

The Reflector

THE REFLECTOR

A youngster, returning from an outing in the woods with his father, proudly announced, "We killed a bear—but, Pa shot it". "We" can do great wonders if it requires nothing of "me".

Have you ever noticed how many brothers and sisters are affected by the "we" mentality. They incessantly talk about what "we" are doing or not doing for the Cause of Christ. Yet, when examined closes "we" quite often does not mean "me".

One needs to understand that "we" of the congregation or "we" of the brotherhood includes "me". It is awfully easy for a "me" to lose himself in the larger "we" when it comes to accepting responsibility and/or blame. Unless some "me's" act then there is no "we" action.

I am forever hearing:

"We are not doing [you fill in the blank] that we should be doing."

"We need to be busy and doing this or that."

"We need to be reaching more people in the community."

"We need to visit the sick more."

"We need to have more home Bible classes."

More often than not, when the chips are down, "we" need to" doesn't mean "me", but "you" or "someone" needs to. As to what "we" are not doing that we should be doing may very well mean "me".

Quite often when someone complains to me about what "we" are—or are not doing, I am tempted to say "Speak for yourself, my friend".

A sister kept saying that "we" needed to do more personal work and how she wished that "we" would buy some aids like a neighboring congregation was using so that they would be available for "us" to check out and use. Well, "we" bought the tools suggested. How many times did that sister check these tools out? Well, evidently "we" didn't mean "me".

A brother complains that "we" need to have more Home Bible Studies? The brethren agree. How many of the Studies has he set up in his home? How many of these studies has he arranged with his neighbors? Well, evidently, again "we" didn't mean "me".

Does "WE" Mean "ME"?

By EDWARD O. BRAGWELL, SR.

One complains that "we" need to visit the sick and shut-ins more. Does this "we" include "me", or does he mean that the preacher, elders, or some other members need to do more visiting. Then he can tell the world how "we", at Possum Hollow Church Of Christ visit, without "we" really involving "me".

Some rightly point to the church's budget as evidence of what "we" are doing in evangelism, benevolence, etc. Such expenditures do represent a collective ("we") effort. However,

as one points to this effort does "we" mean "me". The collective work in Acts 11:27-30 was a result of "the disciples, each according to his ability, determin[ing] to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea." The collective work in 1 Cor. 16:1-4 was a result of "each one laying by in store. As one looks at this, he should ask, does what "we" are doing here mean "me". It doesn't unless one has contributed according to his ability.

Too, before one complains to much about what "we" are not doing in the area of personal responsibilities he might consider that he may not know what another may be quietly doing day by day without letting him know about it. One might do better to speak for "me" rather than for "we" in such matters.

Does "we" really include "me"?

OUR NEXT MEETING

MAY 7-12, 1989

H. E. PHILLIPS

"I am not ashamed..."

By EDWARD O. BRAGWELL, SR.

"For this reason I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day." — 2 Tim. 1:12

Most brethren that I know would like to see the church grow at a more rapid pace. Sometimes we point to past periods of rapid growth and wonder why it is not presently so. Some blame the materialism and humanism of modern society. Others cite the tendency to splinter up into factions. Still others say that Christians, collectively and individually, are just not getting the gospel to the lost. It is quite likely that all of these factors play a role in declining growth.

I believe that there is an even larger element in this equation. It is how we feel about ourselves as the Lord's people. It is almost as if we are ashamed of who or what we are.

Too often, we seem to be apologetic and uncertain about our faith.

Too often, we allow criticism and rejection by others to put us on the defensive.

Too often, we allow perversions and abuses of the Lord's words to make us ashamed of those words — this we cannot do. (cf. Mark. 8:30).

Too often, we play into the hands of those who oppose truth by reacting in such a way as to let them "call our shots".

It is time that God's people let one and all know that they are not ashamed of who or what they are. Not with a spirit of arrogance, but with a spirit of boldness and confidence befitting children of God. God's children have no reason to be timid or ashamed. They must always be meek, but never weak and apologetic about their relationship to Christ and His word.

There are three things of Christ of which "I am not ashamed...":

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Let others pervert it if they will, I still must gladly embrace it. Paul charged some were disposed to "pervert the gospel of Christ". (Gal. 1:7). Yet he still called his message, "the gospel of Christ", declaring that he was not ashamed of it. (Rom. 1:16). The words chosen by the Holy Spirit to describe the message that we preach are still valid — even if false teachers have given the "gospel of Christ" a bad name. The gospel according to various denominations and TV evangelists is a far

cry from the "gospel of Christ" that Paul preached. A true preacher of the gospel of Christ may be tempted to avoid calling his message, "the gospel of Christ", to avoid being confused with the perverter's gospel. However, the word of God still calls it "the gospel of Christ" and we still need to proclaim it as the gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 9:16-18). Should we look for ways to conceal from our hearers that we are preaching something called "the gospel of Christ" simply because it may suggest a perverted gospel to some?

