

A Quarterly Journal

(A presentation by email)

“Light For Our Age”

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January 2014

Volume 6 Issue #1

*“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”
Psalm 119:105*

Feature One: Editorial

Some weeks ago my daughter, Melanie, sent me this article, which she said was on the Internet and circulating on Facebook. She was concerned and asked me to read it. I believe it is a reflection of a movement of what took place beginning back in the 1960's. This was when people began to rebel against authority. We see that movement in government, in society, and even within the body of Christ. God's word is our authority, but there have been those within the church that have been attempting to eliminate the absolute authority of the Bible. Denominations have been doing this for years through claims of God speaking to them today, or challenging the

validity of God's word. I have known of people that have actually cut passages out of their Bible because they did not believe them.

Today in the church we face a major challenge from those in leadership positions that have chosen to deny portions of God's word that they claim "go against the beliefs of modern society." With this in mind I would like to examine this article. The article will be in italics and underlined. **My comments will be in plain type and in bold.**

It's You, Not Me: Why More & More Ministers Are Leaving Churches of Christ

If you worship in a Church of Christ (my tribe), your church might be primed to lose her minister. And the next one. And the one after that. Quickly.

First, a bit of explanation for non-Church of Christ readers. In my "non-denomination," the local church selects individual men and women to serve as her ministers / pastors / preachers. These folks may be trained, or not. Theologically adept, or not. Qualified, or not. It's up to the church.

Since each congregation is autonomous, churches can dismiss their ministers at will. Likewise, ministers can pick-up and move on at will. I know what you're thinking, "Wow! That sounds like a lot of turnover." Congratulations, you're right. You're so right that when church of Christ ministers get together with colleagues, conversations typically begin like this: "Are you still at _____?" We anticipate moving. What can I say? We're mobile.

While pastoral (yeah, I just used the “p” word) turnover is high among most Christian denominations, many Churches of Christ, I feel, are at unprecedented risk of chasing away the most gifted and best trained leaders in her midst.

I have been active within the church for almost 60 years. I have served as pulpit minister, stateside missionary, educational director, deacon, and currently serve as one of the elders of the East Ridge congregation. My work has taken me from Michigan to Florida. I am also the son of a minister. I say that to say this. I have never known of the right that congregations have to change ministers, or the right of ministers to decide to locate elsewhere to have been a problem within the church. Certainly, there have been unfortunate situations where changes have been made due to poor reasoning on the part of either the minister or the congregation; but in that God teaches that congregations are to be autonomous, this freedom is essential. Actually, I have known more and more preachers to stay in one place for many years. Our pulpit minister at East Ridge has been with the congregation for over 30 years.

Why am I concerned?

Increasingly, ministers of all stripes are sharing with me their desires to get out of Churches of Christ. I currently serve a non-traditional church, so I suspect I hear more of this than most people. Still, ministers say, “I’m pretty sure my next church will not be a church of Christ.” Of course, as long as their have been ministers there have been ministers complaining about ministry — the pay, the stress, the feelings of inadequacy, lack of

recognition, and unfair expectations, but this is different. People aren't talking about leaving ministry, they're talking about leaving ministry in Churches of Christ.

These comments give us much information about the author of this article and his associates. First, he uses the term “Churches of Christ” in a denominational sense. There is one church (Matthew 16:18) and to leave it is to leave Christ. There is no other option. Yet these “ministers” don't seem to know that. I can understand why faithful congregations do not want them to stay. Secondly, he speaks of their stresses. I want to compare those thoughts with the Apostle Paul's comments of 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 11:22-28 “Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches....”

One final thought on his comment here is found in 1 John.

1 John 2:19 “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have

continued with us:but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”

As young men and women break-up with Churches of Christ, they are not saying, “It’s not you, it’s me.” They’re saying, “It’s you!” The hidden distress inside the church is not merely that she is losing younger people, we are also losing younger ministers, if we are developing them to begin with. More and more, universities within my denomination are reporting fewer and fewer young men and women training for ministry, most opting, instead, to work with or begin non-profit charities.

My comment here is a repetition of the preceding one. He speaks of being in a denomination. This causes me to believe he has no idea what the church is. He has failed to understand the basic concept of New Testament Christianity. Jesus prayed for unity and Paul preached it. To uphold the concept of denominationalism is to speak counter to our Lord. Consider the passages in John 17:20-21 and 1 Corinthians 1:10.

