

May 2020

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- unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp -

In This Issue...

- **Question from Nigeria about Daniel Two and Luke Three**
- **African Brethren Taking Care of Orphans the Right way** | *Paul Coffman*
- **The History of the Institutional Controversy (Pt. 3)** | *Jefferson David Tant*
- **"Lest We Drift Away"** | *Jim Mickells*
- **Counterfeit Doctrines** | *Mike Thomas*
- **To Tell You The Truth** | *William Stewart*
- **Spiritual Leaders Come in All Shapes and Sizes** | *Trevor Campbell*
- **Multiple Assembly Churches vs Single Assembly Churches** | *McIntosh Chimeziri and Joseph Taiwo Ogunare*
- **Review** | *Keith Sharp*

Finally, brethren

WHATEVER THINGS

are true
are noble
are just
are pure
are lovely

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

are of good report
IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

You can download this month's Meditate On These Things as a PDF file by clicking [here](#). Also, an archive of past MOTT issues is available at christstheway.com.

Questions from Nigeria about Daniel Two and Luke Three

Question

Can you please help in this question asked to me after my lessons at preachers Training Programs COC Iheorji. I want to know if my answers are in accordance with yours.

The question is in agreement. If Dan. 2:44 and LK. 3:1-3 are in agreement I need comprehensive explanation or answers

Answer

King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream in which he saw a great image. "This great image, whose splendor was excellent ... and its form was awesome" had a "head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay." The king

"watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:31-35).

The prophet Daniel interpreted the dream thus:

“You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you are this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure” (Daniel 2:37-45).

Beginning with Babylon, there were to be four world kingdoms (world of the Jews). These were, in order, Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek (Macedonian), and Roman. Thus, according to Daniel, the kingdom of God was to be established during the time of Roman rule. “The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.”

The inspired biographer Luke sets the time frame for his narrative thus:

“Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness” (Luke 3:1-2).

Thus, John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah, and Christ Jesus began their ministries under the rule of the Roman Emperor Tiberius. The fourth kingdom of Daniel’s prophecy, that of the Romans, was indeed in power.

The message of John the Baptist was, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matthew 3:2) The message of Jesus was the same (Matthew 4:17). To be “at hand” is to be near (cf. Matthew 26:18, 45, 46).

Later, the Lord promised, “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power” (Mark 9:1). So, the kingdom of God was to come during the life time of some of Jesus’ hearers, and it was to come with power.

After the Lord’s resurrection, as He was about to ascend on high, His apostles asked Him, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Christ replied:

“It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:7-8).

The kingdom was to come with power when the Holy Spirit came on the apostles. Since this kingdom is spiritual (John 18:36; Romans 14:17), the power to establish it was spiritual.

On the following Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles with power (Acts 2:1-4). The apostle Peter proclaimed that Christ Jesus had become Lord and King (Acts 2:22-36). The kingdom of God had indeed been established on earth.

Thereafter the New Testament writers present the kingdom of God as present on earth (Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9).

African Brethren Taking Care of Orphans the Right Way

Paul Coffman | Mt. Pleasant, Texas, USA

The Kitawamba church of Christ is a small body of Christ on the border of the DR Congo. The DR Congo has been in tribal war for the last few years. During this time tribes have been killed - men, women, and children. One Sunday the brethren came for service to discover a group of orphans gathered at the door of their mud and bamboo building. The congregation being very poor could not send them away but rather took them into their families. At last count they have had about 30 kids adopted into their homes and now have out grown their building. Plans are on the way to construct a much needed building that can house them as they assemble together to worship our Lord. The words "I was naked and you clothed me, hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me drink" come to mind. They opened their lives and through their poverty gave these children hope and the Words of Life. The church in action has been seen by others in the area and they continue to preach the Word, and as God has promised it in deed has not returned void.

The History of the Institutional Controversy (Pt 3)

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

The First Half of the 20th Century

As the "dust settled," the conservative churches were few and small. Yater Tant stated that in 1900 there were perhaps twelve full-time preachers among conservative churches. Most, like my grandfather J. D. Tant, supported themselves by farming. Most of the college-educated preachers with nice brick church buildings went with the liberal trend.

Despite such discouraging numbers, these years became, in the words of the Lone Ranger, "the thrilling days of yesteryear" for conservative churches. These were the prime years of men whose names became household words—Foy E. Wallace, Jr., N. B. Hardeman, G. C. Brewer, J. D. Tant, Joe Warlick, H. Leo Boles, and many others. The years of prosperity in the 20s and the depression years of the 30s were years of strong growth among brethren. Some sources place the number of Christians close to 500,000 in 1926. The message was spreading not only in the south, but also in places like Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and the West Coast. The technologies of radio, automobile, and air travel also fueled the spread of the gospel. In many places radio broadcasts had wide audiences. WLAC in Nashville had so many gospel preachers on the air that the station was nicknamed "We Love All Campbellites." KRLD in Dallas featured two young preachers who were also law-school students—W. L. Oliphant and Roy Cogdill.