We should boldly, confidently and kindly proclaim the gospel of Christ as the gospel of Christ without apology as Paul did, at the same time just as boldly exposing perversions by those who claim to be preaching the same gospel, but, in fact, are not. Why should we avoid using the very words the Holy Spirit used, simply because men have abused these words? Why should I let perversions of the gospel of Christ make me timid or ashamed of speaking the gospel of Christ, using the very words of Inspiration?

THE NAME OF CHRIST

I am not ashamed of the name of Christ. I ought not to be ashamed to wear the name of Christ i.e., be called a Christian. (1 Pet. 4:14-16 ASV). "If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name." (NIV) "If (a man suffer) as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this name." (ASV).

Like, the gospel of Christ, the name of Christ has been perverted. Jesus said that "many will come in My name, and will deceive many." (Matt. 24:5). The term "Christian" is tossed around so loosely that it has all but lost its meaning in the world. There are terrible acts done daily by those who call themselves "Christians", claiming to do them in the name of Christ. Northern Ireland and the Middle East are prime examples.

However, the word of God still called our Christ, "Christ" and identifies His followers as "Christians". (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16). Shall we be ashamed to say that we are of Christ because others do terrible things in His name? Shall we not use the name "Christians" because others unjustifiably call themselves such? I think not.

THE CHURCH(ES) OF CHRIST

I am not ashamed of the church(es) of Christ. "The churches of Christ greet you", Paul wrote. (Rom. 16:16).

Like the gospel of Christ and the name of Christ, the world perverts the church(es) of Christ. The church has been denominatized, institutionalized and factionalized. It has been completely misunderstood and misrepresented by its own members. Because of this, the terms "church of Christ" or "churches of Christ" does not mean the same thing to everyone who uses them or hears them.

The Bible still speaks of "churches of Christ" and "church of God (Christ)". Abuse and misunderstanding of these terms is no more reason to abandon their use than it is to abandon "gospel of Christ" or "Christian" or "In the name of Christ".

Yes, I know that "church of Christ" is not the exclusive name for the New Testament church. Yes, I also know that it can scripturally be referred to by other terms. Likewise, I know that the "gospel of Christ" is not an exclusive name for the message that we preach. It may also be scripturally called, "the truth", "the word", "the word of Christ", "the word of God", etc. I know that "Christ" is not an exclusive name for our Savior. He may be called, "Son of God", "Son of man", "Savior", etc. I also know that any scriptural term one uses will likely be misunderstood in our present society because of wide-spread perversion, making it necessary to further explain what we mean. Yet, if the Bible uses the terms, I see no reason why I should be timid or ashamed to freely use them.

I cannot see why some brethren feel so compelled to avoid identifying themselves as "church(es) of Christ" in their preaching, teaching and advertizing. I do not doubt their motive or sincerity. I kind of sympathize with their problem — having been, at times, confused with some groups that call themselves "church of Christ". The fact still remains that "church of Christ" is still a good scriptural way to identify the Lord's people.

Besides, there are other things that need to be considered. Christians are to put aside all craftiness and guile (2 Cor. 4:2); and we are to provide things honest in the sight of all. (Rom. 2:17). If designingly conceal that we are members of the "church of Christ" to catch prospective converts unaware — then it borders on craftiness and guile. Even the world frowns on "bait and switch" advertizing and salesmanship. Why not just be open and honest about who we are and what we are offering, laying it all out on the table, with whatever teaching may be needed to clarify what a "Christian" or the "church of Christ" really is?

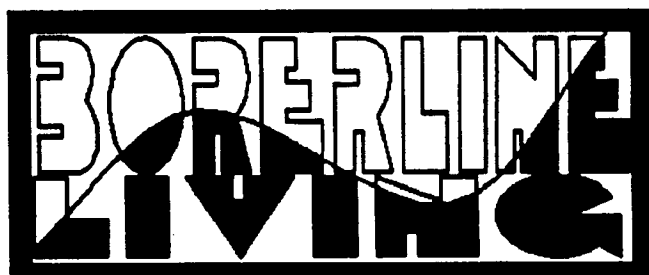
When we start experimenting with terms, trying to find one more appealing to those we are trying to reach and disquising our "church of Christ" affiliation, we may well get caught by our own craftiness. (cf. 1 Cor. 3:19). While many of the

substitute terms may be scriptural, they too run the same risk of causing folks to associate us with the wrong people.

