



## A BADLY NEGLECTED STUDY

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Christians do not study enough. This is at the root of many of the problems that seem to forever face the church.

Preachers are often so busy "serving tables" that there is no time for "prayer and the ministry of the word" (cf. Acts 6:4). Preachers who will not find study time ought to quit - those who cannot need to learn what their priorities are.

It is also a common problem for both student and teacher to come to Bible classes without having done little more than finding out where "we left off last time". Then after getting to class, the class is conducted by the "next" method of teaching. (The "next" method is going down the the row of students with each reading a verse from the Bible or a question from a workbook, making a comment or no-comment, with the teacher announcing "next").

Sermons or class lessons are too often left at the building, with little searching the scriptures daily to see if the things are so. (Acts 17:11)

Now that I have gotten you to thinking about studying, you may think I have kind of played a little trick on you. This articles is not really about that kind of general Bible study, but about the dire need for brethren to:

"Study to be quiet, and to do your own business...as we comanded you" - I Thess. 4:11

The New King James Bible reads, "Aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business".

Satan is not asleep. He is alert to every opportunity to get folks to commit all kinds of sin, up to and including murder; then get to do it thinking they are "doing GOD service", rather than Satan (cf. John 16:2). Do you exclaim, "How depraved can one get"! MURDER! Thinking it is doing GOD service! Now, murder is murder whether it is prompted by cold calculated hate, from a fit of anger, or a "mercy killing".

But we are not writing about murder -- but about studying to mind one's own business, aren't we? So, why bring up murder in the midst of an article on busyboding. There is a connection:

"Let none of you suffer as a MURDERER, a thief, an evildoer, or a BUSYBODY in other peoples matters" (I Peter 4:15)

A murderer who kills for the good(?) of his victim (mercy killing) or a thief who steals from the rich to give to the poor (like Robin Hood) or a meddling busybody who does it for the victim's "own good" or the "good of the church" are all sinners.

A busybody is a self-appointed overseer of the affairs of another. ALLTRI-EPISKOPOS (Translated "busybody") is from ALLOTRIOS (belonging to another) and EPISKOPOS (overseer). Many Bible student will recognize that the latter word is the word for "bishop" or "overseer" in the New Testament.

In spite of the fact that we are to be concerned with the physical, material, and spiritual welfare of our neighbors and especially our brethren - there is still such a thing as being a busybody in their matters.

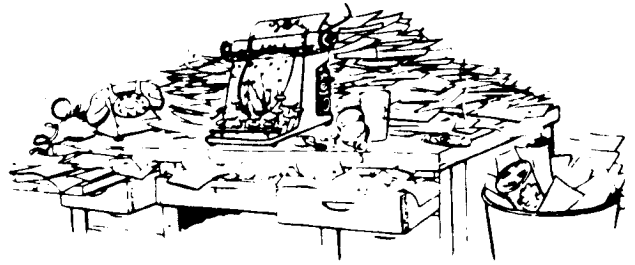
### NEIGHBORHOOD BUSYBODIES

There are folks who seem to have convinced themselves that it is their solemn duty to know all about the private affairs of their neighbors. So, they constantly investigate their private affairs, offer all kinds of unsolicited advice - and can't understand why it is resented. After all, they are just "concerned". You will find such characters in nearly every community and in nearly every church. Virtually nothing is off-limits to their prying. Every dispute between others becomes their responsibility to step in and settle. They feel themselves severely wronged and are deeply hurt when they are told, in no uncertain terms, to mind their own business. But one, bitten by a dog that he has deliberately taken by the ears, has little right to yell. (Read Proverbs 26:17).

### BROTHERHOOD BUSYBODIES

I never cease to be amazed at the amazing,  
 (continued on page 3)

# EDITOR'S DESK



IF YOUR ZIP CODE IS NOT 35068, 35117, 35071 OR YOU ARE NOT A MEMBER OF THIS CONGREGATION, THEN TAKE NOTE. We want to send The Reflector to anyone anywhere who would like to receive it. Mailing costs have increased rapidly in recent months. We are willing and able to pay the cost - but we want to be sure that those receiving it really want it. If your zip is other than those above (this does not apply to members here) and you do not specifically let us know that you want to receive the the Reflector by May 15, 1982 you will be dropped from our mailing list. This does not apply to those with whom we exchange bulletins. Thank you for the cooperation.

