

The Restoration Herald – 2001 Editorials

January 2001

Ignorance is...

Finish this sentence: "Ignorance is....."

Most will say "bliss." Perhaps it was someone who was ignorant and wanted to stay that way who originated that triteism. The thought is fallacious.

When one is stopped by an officer of the law for speeding, ignorance is no excuse to use.

When a heat gauge on the car is ignored because one chooses not to look at it, and the engine blows up and needs to be repaired, the repair bill cannot be viewed as blissful.

When a student has to pay for a college course a second time because he failed the first time, he cannot sit through the course rerun and blissfully enjoy his experience.

Paul did not want people to be ignorant. He said that he did not want people to be ignorant about the mystery of salvation (Romans 11:25), the importance of perseverance (1 Corinthians 10:1), spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1), and the resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Why didn't Paul want the people to be ignorant? Because ignorance is not bliss, it is dangerous.

When I was in Junior High, I had the pleasure of working on the staff of our church camp during the Senior High week. One of my jobs was to build a fire in the small wood burning stove that heated the water for the showers. I was given the wood and the kerosene with which to start the fire. One day I remember well I went to check the fire only to find that there was no flame, just coals. As a Junior high student, I thought flames were better than coals. No one ever told me that you shouldn't put kerosene on coals. You can put it on a flame (which is also dangerous) but never on coals. I threw some kerosene on the coals and an explosion occurred. Apparently flames shot out of the chimney of the bath house, because faculty came running from all over the camp. I found out that my ignorance of kerosene was not blissful, but was very dangerous.

Of course there are some who cannot learn, but ignorance simply means that one does not know something, not that he/she cannot be taught. Paul said that sometimes ignorance is caused by the "hardness of hearts," i.e. people can learn, but simply are not willing to learn.

January is the month when many make resolutions for the New Year. I think that it is good whenever people decide to make changes for the better. Whether it be to lose weight, exercise more, stop smoking, or read the Bible every day. Any attempt to become a better person is always a correct move.

However, there is one more item that I would encourage each one to add to their list of resolutions and that would be to take the advice of Thomas Cranmer and "learn a little history."

We can learn so much from history. That is why God commanded Israel to set up monuments in certain locations, so that they would have the opportunity to teach their children a little history. They needed to remember from whence they came. They needed to remember how they got where they were.

Churches of the Restoration Movement need to know their history. They need to again know where they came from and how they got where they are. It is a thrilling story that will aid in knowing purpose. It is a story that will motivate. It is a story that will inspire. It is a story that will help one keep on track. It is also a story that will help preserve what needs to be preserved.

To neglect knowing this history will be dangerous. To neglect our history could lead us into making some of the same mistakes that others in the past have made.

Make it a point to "learn a little history" this year. Have a class at your church or home on the Restoration Movement. Start a study group. Take a class at a Bible college. Encourage your preacher to teach a class. Get hold of the Bream videos from the CRA.

The 19th century was a time of great growth for the Movement. The 20th century began with a time of growth, moved to a time of controversy, and ended in a period of malaise and uncertainty. What will the 21st century hold for us? Let us again study our history and perhaps we can enter another period of great growth. I hope so!

February 2001

Wills

The Christian Restoration Association came into being because of a will. Sidney S. Clarke left funds in trust with the Richmond Street Christian Church (now the Western Hills Church of Christ) of Cincinnati, OH, for the purpose of evangelism and the establishment of churches after the New Testament order. In time, brethren from all over the country wanted to add to the funds in the Clarke Estate to help with its purpose. This was not legally possible so the Clarke **Fund** was begun. The Clarke Fund grew to where it was too large for the elders of the local church to administer. At that point the Clarke Fund was separated from the church and was formed into its own organization. Later the name of the Clarke Fund was changed to the Christian Restoration Association.

In the Articles of Incorporation of the CRA we find our purpose:

"To promote the cause of the Christian religion and of receiving, soliciting, holding in trust and disbursing bequests, gifts, funds, and moneys for the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to the New Testament pattern without any denominational affiliation; for promoting Christian education and promoting missionary and benevolent enterprises both in the United States and in foreign countries; for acting as trustees for moneys or other property for other similar enterprises; of owning and maintaining suitable real estate and building; and the doing of all things necessary or incident thereto."

The Articles of Incorporation also tell about our relationship to others:

"The Association shall never assume to have in any sense any authority over any local church of Christ or disciple of Christ, other than such authority as it must necessarily exercise over its own employed agents. Nor shall the Association ever assume or have assigned to it, any official character but shall remain always a voluntary, self-perpetuating, service agency for churches and individuals, asking support on grounds of loyalty and efficiency. It recognizes the world field as always open, the local church as always free and the principle of healthy competition in good works as established."

Over the years, the CRA has tried to hold to its original purposes. Money has been given and disbursed to help our churches preach the Gospel of Christ. Some money has been given with explicit purposes behind it to help in the spreading of the Gospel. For instance, some money was given with the express purpose of making low-cost loans to help churches. This is money that we cannot and would not use for ourselves, to buy even a pencil. The giver had a goal in mind and we simply follow his/her wishes.