I’ve tried to listen closely, without bias or reading into their reasoning. And here’s what I think hearing about why they’re flirting with exits (in rank order):

1. Women’s Roles. You may be shocked to find this the #1 reason, but nearly every minister I speak with believes churches of Christ are **dead wrong** on our limitation of women’s roles. A friend told me recently, “I have a daughter who is gifted and I’m not sure how much longer I can tolerate a

church that treats her as second-class.” I hear this sentiment nearly every week.

Yet the irritation is not primarily borne from having female children. As advanced education becomes the norm in churches of Christ, ministers are better educated regarding all the issues present in the Biblical text regarding both the gospel and the role of women. While disagreements persists, no educated Bible reader relies on the handy, but intellectually faulty, ground of “The Bible says what it says...” rationalizations. These men and women know more is going on in scripture than flat, thoughtless readings will allow. Again, disagreements remain between people equally educated, but at least all the educated understand that the other side has a good argument to make.

At the same time, our female ministers have zoomed passed frustration to the point of exit with restrictive roles, male-dominated imagery and language, and a church that limits not just the public voice of women, but demeans their perspective and gifts altogether. To be sure, these convictions aren’t birthed from culture or liberalism, but a dedicated dwelling in and study of the Scriptures. These folks have come to different conclusions than their predecessors and while they love their non-denomination, they are not willing to re-erect the dividing wall they believe Jesus’ death tore down. I mean just this week, I heard someone blaming the decline in masculinity (which is not a problem in the first place), on too much support (Pink!) for breast cancer awareness. People have grown excruciatingly weary of that kind of thinking.

First, let me remind you, the reader, of a well known concept. Different roles with equal benefits are equal in rank. For example, if a company has two vice-presidents and they have equal benefits, they are equal in the eyes of the company even though their tasks are different. You might have a vice-president of sales and a vice-president of production. They are different, yet equal. God has set the church in order and ordained a role for men and another role for women. What, however, is the reward? Is it not heaven for both if they are found faithful? In the corporate world, what would happen if the vice-president of production began giving orders to the sales staff? He or she would be out of line, and the company would be in disarray. Timothy clearly instructs women:

1 Timothy 2:11-12 ESV “Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.”

Still, her reward is the same as man’s. She is equal in the sight of God. To try to do what God commanded men to do is sinful in God’s sight. It really doesn’t matter what “man” thinks. Just a note here, it is obvious that this young man does not regard the scripture. None of his points are backed by God’s word. He is merely referring to people that are rebelling against what God plainly teaches.

2. Leadership. Churches of Christ, we are technically “elder-led.” In many places, this is a misnomer. The congregation selects elders; they are not appointed by a pastor or apostle. This “election” coupled with the deeply adopted American sense of representation means that church leadership is

congregational and often partisan. While there are no congregational votes, per se, not much can happen without the consent of the congregation. Problems arise because less spiritually mature Christians and churches know they are in charge. They understand that should they raise enough stink, cause enough pain, withhold enough funds, or hurt enough feelings, they'll get whatever they want, regardless of its righteousness or wisdom.

Strong, spiritually formed elderships navigate this well. However, many elderships tend to only listen to the will of the people. "We don't want to upset people." The result? Olive Garden, safe, palatable, unchallenging, churches. Success becomes measured only by uncomplaining butts in well-grooved pews. Nothing new or challenging ever happens; the status quo always holds. Frustration arises, then, for leaders – as ministers tend to be – become stuck in a cycle of both never being freed to change nor accomplish anything while simultaneously being judged for their lack of effectiveness or progress. This is not ministry; it's plate-spinning.

Some of what this young man says here is true, but not all. Elders are indeed chosen to lead. Some do not lead well, but we (for I am an elder) "must give an account" – Hebrews 13:17. Also we know from Paul that some elders will "depart from the faith" and "draw disciples away after them." – Acts 20:30. That doesn't change the fact that God placed elders over the congregations. If they fail in their duties, they will answer to God. If they succeed, they will be rewarded.

When the author of this article says, "nothing new or challenging ever happens", he indicates to me that he has not been around very much. Where I serve as an elder many challenging things abound, and

more new and even more challenging things are on the horizon. I know this to be true of many other congregations as well.

