes they are saved by grace in the Baptist church, and then baptized, should be accepted as a brother in Christ. Not to accept this person's baptism would be judgmental.

One of the deacons, who is in the School of Religion at a local university, taught that the **kingdom and the church are not the same.** He said the kingdom has not come yet, because every knee has not bowed. Two elders sat in the class while he taught the class without refuting his teachings.

The same deacon also taught that **the church of Christ was established during the restoration period, and not on the day of Pentecost.**

The same deacon has taught that **the book of Jonah is a fable.** He said it was used to teach the will of God, but this story and others did not actually happen.

The congregation was told that taking the **Lord's supper** is an individual decision and that it is not an absolute to salvation. One elder taught a class on the Lord's supper and gave the following alternatives for taking the Lord's supper.

Take the Lord's supper on Thursday evening since that is when the Lord established the supper in the first place.

Take the Lord's supper once a

year since the Jews took a meal on Passover.

Take the Lord's supper each Sunday. He stated, "The Lord's supper will be offered here each week, if you choose to take it."

Don't take the Lord's supper at all. He stated, "There is more scripture to support foot washing than there is for the Lord's supper."

No conclusion was offered after reviewing these four alternatives! The bell rang. The class was over! That was it!

The same elder who made the statements above, also stated that **"Instrumental music is OK, we just don't use it."**

The elders taught that it is an **individual decision to attend (forsake) the assembly** since this is not an absolute to salvation.

The elder/minister, stated that **a person must have training in New Hermeneutics to thoroughly understand the scriptures.**

ELDERS DENIAL OF KNOWING ANYTHING ABOUT THE "UNITY IN DIVERSITY" PHILOSOPHY

All the elders, except for the elder/minister, stated that they neither had knowledge of the "Unity in Diversity" movement, nor were they familiar with the concept of "Change Agents" in the church. The elder/minister said he was only "vaguely aware" of this terminology.

The following facts are presented for each person to draw their own conclusion, as to whether the elders, could have had knowledge of the "Unity in Diversity" in 1996, and particularly could the elder/minister be only "vaguely aware" of the "Change Agent" concept. Please consider all of the facts together before you draw your conclusion.

Fact 1. Rubel Shelly and Randy Harris were the authors for most of the supplementary reading material that was laid out for the congregation to read during the "God's Eternal Kingdom," series presented by the elders in 1996. The material came primarily from the book, "The Second Incarnation." The elders stated that they had not read the material that had been laid out for the congregation by the elder/minister.

Fact 2. Rubel Shelly and Mike Cope are co-Editors of the publication known as *Wineskins* and Leonard Allen is a feature editor in *Wineskins*. (This shows Mr. Shelly's relation to the *Wineskins* Magazine and shows the elder/minister's knowledge of the magazine when considering the following facts.)

Fact 3. In one class handout prepared by the elder/minister for the elder's classes in 1996 entitled, "One Body, Many Members and Many Talents," he refers to *Wineskins* and *Image* as "left wing" and promoting exclusivity and the denigration of diversity.

Fact 4. The only magazines in the church library with display labels are *Wineskins*, *Image* and *Leaven* magazines. Other publications are packaged together with no labels showing the contents to the public. By the way, "Seek The Old Paths" is not included in this package.

Fact 5. Rubel Shelly, and Mike Cope refer to themselves as "Change Agents" in their *Wineskins* material and proclaim in the *Wineskins* purpose statement that, "*Wineskins* is essentially a magazine devoted to reform and renewal of the church of God.

Fact 6. Rubel Shelly, Mike Cope, Randy Harris, and the elder/minister were all speakers at the 1996 Heartland Workshop in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Fact 7. Rubel Shelly, Mike Cope, Randy Harris, and the elder/minister were all presenters at the Pepperdine Lectures in 1996. Following these lectures, changes increased in both number and seriousness.

Fact 8. Paul Watson (the elder/minister) and Dean Smith are co-editors of a magazine called *Leaven*. Dean Smith is the minister of a congregation in San Antonio, Texas. This congregation now has women leading prayer, serving the Lord's supper, reading scripture, and serving as deacons in that congregation.

Fact 9. Rubel Shelly, Mike Cope, Randy Harris and Leonard Allen have all written feature articles for *Leaven* Magazine in which the elder/minister is a co-editor.

