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It Is No Fun, Charlie Brown

by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Informed observers know that there has been an ever-widening division among "churches of Christ" over the past four decades. In the 50's and 60's, most of the controversy centered around church-support of benevolent institutions and the sponsoring church arrangement of church co-operation. Some said that the church was scripturally authorized to support benevolent institutions, other denied that such authority exists. Some maintained that churches could not scripturally pool their money under the oversight of a sponsoring eldership to preach the gospel to the world. Others said they could.

Many of us, who deny that the Scriptures authorize either of the above mentioned practices, kept saying that these two issues were only the tip of the iceberg. We pointed out that these two innovations were only symptoms of a much deeper problem -- an liberal attitude toward Bible authority. As time passed this became more evident.

A prominent college president wrote a tract, typical of the pattern of thought that was beginning to develop, entitled, "Where There Is No Pattern". (Incidentally, the author eventually went into denominationalism). The main idea was that if the Bible is silent on a matter then we are at liberty to do it. This was reminiscent of the late 1800's and early 1900's when some brethren had argued that

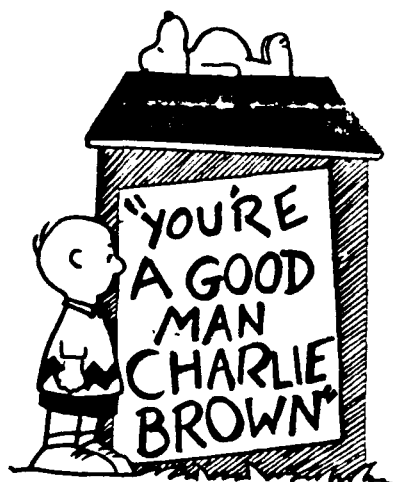
since the New Testament said nothing about instrumental music, either for it or against it, churches were at liberty to use it.

Opponents of this "no pattern" concept argued that such a concept of Bible authority would open up a flood gate for innovations that would be beyond imagination. Just about anything morally right would be justified(?) for the church to do, if we could take that kind of liberty. Who could count the things out there in the world that the Scriptures say nothing about? What the church could do would then only be limited to the brethren's imagination.

Gradually the pat answer to those who still asked, "Where is the scripture for this practice?", became, "The Bible says 'be ready unto every good work'." (cf. 2 Tim. 2:21; Tit. 3:1). One could then think up just about any kind of practice, label it a "good work", and satisfy many who still wanted scripture for what the church did.

So, over the years brethren saw how the "good works" of the denominations seemed to be gaining for them larger memberships with better facilities along with community recognition and acceptance. The number of "good works" multiplied a hundred-fold. Anything from greased pig chases to hypnosis classes. The gap between the churches that insist

THE HOMEWOOD PLAYERS PRESENT



DECEMBER 3, 4, & 5, 1987

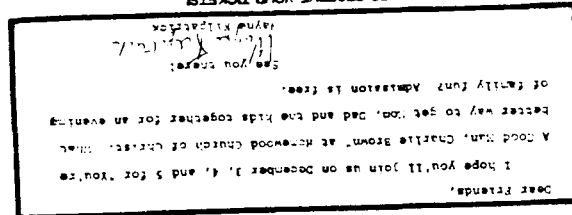
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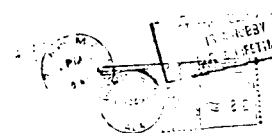
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that Scriptures furnish us "unto every good work" (rather than the catch-all "good works") and those who have taken the more liberal approach has gotten wider and wider. The gap between those who took the more liberal approach and main-line denominations has become narrower and narrower. More and more programs of a purely social, recreational, and entertainment nature, along with facilities necessary to execute them, have surfaced among the churches.

More and more churches, with their facilities and personnel, have become "community centers" to minister to the social, physical, psychological, and recreational needs of the community. Even their so-called evangelistic efforts in the community has taken that tone. Those "encouraging word" spots on our local TV cable is a case in point.

For a while, outright entertainment, was presented under the guise of teaching methods. Puppet shows were presented, but we were told that the object was not entertainment, but to visually aid teaching -- you know, like chalk boards and charts. Now, comes a program that makes no

claim to be anything other than "an evening of family fun". (See the reduced copy of the flyer that was mailed out.) Do you think I would be considered "snoopy" if I asked for book, chapter and verse for the church to present such a program? Money spent on such programs is not "peanuts", my friend, it is money that could be spent on the work that the church is scripturally authorized to do.

A church that simply has facilities for meeting for worship and edification, a benevolent program to care for its own needy, and evangelistic efforts that stress the lost condition of man, dealing with the sin that causes him to be lost, and what he needs to do to be saved and stay saved is considered to be out-dated by a great many brethren. Yet, is that not precisely the kind of congregation depicted by the Scriptures? Why not do as the Bereans of old who "received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so"? (Acts 17:11).

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VISIT WITH US SOON

Corinth: A Sick Church

by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

"Problems, problems, problems! The church is always having problems", we hear so often. Yes, it always has and probably always will until the kingdom is delivered up to the Father. So, what are we going to do about them? Ignore? Accept? Quit? Or Scripturally deal with them as they arise?

When Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, they were a sick church. What was their main problem? Division or schism is mentioned in chapters one, three, eleven and twelve. With just a little investigation one can see that division was but a symptom of a deeper disease. While Paul pleaded for "no divisions among you", he did not leave it there. He went on to deal with the root cause of their divisions. Too many of our efforts today are aimed at the symptom rather than the disease. Now, let's look at Corinth's case and see if we can't profit from it:

THE VISIBLE SYMPTOM: DIVISIONS

Divisions were the outward signs of a deeper spiritual sickness at Corinth. We are not minimizing the seriousness of division. Being visible, it spreads our folly before the world and hinders the gospel. (cf. John 17:21). Yet, when there are divisions, it is dishonest and harmful to deny them. Treating symptoms does not cure the disease. If that is all that is done, it may make the real disease harder to diagnose and cure.

We need to deal honestly with symptoms. It is foolish to mask the root cause by focusing too attention on the symptom. People sometimes try to solve their problems by denying to themselves and all that they have them. If there are divisions, let us frankly admit it. Then let us set out to find the cause and root it out.

THE DEEPER DISEASE: CARNALITY

"For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?" (3:3). To be carnal is to be "sensual, controlled by animal appetites, governed by human nature, instead of by the Spirit of God" (Vine). Fleshly, rather than spiritual considerations, control the appetites, aspirations and evaluations. The

Corinthians inordinate loyalty to men was a form of carnality. They had shifted their loyalty away from the spiritual nature of the message (Christ) to the fleshly nature of the messengers (preachers). Instead of being "of Christ" they were "of" their favorite preacher - dividing up along the lines of carnal loyalty. They were too immature (had not outgrown carnality) to properly evaluate the real role of gospel preachers as planters and waterers with God giving the increase (3;1-15). Their loyalty went beyond honoring these men for their work's sake (cf. 1 Thess. 5:13). They were giving them an authority of their own rather merely being servants of Christ. The preachers became their authority and objects of reverence rather than Christ or the Scriptures. (4:6).

Their division-causing carnality is further seen later in the epistle. They had turned the spiritual Lord's supper into a sensual feast of their own. (Ch. 11) This caused divisions (v. 18). They even took a carnal approach to spiritual gifts, but letting them become an occasion for jealousy and strife -- thus producing schism. (Chapter 12:28). The real problem at Corinth was immature carnal mindedness. Division was but a symptom.

THE CURE: GROW UP!

Paul wrote, "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to BABES IN CHRIST. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for unto now you were not able to *receive it*, and even now you are still not able; FOR YOU ARE STILL CARNAL. For where *there are* envy, strife, divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?" (3:1-3). Their carnality that led to divisions was due to a lack of growth. Like the Hebrews (5:12-14), they should have already outgrown this kind of thinking -- carnal mindedness -- but they had not. Hence, Paul rebukes them for it.

When Christians grow up in Christ they respect God's wisdom over human wisdom, God's power over human power. (2:1-13). They are able to put teachers of

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sunday:

Bible Classes 9:45 a.m.
 Worship. 10:45 a.m.
 Worship. 6:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Class 10:00 a.m.
 Bible Classes 7:30 p.m.

the Gospel into proper perspective. They understand that these mere men are God's servants. It is God who gets the glory. (3:5-15). They understand that all faithful men are working for the same end, not as competitors for a personal following. They understand that God's servants (Apostles, prophets, elders, evangelists, teachers, etc.) are God's blessings to benefit them, but not to be the objects of their faith (3:21-23; 2:5). They avoid the common extremes of (1) "Preacheritis", on the one hand, and (2) Ingratitude and disrespect for God's servants on the other.

When Christians grow up they keep worship and church activities spiritual, rather than, like the Corinthians in chapter 11, turning to things that appeal to the fleshly appetites of man.

It may well be that most of our church problems and divisions today are because we are "still carnal" and have to be fed as babes rather than "spiritual people".

To close up an open sore of division without getting out the underlying infection will not get the job done. It leaves the real problem to eat away at the very spiritual life of those involved until it may prove to be fatal in the end. Brethren, need to understand this before jumping on the bandwagon of some of the "unity movements" -- efforts to bring

brethren together by glossing over the problem that divides them. T
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HELPING HANDS

Was It You... who spoke to that couple in the parking lot last Sunday morning? I heard you greet them cheerfully with, "Good morning, I'm glad to see you today!"

Was It You... with the smile and hearty handshake who greeted folks out in the vestibule between services Sunday?

Was It You... who noticed those visitors who were seated near you? It helped when you introduced yourself and your wife to them and to some of your friends close by.

Was It You.. who saw that young mother with two small children come into services last Sunday? You informed her about the nursery and offered your help. Your thoughtfulness really helped her to be in the right attitude of worship.

Was It You... who last week entertained some of our new members in your home. It you have ever been new in a community, you know how much and invitation like that means. How important it is that we reach out to new members.

Was It You? Well, if it was, you were a blessing to those who are important to God. In these many ways, you help Christ to minister to people when you greet visitors, seek out the lonely and show hospitality to fellow Christians. This kind of positive, excited, happy attitude will do much to build up the body of Christ. And the wonderful thing about it is... everyone can do it!

-- Selected and adapted

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