3. Traditionalism Wins. Ministers are saying, Churches of Christ are spiritually formed by neither Christ nor the Scriptures. Rather, we are primarily formed by the tradition of Churches of Christ itself. Here's what they mean: When a thorny issue is raised, church of Christ people – even with all our gesturing to the text – will ultimately err on the side of traditional Church of Christ practice.

For instance, I love a cappella worship, though my church doesn't practice it. I know of very few thoughtful Church of Christ members who would try to make a Biblical argument against instrumental worship, though a handful still rely on poor textual exegesis to maintain an a cappella only perspective. Church members will, however, leave long time friends, family, and their worshipping community when that particular tradition changes. Of course, they will cite "preference" and that may be true. I can't know for certain. They will say, "I don't disagree with it, but I..." as they walk out the door. This is not about Christ nor the Scriptures, but the tradition itself.

This lets me know that this young man does not know or understand the scriptures. The Bible is clear on this subject. He might be surprised to discover that there are even people not within the body of Christ that understand this. While I could quote much more, let me just quote from one authority, McClintock and Strong's Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature. On page 762 of volume 6 are the following statements: "There is no warrant in the New Testament for their use." The early Reformers, when they came out

of Rome, removed them as the monuments of idolatry.... Instrumental music is incompatible with directions for singing given in the N.T.” Much more is given, but this will have to suffice in this article. Let it be understood that there is no Biblical authority for the use of instrumental music in our worship to God. You cannot turn to God’s word and say we use instrumental music because this passage gives us permission. We all agree that singing is required in worship to God. People use instrumental music to please people. God’s people sing to please God. Worship is to please God, not man.

The ministers that are saying that the churches of Christ are formed by its own traditions have been shown not to be true ministers of Christ, but those that have left the word of God, or never were with the word of God. They operate apparently under the guise of “we think” not “thus saith the Lord”. It is not about preference. I believe this young man (from the comments he has made) sees worship as entertainment. It is “what I like” or “what others want”. Worship is what God wants. If you send someone to the store and give him or her money to buy a dozen eggs, you do not need to give them a list of what not to buy. They either do what you want, or they do not. We either do what God wants, or we do not. For hundreds of years people claiming to follow Christ sang without any instrument. The instrument is a late edition to God’s worship. There is justification for “singing”; there is absolutely no justification for the use of instrumental music in Christian worship.

Obviously, people can make whatever decisions about church they want to make, and can worship where they desire – or anything else regarding

congregational life – but we cannot call blue red and expect to be taken seriously. If tradition is the trump card, the church’s ministers would prefer we simply say so. We cannot make the argument that “I just want what I grew up with...” and it not be about tradition. The appeal itself is about past practice, which is, by definition, tradition.

Certainly, there are traditions within the church. Some congregations traditionally partake of the Lord’s Supper before the sermon, and some after. That is their tradition. However, the Lord’s Supper is a command not a tradition. Yes, we do have traditions, and those traditions can be changed. At East Ridge, in Chattanooga where I attend, we changed a tradition. In the past it had been our tradition to end our worship service with a prayer. For certain reasons the eldership changed it to ending our service with a song. It has worked well for us, and no scripture was broken. Evidently, the author of this article does not understand the difference between tradition and command.

The same is true regarding any hot-button issue when traditional practice is questioned – worship style, women’s participation, new approaches to ministries, etc.... If you listen to arguments carefully, many of them boil down to an appeal to church of Christ tradition and the linguistic dead giveaway begins with, “I don’t have a problem with it, but...” or “I don’t think it’s wrong, but...” or – and this is the grand-daddy of all church of Christ traditionalism arguments – “I don’t think it’s a salvation issue, but...” (as if anything other than Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection is a salvation issue).

I repeat, the author of this article does not understand the difference between tradition and command. If God teaches it in His word, we must comply no matter what our preference. He is correct in that many have grown cold to the understanding of what God says, and people might say the things the author quoted. When we say “I think” or “I don’t think” instead of “God says in this or that passage” we are likely to be wrong.

I must comment on the last statement in this section. “(As if anything other than Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection is a salvation issue”). Is the author of this article claiming the Lord’s Supper is of no effect on salvation? Is baptism? Is obedience to God’s word in general? Jesus lived a perfect life and died a violent death for man. He did His part. The Bible is clear, however, that man has his part. Paul writes in Philippians 2:12, “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” We work out our salvation by obeying those things God has given us to obey.

