



Why "Liberal" & "Conservative" Churches of Christ?

Robert Harkrider

During the past two decades many have asked this question. Some sincere brethren who have been caught up in one stream or the other never fully understand, and many who were too young before have now grown to adulthood wondering why. It is therefore a good question worthy of repeated investigation. Labels of "liberal" and "institutional" versus "anti" and "conservative" have been used by some as a prejudicial tool to halt further investigation. Labels used as prejudicial clubs are to be condemned; yet the terms "liberal" and "conservative" are proper when used as adjectives to describe a difference in attitude toward Bible authority, and consequently, a difference in practice. As the years go by the ATTITUDE underlying the division becomes more apparent. We are not separated because one group believes in benevolence and the other does not, nor because of jealousy and envy. We have divided over a basic attitude toward the Bible: (1) A "liberal" attitude justifies any activity that seems to be a "good work" under the concept, "We do a lot of things for which we have no authority." (2) A "conservative" attitude makes a plea to have Bible authority (either generic or specific) for all we do...therefore we refrain from involving the church in activities alien to that of the church of the New Testament.

Briefly, the walls of innovations which have divided are built in three areas:

WHO?

Who is to do the work of the church? The church, or a human institution? The church has a God-given work to do, and the Lord made the church sufficient to do its own work. Within the framework of elders and deacons, a local church is the only organization necessary to fulfill its mission of evangelism, edification and benevolence (Eph. 3:10,11; 4:11-16; 1 Tim. 3:15). However, a wedge was

driven when some brethren began to reason that the church may build and maintain a separate institution - a different WHO - to do the work of the church. This separate institution is human in origin and control. It is not a church, nor governed by the church; yet, it receives financial maintenance from the church. Human institutions so arranged (such as benevolent homes, hospitals, colleges, or missionary societies) may be doing a good work...but when they become leeches on the church, they deny its independence and all-sufficiency and make a "fund-raising house" of this God-planned institution.

HOW?

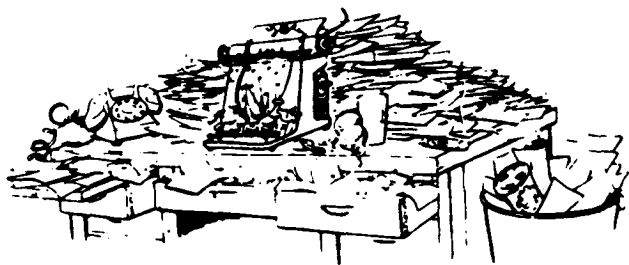
How is the work of the church to be overseen? On a local basis with separate, autonomous congregations? Or may several local churches work as a unit through a "sponsoring eldership"? The organization of the New Testament church is local in nature, with elders limited to oversight of the work of the flock among them (Acts 14:23; 1 Peter 5:2). We are divided by those who promote "brotherhood" works through a plan of inter-congregational effort with centralized oversight, which is an unscriptural HOW.

WHAT?

What is the mission of the church? Spiritual, or social? It is in this area that the loose attitude toward the Scriptures is becoming more apparent. Though wholesome activities are needed by all, the Lord died for a higher and holier mission than fun, food, and frolic. Let the church be kept free to spend its energy and resources in spiritual purposes (Rom. 14:17; 1 Pet. 2:5), and let the home be busy in providing social needs (1 Cor. 11:22,34).

--from Locust Light

EDITOR'S DESK



A REMINDER: If you want to continue receiving this paper you must let us hear from you. We have moved the deadline up to *June 1, 1982*. If we do not hear from you by then your name will be dropped. This DOES NOT apply to those who are members of the church here; or those whose zip codes are 35068, 35071, 35117; or those with whom we exchange papers.

* * * *

We had another GOOD MONTH at Fultondale. We had a good meeting with *brother Granville Tyler*. He has always done a splendid job of preaching the gospel, but I believe he now does better than ever. In spite of there being several good meetings in the area it was exceptionally well attended. One was baptized, two were restored. Our next meeting will be this fall (date to be announced later) with *brother Frank Chumbley*.

