

# The Reflector

"We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" • Acts 4:20

Volume 29 • Number 7

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## "BE COURTEOUS"

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

**"B**e courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling..." — 1 Peter 3:8,9.

"Courteous" is "having or showing good manners; polite".—Syn. See civil.—Ant. rude.—The Random House American Dictionary.

It may be because of the fast-paced, high-pressured, me-first, society of today. It may be aided by so much controversy among Christians. It may be that we have not really emphasized its importance to this generation. I do not know all the causes for it—but I do know that I am seeing a marked decline in common courtesy among my brethren. I even find myself, at times, falling into the pattern and having to apologize and repent of it. It is sad. It is sin.

It is easy to blame it all on the stress of the times. But, First Peter was written to Christians with severe trials and sufferings. In such times it would be easy for Christians to think only of themselves and be short fused with each other—yet it was because of such trying times that Christians need to be more courteous one to another.

It may be that our lack of courtesy today is not so much due to the stress of our times. as it is to the "every man for himself" view of life. The idea that I don't

see why I should be "put out" for anyone. Why should I step aside and let anyone go ahead of me. It may be due in part to all the "rights" movements—movements that would have us think that it a sign of weakness to step back and let another have my place in line. It may be that we parents who remember the day when common courtesy was more common have failed to demand it of our children by allowing them to grow up thinking they do not have to give place to any one; without insisting that they be courteous at home to the family.

But, whatever the cause. Whatever the background. It is becoming more and more evident that courtesy is becoming less and less evident with each new generation. It is a sin that needs our urgent attention. It is not enough to just sweep it aside with the excuse—"well, that is just a personality trait".

Yet, as we deal with the problem of the rudeness in others, we must be careful that we do not fall into the trap of becoming discourteous toward the discourteous. We can get into the childish "he hit me first" mode and actually violate two parts of the text—rudeness to the rude and "returning evil for evil and reviling for reviling". God is not even pleased with discourteous treatment of discourteous people.

Like charity, courtesy begins at home. If we can learn to be courteous at home, where we are not trying to impress anyone—then we are not likely to become discourteous in public. When one gets into the habit of being rude and crude at home then it will sooner or later spill over into his public life.

Speaking of home, a word about hospitality might be in order. Christians, of all people, should be hospitable people, especially to other Christians. and that without grumbling. It is no accident that hospitality and courtesy are mentioned in the same book. (1 Pet. 4:9).

What does hospitality have to do with courtesy? A whole lot! There are Christians who do not know how to be courteous either as hosts or guests. One can either

### Our Regular Services

Sundays:

Bible Classes . . . . . 9:45 A.M.

Worship . . . . . 10:45 A.M.

Worship . . . . . 6:00 P.M.

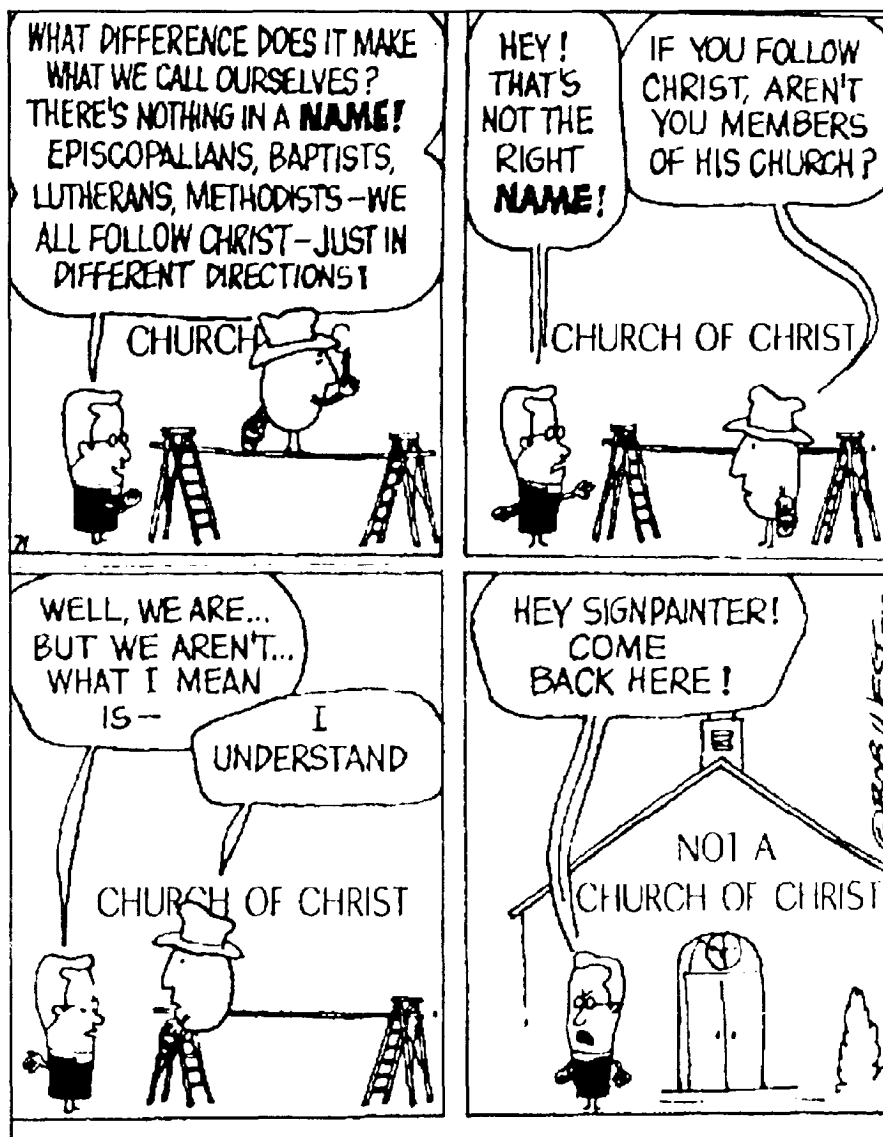
Wednesdays:

Bible Classes . . . . . 7:30 P.M.

Fultondale Church of Christ

2005 Likewood Drive

# THEOPHILUS



make his guest feel that he is there because he is truly wanted—or that he is an intruder. If one is not really welcome in your home, you should not invite him in—take a long hard look at yourself in view of the Biblical injunction to be hospitable. If you are truly hospitable you will treat him with all the courtesy becoming to a Christian. Read the foot-washing chapter, John 13, sometime.

There is another side to the

coin—that of accepting hospitality. As a guest, I am in another's home. It is not mine. It is not for me to impose myself upon my host in such a way as to demand that he jump to my tune. It is not my place to rearrange the whole household routine. It is not my place to see that all attention is focused on me because he has been gracious enough to ask me in. It is not my place to make demands on his attention and time, but to graciously accept his

hospitality, so freely given. I have known a few preachers who have stayed in private homes during meetings that were so demanding, meddlesome, and downright rude that their departure was the best event of the week!

There are so many areas where we could use the command to "be courteous". Differences are going to arise between brethren of strong convictions. They always have and always will. There is a dire need for courtesy in controversy. Just because I may disagree with a brother, or even think that he has become unfaithful or unsound is no reason to be discourteous. Do we not often resort to tactics and language that we would consider extremely discourteous—if they were directed at us by those who might oppose us? Does the fact that we are using the tactic in "defense of truth" make it any more or less courteous?

One can be pointed and plain. One can be unyielding to sin and error. One can even refuse to associate with disorderly brethren. One can still be courteous through it all. The Lord was. His apostles were. So can we.

Should we not want to be the more courteous to those that we love the most—our families and our brethren? Is it not sadly true that we are often more discourteous to these than anyone? Is this because we think that we have to be polite to the general public in order to get what we need and want from the world—but that we don't have to be so careful with our courtesy to family and brethren because they love us so much that they will overlook our rudeness? It may very well be that they will overlook it because they do love us and they want to please God by showing compassion and forbearance toward us. But, at the same time, does it not say

something about our character? Does it not say that our public politeness policy may be a men-pleasing ploy, similar to that of the Pharisees (Matt. 6), to be used to our advantage; and that the very fact that we turn it off when with family, close friends, or brethren shows that it is not genuine. That it is not really being done any time to obey and please God—but is a mere self-serving tool?

I do not believe that most brethren who are discourteous really mean to be. In fact, in most cases, they are truly surprised to learn that folks consider them rude. In many cases they really think that they are showing that they have strong character and are too strong to be controlled by the “whims” of a spouse, another family member, a friend, an associate, a guest, a host, or even a fellow Christian. When, in fact, it shows a weakness of character. It shows that they cannot even control themselves enough to make themselves servants of others (Rom. 15:1-3). “For even Christ did not please Himself”. He was no weakling!

It is a habit that can grow on one and overpower him before he knows it. It is hard to break, because it means that one must deny the one person that he is the closest to—himself. But, it is habit that he must break, if he is going to please the Lord.

Brother, sister, just how courteous are you? To members of your community? To members of your family? To members of your spiritual family, the church? When you associate with them, do you go out of your way to find ways to serve their interests? To please them? Or do you try to see that things go your way or no way? Do you make them feel that their comfort and wishes come first, or do you make it clear that you are

going to be first—and they just as well get used to it.