After reviewing the facts presented above, and the changes that occurred, it is difficult to understand how the elders had "no knowledge" of "change agents" in the church and that the elder/minister was only "vaguely aware" of these concepts. If the elders are telling the truth that

they had no knowledge of the "Unity in Diversity" philosophy, then they are ignorant of the false teachings that has been presented to the flock and the flock is being devoured. If the elders are not telling the truth, they are liars and they shall not inherit the kingdom of God. In either case, the facts seem to be overwhelming that the elder/minister knew more than he admitted to the other elders and to the congregation.

My family and I are now members of a new congregation in Durham, North Carolina, known as the Durham Church of Christ. The congregation was formed on January 2, 1997, with 31 people in attendance and has grown steadily in six months to 55 in attendance. We have had two baptisms and one restoration. We have also had over a hundred different visitors since our conception. We are a faithful congregation of the Lord's people who love the Lord and will continue fighting the evil one from throwing his evil darts against the church. Please keep us in your prayers as we strive to do His work.

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The Kingdom of God and the Church

Chuck Northrop

One of the glorious names or designations that God has given to the church is the kingdom of God. As with any name that God gives, this designation reveals some characteristics about the church. A kingdom is the dominion over which a king rules. Thus, the kingdom of God is the dominion over which God rules. For a kingdom to exist, there are certain criteria that must be met. First, there must be a **king**, and in the kingdom of Christ and of God, Jesus Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords (Acts 17:7; 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 1:5; 17:14). Second, there must be **territory**, and within the kingdom of God, the spiritual territory is in the hearts of men (Luke 17:20,21; John 18:36). Third, there must be **laws** to rule over the kingdom which in the

kingdom of God's dear Son is the New Testament (Rom. 8:2; Gal. 6:2; James 1:25). Fourth, there must be **subjects or citizens** within the kingdom, and in God's kingdom, Christians are the subjects (Eph. 2:19; Col. 1:13). Finally, there must be **privileges afforded** to the citizens of the kingdom, and so citizens of Christ's kingdom "receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting" (Luke 18:30).

Within the New Testament, the term kingdom is used in a variety of ways. It is used of the "**kingdoms of the world**" (Matt. 4:8; Luke 4:5) which are the various political systems of men. Also, it is used of **Satan's kingdom**. Jesus, when He was accused of casting out devils by Beelzebub said, "Every kingdom

divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?" Finally, the majority of the times that this expression is used is with reference to the **kingdom of God**. Interestingly, the term "kingdom of God" is also used in a variety of ways.

First, the term "the kingdom of God" is used of **Israel**. In Matthew 21:33-40, Jesus told the parable of the vineyard in which He likened God to a householder that leased his land to husbandmen and sent servants to receive the fruit of his land. But when his servants came, they beat one, killed another, and stoned another. So, he sent other servants and they did the same. Finally, the

householder sent his son and they slew him. Obviously, the servants of the parable represented the prophets of old, the son represented the Son of God, and the husbandmen represented Israel who had rejected the prophets and God's only Begotten Son. Therefore Jesus said, "*The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*" (Matt. 21:43). When Moses gathered the children of Israel at Mount Sinai, he said, "*And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation*" (Exodus 19:6). Now, Israel would no longer have the privileged blessing of being God's kingdom but the kingdom would be given to those who would bring forth the fruits of trusting obedience to Christ.

Second, the term "the kingdom of God" is used of the church. While in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus said, "*That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*" In this passage, Jesus used the terms "my church" and "the kingdom of heaven" interchangeably. He promised to build His church while giving Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven (i.e. the terms of admission).

In the Gospel accounts, the kingdom was yet in the future. John the baptizer, Jesus, the twelve, and the seventy preached "*Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; Luke 10:9). Jesus taught the disciples to pray, "*Thy kingdom come*" (Matt. 6:10). When instituting the Lord's supper, Jesus said, "*I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God...I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come*" (Luke 22:16,18). Further, Joseph of Arimathea "*waited for the kingdom of God*" (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50-51). And finally, Jesus taught that there would be some who heard Him preach and teach that would "*not taste of death, til they have seen the kingdom of God come with power*" (Mark 9:1; Matt. 16:28; Luke 9:27).