In 1964, a good brother and sister in Christ from Oklahoma left funds in their will that allowed us to purchase the two-apartment building that has served as our office and headquarters since that time. Over the years there have been others who have remembered the CRA generously through their wills; this has allowed us to carry on our daily activities, purchase special equipment and be involved in projects such as publishing, evangelism, and seminars.

Just as our country has learned the importance of one vote, I would hope that Christian people would learn the importance of making gifts not just in life, but also in death through their wills and trusts. Those who track such things tell us that people are not leaving everything in their estates to their families, but are leaving part of it to charitable institutions.

The writer of Ecclesiastes (2) was troubled because he realized that he had worked long and hard for what he possessed, but at death he would have to leave it behind to someone else. He asked about that person to whom he leaves his possessions, *"And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun."*

The question is a good one. Will the person getting the fruit of your labor be wise or foolish with what you leave him? For the Christian the question should take on the added meaning of, "Is the person a Christian and will he use it for Christian purposes?"

A gift given carries great responsibility. The giver of the gift can sometimes help the receiver with the gift. Recently I had the occasion of speaking to a saint who desires to leave some money to a Bible college for a scholarship. She wanted to leave it in memory of her father, a great preacher. I complimented her on what she was doing, but advised her to leave it so it could be a scholarship that would help train preachers. Her gift will not only help a student, but will also help produce a preacher which is what she really wanted to do. In an age when preachers are becoming an endangered species, she is helping the college with its goal of producing preachers.

The CRA came into being, in part, because of the will of Sidney S. Clarke. Our present facility was provided by the will of Isom Roberts. We have often been preserved because of wills of Christians. Our purpose is often fulfilled by the way we administer funds left to our keeping in wills. Wills have been and continue to be important to the work of the CRA. What I am saying is that the CRA has more than 80 years of showing faithfulness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to our original purposes. Our trustees are men of wisdom and integrity. Please keep the CRA in your mind as you establish your will or trust.

March 2001

Learning from Lawyers

"Do you know how many jokes there are about lawyers?"

"Just one. All the rest are true!"

Lawyers often get the brunt of many jokes unfairly. We have had in our churches some of the most outstanding and upright lawyers serving our Lord during the last century. They were/are men of great wisdom and integrity. I am thinking specifically of John Hudson, Edwin Crouch, and Luther D. Burrus.

During the fight for the Presidency we have all had a lesson in not only civics, but also the law. We have watched with great interest as the lawyers have argued and filed their briefs.

Four things stood out during the contest.

1. One of the most interesting things to me was to find out that our Supreme Court Justices, after they hear a case, dismiss to a dining room where they eat lunch together and are not allowed to discuss the case during the lunch. After that, they go to another room where they discuss the case.
2. Another interesting thing was to see the lawyers shaking hands after their court presentations. Here they were, adversaries, but carrying on with life in a civil manner toward one another.
3. Did you also notice how they referred to each other? They did not use pejorative words but used words of respect for their worthy opposition.
4. They did not shy away from use of the words "argue" and "argument."

In watching the worldly lawyers I'm afraid that I saw a marked contrast with what we often see in the church. Probably all of us have seen Christian brothers fighting with one another. Too often their fighting leads not to a satisfactory conclusion or solution to the original problem, but ends with a parting of the ways. (If the truth be known, how many of our congregations began simply because two brethren couldn't get along with one another?)

I wonder why Christian people cannot disagree in a Christian way. We must admit that there are areas of our church life where we can have and hold opinions. Haven't we always said, "In matters of faith, unity. In matters of opinion, liberty. In all things, love." Why is it that so many have failed to learn how to respectfully disagree with a brother?

Why is it that when Christians disagree on something that is dear, but not a matter of faith, that the disagreement cannot be discussed? Have we so misunderstood "endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" that we are not allowed to disagree concerning anything? One should know that part of the "endeavoring" would be to civilly discuss the disagreement.

How can people come to a meeting of the minds without facing the very things in which they disagree. To be silent rather than open is often a cause for frustration.

Why is there often name-calling during disagreements? Words like "liberal," "conservative," "reactionary," and others, usually add nothing to the discussion. Might it not be better to follow the Holy Spirit's instructions through Paul to "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;" (Romans 12:10)?

Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement (dare I say argument), but I have a great deal of trouble thinking that they called each other by pejorative names and then never spoke to one another again. Paul had to correct Peter but I doubt that he called him ugly names when he did it.

The Bible does not teach us to not argue (which simply means to give reasons, to present objections), but not to argue about foolish things (Titus 3:9). Why shouldn't we be able to discuss openly with one another our reasons for or objections to something?

Brethren, let us take a lesson from lawyers and learn how to face our brethren with our honest disagreements and while we are at it, we must add in the love of Christ. Who knows but that we might learn something from one another and about one another if we handle things the right way.