During this time, various para-church organizations were also growing. Nashville Bible School became David Lipscomb College, and Harding College settled in Searcy, Arkansas after brief stays in Kentucky, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Kansas. Abilene Christian began as Childers Classical Institute in Texas in 1903. With the establishment of Pepperdine in California and other schools, there was now a band stretching from Tennessee to California. Orphan asylums had their beginning with Tennessee Orphan Home in 1909, and in time others were added—Potter in Kentucky in 1914, Boles Home in Texas in 1927 and Tipton in Oklahoma in 1928.

Although a few skirmishes came about as the result of egos, in general the time following the division with the Christian Church up until WWII was characterized by doctrinal unity. The issue of Premillennialism caused some upset in the 1930s, but it was dealt with quickly and effectively with the resulting loss of only

about 100 churches located mainly in Kentucky, Indiana, and Louisiana. Foy E. Wallace, Jr. was very effective in standing against this false doctrine. This unity is also seen in the numerous debates with brethren across the nation cooperating to present these forums for discussion. N. B. Hardeman had debates on instrumental music with Ira Boswell from the Christian Church, as well as debates with Ben Bogard, a Baptist. Foy Wallace had quite a debate with the notorious Baptist J. Frank Norris in Texas. J. D. Tant had over 300 debates in his lifetime with all sorts of denominational preachers. These debates were well attended, and many conversions resulted. (Joe Warlick had about the same number of debates. - KS)

Gospel meetings were often great events, with great community interest. The Tabernacle Meetings in Nashville in the 1920s were conducted in the old Ryman Auditorium, the home of the Grand Ol' Opry. N. B. Hardeman was the preacher, and crowds of 8,000 to 10,000 came to hear the gospel, with many turned away due to lack of seating space. As historians look at this period, they are agreed that a spirit of unity prevailed. One writer characterized the period in these words:

"There was a time when Churches of Christ were known as a people of the Book. All who knew us knew that we hungered above all for the word of God. They knew that we immersed ourselves in its truths and sacrificed dearly to share the gospel with those who had never heard. These were our most fundamental commitments. We knew it, and others knew it" (Leonard Allen).

Recollections from some older, well-known preachers summarize the era. When comparing the church of the 1980s with that of the 1930s, Willard Collins said:

"I don't think they see the glory of the church, unencumbered by denominationalism, as I did... when I was growing up...I don't think members of the church think the church is different from Protestantism. When I started preaching members of the church believed Protestants needed to be saved. We've lost a lot of that. It goes back to an understanding of the distinctiveness of the church. At an earlier time they really felt the gospel was a lot better than Protestantism."

G. K. Wallace described his preaching in the 20s and 30s:

"Most of the baptisms were from the denominations. In those days denominational people would come to our meetings.... Denominational people do not come these days to our meetings and if they did they would not, in most places, hear anything that would lead them out of false doctrine."

But other factors were also at work, giving a foretaste of the decades to come. Although several colleges had been quietly accepting contributions from churches for years, a stir was created at the Abilene Christian College lectures in 1938 by G. C. Brewer when many understood him to say that the church that did not have Abilene Christian College in its budget had the wrong preacher. A decade later, N. B. Hardeman and others revived the controversy as they began a push to get churches to support the colleges from their treasuries.

Along with this was more material prosperity, as Bill Humble illustrated:

"...larger and more expensive buildings, the more affluent middle-class membership, the number of full-time ministers, the increasing emphasis on Bible schools and Christian education, and missionary outreach all reflect a gradual but impressive growth...After W.W. II the church enjoyed a remarkable growth in urban areas. As its members climbed the economic and educational ladder, the church moved 'across the tracks.'"

At the Abilene Christian College Lectures in 1939, Guy N. Woods gave a warning, which turned out to be quite prophetic.

"The ship of Zion has floundered more than once on the sandbar of institutionalism. The tendency to organize is a characteristic of the age. On the theory that the end justifies the

means, brethren have not scrupled to form organizations in the church to do the work the church itself was designed to do. All such organizations usurp the work of the church, and are unnecessary and sinful."

Brother Woods, later a "Gospel Advocate" editor, continued to sound warnings. In the Annual Lesson Commentary, 1946:

"It should be noted that there was no elaborate organization for the discharge of these charitable functions. The contributions were sent directly to the elders by the churches who raised the offering. This is the New Testament method of functioning. We should be highly suspicious of any scheme that requires the setting up of an organization independent of the church in order to accomplish its work."

It was the "Gospel Advocate" that later became a leading voice in the slide to institutionalism. (To be continued)

"Lest We Drift Away"

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

"Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away" (Hebrews 2:1)

I find it very easy when in a boat to drift away from where you originally started fishing. Many times, you don't even realize you have moved until you look at where you were in comparison to where you are now. There are several things which contribute to this. It could be the wind, the current, waves from other boats, etc. Yet there are a good number of things one can do to prevent this from happening. You could use an anchor, tie up if a bush or tree is near, or you can use a trolling motor to stay in the desired location. If we are catching fish in this area, we will do whatever it takes to stay there and not drift from this spot.

