



The REFLECTOR

JANUARY 1981

WHAT! NO SPECIAL PROGRAMS?

--by Bobby Witherington

Visitors to our assemblies are sometimes amazed (and maybe disappointed) to learn that this congregation does not have a special youth program. Nor a kitchen. Not even a bus ministry.

Do we have something against young people? Or kitchens? Or busses? Not at all. We have several young people, each of whom we appreciate greatly. Besides that, every member of this church either is, or used to be young. Obviously we have nothing against kitchens. In fact, I do not know of a family among us who does not have access to a kitchen. In view of the fact that several of our children ride busses every day, it is apparent that we do not have anything against busses.

Nevertheless, this congregation has never hired a youth minister, built a kitchen, nor owned a bus. In view of the fact that the private life of each individual member of this church is living proof that not one of us opposes young people, kitchens, or busses, why is it that we as a collective unit, each acting in concert with the rest, have never developed a special youth program, built a fellowship hall, or bought a bus?

The answer is partially and indirectly given in the preceding paragraph. You see, we recognize a difference between the individual Christian and the local church. Scripture recognizes this difference also, for in I Cor. 12:14 Paul said, "the body is not one member, but many." If the body is the church, and it is (Eph. 1:22,23), and "the body is not one member," then no individual member is the church. In fact, the difference between the individual member and the church is illustrated in Matthew 18:15-17. In these verses we observe individual action, the action of a plurality of members, and church or group action. Regarding the first, Jesus said "if thy brother shall trespass against THEE and him ALONE: if he shall hear thee, THOU hast gained thy brother" (v. 15). The expression, "thou hast gained thy brother," does not mean the CHURCH has done it for you. Concerning the action of a plurality of members, Jesus said: "But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more that in the mouth of TWO or THREE witnesses every word may be established." (v. 16). This still does not constitute church action any more than two or three separate links of a chain constitute a chain. However,

group or collective action is implied in verse 17 wherein Jesus said: "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the CHURCH: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

There are other references which also clearly imply a difference between the individual and the church. Like I Timothy 5:16 which reads: "If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the CHURCH be charged; that IT may relieve them that are widows indeed." In the context of this verse we learn that the "widow indeed" is "desolate" (v.5); she has no children to care for her. The church is to "honour widows that are widows indeed" (v.3) by caring for them. But the widow that has children (v.4) is not a "widow indeed". Hence, Paul said, "if any man or woman that believe have widows, let THEM relieve them..." In this case the church is not to be "charged" with my responsibility--which proves that there is a difference between the CHURCH and ME.

But what does that have to do with this congregation not having a special program for youth, a kitchen, and a bus ministry? Everything! You see, Christ is "head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:22). The church, being His body, must function as the head directs. In no area can the church afford to function apart from the proper directive from her head, Christ. In Colossians 3:17 the apostle Paul expressed it this way: "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." Inasmuch as Christ is "the mediator of the new testament" (Heb. 9:15), if we cannot find any directive in the new covenant for what we are doing, then it should be apparent that what we are doing is not in His "name" or by His authority.

Christ, through His word, revealed the three-fold mission of His church, it being evangelism, edification of the saints, and benevolence to indigent saints (Eph. 4:12-16; I Tim. 3:15; I Thess. 1:7,8; Acts 6:1-6; et. al.). To know what the mission of the church IS is also to know what her mission is NOT. In brief, we affirm that the church's mission is spiritual in nature; it is not social, recreational, or political. Of all the institutions on earth, however worthy, only one was purchased

with the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28), and only one is divinely decreed to be "the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15).

"But," someone says, "does not a youth program, a kitchen or a fellowship hall, and a bus ministry enhance a church's ability to fulfill her mission?"

Many people who ask this, or related questions, are zealous and sincere. They deserve more than a condescending, sarcastic answer.

First, we consider the term "bus ministry." One might reasonably argue that if it is scriptural to send a preacher to preach to people (and it is, Acts 13:1-3), then it would also be scriptural to take the people to hear the preacher. One principle difference, though, is the fact that we find an apostolic example of the one, but not the other. However, our primary objection is not to a bus per se - though, in view of the large number of half empty "mini" busses (cars) that grace meeting house parking lots all over the nation, it is difficult to see how the expenditure for a bus (plus insurance, gas, and upkeep) could be considered expedient. But the "bus ministry" approach is not simply intended as an expedient way to transport people to the assemblies of the church. It is a fun and games approach. Bribes in the form of candy, gum, entertainment, or a \$. bill neatly tucked under the "lucky seat" are offered as enticement to get riders. And the transporting of young people to camps, ball games, picnics, and retreats constitutes a principle reason for purchasing the bus. This is one reason for purchasing the bus. This is one reason why they are called JOY busses! In fact, if it were merely for the purpose of providing a way to worship for people who could not otherwise get a way, it is doubtful that but few churches would see a sufficient need to justify purchasing a bus.