Very few people like confrontations and disagreements, but those things are not the problem. Our problem is how we handle the confrontations and disagreements. If we can learn to handle these things in the spirit of Christ maybe we will be one more step closer to maturity in Christ.

April 2001

A Few Notes on Preachers and Preaching

The roll of the preacher is always exciting. Everyday holds new opportunities for service to Christ and His church. One never knows when he wakes up as to what doors will be open and what doors will be closed.

Sometimes the ministry is filled with joy. How wonderful it is to sit in a home and teach a young family about Jesus Christ and then hear that they now believe and want to accept Christ as their Lord by being immersed into Him. How wonderful it is to unite two Christians in the bonds of matrimony and see their new outpost for Christ begin. How wonderful it is to watch Christians mature and begin to bring others to Christ or start teaching or serving or whatever it may be.

Of course, the ministry also has its low points. There are times when like Jeremiah a minister would like to just leave and open a motel in the desert (Jeremiah 9:2). But no, he cannot do that. For the true minister of the Gospel realizes that his job is not just "hatchin', patchin', and dispatchin' (births, marriages, and funerals). No, his job is to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He feels, like the Apostle Paul, the weight of the Gospel and says, *"for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel"* (1 Corinthians 9:16).

The Gospel, as you know, is the good news of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). It is a message of hope. It is a message of love. It is a message of the grace of our God. It is a message of mercy. It is a message that appeals to the entire being of man.

It is a message that defies the logic of man (1 Corinthians 1). In fact, man says that the preaching of the cross is foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18), but the Apostle goes on to say that it is foolishness to those who are perishing. How sad!

The Gospel is also called the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). The preacher cannot be like the president of the ladies club who announced, "Today's speaker is going to tell us all about his experiences in World War II and he promises to take out all the bad parts." Sometimes you have to tell about the bad parts. John did when he told Herod that he was living in sin with Herodias. That was not the politically correct thing for John to say to a man of Herod's position. But John wasn't out of his mind in preaching that, although later on he was out of a head because he said it. He was being faithful to carrying out the commission he had been given.

Jesus also preached the *"whole counsel of God"* when He called the Sadducees and Pharisees a brood of vipers. Again, not politically correct, but who will say that the Son of God was wrong in either word choice or attitude when He made that pronouncement. It was part of carrying out the commission that the Father had given Him.

And how about the Apostle Paul standing in front of the self-indulgent politician Felix and *"discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come,"* (Acts 24:25).

One most interesting thing about that last passage is that Luke records that someone in that room was afraid during the sermon and it wasn't Paul, it was Felix. There is an element of fear in preaching. The preacher should fear God lest he handle the Word incorrectly and the sinner need fear God if he would be saved (Proverbs 1:7). Who was afraid the last time you spoke the Word?

The lot of the preacher is not always pleasant, although woe to the "Christian" who seeks to do God's servant harm (1 Chronicles 16:22). The great faith chapter, Hebrews 11, records that some of the prophets *"were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground"* (37-38). Those verses are not usually used when trying to recruit young men to go to Bible college and enter the ministry. Do we think that today in the 21st century we should have it better than they did in other times?

But the reward of the faithful preacher is like that of all faithful Christians in the future. Paul said it best when he said, *"there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing"* (2 Timothy 4:8).

What am I really trying to say? If you have a good preacher, and chances are you do, then pray for him and help him in his ministry. O there may be things about him that you may not like, but then there may be things about you he doesn't like. The important thing is that he is faithful to the Word of God and his commission.

If you are a preacher reading this then take another look at your ministry. Are you really preaching the whole counsel of God? Are you loving God and loving your people at the same time?

Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of course said it best when he said, *"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry"* (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

May 2001

Let's Get Serious

This Spring has been quite an eye-opener. Since January I have been to both Florida and California. In Florida I had the privilege of speaking for a congregation in Ft. Lauderdale. During Bible School I gave my usual CRA mission presentation, but this time with a twist. I made the presentation with an interpreter. Half of my audience spoke Spanish. There was an English speaking service during the first hour, then joint Bible School service, then the Spanish speaking service. I had spoken before using an interpreter, but that was in Ukraine, Thailand, Cambodia, and Burma, never here in the United States. That evening I spoke in Miami, again with an interpreter. Some in Florida refer to the area of southern Florida as Central America North, because of all of the Hispanics.

In California I didn't have to use an interpreter, but the scene wasn't that different. I visited the Downey First Christian Church where I had ministered for almost six years. When I was there we had two families with Hispanic surnames. Now the congregation employs a Spanish speaking minister to work with the Hispanic congregation that meets in their building. They still have an English speaking congregation, but have added the Hispanic congregation and a Korean congregation to their ministry. The Downey school system is now populated by over 70% Hispanic surnamed people. Los Angeles will soon become second only to Mexico City in the number of Mexican people living there.

I also had the privilege of speaking at the First Christian Church of Compton. 25 years ago I held a revival there and at that time the congregation was 40% black and 60% white. Now it is almost 100% black. That church has a wonderful story to tell about how they saw that change was coming and how they met that change in order to continue to be a vibrant congregation in their community.

