

THE BLUE BANNER

Volume 9, Issue 4-6

For Christ's Crown & Covenant

April/June 2000

CONTENTS

- 1 *In this Issue*
- 2 *Selected Thoughts on the Synagogue*, by Rev. Richard Bacon
- 17 *Tape Series: Rebuilding Jerusalem's Walls. Acts of the Apostles.*
- 18 *Implications of Repentance*, by Rev. Richard Bacon
- 26 *Speak Truth in Love*
- 27 *The Dangers of Dating*, by Rev. Richard Bacon
- 32 From Our Readers
- 34 Built Upon the Rock. WSC Cards
- 35 Tapes, CDs, Sermon Subscription Service.
- 36 Order Form. About *The Blue Banner* & FPCR

All material in this issue Copyright © 2000 by *The Blue Banner*, a ministry of First Presbyterian Church Rowlett, unless otherwise noted. FPCR Session: Pastor Richard Bacon. Ruling Elders: David Seekamp, Carl Betsch, Thomas Allie. *The Blue Banner* Editor: Christopher Coldwell. *The Blue Banner* is supported by gifts. The cost of an annual subscription is \$15.00 per year. If you are able, please consider giving a gift of \$30.00 to support your subscription and one other.

In this Issue.

Selected Thoughts on the Synagogue ❧ **The Implications of Repentance**
❧ **The Dangers of Dating.**

by Richard Bacon



The articles in this issue are not thematic. One has to do with the Old Testament synagogue and its impact on the New Testament doctrine of the church. The flow of this article may seem somewhat uneven. This is due, in part, to its nature as "selected" thoughts. These selections have been drawn from various places and exegetical considerations in my dissertation, *A Pattern in the Heavens: Ecclesiology*. Some of this material could also have a bearing on the recent discussions over the *regulative principle of worship* and the nature of synagogue worship as a commanded biblical institution.

The second article, dealing with the implications of the Scripture doctrine of repentance, is an example of the Puritan style of preaching. In preaching through the book of Hebrews, the subject of repentance from dead works comes up in Hebrews 6:1. It is the purpose of this sermon beginning on page 18 to draw the picture of a repentant sinner. Each of us has the responsibility to compare himself with that picture.

The article beginning on page 27 is a continuation of a series, part one of which appeared in the December 1998 issue of the *Blue Banner*. It is excerpted from the twenty-five sermon series "A Directory of Domestic Duties." The entire series of four sermons on finding a life's partner will be concluded, DV, in future issues of this magazine. The tapes are available now (see page 35 and the order form on page 36). The whole twenty-five tape series is also available.

Finally, our review by Dr. W. Gary Crampton of Gordon H. Clark's *God and Evil: The Problem Solved* drew some fire from some of our readers. One writer referred mistakenly to both Dr. Crampton and me as "Arminians"! It causes one to wonder. Nevertheless, we have included a representative letter from one of our readers together with a reply from Dr. Crampton on page 32 of this issue of *The Blue Banner*. ❧

Selected Thoughts on the Synagogue

Extracts from 'A Pattern in the Heavens Part One: Ecclesiology.' Copyright © 2000 Richard E. Bacon.

by Rev. Richard Bacon

Throughout the Old Testament from the Exodus onward both the term *qahal* (considered elsewhere) and *edah* refer to the community of Israel as a whole, to the meetings of Israel for worship, or to the transactions connected with the social and cultic life of the people. Further, when we reach the gospels we are confronted with the very terms in Greek that were used to translate the Hebrew Old Testament in the LXX.

Thus Jesus went through all Galilee teaching in the *synagogues* in Matthew 4:23. The hypocrites gathered in front of the *synagogues* (as places of meeting) in Matthew 6:2. Jesus taught in the *synagogues* yet again in Matthew 9:35. The disciples were warned about being delivered to the councils (*sunedrion*) and *synagogues* to be punished in Matthew 10:17. Jesus claimed in Matthew 16:18 that he would build his assembly or congregation (*ekkllesia*) "upon this rock." Disputes that cannot be resolved privately or within the confines of a few witnesses should be taken to the congregation or assembly (*ekkllesia*) in Matthew 18:17.

So also in the Acts and the Epistles we find the same language and terms adopted wholesale in the New Testament that were already familiar from the LXX to the Greek speaking Jew or proselyte. Great fear came upon the congregation (*ekkllesia*) in Acts 5:11. Stephen disputed with the libertine party in the synagogue in Acts 6:9 and referred to the congregation or the assembly (*ekkllesia*) in the wilderness in Acts 7:38. There was a great persecution against the congregation (*ekkllesia*) in Acts 8:1 and who were apparently meeting in the synagogues of the Jews in Acts 9:2. But all the assemblies or congregations (*ekkllesia*) had rest in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee by the time of Acts 9:31.

Similarly these same Greek translations were used in Romans 16:1-4 and Romans 16:23; First Corinthians 1:2; etc. As the Reverend Douglas Bannerman observed over a century ago in his Cunningham Lectures, "It is obvious that we cannot be in a position rightly to estimate the meaning of these words in the New Testament unless we know something of their previous history and use."¹

The congregation or assembly of Israel was in some places called "*sunagoge*" and in other places "*ekkllesia*" in the LXX. According to Girdlestone's *Old Testament Synonyms*, "Whilst *qahal* generally refers to the representative gathering, *edah* often signifies an informal massing of the people."² On the other hand, Campeggio Vitranga distinguished the two words by claiming that the reason the Christians adopted the term "*ekkllesia*" rather than the term "*synagoge*" in the New Testament (and even that is not true in all cases as we shall see) was not so much to distinguish themselves from the Jewish synagogue, but because the term "*ekkllesia*," like "*qahal*," denotes "a number of people, joined together by laws and other bonds, although it may often happen that they are not assembled together, and that it is impossible that they should be so."³

Miqra'

There is yet one more Hebrew term that we should explore in the context of this study of biblical terms. The Hebrew term "*Miqra*" occurs

¹ Douglas Bannerman, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976 reprint of 1887), 89.

² Robert Baker Girdlestone, *Old Testament Synonyms*, (Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc., n.d. reprint of 1897), 231. Transliteration modified for consistency with this dissertation.

³ Campeggio Vitranga, *De Synagoga Vetere* (Franequerae, 1696), volume 1, p. 88. Cited and translated by D. Bannerman in *op. cit.*, 92.

over twenty times in the Hebrew Old Testament and all but three of them are in the Pentateuch, with seventeen of them being in the books of Leviticus and Numbers alone. Additionally, the term can be found in Exodus 12:16; Isaiah 1:13 and 4:5. In the last place listed, the term almost certainly has reference to an assembly that took place for the purpose of worshipping God. A similar term exists in Numbers 10:2 and though there is a word in Nehemiah 8:8 that is closely related (it shows up as being the same word in Wigram's *Concordance*), the Authorized Version properly translates it there as "reading" rather than "convocation." It is of some further interest to note that in all instances but a handful that the term is joined with the adjective "holy." Thus the expression is normally not simply "convocation" but is more fully presented as a "holy convocation," or *miqra'-qodesh*.

The word for convocation comes, as we might expect from the English translation, from the verb *qara'*, "to call or convoke." Not only were the feast days of the annual Hebrew calendar regarded as holy convocations, so also was the weekly Sabbath regarded as a holy convocation or *miqra'-qodesh*. Given the context of Leviticus 23:3, it is difficult to agree with the interpretation of some that it refers *only* to holding worship services at home. Rather, the reason that the Sabbath in verse three is separated from the rest of the "feasts of Jehovah" beginning in verses four and following is that the people were not required to go to the sanctuary in Jerusalem week by week. It is here, rather than post-exilic times as D. Bannerman and others have speculated, that we find the origins of synagogue worship.⁴ Further, the term "dwellings" used in Leviticus 23:3 has reference not so much to houses as *seats* or even *habitations*. The Hebrew term "*moshebh*" and the particular form of Leviticus 23:3, *moshbotheykem*, can also be translated as "your cities" (as in Second Kings 2:19) or even as "your assemblies" (as at Psalm 1:1 and 107:32).⁵

Not only Nehemiah 8:8, but Isaiah 1:13 and 4:5 seem also to indicate that these holy

convocations were indeed local assemblies of the people for the express purpose of public worship, including the reading (so the use in Nehemiah) and exposition of the law (*torah* and *haf-tarah*). Though Girdlestone suggested that the significance may simply have been that the days of holy convocation were intended to be kept free from secular work, the implication of being "called out" or "*qara' min*" or "*ek kaleo*" is simply too strong to ignore.⁶

Girdlestone went on in that same place to point out that the term was generally translated by the LXX with the Greek phrase "*klete hagia*."⁷ Though it is true that the Greek adjective *hagios* might be here understood, as Girdlestone suggested, in a predicate manner ("called to be holy"), the LXX appears to be using *kletos* in a substantive manner as a called assembly that has a holy purpose or a sanctified origin. Conybeare and Stock refer to this *sort* of LXX usage as "taking the predicative position in an attributive sense."⁸ We thus may understand the adjective "*kletos*" to be used here as a substantive for the Hebrew *miqra'* and the Greek adjective "*hagios*" to be attributive though it is in the predicative position. As Dana and Mantey have also pointed out regarding the Greek adjective, "An adjective is in the attributive relation when it ascribes a quality to the noun which it modifies;... The article, however, does not determine the relation of the adjective to the noun. This is determined by the mode of description by which the adjective presents the noun — whether the adjective is incidental or principal in the statement."⁹ Therefore, although the adjective "*hagia*" appears in the predicative position (i.e. after the word it modifies and without an article) we are justified in translating the phrase "holy convocation" rather than "called to be holy" or "called to be saints" as at Romans 1:7 and First Corinthians 1:2.

⁶ Girdlestone, *op. cit.*, 233.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ F. C. Conybeare and St. George Stock, *Grammar of Septuagint Greek*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988 reprint of 1905), 62.

⁹ H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: The MacMillan Co., 1957), 118.

⁴ Keil and Delitzsch, *op. cit.*, l.ii.438-39, n1.

⁵ Gesenius, *op. cit.*, 460.

Neither D. Bannerman nor Vitranga believed that the synagogue can be traced back any farther in time than Nehemiah chapter eight.¹⁰ Bannerman proceeded to quote Marcus Dods' *Presbyterianism Older Than Christianity* to the same end. However, we must respectfully disagree at this point with the learned Reverends Bannerman and Dods. First, we can see something very like the synagogue in the meeting together of the people to hear the expositions and sermons of the prophets, both in the exile and even prior to the Babylonian captivity.

Ezekiel 8:1 may seem at first glance to have reference to Ezekiel's own house, until we remember the manner in which the term "house" is often used in Scripture in a technical or limited sense for a place of prayer and other worship. The temple itself was sometimes called a house, as Matthew 21:13, "*my house shall be called a house of prayer*" (cf. Isaiah 56:7) and John 2:16, "*make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.*" The word was also used throughout the book of Acts and the Pauline Epistles to refer to places of worship — both private, as Cornelius' reference to the place he used for prayer in Acts 10:30 (see also Daniel 6:10 in this regard) — and public as in Acts 2:46; 5:42; 8:3; 20:20; Romans 16:5; First Corinthians 15:19; Colossians 4:15; Titus 1:11; and Philemon 2. It was as Ezekiel met together with the elders of Israel that he was taken in the spirit (i.e. "in the visions of God," as Ezekiel 40:2 — see above) to the then still-standing temple in Jerusalem.

Again in Ezekiel 14:1ff. "certain of the elders" came to Ezekiel and Ezekiel preached to them the word of the LORD. In that context the prophet spoke to the *house* of Israel (verses 4, 6, 7, 11, etc.). We should also remember as we consider this preaching in and to the *house* of Israel that the modern Hebrew term for the place — the synagogue — where the local assembly takes place is the *beth-knesset*, or *house of gathering*.

In Ezekiel 14:6-7 God began to speak against those who came to a prophet to *inquire* concerning Jehovah. But in the twentieth chapter of Ezekiel that very thing came to pass. "Certain

of the elders of Israel came to *enquire* of the LORD...are ye come to *enquire* of me...I will not be *enquired of* by you" (Ezekiel 20:1-3). Here the Hebrew verb *darash* is used in a theological sense of seeking or consulting for the purpose of receiving an oracle from God.¹¹ Though Scripture does not specifically inform us that the meeting with Ezekiel took place on the Sabbath day, we should note that it was "the desecrations of the Sabbath" that formed the theme or subject of his sermon to the elders that day (see, for example, verses 12, 13, 16, 20, 21, and 24).¹²

In the context of the Sabbath desecrations, one of the accusations that Ezekiel made against the elders (or more accurately God himself made the accusation) was that the people had worshipped God in the high places in a manner that was specifically restricted to the temple. This they did and God characterized it as "polluting the Sabbath." Pollution took place in the high places Sabbath by Sabbath both as the *house* of Israel worshipped false gods (i.e. idols of their hearts — Ezekiel 14:4) and additionally as they worshipped the true and living God in ways that he had never appointed (Ezekiel 20:27-28 cp. Deuteronomy 12:5ff. and Deuteronomy 12:32) for use outside the temple.

There is yet another place in the book of Ezekiel that indicates *at least* the possibility of weekly Sabbath convocations during the exile. In Ezekiel 33:30-31 we read "Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of *the houses*, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD.

¹¹ Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, *op. cit.*, 209. See Brown-Driver-Briggs, 205a.

¹² While we cannot be certain that either the sixth year, the sixth month and the fifth day of the month or the seventh year, the fifth month and the tenth day of the month fell on a Sabbath, it is interesting to note that if the meeting with the elders in Ezekiel chapter eight fell on a Sabbath day, then so also did the meeting in chapter twenty. Figuring with alternating months of twenty-nine days and thirty days, as would be reasonable based upon Israel's lunar calendar, we would have a Sabbath on the following days, if year six of the captivity, the sixth month, contained thirty days (year.month.day): 6.6.5, 12, 19, 26; 6.7.3, 10, 17, 24; 6.8.2, 9, 16, 23, 30; 6.9.7, 14, 21, 28; 6.10.6, 13, 20, 27; 6.11.4, 11, 18, 25; 6.12.3, 10, 17, 24; 7.1.2, 9, 16, 23; 7.2.1, 8, 15, 22, 29; 7.3.6, 13, 20, 27; 7.4.5, 12, 19, 26; 7.5.3, 10, 17, 24. Therefore, if 6.6.5 was on a Sabbath, then so also was 7.5.10.

