

## The Need To Be Understood

**"For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound who will prepare himself for battle? So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air."- 1 Cor. 14:8-9.**

If the specially endowed Spirit-gifted Christians needed to go out of their way to make their message clear, should not all the rest of us strive diligently to that end? We are going to be misunderstood enough without our **purposely** or **carelessly** sounding an uncertain sound. It is important to friend and foe alike that they know exactly what our position is on religious matters.

We hear a great deal today in international political circles about the importance of nations' sending the right signals to world about their intentions and resolve, especially in periods of international tension. Leaders know that it could make the difference in war and peace. It is just as important that the Lord's people send the right signals, in word and deed - if we are going to convert others, edify our own and contend for the faith.

Even though I may not appreciate a man's stand on a matter -- if he makes it clear where he stands, I appreciate the man. There is too much of a tendency among brethren to send out vague and/or mixed signals concerning what they really believe. Such can be a useful tool to those who desire to "lie in wait to deceive" but those who have nothing to hide have little

use for such. It is amazing how "misunderstood" some very capable but factious brethren can be, when they are confronted by faithful brethren about their subtle efforts to draw away disciples after them. This has been especially true in recent years with those fellows who want to make the grace of God cover about all the sins of brethren (repented or not) and extend fellowship beyond the limits of Scripture and reason. Have you tried to pin one of those fellows down? If you haven't it will be a good learning experience for you. You will learn quickly how many ways one can be "misunderstood" and still maintain vagueness about the misunderstandings.

There are two ways that we can make our faith clear to all - our **words** and our **works**:

The Christian should strive to express his faith in **words** that are easily understood: "unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken?"

Those who had the gift of tongues were to abide by this principle. Those tongues were languages that existed somewhere in the world (Acts 2: 4-11; 1 Cor. 14:11) - not meaningless chanting. The tongues were only to be used with an interpreter or translator (1 Cor. 14:5,18,19,28). Even with interpretation they were to be used sparingly (vs. 27,28). The gift ceased when the perfect or complete will of God was revealed (1 Cor. 13:8-13). Even when the gift was in operation, it was not only useless but harmful unless they could be used to

edify by being clearly understood - thus the need of translation.

While not many speak, preach or teach in a language foreign to their hearers (non do it miraculously), they might as well. They make truth hard to be understood by theological jargon. Some are masters at "double talk". A Christian is not to be double-tongued or exploit with deceptive words (cf. 1 Tim. 3:8; 2 Pet. 2:3). The word for "feigned" or "deceptive" in 2 Pet. 2:3 is the Greek word, "**plastos**", the word from which we get plastic. The idea is words that can be moulded or shaped to suit the occasion. Many politicians are masters with such words. It is a useful device for them. One can use words that are subject to a variety or even opposite interpretations. The hearer is led to believe one thing, while in reality the speaker really believes something entirely different. The speaker can salve his conscience with the knowledge that he did not mean what the hearer thought he meant and the hearer is more receptive to the speaker because he thinks the speaker is speaking the truth. It is also useful when one is called on the carpet by on any controversial matter. If the words are such that can be fairly interpreted in opposite ways, then one can always satisfy the questioners on all sides of an issue by taking the words, using any of the several possible interpretations, and convincing the questioner that their views are the same - regardless to what view the questioner

holds.

It is possible that we may sometimes (intentional or not) cover up vital truth with generalities. In many cases, depending upon the hearers understanding, general words are all that is needed. But sometimes general terms are inadequate to get the job done of convicting folks of sin and teaching them the truth. All religious people will tell you that they are for **truth** and against **error**. They are for **righteousness** and against **sin**. It is when one gets down to specific points of sin and error or specific acts of sin or righteousness that real test of one's loyalty to the Lord is tested.

I heard the story a few years ago about some college students on the campus of one of the "Christian Colleges" that wondered where a certain teacher stood on premillennialism - a issue that was troubling brethren in those days. So, they decided to go into his office and come right out and ask him where he stood. So, they did. Without hesitation, he told them, "Boys, you don't have a thing to worry about, I stand '**foursquare**' on premillennialism". That was a real relief to those young men. They left his office in complete confidence that this good brother stood 'four-square' - until they realized that he had not really said anything!

A friend of mine was wondering out loud one day in the presence of some other preachers as to why he often offended brethren when he preached against certain things and he noticed that other preachers preached against the same things without getting too much flack. One of the preachers present said, "Maybe it is because you preach against it like you think someone has been up to it". Now that makes sense. Brethren will endure preaching on "sin", "false doctrine", "immodest dress

and/or behavior", "lasciviousness" without offence (or change) as long you do not tell what is sin, what is false, what is immodest, what is lascivious. So, even good words can utter an uncertain sound, if they are too general to get the job done of convincing people to turn from specific sins and believe and obey specific truth. David had no trouble with the principle of the stealing from a poor man nor did he profit by it - until it was pointed out that "You are the man!" It did him little good to know the the general principle until the principle was specifically applied to what he had done. (cf. 2 Sam. 12:1-13).

