



The Reflector

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by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

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"The Brotherhood"

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

"Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. (1 Peter 2:17)

The word "brotherhood" here is translated from *adelphotes*. It appears only twice in the New Testament, both times in First Peter (2:17; 5:9). The King James renders it "brethren" in 5:9, but the New King James renders it "brotherhood" in both verses. Of *adelphotes* Vine says, "primarily, 'a brotherly relationship,'" and so, the community possessed of this relationship, "a brotherhood," 1 Pet. 2:17 (see 5:9 marg.)" and Thayer says, "*brotherhood*"; the abstract for the concrete, *a band of brothers* i.e. of Christians, *Christian brethren*: 1 Pet. ii. 17; v.9).

It is clear that Peter uses the term to refer to what Vine calls "the community possessed of this relationship" throughout the world. In 5:9 he compares the sufferings of those immediately addressed in his epistle to that experienced by their "brotherhood in the world (nkj)." In 2:17, it seems to be a contrast to "all men." Hence, when we as children of God and brothers and sisters in Christ speak of "the brotherhood" we are speaking of ourselves along with all in the world that share in this great relationship. What a great throng of people! It is this throng that Peter especially tells us to love.

It seems to me that in recent years we have lost much of that keen sense of brotherhood that we once enjoyed. Those of us who consider ourselves "conservative" and "non-institutional" have done a pretty good job of teaching that each local congregation is autonomous and independent of any other congregation in the world. We have shown that a failure to recognize this fundamental Bible principle has historically led to most of the wholesale apostasies of the past. We have rightly pointed out that the congregation of which we are members can exist and scripturally function as if there were no others like it in the world. We have also emphasized that each member

of a congregation has a relationship and responsibility to the local church collectively and distributively that he does not have toward brethren elsewhere.

I fear that during all of this we may have developed a mentality that is a bit too "independent." As a result of this perverted sense of independence, brethren have almost isolated themselves from any real concern, contact or sense of fellowship with their brethren elsewhere – even other brethren meeting across town. An invitation can come (in some cases no invitation is sent) from faithful brethren elsewhere to their gospel meeting. It may or may not be announced at the receiving congregation, but it is generally ignored because it not a function of "our" congregation. In some areas preachers of local congregations have little contact or interaction with preachers or other members of other congregations. This writer confesses his own guilt to a degree at times along these lines.

We can remember a time when a church, in an area where there were several congregations would have a gospel meeting that the house would be filled mostly with members from the other congregations. Often, we would travel miles to encourage another congregation in its gospel meetings. We were just as interested in seeing another congregation prosper in the Lord as we were to see the congregation where we attended. We showed an interest in and often inquired about how that brethren meeting at such and such place were doing. That was before we conceived that "autonomous" and "independent" meant "isolation." Have we forgotten how to heed Peter's admonition to "love the brotherhood?"

The brotherhood, of which Peter wrote, is not a brotherhood of churches organized together as a unit nor is it a brotherhood of Christians organized into a unit. It is a *relationship* that exists between all Christians. They share a common faith and have common interests.

While New Testament congregations were not tied together organizationally speaking, they were tied

together doctrinally because they subscribed to the same standard. Paul declared that what he taught and ordained in one church he ordained in all (1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17). They shared in a common faith.

I do not have the right to meddle in the internal affairs of another congregation nor infringe upon its autonomy. It can decide, without any interference for me, its meeting times, when it will have a gospel meeting, how it can best use its treasury, who will do its teaching and preaching, lead its singing and praying, what kind of facilities it will provide to do its work, which of its members it may or may not discipline, etc.

But, because of my duty to "love the brotherhood," I have an obligation to "speak the truth in love" to my brethren everywhere I have the opportunity to do so,

just as I have an obligation to preach the gospel to every creature in the world because I love their souls. It is not interference into the affairs of other congregations when I demonstrate my love of the brotherhood by teaching them the truth and warning them of departures from the faith once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3) and even the Bible teaching that should govern them as they exercise their autonomy.

Let us love and appreciate those of the brotherhood that we meet and work with regularly in the local congregation, but let us also broaden our scope of interest and "love the brotherhood" as a whole – enough to "correct, rebuke and encourage" (2 Tim. 4:2 - NIV) as needed. ♦

Why I Left The Christian Church

Floyd Decker

(Editor's Note: This article by the late brother Floyd Decker is just as relevant in 2007 as it was in 1944. Many of the things that brother Decker left behind in the Christian Church have found their way into some churches of Christ time and time again since 1944. If we who still oppose these things don't continue to teach and emphasize the Bible principles that condemn such practices, the only reasons for rejecting them will be tradition and prejudice. Once an untaught and unlearned generation overcomes its prejudice against such practices they will again become common practice – EOB)

1. The Christian Church has women Counselors, Directors and Lecturers; the church of Christ does not (1 Tim. 2:11, 12; 1 Cor. 14:34).

