

THE Reflector

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Postfixed Divorces

By Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.



In grammar, a *postfix* (or *suffix*) is "a sound, syllable, or syllables added at the end of a word or word base to change its meaning, give it grammatical function, or form a new word." (*Webster's New World Dictionary Of The American Language*. p. 1457).

It occurs to me that postfixing (to fix after) is what some are do accounts of their divorces. Often there is the account given at the time of the divorce and then a postfixed one given at the time of remarriage. The story is now fixed, after the fact, to include scriptural grounds for divorce. Why? Because the scriptural reason is now far more important than it was at the time of the divorce.

A person is in a difficult marriage. Things have gotten so bad that divorce seems to be the only way out. The person is so disgusted and hurt by this marriage that he or she just wants out. To find another mate? Never! He has had it with this marriage. He has had it with marriage — period. The quicker he can end this

misery the better. So, he gets the divorce, using the easiest provable grounds he can find that the state will accept (which is almost any reason or no reason) to get the divorce over with. He is fed up with this intolerable situation.

Had the person's spouse committed fornication? He says he (or she) really doesn't know and moreover it really doesn't matter — because he is going to get the divorce anyway. But, what if he should change his mind later and decide to remarry? He assures us that this is not going to happen. But it does!

Years ago, I was riding a bus to a meeting in Georgetown, Kentucky. A young lady with two small children boarded the bus at Louisville and took a seat directly behind me. Just outside of Louisville a man boarded and sat down just across the aisle from the young lady. She was in a talkative mood. She began telling the story of her life. She had just gotten a divorce and was on the way back to her parents. She was disgusted with men in general. If she could just make it to her parents, she would make it just fine, without ever looking at a man as long as she lived. This kind of talk went on

for several minutes. Finally, the man across the aisle began talking with her. He did not have a wife and needed one. By the time we stopped in Frankfort the young lady had been talked into getting off the bus there with her new friend with the view of giving further consideration to their possible marriage. How quickly the mind changes.

While that young lady's case may be an extreme example, it illustrates how easily minds are sometimes changed. We know of several cases where divorced people have adamantly affirmed that they would never want another spouse, but have changed their minds with the passing of time — some within a few weeks, some within a few months, and others within a few years. They meet

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NEXT MEETING

December 1-6
David Hartselle

REGULAR SERVICES

Sundays:

Bibles Classes 9:45 A.M.
Worship 10:45 A.M.
Worship 6:00 P.M.

Wednesdays:

Bible Classes 7:30 P.M.

Exaggerated Reports Of Dead Churches

By Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Mark Twain once sent a telegram stating that "the reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated."

Occasionally I hear that a certain church is dead. Knowing that churches do die, this concerns me because I love God's people.

Sardis was a dead church with a general reputation of being alive. (Rev. 3:1). This Biblical example and my own experience teaches me that people's assessment of a situation may not be accurate. A church pronounced alive by certain people may in fact be dead. Conversely, a church pronounced dead by certain people may be alive and well—thank you.

When I hear these reports of dead churches, I try not to get too alarmed and immediately go into mourning over their passing. Nor do I hastily jump in with some kind of drastic recitative measures to restore their breath of life. It just might be that these reports have been greatly exaggerated. I have learned to consider my sources before notifying the next of kin throughout the brotherhood or even expressing my concern to the membership of these "dead churches." A church that may be dead from a certain person's perspective may not really be dead after all because his concept of deadness may be influenced by certain experiences in his background.

A person with "pentecostal" leanings will sometimes observe the quite and orderly manner of a congregation's worship and pronounce it dead. A decent and orderly service, according to the principle taught in 1 Cor. 14:40, needs some life pumped into it from his perspective. To him, a little foot stamping, hand clapping, bodily gyrations, gospel music to a rock, country, or western beat, and spontaneous outbursts would infuse some life into this "dead church."

But, the churches in the New Testament seemed to get along and thrive without such things.

A very liberal-minded brother analyzes a congregation's collective work and pronounces the church dead. He sees no social welfare activities. He notices no organized recreational, social, political or other "fellowship" activities for its various age groups. He looks over the church staff and facilities and sees nothing that indicates the church's involvement in such things. The congregation just meets for worship and edification, conducts periods of Bible study for all who will attend, maybe has a special series of meetings from time to time, supports an evangelist who works locally with them and other evangelists who work in various places in the world, and gives financial aid to needy members as the need arises. What a dead church! Poor thing! To a person of this mind-set, this church needs a transfusion of a whirlwind of activities more relevant to today's world along with the trained personnel to direct these great "ministries" to raise it from the dead. Again, never mind that the Scriptures nowhere authorized these social and recreational programs.

