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CHRISTIAN ARRAY

RESTORING THE RESTORATION
IN OUR GENERATION

NUMBER 3

JANUARY, 1990

GUIDING PRINCIPLES & GROWTH

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

MAY 28, A.D. 30: On this day of Pentecost the church was established in purity and experienced explosive growth and commitment (Acts 2:37-47).

BY A.D. 51-57: Christians were falling from grace for bringing portions of God's old law into the new church (Gal. 5:4)

BY A.D. 95: Entire churches were considered as being in trouble and in danger of falling. Their sincerity was not questioned, only their salvation. (Rev. 3:14-22)

If the generation which saw Christ's resurrection and the power of the miracles apostacized within 20 - 65 years of the resurrection, does it surprise you that the next 1900 years have yielded many different religious groups which have strayed even further from the New Testament pattern?

If you pick a church based upon the advise of family members, the advise of friends, location, or other personal criteria; how do you know if you will pick the church which follows God's teachings rather than the apostacies of someone's preferences.

Seek the advise of others, but recognize that the New Testament specifically identifies several items as wrong (i.e. the common practice of calling others "Father", Matt. 23:8-10). Well educated ministers are teaching exactly what was instructed to be wrong. How can they possibly be right? Remember, you are ultimately responsible for finding the truth for yourself.

FORMULAS AND PHILOSOPHIES

The first decision to be made in what you are going to believe. As discussed in the November issue, philosophical decisions can be categorized as liberal (taking away from the requirements of the scriptures), conservative (adding to the requirements of the scriptures), or strict construction (as it is).

If you are going to take away, only personal judgment can be the guideline for how much it is acceptable to take away. You then have a religion pleasing to yourself. As you have taken away from God's religion, you cannot be sure that it is pleasing to God.

If you are going to add to, only personal judgment can be the guideline for how much it is acceptable to add to. You then have a religion pleasing to yourself. As you have added to God's religion, you cannot be sure that it is pleasing to God.

Only a strict construction philosophy toward the Bible can lead you toward a belief (church) which you know will be pleasing to God (Rev. 22:18-19).

A decision to be a strict constructionist is necessary, but unfortunately is not sufficient. Jesus was a Jew by religion. Must you follow His example and be a Jew? Paul performed miracles, must you be able to perform miracles?

As a mathematical theorem has supplementary corollaries, a decision to take the Bible as it is has supporting principles or guiding principles in the terms of this article. The following listing of statements does not tell you what Christ's church is, it shows how to identify it when you see it. It is intended to help prepare you to pick the church which follows simple New Testament Christianity.

This article is divided into the following sections to provide a logical sequence:

1. Background Facts
2. Basic Biblical Principles
3. Primary Conclusions
4. Conclusions

BACKGROUND FACTS

1. The Old Testament and New Testament are collections of inspired individual's writings including history; instructions to individuals and churches; and prophecies. They were collected together under God's guidance to reveal to us the will of God.
2. Jesus was not a "Christian". He was a Jew by both race and religion. His teachings were applicable to the Jews in the Jewish Dispensation in which He taught, and are applicable in the Christian Dispensation which began after His resurrection. His Great Commission came after the resurrection. The outward symbols of His religious life before His resurrection were Jewish.

BASIC BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

1. The Bible states in several places that it thoroughly furnished us to all good works and that we are neither to add to nor take away from it. We should speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible is silent. (Rev. 22:18-19, II Timothy 3:16-17, Galatians 1:8-9)
2. Unless there is a specific reason to do otherwise, all parts of the Bible should be taken literally.
3. We are only under the New Testament today. The Old Law was fulfilled by Christ and was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24-25). There are 248 commands and 365 prohibitions in

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the Old Testament, many of which relate to blood sacrifices. People who choose to be under the Old Testament today do not choose to be under all of God's Old Testament, only the parts which they desire to be under.

4. Adding other things into the gospel will cause you to fall from grace. (Galatians 5:4) The Galatians were falling from grace for bringing part of God's Old Law into the new church. How much worse off will you be if you bring outside teachings into the church.
5. Being a good moral person will not get you to Heaven. (Acts 10, Galatians 5:4)
6. A doctrine cannot be true if it makes God a respecter of persons. (Acts 10:34)
7. A doctrine cannot be true if it violates the free moral agency of man, his free will to believe or not to believe in God. (Gen. 2:17, Mark 16:16, Revelations 3:20)

