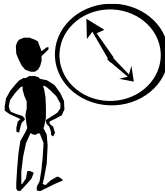


Inside this issue:

<i>Unless the Lord Builds the House</i>	1
<i>Thoughts from South Africa</i>	5
<i>A.M. Sermon Outline: What Constitutes Worship?</i>	6
Duty Rosters	7
Announcements & For the Record	8



Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.
Worship 10:00 a.m.

Every other Sunday night:

Bible Study 4:00 p.m.
Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

Unless the Lord Builds the House

By Jefferson David Tant

The 127th Psalm begins with some words that are certainly applicable to us today, as we have in the world some 42,000 different denominations, all claiming to be Christian. Note the first half of the Psalms first verse: *“Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.”*

Various passages use the illustrations of building a structure that refers to the establishment of the Lord’s church. We want to note some of the passages and then make some applications.

There is the familiar phrase in [Matthew 16:18](#) as Christ responds to the answer his disciples had given to his question as to his identity. Upon Peter stating that he was the Son of God, Christ replied, *“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.”* Notice that he said *“I will build ...”* We know he is not talking about a literal building, but a spiritual kingdom/church.

Then note [I Corinthians 3:9-11](#): *“For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”*

Obviously, any kind of structure must follow its foundation, for a building without a foundation, or one that does not closely follow its foundation will fall. Thus Paul warns that Jesus Christ is the foundation, and if we are to be building, we must carefully follow the blueprint’s foundation. And what is the blueprint for the church? Obviously, it is the Bible, the New Testament.

The author of Hebrews wrote about Abraham, “*for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God*” ([Hebrews 11:10](#)).

Now consider what we have learned from these passages.

1. God is the architect and builder of the church.
2. Christ is the foundation.
3. We are enjoined to carefully follow the blueprint/plan that God has given.
4. We are forbidden to deviate from the plan God has given.

With those thoughts in mind, let us consider some things about the denominational world, the churches of men, that go against the founder’s teaching concerning the church — God’s building.

To start, consider a question sent to Marilyn Vos Savant in her Sunday’s Parade column. “At fundraisers, my church has always sold raffle tickets at \$20 for 40 tickets...” The querist then asks about the odds of winning. Do you see a problem here? I see two problems:

1. This is obviously gambling, which is against Biblical principles about earning wages for our needs. The money was taken from others, who have lost their money with nothing to show for it. History shows that countless numbers have suffered ruin from gambling.
2. The “blueprint” gives clear directions as to how churches are to raise their funds. Paul writes to the church at Corinth about some help they are to give for Christians in Judea: “*Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come.*” ([I Corinthians 16:1-2](#))

So, what are the “builder’s” directions for church needs? Give voluntarily on the first day of the week. Even beyond the raffle tickets, I know of churches operating retail bookstores and various other means of collecting money. They are not following the blueprint.

On the subject of baptism, we see various departures from the blueprint. Here is a quote from *Hiscox Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*, p. 22: "It is most likely that in the Apostolic Age when there was but 'one Lord, one faith, and one baptism,' and no differing denominations existed ... 'baptism was the door into the church.' Now, it is different ... The churches therefore have candidates ... give their 'experience,' and then their reception is decided by a vote of the members."

Who said it is different? Has the blueprint changed? The Manual understands what the Bible says about baptism’s purpose, but then says “Now, it is different.” Who gave the Baptist Church the authority to make anything different than what the Bible says? By what authority has the blueprint been changed? By the authority of God or by

the authority of Satan?

Another baptism question concerns whether it is by immersion, sprinkling, pouring, or dropping rose petals (which I was told a church in Oklahoma does). All Bible scholars from whatever background, Catholic, Protestant, etc., agree that the original Greek New Testament clearly shows that baptism is an immersion in water. Strong's Greek Dictionary defines "*baptizo*" thusly: "to immerse, submerge; to make whelmed (i.e. fully wet)." Yet countless denominations today prefer to sprinkle or pour water rather than follow the Bible practice of immersion.

One scripture, among several others, clearly shows that baptism is a burial in water. "*Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life*" (Romans 6:4).

So, why was immersion changed to sprinkling or pouring, etc.? Consider the following quote: "An interesting fact of history is that the Church of England, Presbyterian, and Congregational churches all allowed immersion until the Westminster assembly in 1643. A number of bishops, seeing how much more convenient sprinkling was, came before Parliament, insisting that "the devil of immersion ought to be legislated out of the realm, it is so troublesome." (*Edinburg Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, p. 236). A vote was taken, and immersion lost by one vote.