Orange County, California now has sections where English signs are in the minority when compared to other languages represented. There is even a freeway sign that says, "Little Saigon next exit."

The face of America is changing! But is the face of our brotherhood changing? Is the face of the community and congregation where you live changing?

Comparing the *Directory of the Ministry* of 1990 and 2000 shows that in our fellowship we have gained 78,864 members. That is good, but hardly in keeping with the 9.6% rate of growth in our country.

Perhaps it would be good for each of our congregations to take a look at their last ten years. Has the congregation grown by 9.6%? Has the congregation's growth been consistent with that of its own community? And then if you want to really launch out into dangerous territory ask how many new Christians have been made in the last ten years, five years, or last year and how many of them were brought to Christ by the leaders of the congregation.

If Christ came to "seek and to save the lost," isn't it time that His body became serious about the same task?

According to Empty Tomb, a research group in Champaign, IL, churchgoers are giving an increasingly smaller share of their incomes. Since 1968, Protestant giving has fallen from 3.1% to 2.5 in 1998. Contributions rose, but when inflation is figured in, giving decreased.

If funds are needed to "seek and save the lost," isn't it time that the body of Christ became serious about this task and showed how serious we are with our funds?

If people cannot hear the message of Christ without a preacher (Romans 10:14-15), isn't it time that the church became serious about this and treated their preachers better and preachers became serious and gave more time to "prayer and the ministry of the Word" ? Isn't it time that we started giving our best youth to vocational Christian ministry?

If our community is "evangelized" already (it probably isn't) then isn't it time for the church to get serious about reaching the lost around the world. (Really, the healthy church is interested in reaching their "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth" all at the same time.)

It is great to be a Christian. The fellowship among Christians is like nothing else. But isn't it time to become serious about allowing others to enjoy that same fellowship with Christ and His church?

O, we have some wonderful congregations out there. Some of the finest people anywhere are part of those congregations. They are places that make a difference in their community and in the world. They are places that show concern and compassion for the lost and the down and out. They are places where Christ can be seen. But there are also many congregations that are simply playing at church these days. Isn't it time we got serious and started being the church?

June 2001

For God or As God?

There is a great deal of difference in speaking for God and speaking as God. Moses found this out at Meribah. The children of Israel were close to entering the Promised Land. They were thirsty and began to grumble about their plight.

Moses was told by God to speak to the rock and water would come forth for all the people and their animals. But Moses went too far. He not only spoke for God, but he became presumptuous and spoke as God. Numbers 20 tells us that Moses said, "Listen now, you rebels; shall *we* bring forth water for you out of this rock?"

The passage goes on to say, "Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly...."

Moses had been speaking for God for so long that the line that divided his speaking for and speaking as God was very easy to cross. This can happen to many of us.

The preacher who week after week stands before a congregation and shares the Word of God with his people and is looked upon to help make important decisions both in the lives of the individual members and the corporate body has a special danger here. He spends so much of his time being "God's man" that if he is not careful the line can become blurred very easily.

Every week he speaks to the people and they line up and shake his hand and tell him what a great message that was. It is nice to be appreciated, but if he is not careful he can begin to believe all of those compliments and become puffed up; and that is when the danger of speaking as God becomes the greatest.

The preacher must not think that his people are lying about the sermon, but neither must he consider their favorable comments as the equivalent of an A+ from God.

A sweet lady in her 80's approached me on Sunday morning saying that she had heard me on the radio the day before and really appreciated the message. I thanked her as she said that she agreed with everything I had said. My comment was, "It was probably good to hear a religious program where you could agree with everything for a change." "Yes, it was" was her reply. But then as I walked away feeling so good, I heard her mumble to herself, "But then I agree with everything everybody says."

The preacher may speak for God, but he isn't God. And it makes no difference how large or small the congregation, the danger is still there that someone can cross that line. Many good things are said, success (in the way the world sees success) is achieved in a great way as crowds increase, decision making is centralized in one or two people, and the stage is set to cross that line and speak for God.

Here is a case in point. The truth of the matter is that it is many cases in point because the same thing is being played out from east to west and north to south. It goes something like this. For some reason (the reasons are not important here at this time) people leave their church. The minister (or pastor) tells others that "we have trimmed (or pruned) the branches for growth." **He just spoke for God!**

The passage that he alludes to in talking about "trimming the branches" is in John 15 where we are told that branches are trimmed (pruned) so that they will bear more fruit.

The problem with using that passage is that God is the one who does the trimming of the branches in John 15, not the preacher.

There may be times, and are, times when church discipline must be used, but the purpose of church discipline is to ultimately save the person disciplined. Our throw away age has gotten into the church where oftentimes leaders think that if someone is not following them exactly then they must be jettisoned because they are of no worth.

There are times when it may be best for someone to begin attending a sister congregation where they can be actively involved and happy in their service to the King. Perhaps leadership can help the person make that transition gracefully. But too many times that is not the case today. Instead we simply "trim the branches" and get rid of our "problem."