The writer of the book of Hebrews warns that this can happen to us spiritually. The word "drift" is defined as "to flow past, to glide by: lest we be carried past, pass by (R.V. drift away from them) (missing the thing), i.e. lest the salvation which the things heard show us how to obtain slip away from us" (Thayer). Vincent says, "The idea is in sharp contrast with giving earnest heed. Lapse from truth and goodness is more often the result of inattention than of design. Drifting is a mark of death: giving heed, of life. The log drifts with the tide: the ship breasts the adverse waves, because someone is giving earnest heed" (**Word Studies in the New Testament**).

How can I tell if I am drifting spiritually? Take a good look at the warning signs. Where are you now in comparison to where you were. Let me explain. Are you spending a fair amount of time in the study of your Bible (Psalm 1:1-2; 1 Timothy 4:13-16; 2 Timothy 2:15)? How often do you pray each day (Luke 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17). Have you continued to be involved in all aspects of the Lord's work? Do you call and visit the sick and shut-ins? Are you trying to teach the lost, strengthen the weak, and speak words of encouragement to all the brethren (James 1:27; 2 Timothy 2:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:14)? What about my assembly with the saints? Do I forsake by finding excuses why I cannot be there? Even if I go, do I find it drudgery to worship my God (Hebrews 10:24-25; Psalm 122:1)? If I no longer find the time to study, pray, work for the Lord, assemble and do it with joy, then I am drifting.

This is a gradual process; it does not happen overnight. In the forty years since I have been preaching, I have seen this occur over and over. It starts out with less study, less prayer, less work, missing on Wednesday or Sunday night, and then there is no joy in serving the Creator. The next step is total apostasy. After the writer warned about drifting, He said, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12). He goes on to say, "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it" (Hebrews 4:1).

How can I prevent this from happening? How can I anchor my soul? I think it would do us all good if we would turn off the iPhone, computer, TV, and any other electronic device which takes us away from our Bible study, our praying and the Lord's work. We need to make sure we redeem the time, use it wisely doing the things which will help us draw closer to the Lord (Ephesians 5:16). Be around other Christians, who will encourage, strengthen, and build you up. I have found through the years it is hard to do wrong when you are around good people, yet it is easy to do what you know you shouldn't when around those who are not servants of Jehovah. Follow the good examples of all those men and women in the Bible, who sacrificed so much to be servants of God (Hebrews 11).

Inspiration is given to us in the Scriptures which will help prevent drifting. Think of God's love for us. He gave His Son so we would not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16-17). Jesus was crucified and died on the cross to redeem us from our sins (1 Peter 1:18-19). The Spirit's work in the revelation of the Father's will so we can know how to be forgiven, how to live, and finally how to go home when life on earth is over (John 14:26; 16:7-15). Our food, clothing and shelter are all gifts from God. This should motivate us to draw near to Him and not to drift from the peaceful shores of His grace and mercy (James 4:8). Lord help us to give the more earnest heed to what You have said to us.

Counterfeit Doctrines

Mike Thomas | Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA

A local business owner told me he received a bogus \$20 bill from a customer and did not realize it. It was discovered by a bank teller when he was making his daily deposit. When the bank showed him the fake bill next to a real one, he could not believe how little difference there was between the two. The color, shape, detail, and even fiber looked identical. The only difference was in texture, which the teller noticed right away because of her experience in handling real money.

If we are wise, we will realize there are many false doctrines in circulation today. Like ignorant store owners, we assume that everything handed to us is real and authentic without testing it. The Sadducees did this in dismissing a belief in life after death (Matthew 22:23-28). They thought they were in alignment with God's will by upholding that doctrine. Jesus told them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God" (verse 29). They may have been sincere and zealous, but they were "mistaken" for accepting a doctrine not found in the word of God. They were like all others who blindly follow manmade doctrines—

"they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:2-3).

Unless we are looking for counterfeit doctrines, we may accept things not taught in the word of God and still feel right. Many are now convincing themselves that God approves of any religion, any form of sexuality, and any religious holiday as long as a person is sincere. Yet God warns: "evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13). There is no point in issuing that alarm if false doctrine and self-deception do not exist, or if any belief is okay. Why warn us of that which is not a threat? Obviously, the Sadducees were not the only ones who were mistaken. I imagine that most people would be surprised to learn the Scriptures do not support many of the long-held doctrines in circulation today: infant baptism, denominationalism, the Rapture, the earthly reign of Christ, Christmas, Easter, church-sponsored entertainment, and so on. Where are these doctrines taught in the Bible? What does the word of God say about these? And if the Bible does not teach them, who put them in circulation? Jesus warned:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who

practice lawlessness!" (Matthew 7:21-23).