After all, common courtesy, is simply stepping aside and giving way to the interests of another. It can not only effect your relationships with brethren, friends and family—it can effect my relationship to God. “Be courteous” is a command of God. To ignore a command of God is sin. Think about it. ■

## **“A Full Time Hospital Minister”**

**Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.**

**“Help us place a full time hospital minister in M. D. Anderson Hospital in the Texas Medical Center to serve the needs of the 60 patients from churches of Christ who daily receive treatment there ... please put us in your budget now for \$50, \$100, \$200, or more per month.”— Excerpts from a letter we received from a church.**

This project will be viewed by some as a great step forward in extending the “ministry” of the church. This progressive church is not only willing to hire such a “minister”—they are willing to let

us help them pay him!

What on earth could be wrong with such a project as this? Why not put a full time minister into every hospital and nursing home in the country? Why not? There is not one iota of scriptural authority for the church’s being in that kind of “ministry”. It is not the mission of the church to minister to the physical, social nor psychological needs of people. It is in the soul-saving business. (See Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Tim. 3:15).

There are two basic things that disturb us about a report like this:

1. That brethren would think that such is the mission of the church.

If such a work is the mission of the CHURCH, where is the verse that authorizes it? I can read where New Testament churches supported gospel preachers (Phil. 4:15,16, 1 Cor. 9), elders who labor in word and doctrine (1 Tim. 5:17,18), and saints in financial need (Acts 6; 11:29,30). But I read nothing that would parallel “hospital minister”. Such is just another example of the “social gospel” shift in emphasis from the a spiritual ministry to a social one.

2. That it may just be an extension of a concept that too many brethren have had a long time.

The fact that full time gospel preachers have long been expected

**Our Next**

# **Gospel Meeting**

**September 22, 23, 24**

**Speaker:**

**Max Shearer**

to be hospital ministers could have well paved the way for such a step. Too many brethren think that a major reason for "hiring" a full time preacher is that we may now have someone to spend more time ministering to the sick, afflicted, and aged. He is expected to make regular rounds at the hospitals and nursing homes—as one of his duties as their preacher. Just where did brethren ever get that idea? Not from the Bible. It comes from a concept formed in the minds of brethren as they watched the denominational preachers, faithfully making their appointed rounds, assigned to them by their church. Frankly, we do little to dispel that idea by falling right into step with that concept in our practice.

Don't get me wrong. Visiting the sick, as we have opportunity, in or out of the hospital, is a good work that a Christian ought to do—even gospel preachers. (See Matt. 25). But, it a work of each Christian, individually—not the work for the church. Since "hospital ministry" is not a church ministry, then the church should not hire a full or part time "hospital minister"; nor, support a gospel preacher—and turn him into a semi-official hospital/nursing home

chaplain. Preachers and elders (especially elders, when sent for by a member—Jas. 5:14) should gladly, visit the sick (in or out of the hospital) as they have time and opportunity—to fulfill their personal obligation and to be examples to believers, just like any other Christian. But, not as hired representatives of the church to do the brethren's visiting for them! We need to get out of this business of thinking that we are doing "church work" when we serve the physical and emotional needs of man. Christians should do it—but it is not "church work". The church is a spiritual body engaged in spiritual business, ministering to man's spiritual needs. ■

### Dressing for Worship

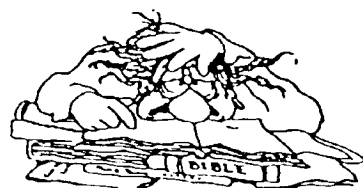
J. Wiley Adams

When I was a boy, going to church seivces was always a special thing at our house. Whatever was our best, we put it on. Shoes were shined on Saturday evening out on the back porch, all was made ready for Sunday. Trousers were pressed and shirts were starched.

Dresses and blouses were ironed to perfection. We were going to worship God. It was **special**, so our **attire** was also **special**. It is a reproach on our generation, I believe, when some dress for worship as if they were going fishing, camping, or just "hanging around." We have gone crazy over being casual about nearly everything. **Brethren, worshipping God is not and cannot be casual.** Blue jeans, T-shirts, tennis shoes, and pant-suits may have their place, but we associate them with the **ordinary** and not with that which is **special**.

— From *The Pathfinder* via *Pause-Ponder-Profit* via "thing on these things"

### How's Your Bible Study Coming?



**Why Not Attend  
Our Bible Classes,  
Or Preaching Services,  
Or A Home Bible Study?**



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