The Christian should strive to express his faith in **works** that are easily understood (Matt. 5:13-16, Jas. 2:14-18).

Our behavior before the world and our brethren should be such that it sends a clear signal as to what say that we believe about matters. (cf. 1 Cor. 8:10).

Inconsistent and hypocritical behavior gives an uncertain ring to our faith. (cf. Matt. 23:1-4, 25-31). Peter was rebuked for such (Gal. 2:14ff). One needs to be careful that his behavior at all times is such that no one will be surprised that he professes to be a Christian. How can one convince another privately that he is a Christian, when his public behavior is so inconsistent with the principles taught by Christ. We have known of brethren who would privately tell other brethren that they considered some brother to be unsound and dangerous to the Cause - yet when that same "unsound" and "dangerous" brother (I am not talking about some brother that we might disagree with on some point - but one that we see fit to at least privately label as mentioned) is publicly recognized and used in their services like they were as solid as a rock. Is not such sending out an

uncertain sound?

Negligent behavior gives an uncertain ring to our faith. (cf. Jas. 1:24-25, 2:18). How can we convince others that our faith is really important to us when they see us neglect the very fundamentals of the faith? How am I going to convince my neighbor that the Lord and His kingdom is the most important thing in the world, when he sees me load up and head for the lake about church time on Sunday morning? How can I convince him that it is all the world to me, when he know that I am well, hardy, and **at home** during any service watching TV? How am I going to send a clear signal to him that the gospel must be obeyed by every creature in order to be saved, if he knows that I find time for everything else but to talk to my neighbors about the Lord and His church?

Marginal behavior gives our faith an uncertain sound (cf. Rev. 3:16). There are areas where it is admittedly not as easy to draw the line between right and wrong as it is in other cases. We believe any thinking and honest Christian will have to admit this fact. However, there is an attitude among brethren that is troublesome. It is what I call "border-line" or "marginal" living. It is seeing how close to the border one can live without actually stepping over into sin. Such can be dangerous. I heard of a man during the American Civil War that lived near the border between the north and south. He wore a Blue coat with gray trousers. The result the rebels shot him in the coat and the yanks shot him in the pants.

Let us behave so that no honest, informed, thinking person will have any reason to doubt where we stand on any religious issue: whether it be congregational independence, hair length on men and women, modesty of dress, or whatever. Even when we are forced to admit that we may not know the exact point where one crosses

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over the border - the Christian will send a clear signal when he takes a position that is far enough from the border to convince reasonable men that he stands for what the Bible teaches.

Do you stand for what the Bible teaches in religion and morals? Do you make a deliberate effort to express it to others in words that can be understood? Do you strive to send a clear signal to all where you stand by your action? Think about it.-Editor

## This 'N That

### ~~~~~ **The Lee Jones' Moving.**

Since October of last year, brother Lee Jones served well as one of the elders of this congregation. He has been working out of town for several weeks and plans to move with his family soon. We will miss them so much as co-workers in this congregation. Lee's work in the eldership will be missed by all the congregation and the other elders. We will miss the entire family.

### **A Change In The Bulletin.**

We have not been including local news in this paper. It is, in design and purpose, a teaching paper. We will continue that policy, with one exception. It has been suggested to us that since people formerly connected with this congregation find it helpful if we mentioned any deaths that may have taken place among our members, some have said they would have expressed sympathy to the families at the time had they known about it. So, we will

try to mention each month any who have passed away since the last month's bulletin.

### **Young Preachers**

I know some fine young preachers, whom I consider to be capable and mature beyond their years, who would like to locate (or relocate) and work full-time with some congregational. We certainly are not about to try to get into the preacher-placement business. However, if any congregation is interested in talking with any of them - I would be glad to furnish information concerning them.- Editor.

## "The Church"

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"Church" is the word English translators have used for the Greek word, **Ekklesia**, in the New Testament.

It has one basic meaning, with at least five applications:

1. The assembly called together by Demetrius the silversmith. (Acts 19:24 ff.)

2. The "lawful assembly" to which the city clerk proposed to refer the dispute in Act 19:39.

3. The church, composed of all saved people - everywhere. (Eph. 5:23; Acts 2:47; Heb. 12:23).

4. A church, composed of saved people at particular location. (1 Cor. 1:1-3; Acts 20:28).

5. A church or assembly of Christians physically assembled together in one place. (1 Cor. 11:18, 14:34,35).

The word means a called-out assembly. **W. E. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** says it "was used among the Greeks of a body of citizens gathered to discuss the affairs of State, Acts 19:39. In the Sept. it is used to designate the gathering of Israel, summoned

for any definite purpose, or a gathering regarded as representative of the whole nation. In Acts 7:38 it is used of Israel; in 19:32,41, of a riotous mob."