That should be all the warning we need to carefully examine all that we do in religion. Elsewhere, John said, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Paul added, "Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22).

If these verses were telling us to watch out for fake money, would we take these instructions more seriously? Yet Jesus and His apostles are telling us to carefully examine every doctrine and belief before we consent to it. Apparently, there is a lot to lose (much more than money) in accepting counterfeit doctrines.

To Tell You The Truth

William J. Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

I have no idea how many times I've heard folks use the phrase, "To tell you the truth;" what I do know is that it has irritated me every time I have heard it. The implication of such a statement is that perhaps at other times, the individual speaking is not really telling me the truth (and in fact, calls into question whether at that moment they are indeed being truthful). What irks me even more is when I hear a child of God utter these words. That folks in the world are given to deceit and falsehood is sad, but that a Christian should feel the need to confirm the truthfulness of his words is greatly disturbing.

The January 9, 1992 edition of USA Today revealed very unsettling statistics on lying. Quoting a 1991 study from the book "The Day America Told The Truth," we are told that 91% of all people lie routinely, and that this practice begins in childhood, as 86% of children reportedly lie to their parents. The paper continues to tell us:

- 81% lie about their feelings;
- 75% lie to their friends;
- 73% lie to their siblings;
- 69% lie to their spouse;
- 43% lie about their income;
- 40% lie about sex;
- 36% tell "dark, important lies."

One conclusion we might draw from these stats is that not only is lying common, but it is in fact widely accepted. When 91% of the population openly and actively engage in an activity, that bears witness to the acceptance of the practice by the masses. We have folks referring to some falsehood as "white lies"; we have musicians singing "...tell me lies, tell me sweet little lies..." (Fleetwood Mac). Every indication from society is that lying is OK, even encouraged. But what does the Bible say?

Writing to the Ephesians, Paul pointedly said that those who have "...put on the new man which is created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness..." need to put away lying (Ephesians 4:24-25). This thought is echoed in Paul's letter to the Colossians, where we read, "Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him..." (Colossians 3:9-10).

The Scriptures reveal that the tongue and lips of those who lie are an abomination to the LORD (Proverbs 6:16-19; 12:22). Lying is an expression of hatred on the part of the liar toward others (Proverbs 26:28). It is a work of the devil, and those who engage in it make themselves sons of the devil (John 8:44). In Revelation 21:8 (cf. 21:27), as John records a list of those who will be cast into the lake of fire, he mentions, "...the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolators, and all liars..." How awful is lying in the sight of God? "...All liars shall have their part in the lake which burns

with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

May our lips always utter truth. Those who always tell the truth never need to say, "To tell you the truth..." Their "yes" is "yes," their "no" is "no" (James 5:12; Matthew 5:34-37). Friend, let us tell the truth.

Spiritual Leaders Come in All Shapes and Sizes

Trevor Campbell | Pyatt, Arkansas, USA

There are many wonderful examples of spiritual leaders found in the Bible, but I would like to take this time to look at just a few of them, and to remind us that we can all lead in some capacity.

I'd like to start with the example of Noah. One thing I love about the record of Noah, is that God makes Noah's spiritual leadership in the home very apparent. For the sacred record states:

"By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Hebrews 11:7).

Noah sought the salvation of his household, which in this case was physical, as well as spiritual. The record states that those who perished in the flood were ungodly, for God, "did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly" (2 Peter 2:5). Noah's family was not among the "ungodly," for they were safe on the ark. In the Genesis account the Lord said to Noah, "Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation" (Genesis 7:1). No one forced Noah's seven family members to get on the ark; they had faith as he did, and they obeyed when God said, "Come into the ark." They partook of the salvation that God provided through Noah, for he "prepared an ark for the saving of his household."

Another example of spiritual leadership in the home is seen in Lois and Eunice, two women mentioned in the second letter to Timothy. In 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul speaks of the "genuine faith" that is in Timothy, a faith that he says, "dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice..." I believe it's clear from this text that these women passed on a genuine faith to Timothy, and we know that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). So it's clear that they taught Timothy God's law. In 2 Timothy 3:15 Paul says to Timothy, "from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." These godly woman were following the law God gave long ago;

"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

What wonderful guidance young Timothy had.

Spiritual leadership is certainly seen in Timothy's mother and grandmother, but I believe Timothy himself was also a leader, and a young one at that. We know he had a genuine faith, and that he was "well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium" (Acts 16:2). The apostle Paul was so impressed with this young man that he had Timothy join himself, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas, on a missionary journey. This Judas and Silas were referred to as "leading men among the brethren" in Acts 15:22. These men, including young Timothy were to deliver to the churches "decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem" (Acts 16:4). What a testimony to this young man's character, that he would be chosen to accompany such men, and to minister with them. If you continue in the text it says, "the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily." From this example we see that young people can have an impact on the souls of others. We should remember that Jesus was only twelve years old when He made a statement that spoke volumes, "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). A good thing for us all to keep in mind - Are we about our Father's

business?