2. The Christian Church has Educational Directors, Associate Ministers and Youth Directors; the church of Christ has elders, deacons, evangelists and teachers (Eph. 4:11; Phil. 1:1).

3. The Christian Church has Missionary, Benevolent and Educational Organizations to execute the work of the church; the church of Christ does not (Eph. 4:4; Eph. 3:10, 21).

4. The Christian Church celebrates days of heathen worship, such as Easter, Mother's Day and Christmas; the church of Christ does not (Gal. 4:10).

5. The Christian Church fellowships various denominations in their activities, leaving the impression that all are brethren; the church of Christ does not (2 John 9-11; Gal. 1:6-10).

6. The Christian Church seeks to get crowds with Youth Meetings, Campaigns for Christ, Rallies, Drives and Promotions; the church of Christ does not (Rom.

1:16; Rev. 22:18, 19).

7. The Christian Church emphasizes society and the physical man by appealing to the carnal nature, with church carnivals, bands, plays, choruses, dramatics, church kitchens, church camps, and elaborate fellowship halls; the church of Christ does not (1 Cor. 10:7; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 11:22,34).

8. The Christian Church elevates its preachers above the rest of the members by using such titles as Pastor, Superintendent, President and Doctor, but the church of Christ does not (Matt. 23:5-12; Job 32:21, 22). Also, the Christian Church has forced its ministers into the denominational "Pastor System" by hinting, suggesting, complaining, and even demanding that its preachers run after the members, taxi the people here and there, and hold hands of the sick. The church of Christ does not expect this and God does not expect this sort of treatment from those who have been called to preach the gospel. Acts 6 points out that it is not scriptural for ministers of the gospel to leave the word of God and serve tables. The church has women servants and has deacons who are supposed to take care of the physical needs of the congregation. And the church has elders who are entrusted with the "souls" of the members. And the preacher is left free to study, meditate, pray and carry on an unhampered work of preaching the gospel to the lost (Acts 6:4; 2 Tim. 2:15; 4:1-5). And if a church does not have elders, etc., it can no more scripturally introduce the "Pastor System" than it can introduce the piano because it has poor singing.

9. The Christian Church misuses the name "Christian," which is a noun, by speaking of "Christian nations," "Christian schools," and "Christian Church." The church of Christ does not (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16).

10. The Christian Church takes up collections at services other than on the first day of the week, and uses unscriptural means such as suppers, property rentals and special collections to raise money for the church; the church of Christ follows 1 Corinthians 16:1,2 by having each member lay by in store on the first day of the week. This is its only way of raising money.

11. The Christian Church owns and operates Publishing Houses, Radio Stations, Hospitals, and other Benevolent Societies; churches of Christ build nothing

but churches (Eph. 3:21).

12. The Christian Church owns, supports and operates schools for secular education, through theological schools; the church of Christ does not (1 Tim. 3:15).

13. The Christian Church has a compromising spirit, will not defend its doctrine, is nothing but a man-made denomination, has no regard for the authority of the Bible, bases its practice on the silence of the scriptures, and appeals to the traditions of the elders rather than to the simple unadulterated gospel of Christ. The Christian Church is not part of the New Testament church and should not be regarded as a friend of Christ nor of the truth.

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Does Jesus Care?

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

The song, "Does Jesus Care?", written in 1901, has been a comfort to Christians during the trials of the past century. It is one of my favorites. The other night, while meditating on the words of the song, it occurred to me that the title could have a much broader application than the wonderful words of comfort in the song. We could profit greatly by applying the question to many areas of our lives and seeking to find the answer from the scriptures. For example, does Jesus care, one way or the other, whether one is a Jew or Gentile, bond or free, rich or poor, when it comes to saving him from sin and adding him to the church? The answer is, no he does not care one way or the other. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:13). Let us see if we can apply this to some other matters.