¹⁰ D. Bannerman, *op. cit.*, 123ff.

And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.” We should note at this passage not only the portion emphasized — *the* houses and not *their* houses — but also the fact that the people who came claimed that they were coming for the purpose of hearing a word from the LORD. Of course the fact that they came hypocritically does not change the fact of their *purported* reason for coming to the prophet Ezekiel. Further, once they came to Ezekiel, they sat before him in order to hear his preaching (*w^eyashbhu l^ephaneykha `ammi w^esham`u eth-d^ebhareykha*). But this is exactly the activity that was taking place in Nehemiah chapter eight where D. Bannerman, Dods, Vitringa and others claim that it is possible to discern the synagogue worship. But if the *same elements* are present both in the Ezekiel passages as well as in Nehemiah, then it seems to this author somewhat more than a little arbitrary to claim to have found the synagogue in one place and *not* in the other.

While the above considerations from Ezekiel certainly seem to move the synagogue — the place of weekly Sabbath convocations — back to the exile, a question remains whether we can with good cause link the meetings and enquiries of Ezekiel’s day with the holy convocation of Leviticus 23:3. There is yet another place in the Old Testament that may, upon proper consideration, move the weekly synagogue Sabbath convocation back to the time of the kings of Israel and Judah (see below in this section). But if the synagogue predates the exile, then there is really no reason to find the synagogue’s inauguration in the destruction of the temple as many commentators have done.¹³

Yet those very commentators and authors have simply "dismissed" the idea of an early synagogue rather than dealing with the passages of Scripture adduced thus far in this dissertation.

¹³ Not only is this the opinion of D. Bannerman, Dods, and Vitringa as already mentioned; so also is it the opinion of Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), I.431.

The synagogue clearly and certainly existed by Christ’s day. Further, rather than regarding the synagogue as an illegitimate institution, Christ frequented the synagogue and even taught in the synagogues of Galilee. It was his *custom* to enter the synagogue Sabbath by Sabbath (Luke 4:16) and to teach in the synagogues “about all Galilee” (Matthew 4:23). But if the synagogues were nothing more than institutions developed by the wit and wisdom of men, then one could not endorse them any more than he could endorse the high places that were dedicated to Jehovah, but condemned by him (see again Ezekiel 20:26ff. and Deuteronomy 12:5ff.).

We might reason as follows: If Christ partook of the synagogue worship, then the synagogue worship was lawful (Hebrews 7:26; First Peter 2:22). But Christ partook of the synagogue worship (Luke 4:16; Matthew 4:23). Therefore the synagogue worship was lawful (*modus ponens*).¹⁴ At the same time, however, we must reason from Deuteronomy 12 and similar passages thus: If an institution of God’s worship is not commanded, then it is unlawful (Deuteronomy 12:5-6, 32; Ezekiel 20:28; Colossians 2:22-23; Matthew 15:6, 9).¹⁵ But the synagogue is not unlawful (by double negation of our previous conclusion: q = not not q). Therefore the synagogue is a commanded institution (*modus tollens*).¹⁶

But if Leviticus 23:3 is not the command instituting the synagogue as the weekly *miqra’-qodesh*, then there is no such command.¹⁷ This we prove reasoning *modus tollens* as above: If there is *no* Scriptural command instituting the Sabbath synagogue worship, then Leviticus 23:3 is not such a command. But Leviticus 23:3 *does* institute a weekly *miqra’-qodesh*. Therefore, there is a Scripture command instituting the Sabbath synagogue worship. We thus demonstrate

¹⁴ I.e., following the prepositional form of “If ‘p’ then ‘q.’ But ‘p.’ Therefore ‘q.’”

¹⁵ See also Westminster Confession of Faith XXI.5

¹⁶ I.e., following the prepositional form of “If ‘p’ then ‘q.’ But not ‘q.’ Therefore not ‘p.’”

¹⁷ Of course it could be argued here that the very existence of the synagogue would “by divine example” be an argument for its legitimacy and an explicit or implicit command need not be found. That argument can have a probative or evidentiary value, but in the final analysis we must agree with those who point out that it is logically impossible to argue from “is” to “ought” (the “naturalistic fallacy”).

apagogically that if Leviticus 23:3 does not institute the synagogue (or if there is no *other* passage in holy writ that institutes it), then at least one of our presuppositions of a consistent Scripture and a sinless Christ must be a false presupposition. If valid deductions from our axioms result in contradictions, then our axioms must be false. But we do not accept the contradiction that the synagogue is both lawful and unlawful at the same time and in the same way. We maintain that the synagogue *must* have originated in “the pattern in the heavens” and was revealed through Moses in Leviticus 23:3.

The final passage we should adduce to bridge the gap between the exile and Leviticus 23:3 is Second Kings 4:18ff. The particular portion of the story of the Shunammite woman that interests us in the context of the weekly synagogue worship is found in verse 23, “And he [her husband] said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him [the prophet Elisha] to day? It is neither new moon, nor *Sabbath*. And she said, It shall be well.” It may be that at first glance this Scripture seems to tell us little or nothing about the Sabbath *miqra'*. After all, the husband of the Shunammite woman declared clearly, “it is neither new moon nor Sabbath.” But it is his *surprise* at her leaving that attracts our attention. Had she left on a new moon or a Sabbath, he would not have been surprised, it would seem. C. F. Keil correctly commented on this place, “From these words,...[some] have drawn the correct conclusion, that the pious in Israel were accustomed to meet together...for worship and edification, on those days which were *appointed* in the law (Lev. xxiii.3; Num. xxviii.11 sqq.) for the worship of God; and from this Hertz and Hengstenberg have still further inferred, that in the kingdom of the ten tribes not only were the Sabbath and new moons kept, as is evident from Amos viii.5 also, but the prophets supplied the pious in that kingdom with a substitute for the missing Levitical priesthood.”¹⁸

We cannot agree with the idea that the prophets supplied everything that the priesthood was intended to perform under that economy, if that

is what Mr. Keil had in mind. Clearly had they attempted to provide sacrifice or burn incense or some such function peculiar to the Aaronic priesthood, God would have regarded them as “light fellows” such as the ones Jeroboam installed at Dan and Bethel (Second Chronicles 11:15; First Kings 12:31). Nevertheless, as the priests and Levites were ordained by God to know and to teach his law and to provide wisdom for the judges and the people alike, Keil has rightly understood the function of the prophet and the role he would have played in a kingdom deprived, according to Second Chronicles chapter eleven, of its Levites.

So then, in conclusion, we maintain that while it is difficult to trace the synagogue through every book and time of the Mosaic institutions, there is a train that extends from Leviticus through Nehemiah, which is to say from Moses' generation through the generation in which the Old Testament canon came to a close. There was a *miqra'-qodesh* in the days of Moses, in the days of Elisha, in the days of Ezekiel, and in the days of Christ. That synagogue was an institution of God and will be investigated in somewhat greater detail in the following section in which we will consider some Greek terminology in the New Testament.

THE GREEK WORDS:

Sunagogē

We have encountered the Greek word “*sunagogē*” in our previous section(s). We noted there that the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint or LXX, often translated key Hebrew terms for the church using the Greek word “*sunagogē*.” The Greek word comes from a root word that means “to gather together,” so that a synagogue comes to mean a gathering place by way of metonymy: the building in this case standing for its function.¹⁹

Thus Philo used the term as a reference to a sacred place where the Jews gathered on the Sabbath day. “Now these laws they are taught at other times, indeed, but most especially on the seventh day, for the seventh day is accounted

¹⁸ Keil and Delitzsch, *op. cit.*, III.i.311., n1.

¹⁹ Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, *op. cit.*, 789-91.

sacred, on which they abstain from all other employments, and frequent the sacred places which are called synagogues, and there they sit according to their age in classes, the younger sitting under the elder, and listening with eager attention in becoming order.”²⁰

Josephus used the term in an identical sense in his famous work, *The Wars of the Jews*, “Now on the next day, which was the seventh day of the week, when the Jews were crowding apace to their synagogue, a certain man of Caesarea, of a seditious temper, got an earthen vessel, and set it with the bottom upward, at the entrance of that synagogue, and sacrificed birds.”²¹ Though early Jewish sources such as Philo and Josephus indicate an understanding of the synagogue as a meeting place, the LXX *never* uses the Greek term for an actual building.²² By the time of the New Testament, however, the term was used regularly as a place for corporate prayer, reading of Scripture, preaching, and teaching.²³ Thus we find such language in the New Testament as “teaching in their synagogues” (Matthew 4:23; 9:35), “he entered into the synagogue” (Mark 1:21; 3:1), “he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day” (Luke 4:16), and “he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath” (Luke 13:10).

The synagogue, as an institution, appears to have served a three-fold purpose of worship, education, and government. Whether the elders of the synagogue were ever permitted to exercise discipline and punish members in civil cases,²⁴ they certainly could hear ecclesiastical cases and inflict ecclesiastical censures. Based upon the record of the New Testament, it is the opinion of

this author that the Jews were restricted, at least in the first century, to an *ecclesiastical* court in the synagogue, but with instituted punishments that seemingly went beyond the Christian church’s present-day authority to administer. The Christian church has no authority to administer *corporal* punishments, but is limited according to biblical and Presbyterian understanding to spiritual censures. Thus the Westminster Confession correctly gives an exhaustive list of the church’s remedies in chapter thirty: “For the better attaining of these ends, the officers of the church are to proceed by admonition, suspension from the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper for a season, and by excommunication from the church, according to the nature of the crime, and demerit of the person. Yet, according to Matthew 10:17, the councils were permitted to scourge ecclesiastical offenders, and that seemingly in context of the synagogue. Luke 12:11 seems to distinguish between the synagogue on the one hand and the magistrate on the other, yet there is nothing in the immediate context that *rules out* the idea that the phrase “synagogues, magistrates, and powers” may not form a figure of speech known as “synonymia” in which all three terms have the same referent(s). It must be admitted that it is a possibility, contextually, however remote, that *sunagogas*, *archas*, and *exousias* all have reference to the leadership and jurisdiction of the synagogue. Thus the distinct possibility exists that the synagogue was used not merely for ecclesiastical censures, but for civil censures as well.

In a similarly worded passage in Luke 21:12 the wording seems to refer simply to the various temporal enemies that may one day “lay hands” on Christians without particular reference to either the ecclesiastical or civil, but using terms that encompass both. Whether the synagogue therefore had authority to administer *all* corporal punishments, what is clear is that the synagogue could excommunicate wayward members and this excommunication may in fact have been regarded as the maximum punishment that the synagogue, as it was ecclesiastical, could rightly inflict upon its members. Thus the phrase to be

²⁰ C. D. Yonge, trans. *The Works of Philo* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 689-90.

²¹ William Whiston, trans. *The Works of Josephus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 616 [standard Loeb notation II.14.289.]

²² Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, Eds. *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), *in loco*. Hereafter Kittel.

²³ Anthony J. Saldarini, “Synagogue,” in *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, Paul J. Achtemeier, ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1985), *in loco*.

²⁴ Dr. Charles Feinberg is of this opinion in his article on the “Synagogue” in *The New Bible Dictionary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1962), *in loco*. He bases his opinion primarily on the fact that punishment in the form of “scourging” was found in the synagogue.

“put out of the synagogue,” which appears in John’s gospel at 9:22; 12:42; and 16:2 carries the semantic force of “to be excommunicated.” This punishment would be the ecclesiastical equivalent of banishment in the civil realm, and clearly carries over to the Christian church.²⁵

Not only did the synagogue have a system for dealing with wayward members and hence a government peculiar to it, it was also a place for the teaching God’s law as can be seen from the New Testament. We already examined such Old Testament passages as Nehemiah 8:8; Ezekiel 8:1; 14:1; 20:1; 33:31; and Second Kings 4:23 and saw the teaching function of the synagogue (or *at least* the proto-synagogue) in those passages. By the time of the New Testament, however, Christ and his disciples frequently taught in the synagogues of the Jews. Of course it would be imprudent to suggest that the synagogue of the first century had the same *shule* that the medieval and modern synagogue enjoy. Yet we must also remember, as Alfred Edersheim reminded us, that to the first century Jew the knowledge of *torah* was everything. “In the days of Christ the pious Jew had no other knowledge, neither sought nor cared for any other — in fact denounced it — than that of the law of God.... To the pious Jew,...the knowledge of God was everything; and to prepare for or impart that knowledge was the sum total, the sole object of his education.”²⁶

²⁵ First Thessalonians 5:12 “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;” Second Thessalonians 3:6 “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.” Second Thessalonians 3:14-15 “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” First Corinthians 5:4-5 “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” First Corinthians 5:13 “But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” Matthew 18:17 “And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” Titus 3:10 “A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;” All quotations are from the Authorized Version of the Bible.

²⁶ Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987 reprint of 1876 edition), 124.

Much of what a Jewish youth needed to know in order to pursue and then carry out his calling he would have received by way of parental education and apprenticeship. But he would have learned *torah* primarily at the synagogue. Thus it was that Christ and those who followed him made attendance at the synagogue their *custom* (Luke 4:16). Jesus taught in the synagogues in Matthew 13:45; Mark 6:2 and places previously adduced. Also significant in this regard is Jesus’ claim in John 18:20, “I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, with the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing.” If it is the case, as Edersheim and others have suggested, that there was a synagogue actually attached to the temple complex,²⁷ then it may also be that much of the teaching that took place “in the temple” was also synagogue teaching (Luke 2:46; Matthew 21:23ff; 23:38-24:2; John 7:14, 28; 8:2; 18:20; etc.). It was also the practice of Christ’s preaching and teaching apostles to teach in the synagogues of the Jews (as Paul at Acts 13:5, 15, 44; 14:1; 17:2-4, 10, 17; 18:4, 26; 19:8).

Additionally, based upon the assumption that there was a synagogue within or attached to the temple, that would likely have been the *house* where the disciples were sitting in Acts 2:2 on the Day of Pentecost. As their preaching on that Pentecost became known, the multitude *came together (sunerchomai)* in a place sufficiently large for all to hear. Later, the disciples prayed in the place “where they were synagogued” in Acts 4:31. So also, if it is the case, as Edersheim further suggested, that the temple synagogue was located at the southeastern corner of the temple complex where Solomon’s Porch and the Royal Porch came together, then that possibly gives new significance to the fact that so much of Christ’s teaching took place “in Solomon’s Porch” (John 10:23) and the disciples “were all with one accord in Solomon’s Porch” (Acts 5:11-12).