There are many other examples we could look at, but hopefully these few that we have looked at will encourage us to be faithful, spiritually minded individuals that can lead the way for others.

Brother Julius Chiemela Nwankwo sent me the following article. He disagrees with it, and asked me to review it. Its authors advocate the "House Church" doctrine. I strongly disagree with their position, and my review follows it. - K.S.

Multiple Assembly Churches vs Single Assembly Churches

McIntosh Chimeziri (Evang.) and Joseph Taiwo Ogudare (Evang.)

Introduction

A people seeking to restore the first century Christianity must continuously review their practice to ensure that they are on the right track. The church today is stunted in growth. There is no deep relationship between members; a whole lot of members are frustrated with a negative church experience. Thus, we have more hypocrites than real people in the church. A true church must have answers to the most profound human emotional needs; otherwise, it is not the church of Christ (Mt.11:28). A sincere restoration movement must not be afraid to make changes whenever the need arises. We firmly believe that the church in the 21st century is a far cry of what the 1st-century church was. We are in a dire need for a paradigm shift.

Therefore, this writ is an attempt to join the voices crying that we return to the old paths so that we may be what we should be and also reach our destination.

In what follows, we will show that:

1. The church, as structured today, is different from the 1st-century church.
2. Each church of the 1st century was a network of cell (home group) churches.
3. The Holy Spirit treated all house assemblies of each city collectively as one church.
4. Elders were ordained over cities and not over each congregation of the same city.
5. Multiple assembly churches are more effective than single assembly churches.

1. The church, as structured today, is different from the 1st-century church.

Today, the church is structured in such a way that every group of Christians meeting under the same roof claim to be autonomous from every other similar group, even if they are three houses away. Thus, they hire their own preacher, ordain their own elders, and develop their peculiar idiosyncrasies. Hence, it becomes difficult to enforce discipline on an erring member of the other group since they must not infringe on the autonomy of the other congregation. They can only accept a disfellowship letter sent by the other group. The lost is deprived of the preacher as his primary duty of preaching to save the lost is subdued as he must spend more time preaching to save the saved. The elders are the armchair board of directors who make decisions for the church, and their decisions are final, whether right or wrong. Thus, most of them become lords instead of leaders, and we love to have it so.

In the 1st-century church, things were different.

- a) The church of Jerusalem, as a case study, were distributed into different cell churches across the city (Acts. 2:46, 12:17, 20:20).
- b) Evangelists were deployed and supported by churches to do their primary assignment of preaching to save the lost (Acts.13:1-5, 14:26). No preacher was restricted to any congregation in order to keep preaching to save the saved.
- c) The elders guided the church in decision making and not making decisions for them (Acts.6:3, 15:22). They were not Lords of the Church (1Pt.5:2-3).

2. Each church of the 1st century was a network of cell (home group) churches.

Today, each congregation functions as an autonomous institution with zonal fellowships as appendages. These appendages only gather as programmed by the main church with restrictions. For example, they cannot assemble differently at the same time that the main church has an activity. Secondly, they cannot congregate to observe the Lord's Supper apart from the parent church.

In contrast, each church of the 1st century had members distributed in different houses, and each house group observed the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:46). Thus

- a. "...Saul made havoc of the church, entering every house..." (Acts 8:3). And after his conversion,
- b. He taught them from "house to house" (Acts 20:20).
- c. After his release from prison, Peter went to the house group in Sister Mary's house. From there, he sent words of his release from prison to the group that met in Bro James' house, and from Sister Mary's house, he went to another house group (Acts 12:17). Luke records that the church in Jerusalem numbered about five thousand at a time (Acts 4:4). It is impractical for such a number to have gathered in one place every Sunday in the face of hostility.
- d. There were at least two groups in Philippi (Acts 16:14-15, 32-33, 39-40).
- e. There were at least two groups in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-5, 1 Corinthians 16:19) and most likely more since there was a mass conversion in Ephesus (Acts 19:18-20).
- f. The church in Rome was also a chain of house groups. One met in the home of Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16:5). Another group was with Asyncritus (Romans 16:14), and another group was with Philologus and Julia (Romans 16:15).
- g. The church in Colosse is another example of the multiple assembly structures (Colossians 4:15).

There is no reason to think that churches in other cities were not so structured. This point is made more evident by the fact that the first-ever purpose-built church building was erected in the third century by Emperor Constantine. The structure of that cathedral was the foundation of what is known today as the Roman Catholic church. The summary is that in the first century, congregations of the same city did not claim autonomy in respect to one another. Churches within the same city functioned as one church, and so created significant impacts on the society.

3. The Holy Spirit treated all house assemblies of each city collectively as one church.

1. All the Christian assemblies in Jerusalem were "the Church [not churches] in Jerusalem" (Acts 11:22).
2. All the house assemblies in Ephesus were one church and not churches (Acts 20:17).
3. All the house groups in the city of Corinth were "the church [not churches] of God which is at Corinth" (1 Corinthians 1:2).
4. So was Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:1).
5. Smyrna,
6. Pergamos,
7. Thyatira,
8. Sardis,
9. Philadelphia and
10. Laodicea (Revelation 1:11).