"Independent", "non-denominational" are good terms. I see no reason why they cannot be used to further describe the nature of a church of Christ. However, *if they are used to make folks initially think that we are someone we are not in order to draw them in*, then that is misleading. Nor do they solve the problem of misidentification. In the Birmingham area phone book, there are 26 denominations who call themselves, "Independent". There are 18 listings for "non-denominational" churches. Many of these are pentecostal groups.

"Christians meet here" is subject the same misunderstanding as "The church of Christ meets here". It may even be misleading by implying that "Christians" is broader in scope than "church of Christ".

We do not need to be ashamed or timid about biblical terminology. If the Bible speaks of the "gospel of Christ", the "name of Christ" or "churches of Christ", so should we. We should have no problem with being identified with each term, making sure that we understand and live up to what they suggest and do the best we can to teach their scriptural meaning to others.



By EDWARD O. BRAGWELL, SR.

Borderline living can be dangerous. We heard of a fellow during the American Civil War who lived near the line dividing the North from the South. Not wanting to be too closely identified with either side, he wore blue pants and a grey coat. The results? The yanks shot him in the coat and the rebs shot him in the pants.

It seems to us that a lot of brethren, spiritually speaking, are putting themselves in about the same position as that fellow. When it comes to their religious practices and general life-styles, they don't want to be too closely identified with either saints or sinner, but kind of identified with both.

In many cases, they really want to be identified with truth and righteousness, but want to see how close to the borderline between truth and error, righteousness and unrighteousness, without stepping over the line. This is especially true of those areas where the border may not be as clearly

marked as it is in others.

On the night of the Lord's trial, Peter tried borderline living. (See Luke 22: 54-62) The text says, "But Peter followed at a distance". He followed Jesus closely enough to see Jesus and to be seen of Him (v. 61), yet just far enough not to be clearly identified with Him. It didn't work. He wound up denying the Lord to his sorrow.

There are brethren who want to think of themselves as faithful Christians and want others to so consider them. At the same time, they want to be just as accepted within a worldly environment. If absolute purity of speech, life and decorum causes them to stand out like a sore thumb in society, then they will shave the corners a bit. At the same time being careful not to become so bold and blatant as to make the brethren feel the need for any kind of disciplinary action.

A member may attend services with just regularly enough to keep the elders, preacher, or other concerned brethren off his back. He wants a list of things that he "has to do" so as to meet the "minimum requirements" for membership. He wants to attend just those services that he "has to", but no more; contribute what he "has to", but no more; and perform any other chore that he "has to", but no more —so that he can have all the time and resources possible to be at other places, doing things that he had much rather be doing in the first place.

Then there are those areas with some degree of relativity — here it is hard to mark the exact spot where one crosses the border. Areas that raise questions like:

Where do you draw the line between modest and immodest apparel?

How long must hair be before it can be considered long?

How much wine would a "little wine" be for the stomach's sake?

How long must one suffer with another to be truly long-suffering?

Since they cannot mark the exact crossover spot, brethren generally deal with this problem in one of three ways:

1. Mark those passages off as impossible to apply.

2. See how close to where the line may be without going over.

3. Try to stay a safe distance from where the line may be.

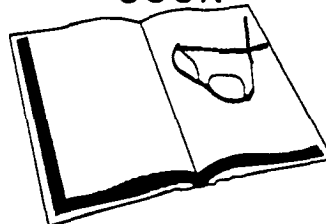
Those who take the last two approaches agree that there is a borderline to be crossed somewhere — that somewhere on each side of that line there is an area that is clearly right or clearly wrong.

It seems to me that the third approach is the one that Christian would want to take in view of what the Bible says about participation in doubtful things. (Romans 14:23).

Then there are those whose words speak the truth, but whose actions bid godspeed to the advocates of error. (cf. 2 John 9-11). They seemingly try to see how closely associated they can be with those on either side of the border and still be accepted by faithful brethren.

How close to the border do you live?

BRING YOUR BIBLE STUDY WITH US SOON



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SERVICES

Sundays:

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

Wednesdays:

Bible Class	10:00 A.M.
Bible Classes	7:30 P.M.

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