Beginning in the book of Acts,

the kingdom or church was a reality. Philip, the evangelist, preached "*the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ*" to the Samaritans and "*they were baptized, both men and women*" (Acts 8:12). Paul writing to the church in Colossae said that Christ had "*delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son*" (Col. 1:13). Please notice the tense in this passage. They were (*past tense*) delivered and translated. Further, Paul said that the Christians in Thessalonica were "*called*" (*past tense*) unto or into "*his kingdom and glory*" (1 Thess. 2:12). Hebrews 12:28 says, "*Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.*" Again notice the tense. This is present active. As the Gospel was being proclaimed, even in the midst of the various trials that they were undergoing, many were being added to the church. Thus, they were "*receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved.*" Finally, John, the apostle of love, was "*in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ*" (Rev. 1:9).

The fact that the church and the kingdom of God is one and the same is further seen in a brief comparison of them.

Both have the same terms of entrance — baptism (John 3:3-5; Acts 2:47; Titus 3:5).

Both have the same head — Jesus Christ (Col. 1:18; 1 Tim. 6:15).

Both have the same laws — "*the perfect law of liberty*" (James 1:25).

Both have the same subjects — Christians (Eph. 2:19; Acts 11:26).

Both have the same seed — the word of God (Luke 8:11; 1 Peter 1:22-25).

Furthermore, the church came with power as Jesus prophesied concerning the kingdom (Acts 2:2-4; Mark 9:1). And, the church was established in the days of the Roman Empire as Daniel prophesied concerning the kingdom that "*the God of heaven shall set up*" (Acts 2:5; Daniel 2:44). Too, the church came in the lifetime of those to whom Jesus taught as Jesus promised concerning the kingdom (Acts 2:14; Mark 9:1). To the honest and sincere student of the Bible, there could be no doubt

that the church and the kingdom are one and the same.

Third, the term "kingdom of God" is used of the "**heavenly kingdom.**" When Jesus entered into Capernaum, a centurion asked the Lord to heal his servant who was sick at home with the palsy. After the centurion's display of faith, Jesus commended him on his great faith and rebuked the lame faith of Israel saying, "*Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (Matt. 8:10-12; See also Luke 13:28-29). Here, the "kingdom of heaven" has clear reference to the heavenly kingdom for it is contrasted to the "outer darkness" of hell. Also, notice the use of "children of the kingdom" which, again, refers to Israel. Later in describing the last day, Jesus made clear mention of the heavenly kingdom when Matthew records, "*Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*" (Matt. 25:34). A final passage to illustrate this use is when Paul said, "*And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen*" (2 Tim. 4:18).

In these later two uses of the term "kingdom of God," we find that the term has both an earthly and a heavenly application. Interestingly, sometimes in scripture, both uses are found together. For example, in the parable of the leaven (Matt. 13:33-43) Jesus said that the good seed are the children of the kingdom — an obvious earthly application (v.38). Later in the explanation of the parable, He says, that "*the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*" (v.43) which is a clear reference to the heavenly kingdom. Paul does the same in the great resurrection chapter. In 1 Corinthians 15:24, he writes, "*Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when*

he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power." Since the kingdom would be delivered up, it had to exist before the end of time. This kingdom is the church in its earthly state. Later in the chapter, Paul wrote, "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." Since "flesh and blood" has part in the kingdom here on earth, then this must refer to the heavenly kingdom which fits the context well.

A special note of consideration ought to be made concerning the phrase "the kingdom of heaven." This phrase is uniquely used by Matthew thirty-three times. "The kingdom of heaven" refers to the place of God rather than God Himself. In the same way, we often refer to Washington D.C. as representative of the United States. Washington D.C. is the capitol — the place of

authority. Similarly, heaven is the place of authority (Matt. 21:23-27). It is the realm from which Christ exercises His authority as King over His kingdom. A close examination of the gospel accounts reveals that the terms "the kingdom of heaven" and "the kingdom of God" are used in the same way — sometimes of the kingdom in its earthly abode and sometimes in its heavenly estate. Mark 1:14-15 is Mark's account of the preaching of Jesus. In this text, Mark records that Jesus came "preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." In Matthew's account, he records, that "Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). Other parallel passages establish the same. (A couple of other examples are: Matthew 5:3 paralleled

with Luke 6:20 and Matthew 19:14 paralleled with Mark 10:14 and Luke 18:16.)