Secondly, we consider the term "church kitchen." How does a church kitchen relate to the church's mission -- evangelism edification, and benevolence? By taxing the imagination, it is possible to conceive of a church with enough indigent members, in which a kitchen could be useful in the realm of benevolence. In such cases a place to sleep would also be equally as needful. But I don't hear of many churches adding bedrooms to their meeting houses!

Hence, "church kitchens" are not built for the purpose of rendering scriptural benevolence. Surely no one would contend that a kitchen is needed for evangelism and edification purposes! Thus, the only purpose for a "church kitchen" is to enable the members to socialize. But where in the scriptures is this set forth as a work of the church? No wonder Paul asked the brethren at Corinth, "What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?" (I Corinthians 11:22).

Thirdly, we consider the term "youth program." In a sense we have a program for our young people -- the same which we have for the middle aged and the elderly. We encourage them to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (Tit. 2:12). We admonish them to abound "in the work of the Lord" (I Cor. 15:58). We urge them to so study the scriptures that the word of Christ may dwell in them "richly in all wisdom" (Col. 3:16). We teach them as they have opportunity to "do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). And in keeping with the principle of feeding "milk" to babes and "meat" to those skillful "in the word of righteousness," we have Bible classes geared to the age level of our members -- whether calendar age or spiritual age (Heb. 5:12-14). So we do have Bible classes which, apart from

the teachers, consist entirely of young people. But you will please note that I said "Bible classes" -- not craft classes, or planning sessions on what to bring to the next outing. With us, this is a matter of conviction. We are glad to see young people enjoy wholesome recreation, but we do not believe such is to be provided by the church. For example, what responsibilities do elders, as elders, have to young people that they do not also have to all the members in the local church? What obligation does an evangelist, as an evangelist, have to young people that he does not also have to every other member?

Conclusion

I believe in kitchens. We have one in our house. I believe in young people. We have four children, including two young grandchildren (I just HAD to say that!). We believe in busses. Our youngest child rides one five days a week. But I also believe that we should distinguish between the individual and the church. That which is an individual or a family obligation should be met by the individual or the family. In such instances, "let not the church be charged!"

But let the church be the church! Let us make certain that church work is indeed church work -- as is enjoined upon the church in the scriptures. Otherwise, the designation "church of Christ" is misleading, for it attaches the name of Christ

to that of which He is not the Author. Remember that if it takes food, fun and frolic to reach the young people, it will take the same to KEEP them. What people are converted BY, they are converted TO. And in the fun and games department, we cannot offer them a single thing which cannot also be offered equally as well by any man-made denomination. If we try to "ape" the sectarians in these matters (and this is where such practices originated), we will experience the same problems they have experienced--that is, when people get too old or too busy to play they will be too disinterested to attend.

On the other hand, GOD's drawing and converting power is His word (John 6:44,45; Rom. 1:16). Those who are reached and kept by anything else may be converted -- but they are not converted to the Lord. Brethren should be extremely dubious of any activity which will visibly swell their ranks but which will not bring a corresponding increase in spirituality, nor add to the number enrolled in the book of life. And if we reach people by any means other than the gospel, they (and we) may get excited, but they will not be converted, nor will their names be "written in heaven." But OURS might be "blotted out!"

ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

By Bill Hall

Our seven year old could hardly wait to get to Canada where she could ride a bus to school. Often she had looked at those big, yellow buses packed with children and had thought how much she was losing in life because she wasn't riding some bus like that. All the excitement was on the inside, and she was on the outside looking in. Our move to Canada is now complete. For three months she has ridden that bus to school, and is learning an important lesson: what seems so exciting when you are on the outside looking in often proves to be but an illusion; the reality never quite equals the dream.

So it is in spiritual realms. We wonder how many Christians born and raised "in the church," feel that they have been deprived by their early training of the real fun in life; that surely the truly "good times" are to be had in the world with its dance halls, night spots, bawdy parties, and exciting affairs. Their convictions being too strong and the pressures too great for them actually to engage in such activities, they stand on the outside looking somewhat longingly within. If only they could realize that the fruit of such conduct is indescribably bitter, and, besides, that the reality never quite equals the dream. If only they would listen to a "prodigal son" of our generation, they would learn that sin's promises are not only an illusion, but a very cruel illusion at that.

We wonder how many people in faithful churches are impressed with the big, promotional programs and inflated statistics of more "progressive" churches, and in turn feel a tinge of embarrassment over the scriptural, but sometimes "lack-luster" efforts of the congregation of which they are a part. One needs but to observe the cyclical and temporary nature of such programs to realize that there is in them nothing of permanent value, but they can seem so thrilling when one is on the outside looking in.