The third function of the synagogue was as a place of prayer and other worship for God’s people. Thus Christ referred to even the hypocrites who came to the synagogue to worship

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 265-66.

in Matthew 6:5, “for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.” This worship appears from Matthew 12:2 (comparing with verse 9) to be especially a part of Sabbath observances. See also Luke 4:15-16 in regard to attendance in the synagogues *on the Sabbath*. Preaching, or exhortation, was also seemingly a part of regular synagogue activity, for Christ not only *taught* in the synagogues; Mark’s gospel informs us pointedly, “he *preached* in their synagogues throughout all Galilee” (Mark 1:39).

The Jewish synagogue was, in conclusion, a place of study and teaching. It was, moreover, a place of covenantal or ecclesiastical government. And most of all, the synagogue was a place where God was worshipped *not* in the passing manner of the temple, but making use of the moral elements of worship that transcend the particulars of the Mosaic institutions. The Synagogue is a multifaceted institution, as Charles Lee Feinberg demonstrated nearly fifty years ago:

The Jewish Synagogue is not only a house of prayer (*beth tefillah*), but a place of communal gathering (*beth haknesseth*) and a place of study (*beth hamidrash*). The synagogue contains the ark, the scrolls of the law, the perpetual light, the candelabra, and the *bimah* or pulpit. The ark containing the scroll is built into the eastern wall toward Palestine. The main scrolls in the ark are of the Pentateuch, but there are smaller scrolls also containing the former and latter prophets. The perpetual light stands for the light that burned continually in the tabernacle and the temple. The *bimah* is the pulpit in front of the synagogue. The reading desk for the reading of the law is in the center of the sanctuary. Synagogues, in keeping with the Jewish interpretation of Exodus 20:4–6, have no paintings, statues, or carvings of any kind. Orthodox Jews forbid the use of an organ in the service, because rabbinical law set this prohibition as a token of mourning over the destruction of the Temple where the Levites played on musical instruments. All orthodox synagogues have a separate balcony or section for women. This had its origin in the Temple where there was a Court of Women. Each

synagogue or temple has a rabbi who is the spiritual leader.²⁸

Jesus said that he would “gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other,” (Matthew 24:31). The word, “gather,” is a Greek verb meaning, literally, “to synagogue,” i.e., to lead, gather, or bring together. The point Jesus was making is that with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Jesus would send out his messengers to gather his elect into his gospel synagogue, the church. Jesus was actually quoting from Moses, who promised, “If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather [*synagogue*] thee, and from thence will he fetch thee,” (Deuteronomy 30:4 LXX). Jesus came, in fulfillment of prophecy to restore God’s house, the organized congregation of his covenant people. In the book of Hebrews, the author urges his readers not to forsake “the assembling [*synagoguing*] of themselves together,” (Hebrews 10:25).

The Local Congregation

Scripturally speaking, the term "church" refers not only to the whole multitude of men who worship the true God and Christ. The term can also signify a body of those in any particular locality who are in the same category of those who call upon the true and living God according to his Word (Acts 14:23; First Corinthians 16:19; Romans 16:3-5; Colossians 4:15; etc.). This local *manifestation* of the visible church universal is also called by Scripture "a church." The church of God, as it is universal and involves not only presently living members, but also members dead and members not yet born, is *one*. The church of God as it is local and involves those who profess Christ together with their children is plural, i.e. *many*.

Previous chapters of this dissertation addressed the catholic (general or universal) visible church as an historical outworking of the ideal church existing eternally in the mind of God. It is the point of view of this dissertation that the catholic

²⁸ Charles Lee Feinberg, “The Old Testament in Jewish Thought and Life,” in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary) Volume 111, #442 (Apr-Jun 1954), 131-32.

visible church is the historical outworking of the ideal church. This point is necessary to press under the heading of the local congregation for two reasons. First, because there have been and are those who maintain that the local congregation is either primary or that there is no church of all the elect, but that the general visible church is at best a mere *post rem* abstraction. However, we should call to mind Calvin's statement "we call by the name of 'the church' *the entire multitude* of men scattered *throughout the world*, who profess to worship the one God and Christ."²⁹ Second, however, it must be kept always in mind that the universal church is *made visible* as it assembles, which assemblies take place in times and locations that we characterize as local congregations.

The universal church spoken of by Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is not a mere conceptualization of men or an abstraction based upon the experience one may have of many local congregations. Properly understood, it is the church of God *as seen by men's judgment*. But men only see the church as it assembles locally for worship or for other ecclesiastical functions such as ordinations, judgments, and writing of confessions. Thus while it is certainly true that the visible church consists of the whole multitude throughout the world who profess the true religion, it is also true that they are *seen* as visible only as they assemble. Those assemblies are — by the very nature of what an assembly is — local congregations.

When this writer, then, speaks of either the universal church or the local church as the *primary* outworking historically of the ideal church in the mind of God, the question he is addressing is not one of church government, for it may be that several congregations may send delegates to form a classis or synod of congregations. Neither is the question addressed whether a classis or synod has authority to plant local congregations. Both of those questions are important questions of church government, to be sure. Nor are they questions of no concern at all

to this dissertation. But they are not the questions presently before us.

The question of the relationship between the local congregation and the universal or general church arises because Scripture uses the same term for both. Just as Scripture sometimes uses the term "church" to refer to all those throughout the world who call upon Christ as Savior, so also do we find in Scripture use of the same term to refer to the local assembly. "Church" sometimes signifies a body of those who profess the Lord Jesus Christ and their children *in any particular place* (see references above) and this local manifestation of the universal church is called "the church" with as much authority as is the universal church. The church of God, then, is one and universal. But the church of God is also many and local. As with the visible and invisible distinction, we do not speak properly of two churches, but of a local *manifestation* of a universal ingathering that is continuing to take place *in time and over time*.

It is thus necessary to speak of local congregations not as independent existences; not as totally complete in themselves without any reference to any other congregation in the catholic (universal) church. Nevertheless, the biblical use of the terminology does not allow us to define the local congregation as merely a *part* of the church or even as a *branch* of the church. Though that language is common when men speak of various denominations, the Scriptures do not speak of the local assemblies in that manner. The Westminster "Form of Presbyterial Church Government" refers to local assemblies as *members* of the general church visible and that is probably the best way to think of it.³⁰ The Scriptures, in fact, emphasize the fact that each assembly does have a functional completion and unity in itself. Paul therefore was able to say of the Corinthian church that by God's grace they were enriched in everything and came behind in no gift (First Corinthians 1:4-9). While overstating the case for the local congregation somewhat, Louis Berkhof maintained, "Every local church is a complete church of Christ, fully equipped with

²⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.i.7. Emphasis added.

³⁰ "Of the Church," *Confession*, 398.

everything that is required for its government. It has absolutely no need of it that any government should be imposed upon it from without.”³¹

It is an unhealthy state of affairs for a Christian not to be an active member of a local congregation. It is *through* the local congregation that the church manifests itself to the Christian and it is by participation in the local assemblies that the Christian shows himself to be faithful to Christ. There may be times when the church is less visible that a Christian will not be able to take part in a local assembly because there is none that shows the marks of the true church (regarding which see below in this chapter). However, such times are both rare and dangerous. Apart from active participation in a local congregation a Christian’s faith will become lopsided and anemic.

At the same time it must necessarily be acknowledged that not every Christian will be or can be a member of some particular congregation. The Eunuch who was baptized by Philip was a member of no discernible local congregation, yet he was in the general visible church as his baptism attested. Likewise it may be that a person in some remote location apart from the ministry of any local congregation may be converted through the reading of Scripture or of a gospel tract or of a radio broadcast or some similar means. Or it may be that imprisonment, shipwreck, banishment, or some other circumstance might prevent him from joining a local congregation. It is impossible to deny that such a one is altogether divorced from the visible church, though he is quite low in visibility, being alone. A person in such circumstances, it should be said, is *fit* to join a local congregation and if it were possible *ought* to join one. But so long as he is isolated from any local assembly we deny that he is part of a local congregation though we do not deny but rather affirm that he is a part of the general visible church.

This consideration forces the conclusion that while particular congregations are members of the general visible church, they do not *exhaust*

the membership of the general visible church. A person is not made a part of the general visible church *by virtue of* his participation in a local congregation. Nor is it always the case that one who professes the true religion will be circumstantially enabled to be a part of a local congregation. Thus we see that there is not an absolute identity between the membership of the general visible church and the aggregate membership of all local congregations. But the general visible church is visible *in context of* the local congregations that are members of it. It becomes necessary at this point to attempt to reconcile this seeming logical difficulty (an epistemological problem).

As James Bannerman, the nineteenth century Free Church of Scotland scholar, well observed: “If all professing Christians throughout the world could meet together in one place, and join in the observance of ordinances in one assembly, they would form a visible society in the strictest sense of the term *one*,--being united among themselves, and separated from the rest of mankind by the profession of a common faith, and by fellowship in the same outward solemnities.”³² Thus if the multitude of men who make up the visible church universal were *not* scattered over the face of the earth but lived in one locality with a facility large enough to hold them all, there would be no epistemological distinction between the local congregation and the universal church. Bannerman continued, “The separation, then, of the congregations of this visible Church from each other by distance of place, by difference of language, by varieties of administration, by different modes of worship and different outward observations, is a separation accidental and not essential, and cannot affect the fact of that higher unity that belongs to them as knit together in the bond of an external covenant.”³³ Of course this idea can be seen most clearly if we consider the church on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter two. Acts 2:1, speaking of all believers alive on

³¹ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 589.

³² J. Bannerman, *op. cit.*, I.41. Emphasis is in original.

³³ *Ibid.*, 45. This dissertation takes some exception to Bannerman’s phrase “external covenant.” A better phrase in this writer’s opinion, would be “knit together in the external bonds of the covenant.”

the earth at that time,³⁴ states “they were all with one accord in one place.” Granted the fact that very soon men “out of every nation under heaven” would be converted and then presumably some of them would return to their original homes (verses 5ff.), at the moment of time spoken of in verse one the entire church alive on earth met together in one place. The single existing local congregation of Christ’s church was co-extensive, as far as is known, with the church catholic.

As God’s Spirit called others to him that day, “they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (verses 41-42). Ignoring for the time being those who may have returned to their respective provinces after the celebrations of Pentecost were past (verses 9-11), there continued *in Jerusalem* a great number of people who formed the membership of the church at Jerusalem. Even though they lived in the same city or its environs, yet they were too numerous to form a single local congregation. Still, verse 47 informs us that “the Lord added to *the church* daily such as should be saved.” The newly saved were not added to “the churches,” but to “the church.”

Yet, in spite of the fact that verse 47 clearly refers to all the believers as “the church,” they met not only in the temple but also broke bread “from house to house.” The phrase “from house to house” has led some to conclude that what is spoken of in verse 46 must be the private meals eaten in private homes (or at least social meals of a few eaten in private homes). Matthew Henry, however, came closer to the truth in this writer’s opinion in his comment on verse 46. Henry commented,

“They frequently joined in the ordinance of the Lord’s supper. They continued in the breaking of bread, in celebrating that memorial of their Master’s death, as those that were not ashamed to own their relation to, and their dependence

³⁴ Of course there may have been others in other parts of the world whose existence was not reported by the Spirit — but we have no knowledge of that since no such thing has been disclosed.

upon, Christ and him crucified.... They broke bread from house to house; *kat’ oikon* — house by house; they did not think fit to celebrate the eucharist in the temple, for that was peculiar to the Christian institutes, and therefore they administered that ordinance in private houses, choosing such houses of the converted Christians as were convenient, to which the neighbors resorted; and they went out from one to another of these little synagogues or domestic chapels, houses that had churches in them, and there celebrated the eucharist with those that usually met there to worship God.”³⁵

Similarly, the Westminster delegate John Lightfoot claimed, “*breaking of bread*, in these places we are now upon, must not be understood of their ordinary eating together, but of the Eucharist; which the Syriac interpreter does render so in express terms: a parallel to which we have in I Cor. x.16; Acts xx.7.”³⁶ The present author would add that not only is the idea of “breaking bread” an ecclesiastical idea in Acts 2:46, so too is the phrase “from house to house.”

At this point we must recall to mind that the eldership of the synagogue was known as the *beth din* or house of justice (judging). The very synagogue itself was called by the Jews (and continues to the present day) their *beth kneset* or house of assembly. Further, as the synagogue was the place of worship for the covenant community it became known as the *beth tephillah* or house of prayer. Accordingly, while it may very well be the case that the earliest Christian meetings were held in private homes, that is not the significance of the breaking of bread taking place from house to house. The early Christians regarded the assemblies in which they administered the Lord’s Supper to be their Christian synagogues.³⁷ By the end of the second chapter of Acts, then, a single *beth kneset*³⁸ had

³⁵ Matthew Henry, *op. cit.*, 6.28. Emphasis is in original.

³⁶ John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989 reprint of Oxford Univ. 1859 edition), 4.36. Emphasis is in original.

³⁷ See, too, James 2:2 where the Greek reads, “*ean gar eiselthe eis ten sunagogen humon.*”

³⁸ See Acts 2:2, “it filled all the house where they [120 strong] were sitting.” Not only could my private dwelling not accommodate 120 people, neither could the sanctuary of the church I pastor.

become an undisclosed plurality of them.³⁹ In Acts 5:42 the same idea of a plurality of Christian synagogues is held forth to us. Though the English phraseology of Acts 5:42 is somewhat different from Acts 2:46, the Greek phraseology of *kat' oikon* is identical. They were not simply teaching and preaching Jesus Christ in private homes considered as such. Rather they were teaching and preaching Jesus Christ in the Christian assemblies, whether those assemblies were taking place within the walls of private homes or elsewhere.

In a similar vein, the book of Acts informs us of an official persecution carried out against “the church which was at Jerusalem” in Acts 8:1ff. At Acts 8:3 the Scripture informs us that Saul (later to be known as Paul) “made havoc of the church, entering into every house,...” Note the use of the singular term “church,” along with the distributive idea of “every house.” In order to hale the Christians into prison, Saul entered *kata tous oikous*. While it is linguistically possible that Scripture is reporting that Saul sought out the private dwellings of Christians in this passage, what is far more likely is that he entered the Christian assemblies *as they took place* and caught the Christians “red-handed,” so to speak. Note carefully how Saul, but as the converted Paul, related this very incident to King Agrippa: “which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests;⁴⁰ and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft *in every synagogue*, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities” (Acts 26:10-11).