Many churches of Christ only discover our unspoken allegiance to tradition the hard way; after they’ve survey the congregation about a hot issue (Problem #2 in effect), and hear back that few are against it, and then watch hundreds leave when change is implemented.

Women’s roles, leadership, and traditionalism are the three rationales I hear most frequently from minister flirting with changing denominations.

I must repeat, this man has left the Lord's church. He may not know it, but he has. He and his associates are the ones Paul warned the elders of Ephesus about in Acts 20:28-29 "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." Jesus clearly taught that he would "remove the candlestick" from the churches in Asia unless they repented. The candlestick represented the church.

I can only hope and pray that he and those with whom he associates will go back to see what God said in His word and follow that. Do not follow the "I think, or he thinks" religion.

Robert T. Oliver

Feature Two: *an article by R. C. Oliver from his radio work*

Christianity is Rational

**"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of...a sound mind."
(2 Timothy 1:7)**

I do not think it is the desire of any man to be recognized as an irrational character—at least such is not my desire. This statement will assist me in explaining to you why I have embraced the Christian religion, and why I wish to encourage you to do likewise. While it is true that many religions are irrational, yet I do not view the Christian religion in that light. Notwithstanding, it is the delight of some to represent it as being rooted and grounded in mental weakness, and a sure indication of intellectual

deficiency. The very opposite of this is the case. The Christian religion imparts true wisdom, real dignity, and is a sure mark of a sound mind. Therefore to apply the term “rationalism” to any theory that is opposed to God, the Christian religion, or the Bible, is a misnomer!

Genuine rationalism is inseparably connected with the Bible. Nothing is impressed more in your Bible than the necessity of rationalism in religion. It is therefore my purpose in this lesson to demonstrate this truth to you. We shall observe together the harmonious unity existing between the sound mind and the Christian religion in their approval of certain things and their condemnation of other things.

Atheism

It is an evident fact that a sound mind will not endorse the corrupt philosophy of the atheist; neither will the Christian religion. The atheist is one who will not accept the testimony but chooses to remain an unbeliever though surrounded by sufficient and satisfactory evidence. Herein lies the difference between the atheist and the Christian. For the Christian will carefully examine the testimony and upon finding it sufficient and satisfactory, he will believe it.

One way the atheist’s thinking is unsound is his belief that the world came into existence by accident. He displays the unsoundness of his mind to a glaring degree when he professes this belief. Just think of the earth. It is a perfect timepiece. In Job 26:7 the record says, “He stretches out the north over empty space; He hangs the earth on nothing.” Agreeing with Job are the scientists who tell us that this old earth is out in space, suspended on nothing but the invisible laws of gravity and centrifugal force. It rotates on its axis at the rate of 1,000 miles an hour and makes its annual revolution about the sun at the terrific velocity of above 66,000 miles per hour. Yet we do not read of

it ever breaking down or having an accident or any such thing. The earth and the relationship to the sun give to us perfect time. The earth is our perfect timepiece. Now could a sound mind accept the hypothesis that such came into existence by accident? Would you recognize me as a rational being, if I were to declare that the watch I have on my arm, and by which I tell the time of day, came into existence by accident? If it took intelligence to make this watch, it must have taken greater intelligence to create the earth and the universe, of which the earth is only a small part. Certainly a sound mind rejects the hypothesis that the earth came into existence by accident, so also does the Christian religion.

Next let us study the subject of credulity. I am confident a sound mind avoids credulity, so does the Christian religion. The credulous believes without, or on imperfect evidence, but such is not true of the Christian. Certainly he will believe all satisfactory testimony, but he will not believe imperfect or unsatisfactory evidence. Neither does he request the latter of any man. The Christian's religion is based on full and satisfactory evidence, and that is his reason for believing in this way of life, He has fulfilled prophecy for his evidence – such evidence cannot be denied! Though the bible is not a science textbook, yet it sometimes treats on a scientific subject, and when it does it is always scientifically correct! The Christian has this also as sound evidence. Also, where is there a more excellent code of ethics than that possessed by the Christian? It is superlative!

The pure and holy influence the Christian religion exerts over the lives of men and women is sufficient evidence to prove its divine origin. Where this holy influence has gone we have churches, hospitals, orphan homes, and asylums of mercy. Therefore, one must admit that the Christian

religion is based upon solid and impregnable evidence. The Christian religion is therefore a religion that invites our scrutiny and investigation.