A careful look at John 15 shows that it is the gardener who trims the branches. The gardener in the passage is God. Jesus is the vine. We are the branches. Branches don't cut off branches. Branches don't have the right to cut off what is also attached to the vine.

When Moses spoke *as* God instead of *for* God he was denied entrance to the Promised Land. He got to the border, but because of that seemingly one little thing, he didn't get to cross the river and enter the land.

May we all speak the Words of God, but let no one presume to be God.

July Editorial is under NACC editorials

August 2001

Truth in Love

On February 13, 2001, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas delivered the Francis Boyer Lecture at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, in Washington, D.C. He told that when he went to Washington in 1979, to work for Sen. John Danforth, he expected it to be a place where great debates on issues of the day were held.

In 1980 he was interviewed by the *Washington Post* and he made some candid comments about what he thought were "legitimate objections to a number of sacred policies...." He commented on the reaction to his views by saying, "I was shocked at the public reaction. I had never been called such names in my entire life."

He went on to say, "Why were these policies beyond question? What or who placed them off limits? Would it not be useful for those who felt strongly about these matters, and who wanted to solve the same problems, to have a point of view and to be heard? Sadly, in most forums of public dialogue in this country, the answer is no."

He went on to say: "Those who raised questions that suggested doubt about popular policies were subjected to intimidation. Debate was not permitted....You had better not engage in serious debate or discussion unless you are willing to endure attacks that range from mere hostile bluster to libel. Often the temptation is to retreat to complaining about the unfairness of it all. But this is admission of defeat. It is a unilateral withdrawal from the field of combat.

"Today, no one can honestly claim surprise at the venomous attacks against those who take positions that are contrary to the canon laid down by those who claim to shape opinions. Such attacks have been standard fare for some time. Complaining about this obvious state of affairs does not elevate one's moral standing. And, it is hardly a substitute for the courage that we badly need.

"If you trim your sails, you appease those who lack the honesty and decency to disagree on the merits, but prefer to engage in personal attacks. A good argument diluted to avoid criticism is not nearly as good as the undiluted argument, because we best arrive at *truth* through a process of honest and vigorous debate. Arguments should not sneak around in disguise, as if dissent were somehow sinister. One should not (be) cowed by criticism."

Later on in his speech he delivered these lines of wisdom. "None of us should be uncivil in our manner as we debate the issues of consequences. No matter how difficult it is, good manners should be routine. However, in the effort to be civil in conduct, many who know better actually dilute firmly held views to avoid appearing 'judgmental.' They curb their tongues not only in form but also in substance. The insistence on civility in the form of our debates has the perverse effect of cannibalizing our principles, the very essence of a civil society....Again, by yielding to a false form of 'civility,' we sometimes allow our critics to intimidate us. As I have said, active citizens are often subjected to truly vile attacks; they are branded as mean-spirited, racist, Uncle Tom, homophobic, sexist, etc. To this we often respond (if not succumb), so as not to be

constantly fighting, by trying to be tolerant and nonjudgmental– i.e., we censor ourselves. This is not civility. It is cowardice, or well-intentioned self-deception at best."

The words of Justice Thomas are true, not only in the political realm, but also in the religious world. Paul's words of Ephesians 4:15 that we are to "*speak the truth in love,*" have been so misused that they are often used with the perverse meaning that any truth voiced with which others disagree must have been said by someone who doesn't love, because after all if one loves, then he wouldn't bring up areas of disagreement.

Yes, things should be said in "civility" as Thomas says. It is that "civility" that Paul is referring to when he speaks of "truth in love." But disagreement does not mean that a person does not love. How many children have said just after they have been disciplined by a parent, "You don't love me." The point was, as any parent can attest, that they disciplined *because* they loved.

If a blind person is crossing the street and about to step into a manhole and a seeing person says and does nothing to prevent it, there is no love there. Nor would it be loving to call out to the blind person, "What a lovely day we are having!" The loving person will tell them to "stop" and may even raise his voice and shout aloud to get the person's attention. May I say that the person yelling the "negative" command to stop is really showing a great deal of love.

It was not the 400 prophets who only prophesied *good* for King Ahab that were loving (1 Kings 22). They only loved their lives and their popularity and importance before the king. The really loving one was that lone prophet Micaiah who dared to tell the king the truth.

Yes, we must be civil when we speak the truth. We must say what needs to be said in a loving way, but that does not mean that because the truth is not what a person wants to hear that it is unloving to tell them. It is unloving to not tell the truth!

But when you speak the truth in love in a loving way be prepared to pay the price. The prophets, the apostles, and our Lord Himself spoke the truth in love and paid for it with their lives. Truth, even when said in love, always costs.

September 2001

The Preacher and the Sermon

From the West comes this true story. I have the paperwork to back it up. It seems that there is a denominational church that pays its preacher over \$225,000 a year (I'll have to write another time about that). The interesting thing about his "pay package" is how it is broken down. One item on the list tells how the church pays a preacher here in the mid-west \$15,000 annually to write sermons for the west-coast preacher. This is not a joke and I am not making this up. It is true. It is real.