It is important that we approach “an argument from silence” with great care and not build something out of a non-statement such as, “Paul did not say he was not persecuting Christians in

the public baths, so he must have been doing it.” Such an argument would, of course, be fallacious. What follows is not that sort of argument. Rather, what we have is an *implication* that arises by good and necessary consequence by comparing two passages of Scripture that relate the same event. Luke explains to his readers in Acts 26 by way of Paul’s explication what he intended for us to understand by *kata tous oikous* in Acts 8:3. Paul’s silence regarding private homes in Acts 26:10-11 is an “eloquent silence” for two reasons: first he described the methodology by which he carried out his fury on the church in Acts chapter eight and that fury involved persecuting the church in every synagogue (*kata pasas tas sunagogas*), though no synagogues are *apparently* mentioned in Acts 8:1ff. Second, the synagogue was known to the Jews of that day as well as this as the *beth kneset* or *house of assembly*. Thus we find that while mention of the local synagogue (or local congregation) is *apparently* missing in Acts 8:1ff., the two passages mesh perfectly (cohere) *if* we understand the “house” of Acts 8:3 to be the same place spoken of as the “synagogue” in Acts 26:11. This also fits with Christ’s own prophecy in Matthew 10:17, “They will deliver you up to the councils [literally “to the Sanhedrin” *sunēdria* or “synod”] and in their synagogues they will scourge you.” This same phraseology is borne out in Acts 20:20, where Paul taught “publicly, even from house to house,” or *demosia kai kat' oikous*. There is no reason from the phrase “from house to house” to suppose that Paul was conducting tutoring sessions in private homes. Given the language of both the Old Testament and the New Testament, however, there is good reason to suppose that Paul was teaching in the public meeting houses.

A further indication that the early Christians thought of their local congregations as Christian synagogues is found in First Corinthians chapters five and six. Chapter five of First Corinthians will be dealt with further in the section on the church as the representative eldership later in this chapter. For now we turn our attention to First Corinthians chapter six. Paul was alarmed that the Corinthian believers,

³⁹ Though the Greek *kat' oikon* utilizes the singular form of the noun, it is nevertheless idiomatically distributive. Thus “from house to house” is an excellent translation of the idiom and preserves the implication of a plurality of synagogues.

⁴⁰ See *The Pattern in the Heavens Part One: Ecclesiology*, Chapter Four for a discussion of the authority of the ecclesiastical courts in Old Testament Israel.

who lived in a godless society with unjust laws, preferred going to the wicked to settle their disputes rather than having them adjudicated by those in the church who knew, submitted to, and practiced the righteousness of God's law. Paul seems in this passage to regard the eldership of the local congregation as a sort of Christian *beth din*. Significantly, Paul was not referring to criminal activity that would properly have come before the Corinthian magistrates.

Of course, modern day antinomians and libertines are quite fond of quoting this passage, but their reason for doing so is corrupt. They want to commit their criminal actions without fear of reprisal. If they can keep a Christian from taking them to the civil magistrate, they believe that few churches would do anything toward them but shrug their ecclesiastical shoulders. This is one reason why church sessions must be willing to pronounce excommunication against the recalcitrant offender. "If he neglect to hear the church let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matthew 18:17). But there is nothing at all inconsistent about taking a heathen or publican before the ungodly magistrate for justice because the heathen or publican (remember that the publican worked for the heathen Roman government) regarded the justice of the wicked. Thus if one refuses to hear God's *beth din* in the local congregation where he will be treated with reclaiming mercy, the *beth din* should turn him over to Satan for destruction of the flesh so that the spirit may be saved in the day of Jesus Christ.

Paul expressed surprise to such a degree in First Corinthians chapter six that we could fairly describe him as outraged at the situation. Brethren who trespassed against one another were taking their complaints to the *wicked* rather than to the *beth din* of the local congregation. Rome had removed most jurisdiction from the local synagogue of Palestine and placed it in the hands of Roman governors (Matthew 27:2; John 19:15; etc.). Because of Roman interference, the synagogue's *beth din* had been reduced for all practical matters to what amounted simply to voluntary arbitration. The only power of enforcement that the synagogue had, then, was

reduced to its moral influence. The moral influence of the eldership of the synagogue was therefore paramount. In the Jewish synagogue, the elders of the synagogue would be seen as naturally the most qualified in the community to arbitrate disputes between members of the synagogue. The title of such men, as Chapter Four of this dissertation shows, was that of "wise men" (*chokmim*). Not only did their judgment carry great weight within the Jewish community, their judgments were also useful in preventing civil litigation when Jews lived in heathen nations (i.e., outside Palestine).⁴¹

No doubt it was to this synagogue arrangement that Paul referred when he warned the Corinthian Christians in First Corinthians 6:1 against going to court before the heathen rather than before the *beth din* of the local congregation. The church at Corinth arose originally from the Jewish synagogue in Corinth (Acts 18:8ff.) and Paul chided them in his epistle for failing to do as the synagogue did. Paul's astonishment is on the surface of his rhetorical question: "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?" Paul seems near bewilderment as he considers that these Corinthians were "telling it to the heathen" rather than "telling it to the church." Paul went on to ask the Corinthians, "is it so that there cannot be found among you one wise man" (*sophos oudē eis--i.e., not one chakham or "wise one"*) "who shall be able to decide between his brethren, but brother goeth to law with brother, and that before unbelievers" (First Corinthians 6:5-6; cp. Acts 18:4-8). Paul believed that the local congregation of Christians should behave themselves as the synagogue would do in a similar circumstance.

These passages and considerations taken together demonstrate that the local congregation, in many respects, grew out of the synagogue. The local congregation, therefore, can be seen to sustain a relationship to the universal church that is not totally dissimilar to the relationship that the synagogue had to the entire nation of

⁴¹ D. Bannerman, *op. cit.*, 147.

Israel.⁴² The existence of separate congregations throughout the whole world does not imply schism in the church of Christ. In order for a true schism to exist, there must be some violation of some of the scriptural bonds of unity.⁴³ However, the mere existence of separate or distinct congregations (local congregations) is not, in itself, a sign of schism. There have, in fact, been distinct congregations of the Lord's church since shortly after Pentecost in Acts chapter two, and even long before that if we look back with an eye to the synagogue. Some separation in the body of Christ is due to weakness and sin in Christians who make up the church; another part of the separation in the body of Christ is due to the essential character of a church as local and particular.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, where schism *does* exist, it is by its definition, the result of the wickedness of those who are in a church. As Bannerman correctly observed, "That can be no light offense which gives to the one kingdom of God in this world the appearance of a kingdom divided against itself, and liable to fall.... [F]or parties to separate wantonly, and on insufficient grounds, from the communion of the visible Church, is a grave and serious offense against the authority of Christ in His house."⁴⁵

This understanding of the distinction to be maintained between the local congregation and the general or universal church is also helpful to understanding the indefectibility of the church. The indefectibility of the church has been discussed somewhat in the chapter on invisibility and will be discussed again below under the subject of the Nicene attributes of the church. Christ promised that the church built upon him

and the Scripture in turn,⁴⁶ refers not to any local church, including the church at Rome. Rather the promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church applies to the universal church.⁴⁷ "The promise of perpetuity, and the fulfillment of that promise in the continual presence of Christ through His Spirit with the Church, belong to it in its character as catholic and not as local."⁴⁸

Not only is it evident that some local assemblies that flourished for a time are now gone; more importantly for our epistemology, Scripture explains how it can be that when Christ promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against his church, the fact is undeniable that there are some local assemblies that are no more. As this dissertation has already observed above, this promise of perpetuity was given not to any particular congregation, but to the church generally. Thus these nearly 2,000 years later the church of Christ does exist. Undeniably the head of the church himself has removed the candlesticks of some particular congregations. The universal church, though at times less visible than at others,⁴⁹ has nevertheless prevailed over the Dragon by the blood of the Lamb and the word of her testimony (Revelation 12:11). The local congregation, by its very nature as a true church of Christ, *must* be a manifestation of the body of Christ or church universal. To the extent that a local congregation fails to express the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, to that very extent it becomes less of a beacon to the truth and may finally even have its candlestick removed by Christ himself (Revelation 2:5).

Moreover, some local congregations and even denominations have so departed from the truth of the gospel as to be no longer churches of Christ but synagogues of Satan.⁵⁰ The buildings may

⁴² Cf. too Matthew 21:43, "therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" and First Peter 2:9, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, *an holy nation*, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

⁴³ Thomas M'Crie, The Unity of the Church (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage, 1989), 95.

⁴⁴ J. Bannerman, op. cit., I.46.

⁴⁵ Ibid., I.48.

⁴⁶ We must understand the phrase "apostles and prophets" in Ephesians 2:20 to refer to their inspired writings and not to their persons or even to their offices.

⁴⁷ Of greatest significance is the fact that Christ's death was unable to prevail against his church, as he demonstrated by his resurrection. Subsequently, however, we see that promise further fulfilled in his abiding with his church to the end of time (cf. Matthew 28:18-20).

⁴⁸ J. Bannerman, op. cit., I.51.

⁴⁹ As, for example, during the centuries just prior to the Reformation there was a significant decrease in visibility for the church.

⁵⁰ WCF XXV.5, Confession, 109.

still stand, to be sure. There may be a certain antiquity to the organization or institution, but it is not founded upon Christ the Rock and is therefore none of his. As we shall see later in this chapter, the preaching of the true gospel is the irreducible mark of a true church — the *sine qua non*. Thus the Reformers, with a remarkable unanimity, declared that any so-called church that preaches a false gospel is a false church. Further, as historicists, they applied Revelation chapter eighteen to false churches generally and to Rome particularly, such that they believed rightly that Christians have a duty before the Lord to separate from apostate communions. “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities” (Revelation 18:4b-5).

Thus we consider the causes of divisions in the church of Christ and are humbled in the dust for our sins. To think that those who proclaim a doctrine of reconciliation cannot be reconciled among themselves; that those who declare peace have become the occasion of such discord is to realize what a stumbling and offense our bickering has become. These are genuine concerns and should bring forth mourning and fasting from all genuine believers. And yet the result of so much needless division and separation over trifles as exist in the church today has also given rise to an even greater evil: latitudinarian evangelicalism.

Thomas M’Crie was a founding minister in the Constitutional Associate Presbytery of Scotland in 1806. M’Crie’s advice is as lively and apt today as it was then:

Mournful as the divisions in the church are, and anxious as all its genuine friends must be to see them cured, it is their duty to examine carefully the plans which may be proposed for attaining this desirable end. We must not do evil that good may come; and there are sacrifices too costly to be made for the procuring of peace with fellow Christians.

Is it necessary to remind you, that unity and peace are not always good, nor a sure and

infallible mark of a true and pure church? We know that there is a church that has long boasted of her catholic unity notwithstanding all the corruptions which pollute her communion; and that within her pale the whole world called Christian once enjoyed a profound repose, and it could be said, ‘Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language.’ It was a union and peace founded in ignorance, delusion, implicit faith, and a base subjection to human authority; and supported by the arts of compulsion and terror.

But there are other methods by which Christians may be deceived, and the interests of religion deeply injured, under the pretext or with the view of uniting its friends. Among these I know none more imposing, nor from which greater danger is to be apprehended in the present time, than that which proceeds on the scheme of principles usually styled latitudinarian.

It has obtained this name because it proclaims an undue latitude in matters of religion, which persons may take to themselves or give to others. Its abettors make light of the differences which subsist among religious parties, and prepare to unite them on the common principles on which they are already agreed, in the way of burying the rest in silence, or of stipulating mutual forbearance and charity with respect to everything about which they may differ in opinion or practice....

These plans are more or less dangerous according to the extent to which they are carried, and the errors or abuses which may prevail among the parties which they embrace. So far as it is agreed and stipulated that any truth or duty shall be sacrificed or neglected, and that any error or sin shall be treated as indifferent or trivial, the essence of latitudinarianism is adopted, room is made for further advancements, and the way is prepared for ascending, through successive generations, to the very highest degree in the scale.⁵¹

More will be said in subsequent *Blue Banners* concerning the interconnectedness of the church, because it is in its interconnectedness that the

⁵¹ M’Crie, *op. cit.*, 106-14.

eye of man can see much of the unity of the church.⁵² Yet we must conclude from not only M'Crie, but also the very Reformation itself, that interconnectedness is a *demonstration* of unity, not a *means* to unity. If local assemblies are not agreed in the Christian faith; if they have differing judgments; if they are not of the same mind in the things of Christ then interconnectedness is a façade at best and dangerous to the true faith at worst. The unity of the church is demonstrated primarily as the local assemblies “all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (First Corinthians 1:10).☞

The Acts of the Apostles

The first generation after the resurrection of Christ saw the most explosive church expansion of all time, and they left us a manual, *The Acts of the Apostles*, to give us instructions on how to follow *their* model for church growth. Yet today in our modern churches, too many believe they have discovered a better, more “seeker friendly” way to build churches. In a day when everyone is talking about church growth, it is strange indeed that few are studying the manual left for us by the most successful church planters in history. This series examines those biblical methods of church growth. Each sermon is available for \$2.50 each or in groups of 6 for \$10.00.