Still another, though not as liberal-minded as the other brother, but geared to the fast-paced, results-oriented, organizational-

ly-minded, elaborately-programmed modern world, looks at a congregation that is not as highly organized as he has become accustomed to in his secular world, as being dead. Such a one has a hard time conceiving of a church being very productive without the same kind of techniques and pressure points that he is used to in his day to day world. His kind often convinces the church to pattern itself after the concepts that they consider to have worked so well for society, business and government. Then they look around at churches that do not have similar "programs" and pompously pronounce them dead on the vine. Unless a church has the same kind of dynamic, hyper-active programs characteristic of their highly organized world, it is simply not doing anything—dead.

These people do not seem to understand that the bulk of the Lord's work commanded and done in the New Testament was done by Christians on a personal level. Yes, there was church organization in the New Testament. (Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23; 1 Pet. 5:1-5). Saints were organized into local congregations with elders to lead and oversee and with special servants called deacons. They had work to do that required organization; and, of course, this is still true today. However, not every thing that a Christians does for the Lord and His church has to be planned, organized, orchestrated nor supervised by the church. The church does not have to have a "program" to cover all the needs, problems and responsibilities of the Christian. In fact, it is this writers judgement that many churches—even those we would label "conservative"—are "programming" themselves to death. Much like secular governments, they are becoming top-heavy with bureaucracy, thus stifling individual initiative and productivity.



To certain people, unless the work is done as a part of a church initiated and highly structured "program", "we are not doing anything." When, in fact, "we" may be doing much more than many of the highly programmed churches are doing. How can this be? By dedicated members, prepared "for works of service" (cf. Eph. 4:12 NIV) by the edification work of the church, going about their daily lives fulfilling their individual responsibilities according to their abilities and opportunities.

A worker talks informally with a fellow-employee about Christ. A housewife who talks to her neighbor about the gospel over a friendly cup of coffee. A student gives tracts to his class-mates at school. A couple invites some folks over for dinner and in the course of it tells them about Christ and the church—maybe even getting together with them again and again. A sister carries meal to a sick or bereaved neighbor and her family. A member notices a fellow-member is missing a lot lately and phones him to find out what the problem is. A mother raises a house full of children, all of whom turn out to be faithful Christians. A family has some kids over to sing, study the Bible, or just to be together. The list could go on and on with things Christians of conviction and dedication do without any public recognition or fanfare. This kind of thing is seldom taken into account by those who are quick to pronounce a church as dead or a "do-nothing" church. Unless these things are done within the framework of some church initiated and supervised "program" they just do not count with some brethren.

A Methodist preacher once told me that they were so organized that if two Methodist preachers accidentally fell out of an airplane that they would not be able to hit the ground without first forming a landing committee to supervise the operation. I fear that some of my brethren are about as bad.

To brethren with this mentality, we are not visiting unless we have a church-planned and supervised visitation *program*. We are not evangelizing the community unless we have a specific personal evangelism

program, planned and supervised by the church. Unless we are super-organized with highly visible programs for such things then we are bound to be accused by certain elements in the church of being dead or at least "we are not doing anything"—no matter how much individual members may be quietly doing without a sound of a trumpet (cf. Matt. 6:2).

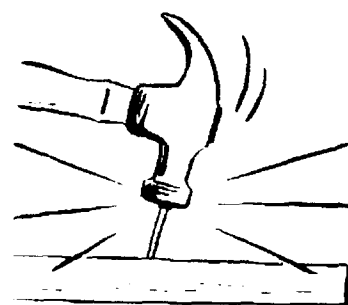
Am I opposed to all organized programs for doing the Lord's work? No. I am simply saying that it has gotten to the point that too much emphasis is being placed on "church programs" and not enough on individual initiative and activity, prompted by personal conviction and commitment to the Lord. Also, that simply because a church may not have a portfolio of organized programs or a church orchestrated effort for every thing that Christians need to be doing for the Lord and His church, does not mean that it is dead nor that it is doing nothing.