PRIMARY CONCLUSIONS

1. We know that the first century church was acceptable to Christ. We have no assurance that any innovations into the worship service are acceptable to God. It should be our primary objective to re-establish the New Testament church in each of our congregations.
 - a. Items of worship which were commanded in the first century would be required today.
 - b. Items of worship which were available in the first century and were not incorporated in the first century church would be wrong to be incorporated in the church today (i.e. instrumental music).
 - c. Items which support worship not available in the first century can be incorporated into services at the discretion of the participants (i.e. microphones, pews, lights).
 - d. Any activity which was not a custom preceding the church and which was instructed for the church in the New Testament is required today.
 - e. On any activity which was a custom which preceded the church, we would follow contemporary customs instead; when it does not otherwise conflict with the scriptures (i.e. washing of feet of John 13:14, holy kiss of Rom. 16:16).
2. Supernatural, observed miracles discussed in the New Testament were done for a specific reason which no longer exists, as the observed miracles no longer exist. Commandments or examples involving observed miracles are history only to us as they only applied to the situation of the first century church.
3. We are not authorized to "simplify" scriptural truths into neat, easy to understand rules which make matters easy to understand at the expense of scriptural accuracy.
4. Jesus is our ultimate example. We must not teach any doctrine which would condemn Jesus as a sinner. (Romans 5:19)
5. The end does not justify the means. Both the "end" and the "means" must be in accordance with the scriptures.
6. An activity can be considered wrong if the

activity of necessity leads to a second or more extreme activity which is stated as wrong in the Bible. If an activity which is not criticized in the Bible does not of necessity lead to a stated wrong (although it might), we are not authorized to label the activity as a sin. I.e. you cannot break the law by speeding a car if you do not drive a car, however, driving a car does not of necessity lead to speeding. We could certainly question entering a house of prostitution.

7. An activity should be avoided if it is not required and it takes on the appearance of something which is an apostasy (I Thes. 5:22).
8. If different requirements are given for an activity or event at different points in the New Testament, we would not take our pick of which to believe and thereby establish Biblical conflict, but rather consider the lists as abridged, and be subject to all the requirements. (I.e. steps in starting a car or in the plan of salvation)
9. The Bible is the infallible word of God, subject to minor translation errors among the versions. We are certainly provided with enough to believe satisfactorily if we will follow it.
10. Paraphrased versions of the Bible may be helpful to get a clearer understanding of a passage, but group translations should be used to settle difference of opinions.
11. The church is only authorized to engage in functions stated in the Bible, and no other church responsibilities are scriptural. (New techniques are O.K., new goals are not!)
12. Any religious activity in a church facility with the elder's knowledge or supported by the church treasury would be considered as engaged in by the church.
13. Both sides of any question can be eloquently defended by scriptures taken out of context, or by only considering a portion of the scriptures. Care must be taken to separate personal feelings from actual scriptural teachings and to rightly divide the scriptures. (II Timothy 2:15)
14. God's people are a peculiar people, but being peculiar doesn't necessarily make you one of God's people.
14. Jesus reflected the social customs of the day when it didn't conflict with the scriptures.
15. It is good if someone's quoting Greek or Hebrew gives you an improved understanding of the English words in you Bible. If they give you a different meaning than the English words, reject the individual's personal interpretations as being subjective.

CONCLUSION

Do you know any man, church council, or other group which is authorized to teach doctrines contrary to those taught in the New Testament? Many men, church councils, and other groups claim this authority for themselves. They seek to "improve" upon the teachings of the New Testament. Paul tells us in Galatians 1:6-10 that such people will be accursed (vs. 7).

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He was not talking about gross perversions by outsiders. He was talking about church attending Christians who were making what they perceived to be "improvements" in the church. Paul says the "improvements" were distortions (vs. 7). If the variety of churches today are formed by man's "improvements" to the Word, surely your decision of which church to pick is important. Only an "unimproved" or "undistorted" church will be pleasing to God.

If you follow these general principles and read your Bible, you will find the New Testament pattern for the church.

Only you will go to Heaven or Hell for yourself. After listening to the best advice you can get and reading your own Bible, you must decide for your self whether you will go to the church of your choice on the church which follows the New Testament pattern.

For more information on what is God's will for you, read your Bible and/or contact a minister or member of your local church of Christ.

AWARD WINNERS

The following was recently noted in the Houston Chronicle:

Best Performance in Business Law: Joe Jamail for Pennzoil.

Worst Performance in Business Law: The 3,942 lawyers who represented Texaco in the same lawsuit.

CHURCH GROWTH: AN OBJECTIVE MEASURE

SUMMARY: True church growth is reflected by more factors than simply a count of Sunday morning worship attendance. Realistic performance in terms of church growth must be considered in terms of changes in size in the congregation's service area. Sometimes a congregation can be growing with a shrinking attendance, or declining with an increasing attendance. This lesson will address an objective measure of the physical growth of a congregation.

WHAT IS CHURCH GROWTH: In the context of this article, church growth is a change in the percentage of the congregation's service area population in attendance at the congregation. Some interesting implications of this statement are:

- GROWING SERVICE AREA:** If the service area population increases by 5% during the year and the congregation's attendance increases by 5%, the church did not grow. If the service area increases by 5% during the year and the congregation's attendance increases by 3%, the church declined, although the numerical count increased.
- DECLINING SERVICE AREA:** If the service area population decreases by 5% during the year and the congregation's attendance decreases by 5%, the church did not decline or grow.
- ADDING NEW CONGREGATIONS:** If a second congregation is formed within the service area of a congregation and the total

number of members of the two is the same as the attendance of the one before, in a stable service area population, the church did not grow or decline.

- COMBINING CONGREGATIONS:** If two congregations combine into a single congregation and the attendance is the sum of the attendance of the two previous congregations in a stable service area population, the church did not grow or decline.