The leadership of that church isn't very smart for a number of reasons that you can figure out. Now right away we know, from the type of congregation that it is, that the Bible is not a big thing with them. Liberal, modernist, left-wing would probably be the order of the day there. And to have the church pay a mid-west preacher to write the weekly sermon is to most of us very strange. But we all should be very concerned about the preacher and the people of that congregation in how they are being fed each week.

First of all, the preacher is not feeding himself and thus will continue to become more and more emaciated in his own spiritual life. The preacher who does not spend time with God in His Word cannot be expected to be able to have a "Word of the Lord" for the people. Only so much can come from a well that doesn't have a spring in it to supply the needed water. To look at the rest of his pay package one can tell that his well has been dry for some time.

Secondly, the people should expect fresh water each week served from a clean vessel. This is not to say that preachers must be perfect to preach. There was only one preacher who was perfect and they crucified Him. But the man who steps before a crowd with a meal of milk and meat should have the utensils clean. He should be a vessel that has been cleansed by being in the Word during the week and applying it to his own life. John 15:3 tells us that the Word can cleanse. I don't want a waiter with "dirty hands", whether he is serving me a meal in a restaurant or from the pulpit.

I'd like to think that our western "friend" is one-of-a-kind, but I'm afraid that it isn't so, and I'm not talking about salary here. Yes, all preachers (most preachers) borrow materials from others. Who is it who says that one source is plagiarism but two sources is scholarship? Most of us pick up an idea here or there and use it. Good ideas are hard to come by so a good one needs to be shared. But there are those who simply take what others have done and parrot it out to their congregations word for word.

I was in a home of one preacher one night discussing this very thing when he turned to me and said, "Lee, I am working so hard at trying to build this church that I don't have time to study, so I am preaching _____'s sermon's." His people were hearing some pretty good sermons, but he wasn't growing, and in time neither would his people. We could talk about how he was trying to "build" the church. Perhaps if he was in the Word more himself the church would grow, as the food served from the pulpit would be fresh.

There are many extremes in preaching today. There is the extreme of the fellow who stands up without much preparation, and yells and quotes a few verses and says that he is letting the Spirit lead. I always want to know what "spirit" he is referring to. Surely the Holy Spirit can work in the study as much and maybe more than off the cuff. If scripture was given by the Holy Spirit then I would assume that He would want us to know what the real meaning of the words that He has given to us.

Another extreme is the flashy fellow who only wants to fill the time with something that will keep the crowds coming back. He may not be interested in giving a well-balanced diet, but if he can keep the crowds coming to the restaurant and paying their bills, then he is happy. To this person the internet becomes a treasure from which he can pick and choose each week. He enrolls with several sermon providers, not to help him get started in his preparation, but so that he won't have to do much preparation at all. Instead of cooking a meal himself, he grabs fast-food and then tries to make everyone believe that he prepared it from scratch. Some are even using sermons written and based on TV programs like Mayberry R.F.D. because the "kids" (the people in the pew for whom they have little respect) will enjoy it. Of course they will, it was written for youth programing originally. But it will also keep the children malnourished as they stay away from good, solid food.

Why would a preacher do such a thing? Perhaps Jeremiah answers the question when he says, *"Everyone is greedy for gain; From the prophet even to the priest"* (8:10 NASU).

God said that there will come a time when there would be a great famine in the land. Amos 8:11 says *"Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord GOD, "when I will send a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the LORD"* (NASU).

There is so much evidence that shows that we are in the midst of a famine right now. Crime is up. Homosexuality is being accepted. Churches are having fewer services. Church leaders are not discerning. Post-modernism is seemingly taking over everywhere.

And where is the pulpit? The silence that comes from the pulpit concerning moral issues of our day, how scripture relates to life, repentance from sin, is deafening. We are becoming a people who are entertained, but not fed.

What can we do about it? Encourage your preacher to spend more time in the Word. Encourage him to know God more than by hearsay. Ask him what you can do so that he will have more time for study. Ask him probing questions about his messages that will aid both of you in your study. Pray for him and let him know that you are praying for him and that you expect a "fresh Word" from God that he has gleaned from His study. Study yourself. After all 2 Timothy 2:15 was not written for preachers only *"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth"* (NASU).

The preacher has a great responsibility (James 3:1), but he is not the only one. We will all have to give account to God.

October, 2001

A Very Important Question

Several things have happened lately which have led to a very important question that our brotherhood (at least as individuals) needs to ponder and answer. The question is this: "When is a church no longer a New Testament church?"

That is not a new question. To the contrary it is a question that has been posed for many years, but in a slightly different way. Evangelists for years preached on a theme similar to "What makes a New Testament church?" In these sermons the preachers would make a list of identifying marks that differentiated a New Testament church from other things that call themselves churches.

C.C. Crawford, in his book, *Sermon Outlines on The Restoration Plea*, gave eleven identifying marks.

C.J. Sharp, in his book, *The Church of the New Testament*, lists six "basic and fundamental" truths that identify the Lord's church.