What is needed is faith: faith to accept that God's word is complete, furnishing us to every good work (2 Timothy 3:16,17); faith to accept that God's plan is best, and that while His plan may not be so exciting to human eyes (The gospel works like leaven, not like dynamite), it cannot be improved upon through human wisdom and ingenuity; faith to accept that the gospel's promises are not illusory as are the world's, but that what "God has promised, He is able also to perform" (Romans 4:21); faith to accept that God's word provides the only true formula for a happy and fulfilled life; faith to accept that eternal life and happiness are far more to be desired than the pleasures and excitement of this world; faith to accept that God knows best in everything.

Don't be deceived! Don't look with envy on the world with its riches and pleasure! If you are a Christian--not only in name, but in life and affection--you have within your grasp the greatest happiness and fulfillment that can be obtained in this life.

If Your Light Be Dark....

By Bob Hutto

In Christ's sermon on the mount he makes the statement, "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness!" What does Christ mean by this paradoxical statement? If there is light how can there be darkness at the same time? Or how can the light itself be darkness? The context in which Jesus made this statement will go a long way in helping us understand the meaning of this statement.

Jesus, in Matthew 6:19 begins a discussion of material goods versus heavenly treasures. He instructs his disciples not to lay up goods on this earth because eventually they will be consumed by moth and rust and will be useless. Instead he tells them to lay up treasures in heaven. There treasures will never be consumed. Heading off any idea we can lay up treasures in both worlds Christ says that man cannot serve two masters. He will either hate one and cleave to the other or he will love one and despise the other. We simply cannot love both Christ and earthly gain. Many have tried but have found it to be impossible. The two are as different as night and day. Christ asks us to give up the luxuries we may gain here for the riches we will gain if we

are faithful to him. Christ corresponds our love for physical riches with darkness and our love for him with light. If we keep our eye single, or on him, we will be full of light.

All through, in the Bible, the ideas of light and dark are used to represent the ideas of good and evil respectively. For example, God is light and in Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). In contrast with Christ (the light) in John 1:5, the world is described as darkness and the world remained in darkness because it knew not Christ. In our text (Matthew 6:22) the Bible says that if we keep our eye single we will be full of light or full of righteousness.

Christ demonstrated the impossibility of serving two masters in the confrontation with the rich young ruler in Matthew 19. The rich young ruler came to Jesus asking what to do to inherit eternal life. After telling Christ that he had kept the law Jesus told him to sell all he had and give to the poor. Of course, we know the reaction of the man; he went away sorrowful. He was not willing to serve only one master. He wanted to keep one foot in each world, but it was just not possible. Actually, few of us, if any, will be called upon to sell all that we have and give to the poor. It is up to us to decide what we can do without and then have the self discipline to do without and fulfill our responsibility to the poor. This is an important lesson we should learn from the story of the rich young ruler. We, as Christians, have a responsibility to the poor. Jesus did not tell this individual to sell what he had and give to his unfortunate brethren, but to the poor in general. Of course, we know that the church when functioning as a single unit has the authority to support only brethren in need. But we, as individuals have the responsibility to the poor in general and we must fulfill this responsibility in some way. The Lord condemns the nation of Israel for neglecting the needs of the poor in order to increase their own possessions. It is said that they sold the needy for a pair of shoes (Amos 2:6, 8:6). Too many times, I am afraid, we focus so much on who we may support out of the church treasury we overlook our individual responsibility to the poor in general. We cannot afford to forget about the needs of the poor. Our souls may depend on our attitude toward them and what we do for them. If our eye is single there will not be a problem for we will not be so attached to our physical goods that we will be unwilling to give them up for someone else's benefit. The Lord said that the poor will always be with us (Matthew 26:11). We must look for an opportunity to do good. If we are full of light we will be able to do this. Otherwise we will not find the opportunity.

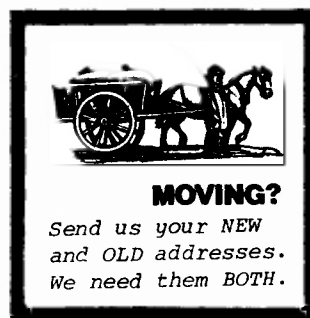
Jesus said that if our eye is single we will be full of light. The only way for us to be the kind of Christian that we should be is to be dedicated to Jesus and him only. Too many of us suffer from double-vision. We try to keep our eye on Jesus and something else. If we expect to be full of light we must be completely devoted to Christ. This illustration comes to mind. In order to keep a horse's attention on the desired goal blinders were used. This kept the horse's attention undivided by

keeping his eye single. Likewise we must keep our eyes single with self-imposed blinders.