The heavenly kingdom consists of both Israel and the church. It is composed of the redeemed of all ages. Only those who are faithful unto God in whatever covenant they may live under will be a part of this marvelous heavenly kingdom. Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). In these last times, only those who are obedient to the gospel of Christ, whom God has added to the church, and who are citizens of the kingdom will have entrance into the heavenly kingdom (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

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DO MEMBERS OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST NEED TO HAVE "UNITY MEETINGS" AMONG THEMSELVES?

Dan Goddard

The blessed Lord prayed, in part: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:20-21). In these words, Jesus expressed the desire that His followers might have oneness, even as He and the Heavenly Father had oneness.

If unity is the desire of Christ, division among those who seek to be His followers is contrary to His desire, and, therefore, an evil and a condition which exists that, to say the least, is not pleasing to the Heavenly Father.

Division among those that have faith in Christ is an indication of difference of doctrine or practice. When division exists, one or all parties may be in error in that respect; but only one could be right, for those in the right would be alike in that respect. They might be wrong and differ, but would not be divided

and right.

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed" (Amos 3:3)? "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). We may have fellowship with our neighbors and not walk in the light, but those that walk in the light have fellowship. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). When members of the church of Christ cease to walk in this light, division is the result, be it a division with respect to the fellow man or division with respect to the New Testament church, or both. There may be a unity among men without the light, but in the light is unity only. Submission and obedience to God's word cannot produce division among those that walk in the light of it.

Division is the result of disobedience that somewhere has entered in among the many good people that look to Christ for their redemp-

tion. Those that are of the party or parties that have allowed false doctrine to divide them from others are perpetuating division that is contrary to the prayer of Jesus; yet some have publicly rejoiced in the existence of such division, so that a person might become a member of the church of Christ that teaches his own particular doctrine.

Also, division may be good or evil, viewed as to whether the division results in a separation from evil toward God's desire or a separation from God's desire toward evil. Joshua declared in his last address: "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but (as for me and my house), we will serve the LORD" (Josh. 24:12). If there was to be a division or divisions, Joshua was determined to be on the side of the Lord only. In rebellion to God's constituted authority, Korah,

in the days of Moses, led in a division among God's people (Num. 16). It does not appear that Korah was intending to follow after strange gods, but he was not willing to walk in the way commanded by the Lord through Moses.

The signification of the word "church" is "called out." We may correctly use the term with reference to the world, as being called out of it. *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him"* (1 John 2:15). Jesus said: *"Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law"* (Luke 12:51-53). Following Christ may result in division among friends and family.

In the beginning of the church *"the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul"* (Acts 4:32). Paul pleaded like-mindedness *"one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God"* (Rom. 15:5-6). But he foretold of a time when *"of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them"* (Acts 20:30).

Looking back from now to that time, we see by the light of history that divisions have occurred among those who profess the desire to follow in the teachings of the apostles. Since the time of Paul's warning, some leaders in the church have become intoxicated on their own teaching and their own authority, walking somewhat in their own footsteps. They have caused many divisions and have caused many to follow in those divisions to their soul's damnation.

Some of our own brethren have remarked: "Well, we are trying to go to the same place." True, but the conflicting doctrines cannot be ignored as if of no consequence. Can we hope that the Lord will graciously overlook this fact? Is it not with a feeling of sadness and with the thought that things in the church are not as they should be, knowing that there exists division? Paul said this should not be: *"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"* (1 Cor. 1:10).

I feel at times there needs to be "unity meetings" among the members of the church of Christ — for we are as divided as any religious group of people. There is no justification before God or man for the many divisions which exist in the Lord's church. But if all would accept what the apostles taught, all of us would be alike.

All of us (I pray it is all of us) desire unity among the members of the church of Christ. But we cannot accept the right hand of fellowship from those who "add to and subtract from" God's inspired word. Nor can the hand of fellowship be extended to those who will not "speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible is silent."

Inspiration says that if we walk in the New Testament light, we have fellowship one with another. When we do so, we will have unity in the churches of Christ!

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