Next consider a subject that has arrested no little attention during the more recent years. It is that of racial prejudice. I am convinced that a sound mind is opposed to racial prejudice and so is the Christian religion. Nothing is more unmistakably taught in your Bible than are the “fatherhood” of God and the “brotherhood” of man. Consider the following passages:

Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers? (Malachi 2:10)

One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Ephesians 4:6)

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matthew 28:19-20)

As you can see, the gospel of Christ is for all nations of the earth, without regard to race or color. All racial barriers have been torn away in Christ; therefore, we read the text that states:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26-28)

Take a look at the division in the religious world today. Without doubt a sound mind is opposed to religious division, so also is the Christian religion. Much that is termed Christianity today is not Christianity! As the primitive church was faced with the problem of differentiating between

Christianity and Judaism, and Christianity and Paganism, so we today are faced with the problem of differentiating between Christianity and Christianity-falsely-so-called. Nothing can be more repulsive to the sound mind than the division we have in modern Christendom. This is true because, (1) it is opposed to genuine Christianity, and (2) it is the cause of much infidelity.

It is obvious to the sound mind that religious division is opposed to genuine Christianity, for genuine Christianity pleats for unity. But in order to maintain their individuality and preserve the life of their respective body, the compromising sympathizer advocates division –the division that compromising with the devil always has, and always will, produce.

The most fertile soil for infidelity that I know is the division that exists in religious circles today. You will see what I mean when you hear the following confession from an infidel. When asked why he was not a Christian, the infidel replied, “It is because of your divisions and a want of practice for what little good you preach.” This is only one confession among many.

The sound mind will reason that God did not intend for his people to be divided into hundreds of religious bodies, because it is plainly written in your Bible that there is only one body. (1 Corinthians 12:20) The Bible also says:

“And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.” (Colossians 1:18)

Therefore we can see why the sound mind would take the above position for upon learning that the Bible teaches that there is only one church, the sound mind would reason that it would be just as rational for one to advocate “join

the Christ of your choice” as it would be for some one else to advocate “join the church of your choice”. The same Bible that speaks of the one, speaks of the other also and distinctly states that there is but one of each. To advocate the theory that one church is just as good as another is not only repulsive to the sound mind, but is a reflection upon the intelligence of the man who would so contend. For this reason a sound mind is opposed to division in religious circles, so is the Christian religion.

Last in our study is the subject of carelessness. I am quite sure a sound mind is opposed to carelessness; so also is the Christian religion. Genuine rationalism will not allow any man to be careless regarding his present or future happiness. Therefore, the philosophy that affords safety and enjoyment in this world, and in that which is to come, is the philosophy that will be accepted by the man of wisdom. Certainly there is nothing that can furnish more true happiness here than can the Christian religion, and that alone can preserve one in the world to come. In conclusion may I urge one and all to walk as wise men and not as the fools. Walk as men who are “in reputation for wisdom and honor”. In this way you can secure for yourself happiness in this world, and in the world to come, eternal life.

Feature Three: Sandy’s Women’s Corner

FROM THE MOUTH OF BABES

I am constantly amazed at the things children say. They have a unique way of saying things that bewilder us, cheer us, confuse us, bring us joy, and often cause us to laugh uncontrollably.

Recently, one of the 5th grade students from my Bible class asked me one Sunday, “Mrs. Sandy, do you have a real job or do they pay you to teach our Bible class?” I wanted to laugh, but I knew better. He was completely serious! He went on to explain that since I had lots of visuals, made bulletin boards, and spent a lot of time on our lessons; the church surely paid me for my efforts.

I took this as a compliment. I am glad he thinks I do enough to be paid! I explained, of course, that no Bible schoolteacher is paid to teach a Bible class.

The thing that amazes me so much about children is that they can get to the heart of the matter. Recently, another one of my students was concerned about whether or not he would go to heaven. This is a touchy subject for 4th and 5th graders. After my explaining about children being safe, he asked a very pointed question. He said, “So if I die tonight, will I go to heaven?” Needless to say, I had a talk with his mother that very day!

I think the thing that amazes me most is the heart of children. They show so much compassion and caring. They really seem to know how to love and forgive, the two things adults need to learn more than anything. They also know how to bring about results that you never expect.