Others give more, some give less, and the two cited above overlap in what they are saying. But the fact remains that there are certain characteristics which allow us to recognize the Lord's church from all others.

Do you remember Lincoln's question to his friend, "How many legs does that dog have if you call the tail a leg?" His friend's reply was "five," to which Lincoln said, "No, just four. Just because you call the tail of a dog a leg doesn't make it one."

Just because a group calls itself a church doesn't make it one in a biblical sense.

For years the churches in the Restoration Movement have recognized this and have strived to "*build all things according to the pattern.*" Our churches realized that there is a pattern to New Testament Christianity that needs to be followed. But was that idea just for the past or does it still apply in this post-modern 21st century?

I am not talking about opinions that may need to be jettisoned in order for the church to survive; I am asking what fundamentals must a church have to continue to be the Lord's church?

We have always held to a weekly first-day-of-the-week observance of the Lord's supper. Can a church not have the Lord's Supper as a part of its Sunday worship, or have it in a side room for those who desire it, and still be considered a New Testament church?

We have always held that salvation is based upon faith in Christ, repentance of sins, confession of Christ as Lord and baptism by immersion into Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Can a church that has baptism by immersion when people have accepted Christ through prayer be a New Testament church? In the past we said that if a church practiced open membership they were not

following the New Testament plan, but is that still valid today? If a church doesn't follow the New Testament plan, can they still be considered a New Testament church?

We have always held that the Lord's church is led by evangelists and a plurality of elders with deacons helping with the work. Can a church that has a one-man rule (a "Pastor" who is either rightfully the evangelist or someone who is a ruling elder) still be a New Testament church?

Does the name of the church make any difference?

Please don't ask if I am seeking some kind of creed to define these things. Our creed is Christ and His Word gives us the direction that we should be following. That Word is at the same time both inclusive and exclusive. The church includes those who follow the Word and excludes those who do not follow the Word. But how much of the Word do we have to follow? Some, it would seem, feel they can pick and choose.

One popular writer thinks that all that is needed for fellowship is that a "person believes in the deity of Jesus Christ, respects the authority of the Word of God, and is bearing the positive fruit of the Spirit." But doesn't respecting the authority of the Word of God mean following it and doing it (Luke 11:28 and James 1:22,23)? Doesn't believing in the deity of Jesus Christ mean obeying (Matthew 7:21 and Luke 6:46) Him? Doesn't bearing the positive fruit of the Spirit mean that we must "keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25)?

And while we are at it, who gave anyone the right to call a New Testament teaching of the Lord, directly or through the New Testament writers, a "secondary doctrine." I, maybe mistakenly, was taught that **all** scripture was *"inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."*

I wonder if Uzzah thought that not touching the Ark of the Covenant was a "secondary doctrine"?

We have always, unless one is a universalist, had to make decisions along this line. When visiting out of town, is one church just as good as another? If it is, then shouldn't that same logic be used in one's hometown? How about someone moving to another town and needing a church? What criteria should be used for recommending one congregation over another one? If it is in a "Yellow Pages" does it automatically pass the test?

You may not like the question, "When is a church no longer a New Testament church?", but in this post-modern age where there seem to be no standards, no right or wrong, and slippage is abundant and apparent, it is a question that demands a well thought out Biblical answer.

November 2001

Maybe it is the Weight of a Flea!

I think the story goes like this: A flea rode an elephant across a bridge. When the bridge broke from the weight, the flea said, "Look what we did!"

We smile at the attitude of the little flea to think that he might have had a part in breaking the bridge, especially when we look at the weight of an elephant. But when you get right down to it, there is a place, somewhere on the scale, where a nano-ounce actually made the difference in what that bridge was able to hold. Who is there to say that it wasn't the weight of the flea, added to that of an elephant, that actually did break the bridge?

Small things often have great consequences. Solomon knew that and said, "Catch the foxes for us, The little foxes that are ruining the vineyards, While our vineyards are in blossom" (Song of Solomon 2:15 NASU). It is easy to keep the cows out of the vineyards—a fence is all that is needed. But those little foxes go under the fences and are harder to keep out.

I want to deal today with a "flea" or a "little fox" that may have greater consequences than most people imagine. Some will say that I am making "much ado about nothing," but when God's Word speaks to a matter we cannot say that it is nothing and of no consequence.

To aid me in this discussion I want to use a column written by the late Pearl Willis; it first appeared in *The Restoration Herald* back in October, 1964. It was titled, "The True Pastors of Christ's Church."

"The apostle Paul writing to the church at Ephesus said, "...and he gave some...pastors" (4:11). The term 'pastor' carries with it the meaning of a shepherd, one who tends herds or flocks (not merely one who feeds them), and is used metaphorically of Christian "pastors" in this passage. In Acts 20:28, it is taught that pastors guide as well as feed the flock and it is further indicated that this is a service that was committed to the elders. Such a position, as a pastor or shepherd, involves tender care and vigilant superintendence.