Just exactly how do we keep our eyes single? Perhaps the key is found in Matthew 16:24. Here Jesus says that if any man is to be his disciple he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow him. Let's notice a few things about this passage. First of all, if we wish to follow Christ we must deny ourselves. Notice the passage does not say we must deny ourselves certain things. We must deny our selves. The word "self" is defined as the entire person of an individual or an individual's typical character or behavior. This is the part of us that we are required to give up. If we do give that up we will be left without an important part of being. What will fill the void? The Bible teaches that in its place should go the person of Christ so that we will be able to say, like Paul, that it is no longer we that live but Christ lives in us (Gal. 2:20).

The next part of that passage tells us to take up the cross. This refers to the sacrifices we must make as Christians. We, as we have seen, must sacrifice the worldly possessions we may gain. We must also give up many pleasurable activities. But if we are going to keep our eyes single we, like Moses, will be willing to suffer ill treatment rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. (Hebrews 11:24).

If we fail in our attempt to keep our eyes single we will be full of darkness. Notice that there is no shade mentioned in this passage. (Matthew 6:22-24). We are either full of light or full of darkness. If our eyes are single, we will be full of light. If our eyes are not single, that is if we try to serve two masters we will be full of darkness. There is a light that shines in all of us. If the light is single, if we deny ourselves, take up the cross, and follow Christ and in him only we will be full of light. We will be full of righteousness. On the other hand, if we try to serve Christ and at the same time love the riches of earth the light in us will be darkness and how great is the darkness thereof! Which will it be for us?



NARROW - SEPARATE - DESPISED

By Robert C. Welch

Fundamentally, Christians and the Lord's church are isolationists and segre-

gationists; but these words have a technical application to governmental activities and policies and to racial problems, and neither the church nor the Christian has anything to do with these issues, insofar as religion is concerned. The very word, church, in its original form (ecclesia) has the meaning of being called out. Those who are saved and added to the church by the Lord are called out of the world and into the fellowship of God and his Son, translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Colossians 1:13).

The Christian is looked upon with disdain for being narrow. Someone said that one year one million purchases were made of one inch bits; not because they wanted one inch bits, but because they wanted one inch holes. No Christian should seek to be narrow for the sake of being narrow, but for the sake of being in the way of the Lord which is narrow (Matt. 7:13, 14). If for this he is despised, he endures knowing that it is really the Lord's way which they despise. Furthermore, they know that for this they are said to be blessed of God (Matt. 5:11).

This narrow way of the Lord isolates the Christian and the Lord's church from the broad way. Concerning his disciples the Lord says: "They are not of the world" (John 17:16). But, just as a nation practicing isolationism is in the world of nations, so the disciple is in the world but not of the world. "As thou didst send me into the world but not of the world;" "As thou didst send me into the world, even so send them into the world." (John 17:18). That which isolates (sanctifies) them is the truth: "Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17). Because they are isolated (not of the world) he says the world hated them (John 17:14). Hence, even as other nations scorn the nation which attends to its own affairs without becoming entangled in all the involved alliances, so does the world despise them who have been sanctified by the word and who refuse to consort with the world.

Christians are required to separate themselves from those whose influence is contrary to the will of Christ. "Wherefore: Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, said the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; And I will receive you. And will be to you a Father, and ye shall be to me sons and daughters, said the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:17,18). This coming out and being separated is not going to make the Christian or the church popular with the world. This is the type of segregation which the Lord authorizes; and the child of God will follow, not because he likes to be separate and condemned, but because he wants the Lord Almighty to be his Father.

Those who follow this rule of separation will, in ridicule and scorn, be called narrow, bigoted, self-righteous, Pharisaical and ignorant. If you cannot stand the taunts of the world, then there is little good that can come from starting the life of a Christian. But if you want to be a child of the Lord Almighty, and to have eternal life; you will have to leave, and by determination you will leave, the broad way with its jeering crowd and take the narrow, separate way with the despised few, the blessed of God.

Hear Evangelist



BILLY ASHWORTH

Volume 21, Number 1. **THE REFLECTOR** is published monthly by the church of Christ, meeting at 2005 Elkwood Drive, Fultondale, AL 35068. Our mailing address: 3004 Brakefield Drive, Fultondale, AL 35068. Second Class postage is paid at Fultondale, AL 35068. **Edited by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.** Phone (205) 841-5293.

You Are Invited To Attend A

Gospel Meeting

March 30 - April 5

TIME OF SERVICES

Sunday Bible Study
Worship
Evenings

9:45 A.M.
10:45 A.M.
7:30 P.M.

Fultondale Church Of Christ