4. Elders were ordained over cities and not over each congregation of the same city.

- a. Ancient Israel appointed elders over cities (Deuteronomy 21:3, Judges 8:16, Ruth 4:2). This method of appointment was carried over to the New Testament. Thus
- b. Jerusalem had different house churches but one eldership (Acts 15:4, 22-23).
- c. Paul and Barnabas ordained elders over the cities of Iconium, Lystra, and Antioch (Acts 14:21-23).
- d. Ephesus had different house groups but one eldership (Acts 20:17).
- e. Paul instructed Titus to do what he and Barnabas did, appoint elders over cities (Titus 1:5).

5. Multiple assembly churches are more effective than single assembly churches.

In single assembly churches, much emphasis is consciously or otherwise laid on the building. Many churches use the size and structure of the building as a yardstick to measure how well they are doing. When they are up to one hundred and fifty members, some teachers and song leaders may have to wait until three to six months to lead. That, of course, even make upcoming talents to stand no chance of developing. Thus, talents or skills are neglected and eventually buried. A single assembly church often exists in a locality for decades without being noticed by most members of the community. When you go out to preach, people keep asking, "Which one is the church of Christ again? New churches everywhere!" That is because they do not spread out among the community as it was in the first century. Many members live distances from the meeting hall and have to commute a long distance to get to the church. Sometimes, needy members forsake the assembly of the saints because they do not have transport fare. Please note, the church could have more funds if some of the money spent on transportation is contributed as an offering. That can only be achieved if the church is at walkable distances to where most members live.

More disturbing is the fact that personal evangelism is difficult because the prospect travels through distances to church. Many prospects have been discouraged by that. That is why most Christians don't even consider personal evangelism. In a single assembly church, many individuals find it difficult to express themselves. They are intimidated by the crowd. But it is always amazing to see supposedly timid individuals express themselves willingly in smaller groups. Single assembly churches are like social clubs where people gather to make casual contacts with one another and head home at the resounding of the closing "Amen." There is hardly a real connection/relationship between them. Collapse the cathedral, and many will disappear. Many Christians are only impressed by the big cathedral and the ceremonies that happen therein, not the real relationship with one another. That is why a lot of "Christians" are hypocrites who live dual lives, pious on Sundays, vipers on weekdays. Is that not idolatry in disguise?

In contrast, a multiple assembly church would take the Church closer to both members and prospects. The talents in the assembly will be discovered, nurtured, and fully utilized for the glory of God. Each group of Christians will flourish as they evangelize their locality. The ready-made talents will get busier and express themselves better. Good leaders will naturally emerge. Deeper relationships amongst members will blossom. Individuals will experience emotional fulfillment as they connect at a different level with one another. Just a perusal of Acts will testify to the effectiveness of multiple assembly churches. Luke wrote, "Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). This account by Luke is just a few years from the beginning of the Church.

Conclusion

Note that this is not an advocacy for statewide or regional eldership or church structuring as some have accused us of. Regions are made up of cities and since all the Christians in each city constitute a church, each region is made up of churches. Example; ""Churches of Galatia" (1 Corinthians 16:1).

Church growth today is nothing compared to the exponential growth recorded in the first-century church. This fact is a red flag that we are not doing something right. At least, something is wrong somewhere. Another red flag is the fact churches now exist for decades without having elders unlike in the first century when elders were ordained just few years after churches were planted. Therefore, we must humbly, sincerely, and judiciously return to the Bible to get back on track. We need to continuously review what we have received from our white brethren so that we can separate scripture from exegetical baggage. We suspect that much of the Western baggage has been read into scripture and handed to us. In times like this, only the courageous will do what is right.

Review

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The two brethren make broad, unsubstantiated accusations about Christians and congregations. Just as in the first century, both local churches and individual Christians vary from dead to vibrant (Revelation 2:8-9; 3:1; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; Philippians 2:19-23). I will not bother to either defend or attack my brethren but will examine the arguments the brothers employ to defend their five basic theses.

Some congregations today are different in matters of faith from those we read about in the New Testament; some are not. Certainly there are unfaithful brethren and congregations, but it is blatantly unfair to lump all together as alike. This is the kind of harsh judgmentalism the Master condemned (Matthew 7:1-5).

I am an elder in the local church where I preach, thus the blanket charges they make about modern elders are directed at me. They are blatantly false. We prayerfully shepherd the members and seek to save them (Hebrews 13:17). We do not "lord it over the flock" (1 Peter 5:3) but seek their input and approval on important decisions. Nonetheless elders rule the local church (1 Timothy 5:17), and to rule is to make decisions others are obligated to follow (Exodus 18:21-26; cf. 1 Kings 20:40).