One of our granddaughters paid her annual visit to Santa. She wrote out her letter to Santa and took it with her. As she sat on Santa’s lap, Santa read her letter. She told Santa that she would like for her little friend, Caroline, to be free of cancer. She also said that she would like an art table and an American Girl doll. Lastly, she asked Santa to please pray for Caroline. As Santa finished the letter, Santa’s helper was about to snap the picture; but Santa held up his hand for her to wait. Then he bowed his head and prayed for Caroline.

I wonder if he has ever prayed with a child while performing his duties as Santa. I wonder what he thinks about a child that asks for such a Christmas gift. I have a great respect for this particular “Santa” because he made my granddaughter think Santa believes in a God who can answer prayers.

Children seem to be able to sort through the material ways of the adult world and get to the heart of what is really important. Two weeks ago, we had some visitors in our worship service. One of their children had been asked what he wanted for Christmas. He simply said, “I already have a lot, and I don’t really need anything”.

My other granddaughter and I were having a conversation over Christmas about friends. Her 13-year-old maturity really surprised me. She was telling me about a girl that she considered a good friend at one time. She proceeded to tell me a story about the two of them; and, of course, it involved a boy. But in the end she told me that she just tries to ignore the way she acts. She said she is just sorry to have lost a friend.

Once again, a child has shown me the way. She is willing to forgive and move on. This isn’t the first time she and I have had a talk like this. She is one of the most forgiving people I know.

Children make us laugh. They ask the hard questions. They understand about prayer and how important it is. They can know the real value of things. They know the true meaning of forgiveness. How blessed we are that God has put these precious little people in our lives.

Feature Four: Bible Question

Is it scriptural to withdraw our fellowship from an entire congregation? When the Bible speaks of withdrawing fellowship, it refers

to individual Christians as in I Corinthians 5. I would be afraid to withdraw from a congregation in that we have no scriptural example to do such. Also, Jesus, through John, told the congregation at Sardis that they were dead; but there were some in that dead congregation that had not defiled their garments. (Revelation 3:1-5). Would it be right to withdraw from faithful Christians that might be in a “dead” congregation?

On the other hand, I believe an eldership has the direction to protect the members under their charge. If a congregation in the area were doing things that are questionable, then certainly it would be right for an eldership to ask its members not to visit or work with that congregation.

Part Five: Our Communication

When you have occasion to speak before a group there are several things you should do before speaking. First, don't rush to the speaker's stand. Take your time and breathe slowly to allow some of the adrenaline to dissipate.

After you have reached the speaker's stand, check your posture. You should be standing straight. Do not bend over the speaker's stand. It is good to stand about 12 to 18 inches away from the stand. Let your hands rest lightly on the front of the stand if you wish, but do not lean on the stand. Do not put your weight on your hands or arms.

Secondly, check your audience to see if they are ready for you to begin. Use this time to really look at your audience: What messages are they sending you nonverbally? By pausing a moment you will cause the audience to focus on you so they will be with you as you begin speaking.

One of the most distracting things a person can do as the speech begins is to start with the sound “Uhhh”. Equally distracting is to begin with “you know”. Sounds or terms such as these show anxiety and nervousness on the part of the speaker. It also indicates that the speaker is not as prepared as he or she should be. That may not be the case, but it appears that it is.

The third step is to place in your mind the first several words of your talk. Glance down at your notes and know exactly what words you plan to use as you begin. That helps you begin solidly and forcefully.

In that you have looked down at your notes to get these words in mind, it is important to re-establish your focus on the audience. Look back up and focus on some individual in the audience, Pause briefly before beginning the presentation.

Finally, you want to hold your focus on the audience for at least eight to ten words. In that way you have established a strong eye contact with your audience as you begin.

Humor:

A little boy got on the elevator in New York City with his daddy, going to the top of the Empire State building. The boy watched the signals flashing 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70.... They kept going and he got nervous. He took his daddy’s hand and said “Daddy, does God know we are coming?”

In Closing:

It is hard to believe another year has come and gone. In many ways it

has been a good year in the brotherhood but challenges still face the church from every direction. We face a government that is somewhat hostile to Christianity; a liberal element in the brotherhood that is threatening to cause the body of Christ harm by violating God's will; and an ultra conservative group within the body of Christ that attacks the very body of Christ. (But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. Galatians 5:15) Jesus said in Revelation 3:11, " Behold, I come quickly: hold fast which thou hast, that no man take they crown." I trust you will have a most excellent new year.

Bob