Why the change? "It is so troublesome." Is that a sufficient reason to change the blueprint? I don't think so, and what do you suppose God thinks about that?

Another question that arises is related to those who are authorized to be leaders in the church. Paul gave instructions to both Timothy and Titus concerning this. "*For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion*" ([Titus 1:5-6](#), see also [1 Timothy 3:1-7](#)).

These "elders" are also identified in other passages and/or translations as bishops, pastors, shepherds, and overseers, referring to different aspects of their work. Now notice a few of the qualifications: "elder," referring to someone mature in age; "husband," meaning he must be married, as well as being a male; "having children who believe," thus proving that he is able to be a spiritual leader. While it cannot be denied that these are the qualifications God has given, yet we see in many denominations that young single men, or married men without children, or even women are ordained as bishops, pastors, etc.

Another qualification seen is that the one appointed must be "above reproach." How do we reconcile this with the practice common in some denominations of appointing homosexuals to positions of authority? Consider the following headline from The

New York Times: “A Woman Is Installed as Top Episcopal Bishop.” The article then says, “Several bishops ... have said they will not acknowledge her in the role, largely because they are at sharp odds over her openness to gay men and lesbians in the episcopate and her support of same-sex marriages.”

It should be obvious to anyone who is familiar with the Bible that there are at least two departures from the foundation that God has laid.

1. As noted earlier, women are not authorized to hold a position of authority. Add to this Paul’s instruction in [I Timothy 2:12](#): “*But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.*” This does not mean that a woman cannot teach a man, as we have a Biblical example of that, but in a public assembly, this is not permitted.
2. The Scriptures are quite clear in the rejection and condemnation of homosexual activity. “*For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error*” ([Romans 1:26-27](#)). Paul also includes homosexuals among those whom God rejects in [I Timothy 1:10](#): “*and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching.*”

It’s obvious that the practices mentioned are not in accord with God’s foundation plans, and thus “*Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.*” (And there are many others.) Consider also that among the Jews there were many sects — Herodians, Pharisees, Zealots, etc. Christ spoke against every one of these denominations. Only one group did he not speak against: “Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, “*Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!*” ([John 1:47](#)) Time and again he spoke against the sects as in [Matthew 2:25](#): “*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees ...*”

“*I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book*” ([Revelation 22:18-19](#)).

“*For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished*” ([Matthew 5:18](#)).

Dear Reader, if you are a member of some church/denomination that practices things that are not according to God’s blueprint, what will your answer be at the Judgment Day? “*So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God*” ([Rom. 14:12](#)).

Thoughts from South Africa

By Hendrik Joubert

CONVENIENCE OR CONVICTION?

Recently I have spent much time working on helping brethren understand that as Christians we should change. We should study the Bible to find out what it is that God wants us to be.

I have been thinking about some of the things that surfaced among the African brethren. It seems that they follow the Bible as long as it is practically possible. When they suddenly find themselves in a threatening situation, they will revert back to their old customs. Making a living, getting food, is important. They will sacrifice simple principles in order to eat.

Then I thought about us Americans. Are we that different? We are also "practical" in our worship of God. We do it when it comes naturally and easily. But when it involves a "worldly crisis," or an old bad habit, it is a different story. Think about this statement. Obedience does not count when it comes naturally. I have never smoked, and have not been drunk ever. This in spite of the fact that I grew up quite ungodly. There are some things I did that I do not wish to mention, but even as a "sinner" I did not **want** to smoke or **drink**, not because of what I thought God says, but because "I" did not like it. I can therefore take no credit, act superior because of that.

The drunk and the smoker finds it difficult to overcome these bad habits. Because they are so hard to overcome, by some, they are often "ignored," or considered to be "grey areas," especially smoking. You do not preach against tobacco in Kentucky? Notice, not only because of people smoking but because of people making a living out of it. In San Francisco, you do not preach against homosexuality? I know this is an obvious violation of God's word, but should our preaching be regional according to the customs of that region?

So, we are not that different from our African brethren. We can preach on their habits, but not ours?

This morning in my discussion with them, I talked about how they would forsake the assembly in order to go make money to get their kids through school. They have to go out to find work. Prostitution becomes an accepted way for "paying," and for earning money. We need to read [Matthew 10:34ff](#) and [Luke 14:36ff](#) and meditate on them. We need to sacrifice for the kingdom of God. We need to change, to grow, to become different.

The lesson caused discussion. Bongani did a good job in discussing the matter with the brethren. I could follow the conversation in Zulu sufficiently to throw in a comment or two here and there. Then I had to go and apply it to myself ...