Does Jesus care who wins the Super Bowl or the Alabama-Auburn game? One would think that He is deeply concerned from listening to some post-game interviews. Players and coaches often are heard giving the Lord credit for their victory. While it is commendable that they would think of the Lord at such a time, I can find nothing in the scriptures that convinces me that the Lord cares one way or the other who wins a football game or any other similar contest. However, there are other areas where many professed Christians seem to think that he does not care when the Bible indicates that he really does care.

Does Jesus care what church we belong to just as long as one is sincere in his choice? "There is one

body..." (Eph. 4:4). The body is the church (Eph. 1:22, 23). "But now are they many members, yet but one body" (1 Cor. 12:20). "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. (Eph. 5:23). If there is one body and it is the church and if He is the head of **the** church and savior of **the** body, then He must care one way or the other.

Does Jesus care what or how one worships as long as he is seeking to honor God? Jesus said, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24). "In spirit" suggests that he cares how one worships. 1 Cor. 14:40 teaches that worship services should "be done decently and in order." "In truth" suggests that he cares what we offer in worship. It must be according God's word – the truth. Also, He said, "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. (Matt. 15:9).

Does Jesus care what day we observe the Lord's Supper in His memory? Luke wrote, concerning the early disciples' practice, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread ..." (Acts 20:7). The breaking of bread here obviously refers to the Lord's Supper since early Christians were forbidden to come together *as a church* to eat a common meal (1 Cor. 11:18, 22, 34, NKJ, NIV).

Does Jesus care what length of hair one wears? From what I am seeing more and more among members

of the church, one might conclude that Jesus does not care, one way or the other? It is not unusual any more to sit behind a couple at a worship service and not be able to tell which is the male or female by their hair styles. Yet, the scriptures say, “Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering (1 Cor. 11:14-15). Does this not indicate to us that the Lord does care one way or the other about the length of one’s hair?”

Does Jesus care about the clothes one wears? “In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works” (1 Tim. 2:9-10). The Bible also clearly

teaches that one is to be clothed so that “the shame of thy nakedness do not appear” (Rev. 3:18). Clothing can make one’s nakedness appear by either leaving certain parts of the body bare or by being so form fitting that nothing is left to the imagination.

The list of applications could go on and on. It would be a good exercise in Bible study for one to list all the things he could think of about which he could ask “Does Jesus care?” Then go to the scriptures to see if He really does care one way or the other.

Yes, Jesus does care, in the words of the song, “when my heart is pained ... when my way is dark ... when I’ve said ‘good-bye’ to the dearest on earth to me.” He also cares about other things in our lives as well. If we seek to please Him, we will care about those things for which he cares. ♦

“Doting About Questions”

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr

Paul warns of those who are “doting about questions and strifes of words.” (1 Tim. 6:4). The basic meaning of the English word “dote” is “to show excessive love or fondness.” The word from which “doting” is translated means “sick.” Three other widely-used translations translate the phrase thusly:

“Obsessed with disputes and arguments over words” (New King James).
 “An unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words” (New International).
 “A morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words” (New American Standard)

From the context it is fairly certain that Paul was talking about certain false teachers who were causing strife among brethren by using their skills at argumentation to persuade poor slaves, who were Christians, to use godliness for their own material gain by rising up against their masters. It may have been that they argued that “freedom in Christ” entitled one to demand all other forms of freedom. What ever the case, Paul tells the slaves that rather than “supposing that gain is godliness,” to consider that “godliness with contentment is great gain.”

It was not the purpose of the gospel to upset nor overthrow the social and political systems of the world, but its purpose was (and is) to give man freedom from

sin and fear of the wrath to come. In order to maintain this freedom a Christian was taught to “live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.” (Tit. 2:12). Part of living that “quiet and peaceable life in all godliness” (1 Tim. 2:2) was to quietly submit to those over them in the social and political realm, rather than being an agitator of strife and a rabble-rouser.

While this is the context of Paul’s warning, it is clear that God does not like for one to “dote about questions” in any context. Christians should not “show excessive love” for controversy. They must “contend earnestly for the faith.” (Jude 3). Jesus and his Apostles left us copious examples of engaging in legitimate debate on religious questions. But we need to be careful that our affinity for controversy does not become excessive until it becomes an obsession, a sickness – so that one seeks to debate just for the love of debating or arguing just for the sake of arguing. Such a one can foment a lot of unnecessary strife and headaches among brethren in general, and within the congregation where he attends in particular, with his endless wrangling over every little question. Bible classes, preaching services, and even social conversations, with such a person present, are tension filled because most of those present wonder what brother Wrangle is going to find to argue about today. It is hard to really learn and be edified in such an atmosphere. ♦