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It would be hard to decide which does the Cause of Christ the more harm - the CHRONIC FAULT-FINDER or the CHRONIC NO-FAULT-FINDER. The first is a threat to the peace and morale of God's people and the second threatens the purity and morals of the church. The first seldom solves a problem, just sees it - the second seldom sees a problem. The first will discourage a good work to death, the second will disarm it to death. The first would likely have criticized Peter's lack of tact in calling brother Ananias and sister Sapphira liars, especially right after their good contribution - the second would likely have "understood" the couples' point of view and urged more love and tolerance. May we be delivered from either extreme.

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With this issue of the The Reflector, we hope to be BACK ON SCHEDULE. A series of events over which we had no control has kept us behind schedule for a while. Some new equipment should help us along this line. It had better, considering the cost. I hope to be writing more that I have been able to for the last year or so.

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ARE YOU DISCOURAGED AS A CHRISTIAN? Then read Romans 8 several times and meditate upon what you have going for you - at the things that God works together for your good: 1. No condemnation in Christ (v.1); 2. Freedom from the law of sin and death (v.2); 3. the Spirit of God dwelling in you (v. 9); 4. are sons God (v.14,15); 5. have hope (vs. 23,24); 6. help in our infirmities (vs. 26-27); 7. the intercession the risen Christ (vs.31-35); 8. assurance of God's love in Christ (vs. 35-39); even sufferings (vs. 17,18, cf. 2 cor. 4:17). No wonder we are said to be more than conquerors! All of this is a part of the new life that we have in Christ that was begun at our baptism into Christ (Rom. 6:4) and is conditioned upon our continuing to obey Christ.

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## STUDY(Cont'd)

near miraculous, perception of some of my brethren. They are able to detail a local church's needs, diagnose her problems, and almost instantly jump right in and present her with THE program or THE answer - all of this without having been there and/or having much opportunity to know the local situation - and without having been asked to offer their "wisdom" on the matter at hand. Amazing indeed!

If we are not careful, some of us, who preach autonomy for the local church, may try to make ourselves the unofficial overseers of churches. It is one thing to teach, admonish, rebuke and correct brethren everywhere - congregations and individuals. It is another thing to try to inject ourselves into the personal affairs of individuals and try to run the day to day details of their lives; or to try to manage the affairs of a congregation of which we are not members.

We must realize that while there is little doubt that our plan or solution is far better than they are capable of producing - there still are some things that are simply not any of our business.

If we preach congregational autonomy - let us leave the churches alone to practice it. Not only do churches have the right to be left alone to manage their own affairs - individual Christians have the same right.

Yes, sin must be condemned and corrected. Apostasy must be checked. Truth must be pressed. Issues must not be ignored. Mistakes must be avoided. Concern for others must be expressed. Involvement with others is necessary. Yet, at the same time, we must be careful to maintain the rights of local churches and individuals to manage their own affairs without undue outside interference.

## CHOOSING A CONGREGATION

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Membership in the church, in the universal sense, is settled at conversion. At baptism one is added the the Lord's one body - the church of God's choice. (Acts 2:47; I Cor. 12:13). In the universal sense of the word, "church", one does not "join the church".

One still faces the responsibility, as Paul did (Acts 9:26), of joining himself to the disciples meeting in a particular locality. These disciples compose a local church. In most cases, one simply becomes a part of the local church that was most instrumental in his conversion, the one that meets in the very building where he was baptized. It is generally assumed by him and the congregation that he will be a member there.

There are several circumstances when one must decide which local church to join. It may be just after having been baptized, or having moved into an area, or feeling a need to change for one reason or the other. The number of churches from which he may choose will vary depending on the area.

Why do people choose one congregation over others. In talking with and observing brethren over the years, I have seen that the reasons generally fall into one of four categories:

### CONVENIENCE

Most people simply prefer to attend services at the place that is the easiest to get to with facilities that appeal to their tastes. This is not wrong, if it is not the only consideration. With too many this is the prime reason. The quality of edification and/or the scripturalness of the church's program is a minor factor.

### COMPANY

In deciding where to "go to church" regularly, many are motivated more by who attends there than anything else. It may be family. It may be good friends. It may even be a charming preacher (modesty forbid my naming one). Such considerations are understandable and not wrong if due consideration has been given to more important matters.