Over all, April was a good month for the church. It may be because the preacher was gone much of the time. Our attendance for all services was up and our contributions were possibly the best ever. This sure helps us recover from the slacking off we had during the fall and winter months. A few more months like this and we might get in a position to increase our support of preaching away from home.

* * * *

I enjoyed TWO GOOD MEETINGS away from home during April with the good churches at *East Albertville* (a "week-end" meeting) and *Pinson*. One was baptized at *Pinson*.

* * * *

I have been around some "RETIRED PREACHERS" lately who make me tired just to think of the amount of work they are doing. I think that is great! *Brother Tyler's* meeting schedule will stagger the imagination. It seems to keep him young. The week before our meeting, *brother Irvin Lee* called from *Elliottsville*, where he was in a meeting. Had a good talk with him. He seems to be going on and on. *Brother Hugh Davis* is at *Inglenook* this week. It was our privilege to spend a few days in his and sister *Davis'* home last year. He is not only busy preaching and teaching classes, but serves as an elder of the church where his son-in-law preaches. It is wonderful to see men like these so actively "retired". churches can benefit greatly from their experience by using them locally and in meetings. In many cases the church would benefit greatly by appointing such men to the eldership. Instead of putting them out to pasture, why not put them in to pastor? Now, brethren file this articles away for I may want to remind you of it in a few years.

* * * *

Speaking of preachers, several brethren have remarked to me lately about what a fine crop of YOUNGER PREACHERS we have all over the country. I couldn't agree more. I have been impressed with their zeal both for study and work. With a few exceptions, I have detected very little inordinate pride and professionalism among them. There seems to be little evidence of any "generation gap" between them and older men. They simply want to do the Lord's work, further his cause, and build up churches in the faith. They deserve our support and encouragement. They are offering a lot in return. A church looking for a preacher to work "full-time" with them should not automatically look for an "older man" without investigating some those younger fellows. Some of them can preach circles around some older men and have the good judgment that it takes to work with a congregation to boot!

PEACE

'He who would love life and see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile; Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it." - 1 Peter 3:10-11

While there may be some in the world who love the excitement of conflict and a few in the church who love the challenge of controversy - I believe the vast majority both in the world and in the church have a longing for peace.

Jesus promised peace. He is Prince of Peace. (Isa. 9:7) His peace differs from that promised by the world. (John 14:27) He does not promise the Christian a world of peace, but peace in the midst of a troubled world. (John 16:33) His peace surpasses all understanding. (Phil. 4:7) Yet, His peace is neither unconditional nor unlimited. (Luke 12:51-52).

A Christian must SEEK and PURSUE peace. He must be at peace with God. (Rom. 5:1) He must be at peace with himself - "having a conscience void of offence" (Acts 24:16; 1 Tim. 1:5,19). He is to do things which make for peace between him and his brethren in the Lord. (Rom. 14:19). He must maintain peace with all men to the extent that it depends on him. (Rom. 12:18)

There is a definite order of priority in the above levels of peace. One must do his best to establish and maintain peace at ALL levels, but sometimes one may have to sacrifice peace at one level in order to have peace at a higher level. The highest level of peace is peace with God, followed by peace with oneself, then peace with one's brethren and then peace with all men. While all these levels are related to each other, it is possible

THE REFLECTOR is published monthly by the church of Christ meeting at 2005 Elkwood Drive, Fulntondale, Alabama. Our mailing address: 3004 Brakefield Drive, Fulntondale, AL 35068.

Edited by: Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.
All articles are by the editor unless otherwise indicated.

ible to have one without the others--though I cannot see how one could have peace with God without having peace with himself (a clear conscience).

In other words, I cannot afford peace with all men if it means offending my brethren, my conscience, or my Lord. I cannot maintain peace with brethren if I must violate conscience to do it (see Rom. 14:22,23) and/or disobey the Lord. I cannot rest secure in a clear conscience (see Acts 23:1;26:9) while failing to obey God. Peace with Him must come first!