"A practice has grown up among us of calling the evangelist 'The Pastor' of the church. Many sincere church members and ministers have accepted this title. Perhaps this has been done because the duties of the pastors of the church have become more and more the responsibilities of the located minister. However, such a practice of transferring the responsibilities of the eldership to the evangelist has been the cause of much concern and frustration. It is impossible for one man, namely, the evangelist, or located minister, to do all that is required of him and at the same time do the work of the elders. Therefore, let us consider some particulars about the office of the pastor. He is charged with seeing that all things are done decently and in order. Care should be taken to prevent disorderly and disgraceful services. The elders who are concerned for the body of Christ will have a well-organized plan for their work and the work of the other officers and members of the church.

"The pastors are responsible for the edification of the members of Christ's church. Therefore, great care should be taken to maintain the purity of the teaching of the Bible School and other such sessions of the church. The pulpit, also, must be guarded with the greatest care lest the membership be exposed to any teaching foreign to Christ's good news which is God's power unto salvation.

"There are times when a member of the church strays from the paths of righteousness. At such times the good shepherds of the flock go out seeking the wandering one to bring him back safely into the fold. However, if such a wanderer will not repent of his ways it is the responsibility of the elders to direct the congregation's attention to the matter and to withdraw from such a disorderly person. However, every action must be done prayerfully and according to the counsel of God.

"The elders should remember that 'to rule well' is not to legislate for the church, nor is it to lord it over God's people. The elders do not have absolute authority as a sovereign but they are to execute fully and faithfully all of the laws of Christ, our King.

"Finally, the true pastors of the church of Christ, should watch for the souls of Christ's people fully aware that they shall give an account of their stewardship.

"With a great responsibility placed upon them, the elders need to take every advantage offered to them for their spiritual growth and counsel and guidance in the performance of their work. It is always good to see all of the elders attending Bible School, all of the worship services of the church and taking advantage of leadership training courses as they are available to them. Let us join together and salute the faithful pastors of Christ's church!"

The denominational world confuses the position of evangelist and pastor, but if we are to restore New Testament Christianity, then polity and terminology also need to be restored.

December 2001

Heroes

A lot of things changed on September 11. Patriotism is again in vogue (although it always should have been). Never have I seen so many flags in so many places. Church attendance is reported to be up. One young lady told me that her husband went to church the Sunday after the attack for the first time since she has known him. I hope the message was true and that his search ends only when he meets the Prince of Peace. Attitudes have changed about what things are important in life. Re-evaluation by many has and is taking place.

One thing that has been most heartening has been the paradigm shift as far as heroes are concerned. For a while people seemed to look to sports (didn't we all want to be like Mickey Mantle or Willie Mays at one time), or the even less appealing world of Hollywood entertainment, or for some the slimy world of rock music, to find a hero. (Hero is defined as someone admired and copied.) But September 11 seems to have changed that.

We watched as people, firefighters, and police, rushed to the aid of those in the World Trade Center and then ended up giving their lives as they tried to save people. A news item tells us that Halloween costumers are receiving more requests for firefighter and police costumes than they ever have. Why? People are now looking at those men and women as being, as Webster defines a hero, "any man admired for his courage, nobility, or exploits, especially in war."

We admire what they did because they were willing to give of themselves for the welfare of someone else. That does take courage and nobility. Yet, isn't this the idea behind genuine Christianity? Doesn't Christianity have at its very heart putting others before the interests of self? Isn't that being said in what is called the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31 NIV).

Hebrews 11 gives a summation of the Bible record in speaking of great heroes. It tells of the patriarchs from Abel to Joseph, and then goes on with Moses to Rahab. Then it condenses the account with amazing brevity when it says:

"And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:32-40 NASU).

Those are real heroes! It would have been so much easier for them to simply do their own thing and only think of themselves, but look at the reward they would have missed.

I think of some modern day heroes who left our country to pioneer so many of our mission fields. People who left the comforts of the U.S., of family and friends, to take the Gospel to places where no one else wanted to go. Their tribe increases to this very day.

Other heroes have started colleges and gone long periods of time without salaries in order to train preachers to carry the message of Christ. Heroes are found in many churches making wages that keep them in or near poverty, but they stay where they are because the people are important and need the message of Christ.

O, how our youth need to hear about both the heroes of Bible times and modern times. How they need to catch the vision of not living for self, of putting others first, and learning that our purpose here is to serve.

How they need to hear about that Great Hero, Jesus Christ our Lord; how He said that He came not to be served, but to serve (Matthew 20:28); how He taught that true life comes not in getting but in giving (Matthew 10:39); how He taught that it is better to give than get (Acts 20:35).

The story of Christmas doesn't stop at the manger. The story of Christmas goes clear through to the cross. He didn't come just to give us some nice little teachings and so that we have something to do on Sundays. He came to give His life for us that we might follow His direction (1 Peter 2:21) and live for others.

The old story of Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, rings on almost every corner in America and storefront at Christmas time. He was getting toward the end of his life and the Army was meeting in convention. He sent a one word message to the troops. All it said was, "Others."

"He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it"
(Matthew 10:39 KJV).