It may be that the folks are very friendly. One likes that kind of company. Most of us could improve on being friendly toward one another and especially to our visitors. The people may be more outgoing than at another place. They may "get together" more and do more things than just church functions. This is attractive and not bad if the distinction between church and individual activities are kept crystal clear. But, all too often this is one's prime consideration and it ought not to be.

Sometimes the company that one seeks are the socially elite, the professionals, the wealthy, etc. So they look for a congregation that has managed to attract these people into its membership and go there. Most experienced preachers will tell you that the really strong Christians are seldom found among such folks - they tend to be liabilities to the Lord's cause rather than assets. There are a few notable exceptions, for which we are thankful. but they are exceptions rather than the rule. Some

had much rather rub elbows with these folks than to be identified with a little group "on the wrong side of the tracks" - even though they are far more spiritually minded.

### COMFORT

There is nothing wrong with seeking comfort. Christians are to comfort one another (I Thess. 4:18). Some brethren change congregations because they are not getting the comfort they need. We need to be more sensitive to the needs of our brethren along this line. Brethren do have problems that need our attention.

However, some will not be comforted. No amount of attention will satisfy them. They insist on wallowing in self-pity, as if they and only they ever have troubles - no amount of concern by brethren is going to comfort them. So, they go on their endless search for new comforters. These new comforters will likely be no more successful than the old ones. It is just a matter of time until they will be out seeking another group to comfort them. These too will likely fail, because the real source of discomfort is the searcher's own attitude - which he refuses recognize and change.

Physical and mental comfort probably plays a larger role in our choice of congregations than we might think. Most of us had rather worship in a building where the temperature and seating is just right. I am for making these things as pleasant as possible. But, let's not overly emphasize them.

But, with many it is not the temperature or the seating that makes them uncomfortable at a given church. They prefer to live as they please - comfortably - without any kind of interference, without having to endure rebuke, or even a hint from the pulpit or class that they might be wrong - much less having the threat of discipline hanging over them. They like for every service to be a tonic - S.S.S. - Smooth, Soothing, and Satisfying. Oh, they like the satisfaction of being in a "sound church" and they say they want "sound teaching" and even believe that sin should be condemned. But they would like for it to be all clothed in such generalities and sweetness that no one feels compelled to do anything about it, beyond a kind of weak, tacit admission that "we all need lessons like that". Sin should be denounced, but not in a tone that you think somebody present has "been up to it". Nathan's sermon to David on the little ewe lamb was a good one. It illustrated truth that even David could see. But it did David little good until Nathan made the specific application - "thou art the man".

That made David uncomfortable - enough to repent! (Read 2 Sam. 12).

If one or someone very close to him is guilty of wrong doing, it is much easier to hear a lesson on "lasciviousness" than on dancing at the school prom; or "modesty" than mixed-swimming at the city pool or on being seen publicly in too-tight or too-short clothing; on "adultery" than that a particular marriage situation being adultery (Matt. 19:9); on "sin" than a detailed description of a sin in his life.

If a lesson does deal with specifics, it is much more comfortable if the impression is given that SOMEBODY, SOMEWHERE, MAY BE doing these things and IF such is the case then THEY might ought to do something about it - but it just must never be implied, much less said, that these things are among US, HERE, and that WE need to do something about it. Such general-type lessons may be more comfortable to hear and they are certainly more comfortable to teach, but are they really the ONLY kind we need? My friend, if that is the kind of comfort you desire then Fultondale is not for you.

### CONVICTION

With others, conviction is the prime consideration. They have strong convictions as to what the worship, work and organization of the church should be. They have strong feelings about the kind of edification and evangelism program the church should have. They are concerned about how their attendance at a place will affect the spiritual growth and welfare of their families and themselves. They are concerned with convictions beyond the "major brotherhood issues" of the day. While they know that no congregation is perfect (being made up of humans) but they are concerned that their basic convictions are not compromised and that they be able to strive together for the faith of the gospel and want to be in a congregation that will show enough concern to lovingly and firmly correct and discipline them if they stray from that course.

Let each of us, as God's children, search the scriptures daily and form our convictions upon what we read therein and not some tradition or emotional attachment. Let us choose a congregation compatible with these convictions first, then and only then let convenience, comfort and company enter the picture.

Why would you choose a congregation? Why would you change congregations? Think about it.