We have peace with God through Jesus Christ. He is our peace. (Rom. 5:1; Eph 2:14) Sin, the alienating element, is removed through Him. (Eph 2:1-13). This happens when one obeys from the heart the gospel of Christ (Rom. 6:17,18). Obeying the gospel involves faith in Christ (Rom. 10:16,17), repentance of sin (Luke 24:47), confessing our faith (Rom. 10:10) and being baptized for the remission of those sins (Acts 2:38;22:16). Without this one is still in sin, without peace with God, no matter how much he may have peace with himself or anyone else. He may speak glowingly of that "inner peace" that came over him at a certain point in his life and has continued with him ever since. but, if the Bible is the word of God (and it is) he is not at peace with God until he has been forgiven by God. God has not promised, in his Word, to forgive any man without obedience to the gospel of Christ - which involves more than just believing (Jas. 2:24).

Then, one keeps peace with God by continuing to obey Him and repenting of and confessing sins committed (1 John 1:7-2:1).

Those reconciled unto God through Jesus Christ are reconciled unto each other in one body. (Eph. 2:12-22) There is no such thing as reconciliation unto God in separate and distinct bodies (churches cf. Eph. 1:22,23). When one is united with God at his conversion he is also united with all others who are reconciled unto God. Peace has been established with all others who are reconciled unto God - they are his brethren. He then is given the duty to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" - which requires patience and proper attitude. (Eph. 4:1-3) The unity that he must keep is the same as the peace that was established back in chapter 2 - unity (reconciliation) with brethren based on reconciliation unto the one God, by the one Spirit, through the One Lord, subscribing to the one faith, having submitted to the one baptism, maintaining the one hope, and being in the one body. (vs. 4-6).

DO OUR TEEN-AGERS HAVE RESPONSIBILITY?

Delton Porter

When we listen to some of our parents make excuses for the behavior of our young people, it seems as if the youngsters do not have any responsibility. To hear some of the teen-agers talk, we get the idea they do not feel any responsibility for their behavior. Some say "they are young and they are going to sow 'wild oats,' so let them alone." The apostle Paul said we must reap what we sow. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Gal. 6:7). If "wild oats" are sown they will be reaped.

Some may feel that the young people now are worse than ever, but I doubt it. "Our youth now love luxury. They have bad manners and a contempt for authority. They show disrespect for elders; love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants and not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, gobble up their food, and tyrannize their teachers." (socrates) This was almost 2,000 years ago but this world still stands. This shows that youth now, like that of those of us who are older, has not changed too much from generation to generation.

I affirm that our young people are responsible to God for their actions, and must be made to realize they have souls made in the image of God (gen. 2:7). When we reach the age of accountability we are responsible for the outcome of our souls. Jesus shows us that our souls are worth more than anything else in this world (Mk.8:36-37). I am afraid teenagers have the wrong conception of what is valuable because of the bad examples set by their elders along this line. Parents sometimes live as if this world were worth more than the world to come.

We have been led to think that we owe the teen-ager certain things. Churches have been put into the recreation business and other projects with the cry, "We have to do it or lose our young people." It is true that we as parents sometimes fail to teach and to provide wholesome entertainment is no excuse for the church to provide that which God has not authorized. Does the teen-ager owe God anything? Does he owe his parents, community and country anything? Why not teach him his re-

sponsibility and use the proper discipline in order to make a man out of him who will be an asset to his God and his country?

The teen-ager needs to learn that he can be lost in hell just as surely as any adult on earth. If he lives ungodly he will be lost if he dies in that condition. God does not handle the teen-ager with kid gloves any more than he does the adult. In the Old Testament the stubborn child was stoned (Deut. 21:18-21). He did not have special attention then; nor should he now.

We need to begin teaching our children from the "cradle up" about God and His law, so that when they reach the age of accountability they will know that one must hear, believe, repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. We should also teach them that after obedience to the first principles, they must continue faithful to the commands of God. It is one thing to obey first principles, and an entirely different thing to have the courage to do that which is right.

Teen-agers and adults alike will be comparatively safe when they learn to sacrifice self and the world and love God more than the world. Someone said, "I'd give the world if I had a faith like yours," to which the reply was, "That is exactly what it cost me - the world."

We all have responsibility - even the teen-ager. "And now my little children, abide in him; that, if he shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming." (1 John 2:28)

-The Way Of Truth

Second Class Postage Paid
Fultondale, AL 35068

Church of Christ
3004 Brakefield Dr.
Fultondale, AL 35068