The word suggests more than a mere gathering or assembly of people. It is a gathering that has been called for a purpose. The assembly in Acts 19, even though it turned into a disorderly mob, was called together by Demetrius and dismissed by the city clerk. (vs. 34-41). It has been suggested by some that the word merely means an assembly - however informal or unplanned it have have been. It is more than a mere gathering - it is a gathering or assembly purposefully called out.

We are here considering only the last three applications of the word listed above - those that are used to refer to disciples of Christ. In doing this, we shall take one individual and trace the steps that relate him to these three applications of the word, "church".

### **The Universal Assembly.**

The lost individual upon hearing hearing the gospel of Christ is convinced that it is of the truth, understands his need to repent of his sins and be baptized for the remission of them. (Acts 2:36-38). He follows through with obedience (verse 41) . He is added to the church (v. 47). He is now a disciple of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20). He along with all others like him, everywhere, have been called out of darkness into the marvelous light of Christ (1 Pet. 2:9). He is one of the firstborn ones "**who are registered in heaven**" (Heb. 12:23). All such ones considered together are

### ~~~~~ **Sister Minnie Lee Handley**

Our sympathy to the family of sister Minnie Lee Handley whose funeral was July 21, 1984.

the Lord's church or called-out assembly. There is but one such body. (Eph. 4:4; 1:22,23). One is not saved and then later joins this assembly - he is in that assembly when he is saved -- when the Lord adds him to the church -- when the Lord registers his name in heaven. That great throng or assembly of people are never called together in one place for any purpose. They never act as a unit. They never pool their resources. They have no mechanism for joint action. Each person simply serves God under the authority of Christ as delivered by inspired men.

### **The Local Assembly**

The individual under consideration is now a member of the one church - not a denomination. Nor is he authorized by Christ to join any denomination on earth. He does have the duty, however, to join himself to other such called-out individuals as himself (disciples) for group worship and work. (Acts 9:26; cf. Heb.10:25). These groups are called "churches" in the New Testament (1 Cor. 1:1-3; Rom. 16:16). Membership in the "church", in the first application of the word we noticed (universal), depends only upon being received by God. Paul had been received by God, thus registered in heaven, thus a member of the church, long before he came to Jerusalem in Acts 9:26. He tried to join the disciples there but was not accepted by them until Barnabas confirmed that his was indeed a disciple. (vs. 27, 28). Those local groups of disciples, being made up of called-out ones, too are called "churches" or called - out assemblies. Local churches are to be made up of those are blood bought. The church of God at Ephesus, being composed of individuals who have been redeemed (bought) by the blood of Christ, is said to have been purchased with the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28, cf. Eph.

1:7). Only baptized believers have been redeemed (bought) with the blood of Christ, thus having the forgiveness of sins (cf. Acts 22:16).

Each of these assemblies of called-out ones functions as a unit. Each is given its own overseeing body (elders, or bishops, or pastors) to rule or lead it as a unit (Act 14:23). Each is authorized to have a common treasury for its work (1 Cor. 16:1-3). Each provides the means for the edification of its members and the general spread of the truth throughout the world (Eph. 4:16; Phil. 4:15-17; 2 Cor. 11:8). Each provides the means for coming together for worship and edification (1 Cor. 11:17 ff.; also chapters 12-14; Heb. 10:25).

Each of these groups is authorized to maintain discipline within its ranks (1 Cor. 5).

There is no scriptural authority to tie these churches together under common oversight and/or with a common treasury. There is no New Testament authority for any of these local churches to discipline any other than their own members.

### **The Assembled Assembly**

When the members of one of these local churches gathered together in one place that assembly is called "church" (1 Cor. 11:18; 14:35,36). Here "in church" is contrasted with being "at home". We are in the church (in the sense of being a member of church universal sense or in the sense of being members of the local church) even "at home" - but "church" here is used of the local church being assembled together in one place (1 Cor. 11:20). It is in such assemblies each Sunday that the Lord's supper is eaten (Acts 20:7) and collections are taken (1 Cor.16:1,2). Spiritual songs are sung, prayers are prayed, teaching is done in such assemblies (1 Cor. 14:15 ff.) (Unlike the

Lord's supper and collection, these acts of worship are not limited to the first day of the week). It is in this way that we sometimes speak of "going to church" - that is to say going to the assembly. It is an assembly that is called together, by the authority of Christ, to worship and serve the Lord. A Bible class, though arranged by the local church as a means of edification of its members, is not "the church" in the third application of the term.

Thus, we have "church" as the New Testament presents it. At no time is it presented as a universal church made up of many denominations. The local churches were of the same order - Paul said what he taught in one he taught in all (1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17). One needs to do what he must do to be saved from sin and do it. The Lord will add him to the church as we noticed earlier. He then needs to join himself to a group of other disciples and work with them and worship with them in their assemblies - doing what God has authorized them to do as a group. Most of what he does is still done as an individual serving Christ. He will still have to answer as an individual. His responsibilities as an individual Christian will not be the same as that of the group of which he is a member (1 Tim. 5:16). Yet, he will have to give account to God individually for his part in the joint action (church action).

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