Spiritual growth is obviously extremely important in the congregations, but is not a subject of this article.

FORMULA FOR MEASURE OF PHYSICAL CHURCH GROWTH:

The following formula is proposed to give an objective of church growth for a congregation. The time period is assumed to be the last 5 years, but any other time period can be used in a similar formula.

CHANGE IN ATTENDANCE IN THE PAST 5 YEARS:

- Average attendance this year: _____
- Average attendance 5 years ago: _____
- Change in attendance (A.-B.) _____
- Average annual change (C./5) _____
- Average annual growth $\{(D./B.) \times 100\}$ _____ %

FACTOR BEYOND CONGREGATIONAL INFLUENCE:

The one factor in our society which the members (and/or leaders) of a congregation do not have substantial influence over is the changes in size of the population in the service area. To determine this factor whether by change in population in the area, or by changes in the size of the service area because of additions or deletions of other churches of Christ, use the following formula:

- Population in service area this year _____
- Population in service area 5 years ago _____
- Relative pop. change (1.05^5) _____
- Percent change in population $\{(H./G.) \times 100\}$ _____ %

MINIMUM EXPECTED GROWTH RATE:

For the purpose of this analysis, we are suggesting that the minimum growth rate for any church which is not lukewarm is at least 5% per year. This means that for every 20 members, at least one member will be added each year. In most cases, this will occur if the children of the members are baptized, so the Lord may well not consider this adequate.

- Minimum net growth rate expected: 5%
(See above)
- Minimum net growth rate compounded for 5 years (1.05^5) 27.6%

FINAL CALCULATIONS:

- Percentage growth rate expected $(I. + K.)$ _____ %
- Actual growth expected $(B. \times L.)$ _____
- Actual attendance this year $(A.)$ _____
- Actual size forecasted for this year $(B. + M.)$ _____
- Performance in comparison with forecast _____

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The following is a set of numbers for a church to give an illustrative set of results: A.-600, B.-450, C.-150, D.- 30, E.-6.6%, F.-52,000, G.-50,000, H.-2,000, I.-4%, J.-5%, K.-27.6%, L.-31.6%, M.-142, N.-600, O.-592, P.-+8. The congregation of this example grew at a rate slightly higher than expected with the 5% assumption.

CHURCH GROWTH PLATEAUS:

Whereas, this lesson is advocating that a church must grow on an objectively measured basis to be pleasing to Jesus, it is probably not true that it must grow every year. Plateaus in the growth process appear to be a natural phenomenon. Sometimes a rest and reorganization may well be an essential ingredient to reaching higher goals for the Lord. Plateaus beyond one year should be suspect though.

Typical plateaus of 100, 250, and 800 members have been discussed in church growth literature. Some reasons for this will be discussed later.

SATURATION OF A SERVICE AREA: If you assume (1) that a congregation has 5% of its service area population in attendance, (2) that the service area population is steady, and (3) a 6% growth rate expectation for the congregation, in 52 years 100% of the population of the service area would attend the congregation. That may work statistically, but in life you would never expect all of a service area to attend any congregation of the church. We have used the number of 20% as complete saturation for a service area, and would not expect any church growth to exceed that number (or probably come close).

CONCLUSION:

There are no specific guidelines as to how much an individual congregation or congregations in an area are expected to be grow to be acceptable. However, it is hard to read the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) and think of returning to the Lord a return of less than 5% on the resources and abilities which He has trusted us with.

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ABORTION

Abortion is the killing of an unborn baby. If we do not inform our young people of this from the pulpit, who can we depend upon to tell them?

EVENTS CALENDAR:

AREA WIDE CONGREGATIONAL EVENTS

March 10, 1990: "One Day On Crete - How To Build The Church God's Way", Dr. Carrol Osburn from ACU, First Colony

Sept. 21-23, 1990: Creation Evolution Seminar, Memorial, 464-0271

AREA WIDE YOUTH EVENTS: TBA

Jan. 8 Youth Ministers & Basketball at Oak Ridge North, 11:30 A.M.
Feb. 5 Youth Ministers & Basketball at Memorial, 11:30 A.M.
Feb. 11 Watters Road hosts Area-Wide Spring Fling at 3:00 P.M.
Mar. 5 Youth Ministers & Basketball at Memorial, 11:30 A.M.
Apr. 7 ACU Spring High School Day
May 7 Youth Ministers & Basketball at Memorial, 11:30 A.M.
June 11 Area-Wide Devo
June 18 Area-Wide Devo
June 25 Area-Wide Devo
July 2 Area-Wide Devo
July 9 Area-Wide Devo
July 16 Area-Wide Devo
July 23 Area-Wide Devo
July 30 Area-Wide Devo
Aug. 6 Area-Wide Devo
Aug. 13 Area-Wide Devo
Aug. 20 Acappella at the Music Hall for Westbury Christian Schools

The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable man persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends upon the unreasonable man.
George Bernard Shaw

Few sinners are saved after the first twenty minutes of a sermon. Mark Twain