The basic error of these brethren is their contention that **"Each church of the 1st century was a network of cell (home group) churches.**

They cite passages that show there were groups of people meeting in their homes from within the same congregation. But a group of Christians within a local church, even if they meet for spiritual reasons, does not comprise a church within a church. If two or three disciples within a local church meet to resolve differences, they are not the church or a church (Matthew 18:15-17). This truth negates all the arguments these brethren use to defend their belief that several house churches should comprise one city-wide church shepherded by one eldership.

They cite passages that do not begin to say what they assert. There is no evidence there were multiple churches in Jerusalem (Acts 11:22; 15:4, 22-23), Ephesus (Acts 20:17), Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2), Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:1), Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, or Laodicea (Revelation 1:11).

They cite verses that demonstrate some cities had more than one congregation, even as we have today. But they did not cite a passage which proves that these various congregations comprised a city-wide congregation shepherded by one eldership. They appeal to no such passage, because no such biblical verse exists (1 Peter 4:11; 2 John 9-11).

They cite passages demonstrating one set of elders to a city (Acts 14:21-23; Titus 1:5), but give no proof whatsoever that these cities had multiple churches.

The work of a preacher is not limited to trying to save the lost. Rather, evangelists are also to edify Christians (Acts 20:20, 32), guard and defend the faith (2 Timothy 4:3-5), teach the faithful to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2), and set the congregation in order (Titus 1:5). Their work is not limited to pulpit preaching but includes house to house teaching and whatever other methods are available (Acts 20:20).

No, preachers are not restricted to one congregation, but they may certainly work with a congregation. The apostle Paul began the church at Corinth (Acts 18:8), but Apollos later went there and watered what Paul had planted (Acts 18:24-28; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:6). Philip the evangelist worked with the brethren in Caesarea for at least twenty years (Acts 8:40; 21:8). When I lived in Upstate New York, I often preached to three congregations and taught home Bible studies in various locations. I know faithful African preachers who do the same.

Congregational autonomy has little to do with making discipline of sinful members more difficult. In our mobile society, a sinful member can just go to a congregation in another city if they will accept him, and some do. The same is true in Nigeria. Regardless, congregational autonomy is the New Testament pattern

(1 Peter 5:1-2), and we must follow it (2 Timothy 1:13).

The authors of this study cite passages devoid of explanation or argumentation to try to substantiate their claim that the church in Jerusalem was composed of “different cell churches across the city.” This is the basic error of the house church movement and adds a fourth meaning to the New Testament word “church.”

The word “church” is used in the New Testament to denote the universal assembly of people called out of the world into fellowship with God (Matthew 16:18), the local congregation (1 Corinthians 1:2), and the public, worship assembly of the local congregation (1 Corinthians 11:18). It is never used scripturally to denote a group within the local church.

Nor is there any New Testament authority for groups smaller than the local church to assemble to eat the Lord’s Supper. Writing to the “church of God at Corinth” (1 Corinthians 1:2), Paul directed them to eat the Lord’s Supper “when you come together as a church” (1 Corinthians 11:17-18), “when you come together in one place” (verses 20, 33). The only New Testament example of Christians observing the Lord’s Supper was when the disciples at Troas “came together” and “were gathered together” (Acts 20:7-8).

Acts 2:46 is not an example of disciples eating the Lord’s Supper. The phrase “breaking bread” is simply a Jewish idiom for eating a meal. The context determines whether it is a common meal or the Lord’s Supper. In Acts 20:7 the church gathered to break bread, that is, they ate the Lord’s Supper. But in Acts 20:11, the next day Paul by himself broke bread, that is, he ate a common meal. In Acts 2:46, the “breaking bread” involved disciples in one another’s homes eating “their food.” Thus, these were common meals eaten because they were hungry. The apostle Paul by inspiration forbade eating your “own supper” in conjunction with the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:22, 34). Eat the Lord’s Supper when all are invited to come together as the church (Acts 20:7-8; 1 Corinthians 11:17, 18, 20, 33). Eat your own meals as a function of the home (1 Corinthians 11:21-22, 34).

In Acts 12:17 “many were gathered together praying” in the home of Mary the mother of John Mark (verse 12), but “James and ... the brethren” were somewhere else. Neither group was called “the church.” It is true that verse five states, “Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.” The church is here spoken of distributively, that is, as each member functioned individually. They were constantly assembled, but they were constantly praying. Acts 8:3, 11:22, and 12:5 are also examples of the word “church” being used in the distributive sense. In Acts 11:22, “news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem.” One collective set of ears, or the members of the church distributively? If Acts 8:3 is a reference to “house churches,” then every family in the church at Jerusalem was its own church. Acts 20:20 does not mention the church and records what Paul did in Ephesus rather than Jerusalem. Yes, Paul taught “house to house,” and so do I, but how that proves there were separate cell churches that together composed a city wide church is beyond me.