- 941016A Introduction To Acts
- 941030A Waiting For The Spirit Part 1
- 941106A Waiting For The Spirit Part 2
- 941113A Pentecost: The Event
- 941120A Pentecost: An Explanation
- 941127A Pentecost: The Effect
- 941204A Christ Centered Evangelism
- 941211A Christ Centered Preaching
- 941218A Satanic Opposition: Within & Without
- 941225A Satanic Opposition: Intensified
- 950101A Satanic Opposition: Distraction & Division
- 950108A Stephen's Teaching And Effects
- 950115A Philip's Ministry 1: Samaria
- 950205A Philip's Ministry 2: The Ethiopian Eunuch
- 950212A Conversion Of Paul
- 950219A Firstfruits Of The Gentiles 1
- 950226A Firstfruits Of The Gentiles 2:
- 950305A Firstfruits Of The Gentiles 3
- 950312A Greek Mission At Antioch

- 950319A Opposition In Jerusalem
- 950326A First Missionary Journey 1
- 950402A First Missionary Journey 2
- 950416A First Missionary Journey 3
- 950423A First Missionary Journey 4:
- 950514A First Missionary Journey 5:
- 950521A Resolving Conflict In Council 1: The Issue
- 950528A Resolving Conflict In Council 2: The Method
- 950604A Resolving Conflict In Council 3: The Outcome
- 960121A Mission In Macedonia 1: Calling
- 960128A Mission In Macedonia 2: Conversion Of Lydia
- 960204A Mission In Macedonia 3: A Slave Girl's Deliverance
- 960211A Mission In Macedonia 4: Jailhouse At Midnight
- 960225A Mission In Macedonia 5: Departure From Philippi
- 960317A The Gospel At Thessalonica
- 960324A Preaching In Berea
- 960331A Paul At Athens 1
- 960414A Paul At Athens 2
- 960428A Many People In Corinth Part 1
- 960505A Many People In Corinth Part 2
- 960512A Bold Eloquence
- 960526A Certain Disciples In Ephesus
- 960721A Confusing & Converting God's Enemies
- 960728A Idolaters' Riot
- 960804A Reviewing Paul's Methods
- 960825A A Meeting In Troas
- 960901A Elders At Ephesus
- 960915A Paul's Journey To Jerusalem
- 960922A Paul's Arrest
- 961103A Paul's Testimony Before The People
- 961110A Opposition Of Jew And Gentile
- 961124A Resurrection's Trial
- 961201A Paul Before Felix
- 970105A Paul And Festus
- 970112A Paul And Agrippa
- 970119A Paul At Sea
- 970126A From Melita To Rome
- 970202A Paul's Last Word

Rebuilding Jerusalem's Walls

This is a new six part series studying Nehemiah's methods as he went about biblically to rebuild the walls of the Church of God in his day. What is the first step toward the goal of building a godly church? Who are the enemies one will face within and without the church? What obstacles must be avoided and what methods does one use to encourage others to join the battle? What role does prayer play in church building? The book of Nehemiah is filled with practical examples of the proper way to build a church. 6 tape series in album binder \$15.95.

⁵² The practical outworking of this interconnectedness will be discussed in volume two of this work, *The New Covenant Temple*, hopefully forthcoming in late 2000 or early 2001, D.V.

Implications of Repentance

This is an edited transcript of the morning sermon at FPCR for November 27, 1999. The tragedy referenced is that of the collapse of the Aggie bonfire at Texas A&M University on November 18, 1999. Twelve students were killed. This sermon is part of the ongoing series on the book of Hebrews.

By Rev. Richard Bacon

Implications of Repentance



I began last week looking at that portion of Hebrews 6:1 that speaks of the foundational doctrine of repentance from dead works. You may remember that we looked at that time at what dead works are, and then secondly, we looked at the beginnings of what it is to repent from dead works. We saw that repentance affects man's judgment, his understanding, his will, his affections and his conversation (that is, his course of life and behavior). Because of that, we say that it affects therefore the whole man. It doesn't affect simply some small portion of who we are. It is not a doctrine that we give a nodding agreement, and then place in our back pockets. Rather it is a doctrine that stays with us throughout our Christian life — if we are truly converted.

Now, later on in this same chapter, the author will suggest that there may be some who are reading his letter who are not converted. He tells how one is able to tell — when the rain of God's word comes down upon the soil of your life, what comes out? What's been planted? If God has planted the seed of his word then you are going to see fruit of the Spirit, thirty, sixty, and a hundred fold. If on the other hand, weeds and thistles and thorns — things associated with the curse — if they've been planted in your life, then when the word of God waters them, briars and brambles will come forth from your life.

There is an organization — I'm not inclined to call them more than that — called Promise Keepers. Let's start off commending people for the name — much better that they should be promise *keepers* than promise *breakers*. There

are already enough promise breakers. One of the things that makes the Promise Keepers so attractive is that they present Christianity as a sort of spiritual football game. They confuse the two things. They present Christianity as though it were a rah-rah sporting event that you can do one day a week and then go home and forget everything but the score. That is one thing that has made Promise Keepers as popular amongst men as it is. Men get to sit on benches and act silly for an hour. Then they call that "being manly." I wish to take issue with that whole approach to Christianity. I put it to you, that until such time as we begin to hear the doctrine of repentance preached from the pulpits of this land, there will not be *any such thing* as "manly Christianity." What we suffer from today is the feminization of the Church, and the feminization of the Church means this: we have turned Christian doctrine into a serving up of sentimental junk food. We have turned the steak of God's word into the marshmallow creme of man. We have taken the pure meat of God's Word and made it milky enough to appeal to the most worldly of individuals. Until such time as we hear the doctrine of repentance again proclaimed from the pulpits of this land, we will continue to be deluged by the easy believism of worldly Christianity. I realize that is an oxymoron. I know that there is no such thing as "worldly Christianity." You cannot serve both God and mammon. You cannot be a friend of the world and a friend of God (James 4:4). And yet that is precisely what the Church wants today. I put it to you that if men want to be the men of the Church; if men really want to stand up on their hind legs and develop a backbone; that they need

to learn the doctrine of repentance, and they need to teach it to their families.

I began to speak to you last week about the doctrine of repentance. No, you will not hear me standing in front of Texas Stadium or the Cotton Bowl, talking to a gang of men who are so carried away by their emotions that they can do nothing but clap and shout and stamp their feet. Repentance begins mentally, not emotionally. Do the emotions follow? Amen. The emotions follow if they are properly attuned to the Word of God. There is nothing bad about emotions; we have to remember however, that just as there is a proper relationship between men and women, so is there also a similar relationship between the understanding and the affections — the emotions. That is a relationship of submission. The emotions must submit to the understanding. When you have the understanding submitting to the emotions, I put it to you, you are going to end up every time with the feminization of Christianity — the feminization of the Church. To deny the emotions altogether, however, is to deny much of what a man is. Therefore we must not deny emotions, men, any more than we would deny our wives — we love our wives. And we ought to also love our emotions, as God has given them to us to move us.

This week there was a tragedy within half a days drive from here, down at College Station, at the campus of Texas A&M. They were building their bonfire, which some of you know, Aggies have been building for longer than any of us here have been alive. How many of you were reminded as you read about that tower, of Luke 13:1-5? I want us to not only look at the question asked by Christ but also at the answer that he gave; because the answer that he gave is a significant part of what we understand repentance to be. Repentance is not the *cause* of salvation, but it is the *door* through which God always brings us to salvation.

In Luke chapter 13, the first five verses:

There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that

these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things?

Here's what he's asking. 'Do you really think that they deserved this affliction more than anybody else? Do you suppose that God only allows such things to happen to the worst in society? This is also a question we ought to be asking ourselves as we consider the tragedy that took place at College Station. Jesus answers it for them: "Nay." The short answer, 'No, they weren't the greatest sinners.' But he said, "but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen," — the death toll currently of the Texas A&M tragedy is 'only' twelve — "upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?" Do you suppose God only killed the twelve greatest sinners in Texas? Do you think that's what happened? 'No,' Jesus, said, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Here's what I want you to understand, because this is what Christ wants us to understand. Repentance is a life and death issue. We can understand children -- and that's what they were, eighteen, nineteen, twenty-one year old children -- we can understand them falling from scaffolding, falling from logs that were stacked up fifty feet into the air, that is three to five stories into the air. We can understand how that brings death, and we can understand the tragedy of it all. It's hard to for us to get our minds around it I grant you, but nevertheless, it is something that we can understand. We can react to that can we not? I hope even with tears in our eyes! But Jesus said that's not the most important thing for you to be thinking about. The most important thing for you to be thinking about is that you are standing on a tower that is far more fragile than that tower in College Station. Yes, it was about to burst into flame. Had they climbed off, that tower would have burst into flame within a week; that was their intention. We too, as we go through our lives, must remember that apart from God's grace, apart from the grace of repentance, we too are about to be cast into a fire that there is no quenching. The bonfire at College Station would eventually burn itself out; the fire into which

some will be cast at the end of their days, there is no quenching.

So do you see how Jesus brings home for us in the affairs of life — tragic affairs of life, yes — that basic gospel duty: that first of all gospel duties, which is repentance from dead works. It is the *sine qua non* of Christianity. It is that grace without which there are no other gospel graces. It is the first gospel grace from which other gospel graces spring, because repentance always has with it the element of faith.

Last time we noted that repentance involves the whole man — the understanding, the will, the judgment, the affections, and our actions. This morning I want us to look at several implications arising from the fact that the whole man is affected in repentance. I want us to contrast what Paul calls a worldly sorrow, with true repentance, with that repentance that is the hallmark of life.

Here's the doctrine: "The repentance of the Christian, which we shall refer to as true repentance, and the repentance of the hypocrite differ in essence though they may have several similarities in appearance."

True repentance and worldly sorrow differ in essence, in their being, in what they are, even though outwardly they may look alike. So we have to pierce beyond the outward appearance. We have to look at what something is as the Bible defines it rather than simply looking at the outward appearance of it. Now, here's the thing I need to warn each of you about before we ever begin: No one else can do this for his neighbor. Each of you must do it on his own, or her own. Not that I'm interested in being politically correct. But neither do I want you ladies to think because I've spoken about manly religion, that this somehow excludes you. Oh no, it doesn't.

True repentance has these *seven* qualities. We're going to look at what the Bible says about repentance; we're not going to have a pep rally. That's not what we're here for; we're not here to get stamp our feet, we're not here to run to the front of the aisles; we're not here to cry, although it wouldn't hurt some of us to shed a few tears about our sins.

1. *Repentance is free.* It is voluntary. Nobody extorts it from you. Nobody stands over you with a club about to beat you in the head if you don't repent. It's not extorted by another. How many of you parents have had an experience with your children where you begin to call them to repentance for some deed that they've done, and finally after taking away of many layers of excuses and many layers perhaps even of lies, you finally are able to extract from them a confession of what they have done? That's just the *opposite* of a free confession. True repentance is free in that it is voluntary. Have you ever been at the source of a spring fed creek or spring fed lake? The water comes gushing out. It may be a trickle, but you don't have to *pump* it. But you've been on that farm where you have to pump, and pump, and pump, and finally some water comes out of the spigot. After it's been primed; after the air has been evacuated from the pipes; then finally you get some water from the pump. The difference is this: one is free and voluntary; one comes forth of its own. The other has to be forced out from the wrong side. In true repentance our confession of sin gushes, as it were, from the heart that has been changed by God. We don't have to have confession of sin extracted from us; it comes freely and voluntarily. And so we find some examples in Ezra (9:8-11).

And now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem. And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken thy commandments, Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, etc.

You see, Ezra was rather moved by God's mercy than by extortion. The confession — "we have forsaken Thy commandments" — flows freely.

And so also Nehemiah in chapter nine, and Daniel in chapter nine, three important nines — Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9, Daniel 9, we find true repentant confession of sin. Job also in Job 40, cries out with free confession of his sin. David in Psalm 5. Paul in Acts 26 (9-11) confesses:

I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

What was the question put to Paul? “Thou art permitted to speak for thyself.” And what did Paul tell him? What a sinner he was. It flowed forth freely, like that mountain spring. Agrippa didn’t have to pump Paul to find out what a sinner Paul was. Paul freely confessed his sin. Why? Because Paul was a repentant man. Because Paul knew the gravity of the sins that he had committed against the most high God. He confessed them, not out of pride, but out of shame. You see when there is freeness of mercy as in the case of Ezra, Ezra said, ‘you have been so merciful to us, oh Lord God, you have given us a place in your holy temple. You’ve given us the ability to rebuild the walls of your city, and who are we but a bunch of sinners?’ Free mercies beget free confession. And where there is no free confession: listen, mark it down in your daybook, if there is no free confession of sin, if there is no free repentance from sin, there’s no free mercy either.

So in Hosea 14:1-5

O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy. I will heal their backsliding, I will

love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him.

You see, where there’s free mercy, where God showers mercy upon us, there is also free confession of sin.

2. *True repentance also contains a full confession of sin.* We don’t harbor the little foxes, the little beloved sins, the little pet sins that we would hate to part with. Rather, those who are truly repentant have a full confession of sin as well as a free confession of sin. Nothing held back. (Lamentations 1:18-20a)

The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment: hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity. I called for my lovers, but they deceived me: my priests and mine elders gave up the ghost in the city, while they sought their meat to relieve their souls. Behold, O Lord; for I am in distress: my bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned within me; for I have grievously rebelled.

This is not a matter of God’s people confessing their one or two sins, but rather confessing a whole course of sin, leaving nothing out. And so in Leviticus 26:40ff., and 19:21, there is the necessity of a full confession of sin. If the Israelite would have his sins atoned, if he would have them covered on the day of atonement, if he would have that sacrifice actually be a sacrifice before the Lord, heart religion must accompany those Old Testament sacrifices. As that Israelite laid his hands upon the goat, how many of his sins could he hold back? Only the ones he didn’t want forgiven. Only hold back the sins you don’t want forgiven. Only cover the ones you don’t want to forsake, for they are the ones that God will not forgive. If we want our sins to be forgiven, then there must be a full confession of sins. Now, a word of warning here. We don’t know enough about God’s word, about God’s mind, to be able to tell what is every sin that we commit. As horrid as this sounds, we sin daily in thought, word, and deed. Many times we sin even from ignorance. The fact that it’s from ignorance makes it no less a sin. We must part with the sins that we know, we must confess the sins that we know, and we must ask God to reveal to us

the ones we don't, that we may also confess and forsake them.

In Judges 10:10: "And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim." The children of Israel, because they confessed in such a way that their confession was not only a free confession but a full confession, God heard them. 'Not only have we served the Baalim, we have forsaken our God.' There is a *full* confession.

So David in Psalm 51. Yes, he sinned against Bathsheba. Yes, he sinned against Uriah. But he was able to cry out 'against thee and thee alone have I sinned,' because the sin against God by its enormity was even greater than the murder he committed against Uriah. David also confessed not only the sins of his hands, but also the sins of his heart. 'I didn't slit Saul's throat, but I had my knife within a foot of his throat. It was in my heart to do. Therefore I have sinned against the Lord.'

In 1 Samuel 12:19, "And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king." The implication is not simply that they wanted to have a king; they wanted to have a king instead of the Lord God. The Lord God was the King of Israel. When they asked for a king like the other nations, they were not simply rejecting Samuel. God told Samuel, in fact, that they were rejecting the Lord God. They have added, they said, to all of their other sins, this. That is the *heart* of full confession, of full repentance, that "of all my other sins, I've sinned again."