Maybe, we can learn from the failures of communist systems around the world. Many countries are beginning to see how unproductive such tightly organized societies really are. They have placed too much emphasis upon state initiated and supervised programs. Such discourages individual initiative and productivity, hindering society as a whole. I believe a similar thing happens in those churches that over-emphasize collective programs for almost every phase of a Christian's life.

One wonders how the church ever grew and prospered before all these ingenious programs, that some brethren think we must have today, became so fashionable. From the very beginning, churches that met for worship and mutual encouragement, edifying themselves through teaching or preaching, supporting gospel preachers and helping needy saints from their treasuries under the oversight of elders and served by deacons grew and prospered around the world. Why? Because the members were converted to the Lord. They were diligent students of the Bible "always abounding in the work of the Lord" from day unto day and from week unto week. They did not

have to have an assignment from some organized program to act.

Maybe if we gave less attention and criticism to what "we" are doing or not doing beyond those things that must necessarily be done collectively and gave more attention to diligently studying the Bible and quietly practicing it, on an individual level from day to day, the church would really grow and prosper. I know this much. When members do this *they do not make up a dead church by any stretch of the imagination.*



Hammer Christians

What we need are more Christians who quietly but effectively do their jobs like a hammer. A hammer keeps its head; it doesn't fly off the handle; it keeps pounding away; it finds the point quickly and drives it home; and perhaps more important, it is the only knocker in the world that accomplishes anything worthwhile!

Consider the hammer, and follow its example in your daily walk with Christ.

The critic is a person who has you write it, sing it, play it, paint it, or carve it as he would — if he could!

Divorce

the new love of their lives and would like for their new marriage to be scriptural and accepted by faithful brethren. So, now the "postfixing" begins.

Maybe they did have scriptural ground for divorce after all. So, they begin the quest for evidence by recalling things that happened before their divorce that seems now to point to the unfaithfulness of the ex-spouse. Why did they not bring these things up before? Could it be that they were so bent on getting out of the marriage they simply overlooked them? Or, could it be that they are now more concerned about the divorce's being scriptural than they were at the time? Or, could it be that, with the passing of time and the increased desire to have the right to another spouse, the facts(?) that were fuzzy at the time have become clearer as the desire to remarry has become stronger? At any rate, they are now convinced that they did have scriptural grounds after all, but because of the pressure at the time of the divorce they did not use them. They can now marry their new love convinced that they are alright and that good brethren will accept the facts(?) as they are now being presented.

But, alas, the scripture still reads, "But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for **any reason except sexual immorality** causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery." (Matt. 5:32 NKJV). "And I say to you whoever divorces his wife, except for **sexual immorality**, and marries another commits adultery..." (Matt. 19:9 NKJV).

My friend, sexual immorality has to be the *reason* for the divorce — not an *afterthought* to justify another marriage.

The person who has "postfixed" his divorce story might or might not have found the scriptural reason for divorce had he or she investigated enough at the time. But he

did not. He was only interested in getting out of an undesirable marriage. The fact is: *he divorced his spouse for reason(s) other than fornication (sexual immorality)*. Whether or not the divorced partner was guilty of fornication at the time or prior to the divorce is not really germane to the question at this late date. The fact remains the spouse was not divorced for that reason. The spouse was divorced for a reason other than fornication. Fornication, among other things, may have even been suspected at the time — but it was not the reason for the divorce action.

It is dangerous to re-write a divorce story to fit the present need and desire for a scriptural marriage. Like necessity, desire is the mother of inventions. A desire to remarry that was not present at the time of divorce can easily cause one to rearrange the facts(?) to justify the present situation.

One may come to believe his revised version. The brethren may accept it. But, remember the Lord knows the real facts. He will not be mocked. His memory does not become fuzzy with time nor biased by desire.

Again, if you are divorced and want to remarry. The only way that you can do it within the bounds of scriptural authority is for fornication (sexual immorality) to have been the reason (at the time) that you divorced your former spouse — assuming that the one you want to marry now has a scriptural right to marry.

When the late Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford celebrated their golden wedding anniversary, a reporter asked them, "To what do you attribute your 50 years of successful married life?"

"The formula," said Ford, "is the same formula I have always used in making cars—just stick to one model."

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Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.
Editor

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