Yes, evangelists were sent out to preach to the lost (Acts 13:1-5; 14:26), but they also stayed in one place and worked with a local church (Acts 8:40; 21:8; 1 Timothy 1:3; Titus 1:5). I have made twenty-nine international preaching trips and visited eleven nations, but throughout that time, when not traveling, I was preaching to a local church in America.

Acts 6:3 is part of an example of the church choosing officers (verses 1-6). Yes, all members of the church participate in choosing their leaders, but elders rule, make decisions for, the congregation of which they are members (1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:1-2).

The authors assert, “Today, each congregation functions as an autonomous institution with zonal fellowships as appendages.” I don’t even know what that means. According to the New Testament, a local church is composed of saints who agree to work together (Acts 9:26-28), is sufficiently local (1 Corinthians 1:2; Romans 16:5), that its members assemble regularly (Acts 11:25-26; 20:7; Hebrews 10:24-25), it

functions collectively, i.e., as a whole (I Timothy 5:16; I Corinthians 16:1-2), and, when mature, is organized, with bishops (i.e., overseers, also called elders or pastors/shepherds (Philippians 1:1; Acts 20:17, 28), deacons (servants, 1 Timothy 3:8-13), and saints (members) working together as they have ability and opportunity (Romans 12:4-8). It may have fellowship with a preacher or preachers, who both preach to them and work in other places (Philippians 4:15-16). Each local church is autonomous (independent, self-ruled (1 Peter 5:1-2; Acts 13:1-3). Certainly disciples may meet for Bible study, prayer, and singing of hymns in each other's homes (Acts 12:17), but that doesn't mean the disciples so gathered constitute a church within the citywide church or a "zonal fellowship."

Yes, in Acts 4:4 the church in Jerusalem came to number about 5000, but they were indeed, so far as is revealed, still meeting in the temple (Acts 2:46), and this continued even later (Acts 5:42). When the severe persecution began, these great numbers were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). The first congregation of disciples met for public worship in the temple, because, as Jews they had access to it, and it was the only venue large enough to hold them. New Testament congregations met for worship in the temple (Acts 2:46; 5:12), an upper room (Acts 20:7-8), by a river side (Acts 16:13-14), in a school (Acts 19:9), and in private houses (Romans 16:5). They met wherever it was convenient to do so, and we do the same.

There is no proof whatsoever that the house of Lydia (Acts 16:14-15) and the jailor (Acts 16:32-33) composed two separate house churches. These are simply two separate conversion narratives. I have no idea by what logic these brethren read Acts 19:1-5, 18-20, and 1 Corinthians 16:19 and conclude there were multiple house churches composing one city church in Ephesus. They just assert their position and cite irrelevant passages without offering reasons for their assertion.

There appear to have been multiple congregations in Rome (Romans 16:5, 14-15), but there is no evidence they all composed one local church under one eldership.

There may have been a separate congregation meeting in the home of Nymphas (Colossians 4:15), but there is no evidence multiple house churches in Colosse were under one eldership.

These brethren claim that building church buildings (which they associate with "cathedrals," a prejudicial term) was the beginning of the apostasy that led to Roman Catholicism. They make the meeting place a matter of faith, whereas the Lord taught that where we worship is unimportant (John 4:23-24). They make one kind of meeting place, a private house, a matter of faith, whereas the church first met in the temple (Acts 2:46). They are actually guilty of the beginning of apostasy by placing elders over multiple churches, just as in the beginning of the first apostasy a bishop was placed over multiple churches.

They are historically mistaken in asserting that church owned meeting halls began with the Roman Emperor Constantine (ruled 306 A.D. to 337 A.D.).

*"Until about the close of the second century (199 A.D. - KS) the Christians held their worship mostly in private houses, or in desert places, at the graves of martyrs, and in the crypts of the catacombs....The first traces of special houses of worship occur in Tertullian (ca. 155 A.D. - 240 A.D. - KS), who speaks of going to church, and in his contemporary, Clement of Alexandria" (ca. 150 A.D. - 215 A.D. - KS) (Philip Schaff, **History of the Christian Church.** 2:199-200).*

The organization of ancient Israel proves nothing about the organization of the church of Christ (Deuteronomy 21:3; Judges 8:16; Ruth 4:2; cf. Galatians 4:9). Israel had, by divine appointment, various levels of judges (Exodus 18:13-24). Shall the church have various levels of elders? This is indeed how the apostasy began that led to Roman Catholicism.

A well ruled church will provide training for service for all its members (Ephesians 4:11-16; 2 Timothy 2:2), regardless of the size of the congregation. It might be wise to start another congregation in a city, but that

gives no proof that one group of elders should shepherd multiple house churches.

Certainly we should all be concerned with reaching the lost with the gospel. If various groups within a local church meeting in their homes for evangelism helps, then use this method. But don't call each of these study groups a church.

Yes, white brethren sent the gospel to Nigeria in 1948 via a Bible correspondence course. But the House Church Movement also began among white brethren in the late 20th century, although Anabaptists adopted the practice long ago. Regardless, "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).



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