In Proverbs 30:20, see the denial of a non-repentant person. "Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness." 'There's nothing wrong with that; I don't see anything wrong with it.' 'After all, I didn't plunge a knife into my brother's heart; therefore the fact that I have hated him, that I have lied about him, the fact that I have destroyed his reputation, that's o.k.' 'I've done no wickedness.' 'I've kept the sixth commandment.' And so the adulterous

woman and the Pharisee, the legalist, are siblings, are brother and sister in this: they both deny that they've done any wrong. The adulterous woman in that she wipes off her mouth. 'Where's the evidence?' The Pharisee in that he refuses to apply the law of God to anything but outward actions. The unrepentant person hides, he covers, he denies, but he doesn't forsake.

Many, who for some reason are not ashamed to *do* sins, are nevertheless ashamed to *confess* them. 'Oh, what would people think of me; how could I live it down, if I were to confess fully and freely my sins.' What difference does that make? You weren't ashamed to do them! Why then are you ashamed to confess them? If you know they're so wicked that you should be ashamed to confess, don't you know that you should have been ashamed to have done them?

Here's another thing that we oftentimes do. We are willing to confess the larger sin, without confessing the little sins that led up to that larger sin. 'Oh, I don't know how I got there. I just woke up and there I was in the middle of a sin.' No, that's not what happened. There was attractiveness; there was an allurements. That sin got a hold on your heart somehow. Before it was in your hand, it was in your heart. You may have gone to that adulteress by degrees. But you went. The steps may have been baby steps; but they were steps in the wrong direction. Oh so quick are we to confess that large sin, or the sin in which we may have been caught, without ever confessing the sins that got us there.

We may remember that it has been a little over a year ago now, that the highest executive in our land finally, not freely, not fully, but nevertheless by a sort of legal "pumping," finally confessed to an enormous sin in office. But never did he once confess to the sins that led him there. Never once did he acknowledge that he lied. Never did he say, "I encouraged others in their lies. I lusted in my heart. I created the very circumstances in my office by which that sin might take place. I ignored the counsel of my wife. I ignored the counsel of the wise men of the nation." Was there full and free confession of sin? Was there full and

free repentance? No, what we saw that day in August was the sorrow that works death.

3. *True repentance is cordial.* True repentance is from the heart. It's genuine. It's not lip-repentance. Remember Isaiah's warning about the people in his day. 'This people doth honor with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.' Now days we hear evangelicals talking about the difference between a head knowledge and a heart knowledge. That's not the problem. The problem according to Isaiah and according to Christ, is between the heart and the lips. Lips confess things that simply aren't going on *inside*. And so Hosea, talks about the *calves* of our lips. Many people are willing to give lip service, but they're not willing to give the calves; they're not willing to give the true repentance, the true cordial repentance toward God.

And so in Psalm 51 again,¹ (Psalm 51:12-13): "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness." Is the tongue involved? Yes, by all means. But God would have our hearts *before* he would our mouths. There is such a thing as the heart turning to God while the lips remain silent. But it does no good to turn to God with our lips while our hearts remain far from him. That's hypocrisy. That is the difference between a hypocritical repentance — the sorrow that works death — and a true heart repentance.

You see, a cold, careless, perfunctory, formal, confession of sin, is an abomination. It is to take the name of God lightly, or "in vain." It is simply adding sin to sin. Whatever our previous sins may have been, to bring forth a cold lifeless confession of sin before the Lord God is simply to add a sin against the third commandment to our many other sins. In Jeremiah 12:1-2. "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore

doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit: thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins."

You understand that 'reins' is simply an old word for kidneys. Just as the innermost part of our being, the spiritual man is characterized as our heart, as our mind, sometimes as our understanding; it is also sometimes characterized as our kidneys. And sometimes as our 'gut.' The word that is often translated from the Greek as compassion, comes from the same word from which we get the word viscera — gut, the belly, the gastronomical area of the body. And so we are to call upon God from our belly, from our heart, from our mind, from our kidneys, to call that is, from the inner man. From that part of us that is not *simply* lips. Lips and tongues are not so important to God as our hearts. God would have our hearts. And when he gives repentance, it's cordial repentance, it's heart repentance, it's repentance that has learned to despise the sins from which it repents.

That's why I put it to you — in fact others have said this to you as well — there is no such thing as a Christian having a beloved sin. If a man has a sin that he loves, he is not yet a Christian man. Oh he may have sins with which he struggles repeatedly — he may have sins in which he finds the flesh still has a strength that he didn't take into consideration. There may be times when he is surprised by sin. But there are no sins that he loves. There are no sins that he conspires to have back. No, true repentance is cordial. It's repentance from a heart that has learned to detest its sin.

4. *True repentance is distinct, not confused.* True repentance never has to ask what it did wrong. Now, again, a true confession will not know all the sins that a person has committed. We don't know the Bible well enough yet to know all the sins that we have committed. And yet when we know our sins, it's not just some vague feeling that 'well, everybody's a sinner so I must be one too.' And let me also warn you, that people who repent that way will use that kind of repentance to manipulate you. 'You know you're a sinner so

¹ Let me encourage you, if you want to learn what is repentance and what is the heart of a repentant man, to turn to Psalm 32, and 51, and 79, and learn to sing these psalms as they were written by people who had been turned by the Spirit of God from their sins.

you might be wrong about this. You know you're a sinner so you must have some guilt in this.' Well, good, if I have guilt in this, tell me what it is, so I can repent. Because I can't repent generally. There is no such thing as confused repentance. Repentance is always distinct, repentance always knows that it's the commands of God, the will of God, the precepts of God, the judgments of God, that have been overthrown in his life. And that's why he must repent. In fact, in that chapter of our confession which deals with repentance,² we are told specifically that we are not to rest in a general repentance, but that we are to repent from particular sins particularly. Now what that means is that we have to know our catechism, children! We have to know what each commandment requires and what it forbids. We have to know what God requires and forbids in his commandments because sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God. And so repentance must be tied to our knowledge of God's commandments. If it's not, it's a vague confused general repentance of 'I feel bad about myself.'

Well, it *may* be good that you feel bad about yourself; yet it may *not* be good. If God placed you in a position and gave you the knowledge and wherewithal to rebuke someone his sins and then that person says, 'you should feel bad about that.' Don't buy in! Don't settle for some vague blame shifting. Romans 2:15 tells us specifically, that when unrepentant people are confronted with their sin, their first reaction is to accuse and excuse. 'I don't like the way you brought that up. I don't like the way you said that.' Listen, we *do* want to make the truth as winsome to people as we can. We do want to make the truth as attractive as we can. We do want to make repentance as salutary to people as we can. But at the end of the day, that's not the issue. The issue is that we have raised an accusation of sin in a person's life and they have not responded as a repentant person responds. Now, when you live that principle, you are not invited to teach Dale Carnegie courses.³

² Westminster Confession of Faith XV:5.

³ Some of you are too young to know who Dale Carnegie was. Dale Carnegie used to teach courses on how to win friends and influence people.

A true confession will not content itself with confession of sins in a lump. It wants distinct sins to be able to confess. Look again at Paul's confession in Acts 26. Paul didn't just say, 'Well, you know I was kind of an anti-Christian for a while before I really sought the Lord ...' or 'I used to be a sinner too.' That's not the way Paul confessed his sins. Acts 26:10-11.

Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

He tells us *where* he sinned — "in Jerusalem" — and *who* he sinned *against* — "many of the saints." 'I didn't just offend them, here's *how* I did it.' 'I shut them up in prison.' 'I didn't just 'persecute them; here's how I went about it — I shut them up in prison. I went to people who had greater authority than I did in order to involve them in my sin.' 'And when they were put to death, not only did I not raise a hand to stop it, I said, Amen.' 'I didn't do it once. I didn't do occasionally. I did it *often*.' 'In every synagogue, in every place I could find them, I went after them. I was furious; I was mad with power.'

Do you see that the confession of Paul's sin was not some general, 'yeah, I was a real jerk before I was a Christian. But now, don't you know, you have to forgive me because God did. Don't hold that against me.' No rather, Paul's desire was to show such a difference in his life that people were compelled to forgive him. 'Oh, were these the ones I persecuted; then let me scour the empire for gifts to bring to them in their poverty and affliction.'

It was basically a course on how to manipulate people. The only kind of people that can be manipulated are manipulators. If you're easily manipulated it is because you don't recognize the techniques because you're used to thinking of them as conversation yourself. If you recognize the techniques, so that you can't be fooled by them, *neither should you use them*. You don't fog, you don't mystify, you don't accuse. You don't gunnysack. For an explanation of these, obtain the tape series, 'Speak the Truth in Love.' See the notice for this tape series on page 26.

Was Paul a great sinner? He says because of his persecutions (1 Tim. 1:13) he was the greatest of sinners. But if he would be the greatest of sinners, then he would be the greatest of confessors — the greatest of repenters.

What did King Saul do? Saul held back a few sheep, a few oxen, but he covered his sin. When Samuel came and asked for a full and free and distinct confession of his sins, he said, 'It wasn't me so much as it was the people. And besides that, we did God's will for the most part; it was just a few things we left undone.'

Compare that to David's sin. David committed adultery. He committed murder! Then, look at David's confession. Nathan said to him 'thou art the man,' and it broke David's heart, because it was a regenerate, repentant heart. We then see in Psalm 51 and Psalm 32 David's repentance, the confession of one forgiven his transgressions.

Was David a greater sinner than Saul? On that day he was. But if he would be a great sinner, then as a Christian he would be great confessor; he would be a great "repenter." He would repent of his many sins, of his vile sins, of his odious sins, and he would learn to hate them.

5. *True repentance confesses sins humbly and sorrowfully.* How did the publican confess his sins (Luke 18)? Do not imagine the publican with his hands in his pockets, 'Ah, I'm just a sinner too.' His response was to smite his breast; not because the smiting of the breast is itself indicative of a forgiven person, but it was indicative of the fact that he was genuinely sorry. He was humbled for his sin. He didn't dare look up to heaven, but rather looked down, and simply cried out 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' There was in him a spirit of mourning. Blessed are those who mourn, not because afflictions have overcome them in this life. No, the psalmist indicates there is a Christian virtue in remaining silent in affliction. But there is a sorrow, there is a spirit of mourning. And I know that not all of us have the same degree, level, or the touchstones of emotion. We differ in that just as we differ in our intellect and in our appearance. But if you at least cannot grieve over the fact that you cannot grieve, then there is no repentance.

How callous must one be to say, 'yep, that's a sin all right. I shouldn't have done that,' with no humility of heart, with no sorrow of spirit, with no crying out to God. David wept so over his sins that he said, 'I can't sleep in my bed — it's full of water. I have wet my couch by my tears.' I dare say few of us could have wet a cotton ball by now in our mourning over sin.

The Puritan Joseph Hall put it this way:

And if God spared not the angels, whom He placed in the highest heavens, but for their pride threw them down headlong to the nethermost hell, how much less shall He spare the proud dust and ashes of the sons of men, but shall cast them from the height of their earthly altitude to the bottom of that infernal dungeon! 'Humility makes men angels, pride makes angels devils;' as that father said, Oh let us be humbled by our repentance, that we may not be brought down to everlasting confusion. Let us be cast down upon our knees that we may not be cast down upon our faces. For God will make good His own Word, one way; 'A man's pride shall bring him low.'⁴

Now I didn't say, "in our mourning over getting caught," nor in "our mourning over the dire consequences of sin." We must truly hate our sin because God hates it. The humbled sinner cries out, "I have done that which my Savior has forbidden, and how dare I do it with dry eyes?"

6. *True repentance is always mixed with some measure of faith.* It may be a weak faith; it may be a faith that is not yet ready to tackle giants. But true repentance always, by definition, apprehends something of the mercy of God in Christ. If we are calling out to God because of our sins, but without putting our hearts at his mercy, then we are simply crying out in despair, and not in repentance. Here are some examples of people crying out in despair:

Pharaoh certainly wanted to get rid of those frogs. He didn't mind it being "tomorrow

⁴ Joseph Hall in I.D.E. Thomas, *The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations*.

morning,” but he *did* want to get rid of the frogs. He wanted to get rid of the lice and flies and the river of blood. There was indeed some sorrow over the consequences of sin; but there was no apprehension of the mercy of God in it.

Let me give you yet another example of someone who sorrowed over what he had done, over the miserable sinner that he had made himself. Judas Iscariot cast himself down headlong and hanged himself. Of course he never repented for covetousness. He never repented for being in league with his master’s enemies. And when it came time for him to repent from having sold his Savior, repentance eluded him altogether. The reason he hanged himself was not because he was truly repentant, but because he had the worldly sorrow of the hypocrite. Yes, there are many who are sorrowful unto despair for their sins, yet never apprehend the mercy of God in Christ. They never cast themselves upon Christ for his mercies. ‘Oh, I’m going to do better,’ they say. ‘I can’t do better,’ they say, ‘why try at all.’ Some even say, ‘I can’t do better, why not just end it all.’

Worldly sorrow always works death; it never works life, because it doesn’t apprehend the mercy of God in Christ. Repentance must be mixed with some hope of pardon. And this is what we mean when we talk about waiting for God to show mercy. We don’t mean by waiting for God’s mercy that there are three, seven or ninety-nine steps to conversion. What we mean by waiting for God’s mercy, is thinking, “*now* that I hate my sin, *now* that God has given me some measure of the hatred I ought always to have had for my sin, *now* oh Lord show forth mercy by the bucket. Grant to me forgiveness and assurance of forgiveness *now!*”

7. *True repentance is always joined with true reformation.* Again, in Psalm 51:10, David cried out ‘because you have forgiven me I will teach sinners your ways.’ David would teach sinners not by opening a seminary, but by living the life God called him to live. Again in Proverbs 28:13. ‘Who so covers his sins shall be destroyed. But who so confesses and forsakes them shall be forgiven.’ The confession of the true penitent is always joined with a true turning. The wicked are

double minded, even in their repentance. ‘Yes, I hate it, but, yes, I’m going to do it again.’ ‘Yes, I know God doesn’t like, but I just can’t help it.’ ‘After all Christians are forgiven, not perfect.’

If that is *your* attitude, then you don’t know the first thing yet about repentance. Repentance from dead works, joined with belief in God, is the first, the foundational principle, of the Christian life. It matters little how much you’re in church, or how much you read the Bible. If you have not done these things from a repentant heart, they are not the calves of your lips; but simply lip-service. It’s worthless. It’s without value. If your confession, if your repentance, is not full, free, distinct, humble, sorrowful, cordial, faithful, and accompanied by true reformation, then it’s not biblical repentance. It is that worldly sorrow that works death. I must call upon you, as Christ called upon his hearers in that day in Luke 13, “I tell you nay; except you repent, you shall all likewise perish.” Let us stand and call upon the Lord in prayer. ☞

Don’t Be Manipulated And Don’t Manipulate.

Do you recognize the techniques when they are being used on you...or when you are using them on someone else? What is the biblical teaching on how to communicate with others?


“Speak the Truth in Love”

is our Biblical Institutes 6 tape series which explores the biblical basis for communication between Christians in all relationships; employer/employee, church member/elder, husband/wife. These are doctrines that are taught in Scripture, but very little is ever said about them in the pulpits of today’s churches. Learn to speak properly one with another. Special price of \$12.50 in binder, postage extra. See Order Form on back page.

The Dangers of Dating

This is the second of a four part series on the subject of finding a life partner and the danger and evils of 'dating.' The first part, **Dating: Finding a Life Partner**, appeared in the December 1998 issue of *The Blue Banner*, volume 7, number 12. These four lectures form a part of the 25 tape series, **A Directory for Domestic Duties**, for which see a notice in the advertisements for audio tapes at the end of this issue.

By Rev. Richard Bacon

n the first part of this four part series, we began dealing with how one goes about finding a husband or a wife – a life mate. Last week we studied why this is so important: *once married, forever married*. Once we have made that marriage covenant, once we have made that marriage contract, it is inviolable by us. We must indeed keep the promises we have made to God. Even as the king (Psalm 61) who makes vows must keep those vows, so must everyone who makes a vow before the Lord keep their vows. The only biblical exception is if a maiden makes a vow without her father's knowledge or consent. As soon as the father finds out about the vow, he may annul it. But he has to do it as soon as he finds out about it. If he does not annul it immediately, his silence is regarded as consent. Let us learn from this a further Scriptural principal: when we give silence to anything about which we have knowledge, we have consented. According to our place and stations, we have a responsibility to speak against that which is in error, or that which is wrong, or that which is immoral. We need to remember that this principle applies to us *according to our places and stations*. We must speak in the proper manner and place. Nevertheless, we dare not remain silent in the face of injustice. If we do, we have, by our silence, consented to the injustice.

In part one we began to look at dating — the system used in this country, and throughout the western world, for finding a life partner. The first thing we saw that was wrong with it was that it makes a mockery of parental supervision,

oversight and authority in the lives of young people who are of an age to look for a life's partner. Remember how Rebecca's soul was grieved within her when Esau married women from among the Hittites? Basically, he had begun dating some of the unbelievers in the neighborhood. As a result of that dating, he married with unbelievers. He married with idolaters outside the covenant, and it grieved his mother's heart.

INORDINATE DESIRES

We are going to deal with a second problem this morning, and that is the problem of lust. Lust is an inordinate desire for anything. Lust is when you desire something either more than you ought, or in a way that you ought not. There are perfectly legitimate desires in life. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul spoke of his desire for people to be saved. He spoke of his desire to see people come to the Lord Jesus Christ. He spoke of his desire to preach the gospel — so much so that he said in verse 16, "woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" What a strong desire that is! Unlike the stoics, we do not say that desires are inordinate because they are strong! We ought to have strong passions and strong desires. A desire becomes inordinate — a lust — when it is either for the wrong thing, or it is held by the wrong person, or it is exercised in the wrong way. That is what we mean by an inordinate desire. It is one that is not bounded properly by God's word; one that is outside the ordinances of God.

THE NATURE OF FALLEN MEN AND WOMEN

Why is lust one of the problems with dating to find a mate? It is because men lust for women, and women lust to be lusted after by men. Men are more keyed to the visual. Men are more keyed to what they see. Thus Jesus taught in Matthew 5:28, "But I say unto you, That whosoever *looketh* on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." He has *already committed adultery* with her in his thinking, in his heart. He has already turned it over in his mind; he has already given in to the inordinate desire for her. Job said in Job 31:1, "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?" The lust gets into the heart through the "eye-gate."

Women, on the other hand typically lust to be lusted after. This is one of the things that makes us different. As you look through the animal world, the way God made birds and mammals and so forth, which is usually the more ornate, the more beautiful? All things else being equal, generally speaking, the male is the more ornate of the two. For instance, of the cardinals, the male is the bright red one and the female is the dull brownish-red one. But in the human species, what do women do? They dress themselves up to be the more ornate, do they not? Why? Because it is the nature of women to lust to be lusted after.

TRUE BEAUTY

Why is it that Peter warns women about plaiting their hair and about wearing gold jewelry? It is not because plaited hair or gold is in and of itself evil. In fact, according to Genesis chapter two, the gold of that land was *good*. The reason that Peter dissuades the women from plaiting their hair and wearing gold ornaments and jewelry is because they tend to think of that as beauty rather than thinking of what God calls beauty as beauty. Why is it that we Presbyterians refrain from decorating our walls and putting up statues and making our houses of worship as ornate as do others? It is because we believe that the beauty of holiness is preferred to the 'wanna-be' holiness of beauty. Now, that is not to say that we do not want beautiful things, which we do.

But we need to be careful that they do not become to us an inordinate lust.

FLEE YOUTHFUL LUSTS

In 2 Timothy 2:22, Paul tells young Timothy¹ to flee youthful lusts and follow "righteousness, faith, charity and peace, with them that call on the Lord with a pure heart." In Romans 14:13-14, Paul writes "Let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wontonness, not in strife and envying, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." The main thing that dating does, with respect to inordinate desires of the flesh, is to make provision for the flesh. What is it to make provision for the flesh? Someone who intends to go on a diet, but goes to the bakery and stocks up on cakes and puts some in the refrigerator has made provision to break that diet. And so Paul tells us here not only to flee youthful lusts, but also not to make any provision! Don't stock it up in the refrigerator! Don't put things aside hoping to come back to them later. But what are we doing when we set aside Friday night or Saturday night as date night, when we set aside such time to spend alone with some member of the opposite sex who is not our spouse? We are making provision for the lusts of the flesh.

Note, if it is necessary for us to avoid sin, then it is wise and lawful for us to avoid temptation. We ought to avoid that which tempts us to sin. Do we not pray in the Lord's Prayer that He would not lead us into temptation? And yet, so often, He does not have to lead us into temptation, does He? We find our way there all by ourselves. These verses tell us that we are to avoid sin and we are also to avoid the occasion of sin.

DISHEARTENING STATISTICS

I am not going to go into the details -- just the facts without the details are disheartening

¹ Although Paul refers to Timothy as youthful, Timothy was not some sixteen-year old teenager. Timothy was a mature man. He simply was not as old as some of the men in the church, and compared to Paul he wasn't an old man.

enough. According to both Northwestern University Medical School and Barna research, over half (55%) of *evangelical youth*, have engaged in the sex act by the time they reach age eighteen. Is it any wonder that people cannot see the difference between the church's children and the pagans? Nearly three-fourths of them (74%) have engaged in some level of sexual immorality by the age of eighteen.

Why is that? In part at least, it is because the world's movies, the world's literature, the world's television, the world's songs, the world's radio, the world's culture, are all telling our children that there is nothing wrong with it. In fact, the world claims, that is what love is. Yet, these same movies and literature and television and songs and radio do not warn our children about date rape and about unconsummated sex. And where do such things go on? They go on in cars. And why are that young man and young woman together in a car? Because they are on a date. And it results in fornication, guilt, pregnancy, disease, abortion, estrangement and bitterness.

The Bible does tell us about these things, and that is why we need to follow God's way instead of the way of the world. That is why we need to look to God's Word for instruction on how to find a life partner instead of looking to the world for instructions on how to find a life partner. We know how things end up when we do it the world's way. We have seen that! It ends up in teen pregnancy, it ends up in welfare, it ends up in diseases like AIDS. People are *dying* from this sin! Yet it goes on. And how dare we — *how dare we* — think that our children are somehow different so that they will not be infected by the world when they do things the world's way. That is not faith. That is just plain presumption. It is presuming upon the grace of God.

AWAKEN NOT LOVE BEFORE ITS TIME.

Well, the Bible it seems to me does have the answer. I agree with those Puritan divines who understood the book of the Song of Solomon to have reference to Christ and His bride the church. However, remember that when the Song of Solomon speaks, even in that symbolic way, it does use that language of male and female love.

We can learn much from the Song of Solomon about that subject. Song of Solomon 2:7: "I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the hinds of the fields, that you stir not up nor awake love until it please."² This means: 'Do not stir up or awaken love until it is the right time, until it is the pleasing time, until it is the right time for it to happen.' In Song of Solomon 3:5 it says "I charge you, O ye Daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that ye not stir up nor awake love until it is the right time," – i.e. until it pleases, until it is appropriate, until it is the blessed time. There is almost the same thought repeated in 8:4. Now, whenever a verse like that is repeated almost verbatim three times in the same book, it practically takes on the nature of the theme of the book. We are not to awaken, we are not to arouse, and we are not to stir up the desires of male-female love until it is the right time.

When people date and spend time alone together, is it not the case that love is being awakened, and stirred up? Not just the physical desires, but the emotional and spiritual desires as well. Doug Wilson, the pastor of a Protestant church up in Moscow, Idaho, has said that when a person gives himself or herself to another person emotionally and spiritually, they cannot refrain from giving themselves to them bodily any more than you can unroll the left end of a carpet without unrolling the right end of the carpet. When a man and a woman give themselves to each other emotionally and spiritually, giving of themselves bodily follows as well. So, Solomon here in the Song of Solomon cautions us not to stir up love, not to stir up that feeling, not to stir up that attachment until it is the right time.

As to the statistics mentioned earlier, it behooves to ask how it could happen. They have been taught better, haven't they? Yet they go out and do it in spite of all the good counsel they have received. It happens anyway. How does it happen? Romantic desire is stirred up. A boy and a girl together, alone, unsupervised, untrained, in

² In the King James Version, the word 'my' has been supplied by the translators; it is not there in the original.

the dark, in a traveling bedroom; a bedroom on wheels. That is how it happens.

But the Bible says to flee youthful lusts and to give no occasion to the devil. If it is unlawful for us *to do*, then it is wise for us *to avoid*. We are to avoid that which stirs it up. We should avoid that which stirs up inordinate desires.

MEN: MAKE A COVENANT WITH YOUR EYES

So, keeping in mind the fact that men lust after women, what are men to do? We do as Job did, and we make a covenant with our eyes that we should not look upon a maid. I believe it was Luther who said that temptation is like a bird flying overhead. You cannot help it when a bird flies over, but you can keep it from building a nest in you hair. Yes, from time to time, you will see women who are immodestly dressed, and that is the time to avert your eyes. What became of Joseph and Potiphar's wife when they spent time together alone? It was only because of Joseph's commitment to God that he was able to withstand her seductions. And what did he do? He ran away! He fled youthful lusts. What were they doing? They were spending time together alone. Yet even as righteous as Joseph was, it gave Potiphar's wife occasion to lie about him when he was alone with her. Men, do not spend time alone with young women, or with other men's wives.

WOMEN: DRESS MODESTLY

And also, keep in mind that women lust to be lusted after. Women should watch their clothing; watch their apparel; watch the way they make themselves up. Now, I realize that part of the lust, part of the desire that goes on in a man's heart is biological and part of it is cultural. In certain cultures, because some things are forbidden to be looked at, they are taboo, as it were. Just looking at them causes us to be stirred up. We should avoid anything doubtful. If there is any doubt about it, cover it up. Now, I am not saying that dresses have to be this far off the ground and this far below the knee, and that the preacher and elders need to go around with a tape measure. That would be legalism. I'm suggesting the same kind of thing that Paul said

he would do in 1 Corinthians 9: I'll lay down my liberty rather than cause a brother to stumble. Ladies, that is what I am asking you to do and to teach your daughters to do. Lay down any liberties you may think you have in order to keep a brother from stumbling. That is not unreasonable. Again, if it is doubtful, cover it up. Something that is modest when you are standing up, ladies, may not be modest when you are sitting down. Especially given the height sometimes today of car-seats and so forth, as you are driving down the road, or as you are seated even in a pew, you need to keep modesty in mind.

So, we have talked about spending time together alone, and about immodest apparel. How about idleness? Did you ever stop and think about how your mind wanders and which direction it wanders in when you are idle? My grandmother always said that idle hands are the devil's workshop. Well, that *principle* is in the Bible. When we are not about our callings; when we are not doing the things that God would have us to do, then, as likely as not, we are over here in the area in which we are being tempted. We are not fleeing youthful lusts. One of the worst things that we can have, is time on our hands. It can be so detrimental to us simply because of how our minds work. King David should have been off at war when he was tempted to sin with Bathsheba.

Another thing to avoid is emotional and spiritual involvement with somebody too soon. Again, we cannot give ourselves to someone emotionally and spiritually without other things just following naturally. So, if we avoid that which stirs up lusts we are fleeing youthful lust. And what were those things? No time together alone, no immodest apparel, no idleness, and no emotional and spiritual involvement too soon.

CHOOSING SOMEONE TO LOVE

We do not need to learn everything there is to know about someone before we get married. Here is a personal anecdote. I did not have a parent or church session that was interested in helping me choose a wife. I really did not have many older brothers in the Lord who were interested in counseling me about how to choose a wife either.

So, I know I made some mistakes -- not mistakes in whom I chose but mistakes made in the way I went about doing it. Nevertheless, I want you to think about whether or not God would have you to do something very similar to the approach I took. Once I decided it was time to get married, one of the things that I did was to sit down with a pad and a pencil and write down what it was that I thought God wanted me to look for in a wife. *Then* I spent time observing how the women on campus behaved. I watched to see which women would pick up their tray in the cafeteria and carry it back to the kitchen instead of expecting somebody else to do it for them. I watched to see which ones were dressed modestly. I watched to see which ones were at the events that I thought a sober-minded person should attend, and which ones were absent from those events. In other words, I was looking for an out-working of the qualities that I expected to find: a sober-minded, modest, helpful, humble, and submissive woman. As I saw those things being worked out in several young women's lives, I had a list that I narrowed down from around twelve hundred women to five young ladies. The commitment that I had to my list at that point was that I was willing to marry any of them. Whichever one I married is the one I would love.

Here is the point: *First* you choose who you are going to love, *then* you love the one you chose. Do not become emotionally involved with your choice *before* you make it. Make your choice based on biblical principles. Do not settle for less than God's best. Make that list, know what it is that you are looking for and then observe to see who it is that is living that way. That is a story from my life; it's an anecdote and not Bible. But it certainly is a way of unemotionally — that is, pre-emotionally — selecting someone whom you will then chose to love.

WESTMINSTER LARGER CATECHISM

The Westminster Larger Catechism on the Seventh commandment has some pertinent things to say on this subject.³ The seventh commandment requires not only the preservation

of our own chastity but the preservation of our neighbor's. That means that not only does God require you to maintain your own chastity in body, mind, affection, word and behavior, but also the preservation of it in others. Not only that, but it requires that you shun all occasions of uncleanness, and it requires that you resist all temptations thereunto. "Watchfulness over the eyes, all the senses, temperance, keeping of chaste company, modesty in apparel, marriage by those that have not the gift of constancy, conjugal love, co-habitation, diligent labor in our callings [remember what we said about idleness], shunning all occasions of uncleanness, fleeing youthful lusts, and resisting temptations thereunto." In accordance with the Westminster Larger Catechism, clearly what I have advocated is not at all unusual. The system of dating as the pagans practice it in this country is completely contrary to question 138 of our Larger Catechism, which we understand simply to be an exposition of the requirements of the seventh commandment.

Larger Catechism Question 139 talks about that which is forbidden in the seventh commandment. It forbids unclean imagination. Now it may be that there are people who can go to certain stage plays and movies and look at certain books and pictures and sing certain songs and not have unfruitful, lascivious, unclean imaginations. But I doubt it. We should just avoid these things: Unclean imaginations, unclean thoughts, unclean purposes, unclean affections — even foolish talking and jesting. We are to take ourselves out of situations where these things may prove a temptation. I suppose it is possible that the Westminster Divines had dirty jokes in mind here, the kind of thing men may hear at work. We should just shut our ears to them. We surely do not repeat them, and as much as lies within us, we shut our ears to them. If it is happening at the water cooler, start bringing a thermos of water to work. Shun such things as may cause you to stumble.

WARNING AND ADMONITION TO PARENTS

If those who are past the age where hormones are still surging through their bodies, find it

³ Westminster Larger Catechism 138-139.

difficult because of the lust of the eyes, how much more difficult is it for children, who are going through puberty, who *do* have the various hormones of puberty surging through their bodies at a level that will never be repeated? Parents have a responsibility to keep their children from being stumbled. Jesus said if we let a little one be stumbled, or if we cause a little one to stumble, it were better for us if we had a millstone attached to our necks and we were cast into the sea. It would be *better* for you if that happened. So there is some fate worse than that

in store for those who stumble one of these little covenant children. Parents, when we put our daughters and our sons in that rolling bedroom alone after dark with no supervision, asking them only to be home before midnight, it is hard telling what temptations they will be confronted with before they get home. And we dare not so stumble our children. To keep that from happening, from the very earliest stages, from the very earliest days, raise your children explaining to them that Christians do not find a life partner the same way the world tries to find one. ☞

From Our Readers

Mail and Email from readers of *The Blue Banner*. Dr. W. Gary Crampton responds to some criticism of his review article, *Clark's God and Evil: The Problem Solved*, which appeared in the November/December 1999 issue of the *Blue Banner*.

Letter from JR in Sierra Madre, CA.

Please renew my subscription for a year. Enclosed is \$30.00. The article by Mr. Coldwell on "Christmas" was excellent [September/October 1999]. As a PCA elder to-be, I want to see if I can set this out on our literature table. I'd like to see the whole complex of holy days and will-worship swept away.

Sincerely

JR

Email. Subject: Article by Clark / Is God really the cause of sin?

Dear Mr. Coldwell,

I am writing this to you as the editor of "The Blue Banner."

Your publication has contained much fine material that honors God and I plan to continue to receive it with interest.

However, in my conviction, the article in the November/December 1999 issue entitled "Clark's God and Evil: The Problem Solved," while not containing actual heresy, clearly presents a corruption of the holy doctrine of God's sovereignty.

Your strong interest in doctrinal purity leads me to believe that you will want to seriously examine all evidence against the position you are supporting. I believe that I have plenty and am willing to share it with you.

Here are some questions that I hope will get the ball rolling.

How does Dr. Clark know that the fact that God causes every human action (and He does!) proves that He causes the sinfulness of human actions? Are you aware that Francis Turretin, for example, taught that God incomprehensibly causes one without the other? Is this impossible for God? Is He incapable of acting with such amazing precision?

In James 1:13-14 does temptation refer to the inner inclination to sin? Is the Arndt & Gingrich

lexicon (pp. 87-88) wrong when it affirms that James is rejecting the following idea: "the temptation is caused by God, though not actually carried out by him."

Also, would you please read my letter to "Outside the Camp," which you will find at www.outsidethecamp.org/letters32.htm?

In Christ,

K. F.

P.S. I hope to get a check for the support of the Banner in the mail soon.

Response from Dr. Crampton.

Dear Mr. Coldwell:

I am in receipt of the negative response to my article "God and Evil: The Problem Solved" by Mr. K. F. As per your request, I am writing this reply. First, the article you published is really a book review of Gordon H. Clark's book *God and Evil: The Problem Solved*. The view set forth, therefore, is that of Dr. Clark. But second, since I happen to be in agreement with Dr. Clark's view, I will be glad to respond to Mr. F.'s concerns, *seriatim*.

The first thing Mr. F. says is that the article, "while not containing actual heresy, clearly presents a corruption of the holy doctrine of God's sovereignty." It is hard to imagine how an article that "clearly presents a corruption of the holy doctrine of God's sovereignty" is not "actual heresy." Nevertheless, the view taught by Dr. Clark is that which has been espoused by the Reformed church throughout the centuries. The Westminster Confession of Faith (3:1; 5:1,4), for example, reads: "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established God the Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and

holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so far manifest themselves in His providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men; and not by a bare permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and other wise ordering, and governing them, in a manifold dispensation, to His own holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin."

That is to say, God has unchangeably foreordained everything which ever comes to pass, including the sinful actions of all men and angels. Yet, He has done so by means of "second causes." Thus, God, who is perfectly holy, and cannot sin or err in any way, is not the author of sin. Only second causes can sin.

The second thing the respondent has to say comes in the form of a series of questions: "How does Dr. Clark know that the fact that God causes every human action (and He does!) proves that He causes the sinfulness of human actions? Are you aware that Francis Turretin, for example, taught that God incomprehensibly causes one without the other? Is this impossible for God? Is He incapable of acting with such amazing precision?"

The issue here is not whether something is "impossible for God," or if He is "incapable of acting with such amazing precision." Scripture tells us that "with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27), that is "all things" which are rational, and not contrary to His most holy will. Further, Scripture teaches us that all things which God does are perfect and holy (Psalm 77:13; Mark 7:37; *passim*), and thus manifest "amazing precision." Rather, the issue is "what does the Scripture say?" (Romans 4:3).

Dr. Clark knows that God causes every human action (thought, word, and deed), as Mr. F.

agrees, because the Bible says He does (Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17; Psalm 145:14-16; Nehemiah 9:6; *passim*). And since the “sinfulness of human actions” is by definition itself an action (or actions), then God ultimately causes these as well (Isaiah 45:7; Amos 3:6; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; *passim*). Or to put it in the form of a syllogism: God causes every human action; sin is a human action; therefore, God causes sin. Further, to demur by alleging that “God incomprehensibly causes one without the other” is really jejune. That is, if God’s actions in such matters are incomprehensible, how would we know that He “causes one without the other?” Moreover, if the doctrine of God’s incomprehensibility teaches (which it does not!) what Mr. F. seems to believe it teaches, we could not know anything (or practically nothing) about God at all.

The third response has to do with James 1: 13-14, which reads: “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.” Mr. F. poses the question, “Is the Arndt & Gingrich lexicon wrong when it affirms that James is rejecting the following ideas; ‘the temptation is caused by God, though not actually caused by Him?’” Yes, this is an incorrect analysis of the verses. As properly taught by the Westminster Confession of Faith (5:4), God’s providence “extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men ... yet so, as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.” One such example of this is found in the biblical accounts of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness. Matthew 4:1 clearly states that “Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” Here we learn that it is God the Spirit who leads Jesus to be tempted, but it is the creature Satan (a second cause) who does the tempting.

The Scripture is clear at this point. God is the first cause of all things, including sin (Isaiah 45:7; Amos 3:6). But He accomplishes His good purposes by means of creaturely second causes.

If someone has a problem with this, his problem is not with Dr. Clark, it is with God.

Humbly, in Christ,

Dr. W. Gary Crampton

Built Upon The Rock

A Study of the Doctrine of the Church

By W. Gary Crampton, Th.D.

& Pastor Richard Bacon

This short (52pp) booklet by Crampton and Bacon is designed to explain the basics of Presbyterian Church Government. The booklet would be excellent for teaching church classes on the subject and should be read by all Presbyterian church office-holders or those intending church office.

“The authors understand the eternal Christ to be the Rock upon which the church is built. There may be other organizations built upon Peter (or rather, who think they are), but only the church is built upon the eternal Son of God. We shall go so far as to maintain that except a church is built upon the Rock of Christ, it is no church of his.”

Sections include, Covenant Theology and the Church, Meaning of the Word “Church,” Attributes of the Church, Marks of the True Church, Authority of the Church, Duties of the Church, Church State Relationship, Government of the Church, Church Officers.

Single Copy \$3.95ea. 2-24 Copies \$2.40ea. 25 Copies & up \$1.95ea.

See Order Form on back page for shipping costs and instructions.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Memory Cards

**Flash Cards, business card size, with WSC
question and answer on one side and a
Scripture proof on the other.**

\$4.95 per set or \$14.95 for 5 sets (postage extra).

FPCR CD. Best Bargain!

Over 100 sermons and lectures available for less than \$25.00

Now available on CD ROM is a collection of both morning and afternoon sermons, Biblical Institute lectures, as well as Scripture expositions, communion addresses and pastoral prayers. Over 100 sermons on each CD.

1998 Sermons of Richard Bacon

1999 Sermons of Richard Bacon

CD requires a multimedia PC, with a web browser and the Real Audio Player software installed. Real Audio software is available free over the Internet. Internet connection not required to run the CD. Each CD sale priced at \$23.50 each or both for \$45.00

Hebrews Series Christ "A Priest For Ever After The Order Of Melchisedec"

FPCR Sermon Subscription Service

Pastor Bacon is preaching through Hebrews in the morning worship service and has reached chapter 7: Christ "A Priest For Ever After The Order Of Melchisedec." For \$10 per month, one receives all the Hebrew sermons automatically the week following the Lord's day on which they were preached. (Postage is included in this price.)

Two New Series

The Sermon "Implications of Repentance" on page 18 is part of Pastor Bacon's ongoing study of the book of Hebrews. These weekly sermons in Hebrews have been a wealth of both basic and advanced Biblical doctrine. Offered below are two new tape series first advertised in our last issue of *The Blue Banner*. The first, *How to Hear the Word of God*, was preached a month before the sermon you just read. The second series, *Avoiding Apostasy*, was preached the month afterward. Each series is offered at a special price of \$8.00 each or both series (11 tapes total) for \$15.00. Album binder is available for an additional charge. Postage extra.

HOW TO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD

These five sermons from Hebrews 5 are studies on the duties and responsibilities from the Word of God upon all who sit in pews Sabbath after Sabbath. How does one properly prepare to hear the gospel preached? What should our response be? How do we "feed on Christ" in preaching? What is required for correct hearing of the sermon? Does the rebuke that the writer of Hebrews wrote to his readers apply to us today? Do you know how to hear the Word of God? 5 tapes for \$8.00

AVOIDING APOSTASY

For it is impossible ...to renew them again unto repentance.
Hebrews 6:4-6

This is one of the saddest statements in the New Testament. Pastor Bacon closely examined the phrase "impossible ... to renew them" as he preached through the passage in Hebrews 6:4-6. These 6 sermons offer a clear, concise teaching on this difficult biblical doctrine. 6 tapes for \$8.00

Special: Dating Series. \$3.50

"I wish I had heard these sermons when I was a teenager." This is a comment we often hear from adults who listened to Pastor Bacon's four part series on Dating. They know that biblical teaching on dating would have made a great impact on their lives.

It is our desire to give solid biblical teaching to Christian young people on how to make some of the most important decisions of their lives. **This four tapes is being offered for \$3.50 for the entire set (normally \$10.00).** Buy several to give to each of your teenage sons and daughters, nieces and nephews, family and friends. The tapes would make a great graduation gift for young people heading off to college. Four tapes in poly boxes. Album binder available for additional cost. Postage extra.

The Blue Banner

A Publication of First Presbyterian Church Rowlett

P O Box 141084

Dallas, TX 75214

Return Postage Guaranteed



Volume 9 Number 4-6 — April/June 2000

The First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett

The Blue Banner is published by The First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett, Texas (Reformation Presbyterian Church). **Session:** Pastor Richard Bacon. Ruling Elders: David Seekamp, Carl Betsch, Thomas Allie.

Contact Information: Email: pastor@fpccr.org WEB: <http://www.fpccr.org> Church Mail: P O Box 141084, Dallas, TX. 75214. Phone: 972-475-9164 or 972-475-2184. Fax: 972-475-5317

Worship Services: 10:30 AM and 2:00 PM on each Lord's Day. Visitors are welcome to stay for **lunch** between the two services. **Biblical Institutes:** 4:00 PM.

Location: First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett meets at 8210 Schrade Road, Rowlett, TX. From Interstate 30, take exit 64 north on Dalrock Road. From the Diamond Shamrock gas station, go 1.5 miles north to Schrade Road. Turn left and go approximately 1/4 mile. We are in the first building on the left. Parking is in the rear of the building.

Order Form

THE BLUE BANNER, P O BOX 141084, DALLAS, TX 75214

Item	Qty	Price Each	Total
Avoiding Apostasy		\$8.00	
Hear Word of God		\$8.00	
Both the Above		\$15.00	
Blue Banner Subscription			
Dating Series		\$3.50	
Add 10% for postage and handling (\$3.50 min) USA Only.*			
Total			

*Orders from outside the USA must be paid in US funds drawn on a U.S. bank. Please write for additional shipping costs.