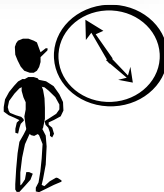


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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.
Worship 10:00 a.m.
(Or every other week)

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

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

The Wages of Sin is Death

By Doy Moyer

“For the wages of sin is death...” (Romans 6:23).

Why should death have been the penalty for sin? In short, because we have disregarded the Giver of all life and breath and all things. If in our own pride we try to usurp God and take His throne and His glory for ourselves, why should we think that He ought to continue to grant us life and breath? We cannot think that we can disregard the Giver and then also steal life from Him as if it is ours to decide. Death is the attention-getter that helps us understand how egregious sin is. There can be no life in sin, but only death. The repeated *“And he died”* in Genesis 5 reminds us of this fact.

“...but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)

This is why the gospel is so great. The Giver of Life is willing to give us life again, but to make this offer, He first took death upon Himself — the One who gives life suffered death so that He, with full justice, can offer life again to those who deserved the death. This is love.

Physical death is always a reminder of what sin did in this world as the Giver of all life was spurned, but this death is not permanent death. Eternal life in Christ our Lord is offered, with Him having defeated death through the resurrection. God gives life. Death will never have the final word (I Corinthians 15:50-58).



Stages of Decline

By Steve Wolfgang

The stages of development often seen in religious fellowships, related here by historian David Edwin Harrell, Jr., are well worth contemplating in these times.

1. From truth-oriented to group-oriented.
2. From open controversy to closed controversy.
3. From self-conscious rejection of society to self-conscious acceptance of society.
4. From builders to preservers.

[Ed Harrell, "B.C. Goodpasture: Leader of Institutional Thought," in Melvin D. Curry, ed., *They Being Dead Yet Speak (Florida College Lectures, 1981)*, pp. 249-250.

(Excerpt from a section entitled "The Emergence of Denominational Leadership").

B. C. Goodpasture fits neatly into a sociological model of second-generation religious leaders. One can pretty well trace the evolution of a religious group by the changes in skills from first to second-generation leaders.

From truth-oriented to group-oriented

First-generation religious leaders are committed to ideas, often being forced to abandon their parent groups because of that commitment. Like the evangelists of New Testament days, they preach their message regardless of the consequences. The second generation shows a growing concern about the good of the group, though ostensibly doctrine must still be measured by truth. But the emphasis changes. Instead of the church growing out of the truth, the truth becomes the possession of the church. The type of man demanded for the first work is a preacher, a Bible student, a defender of the truth; what is needed for the second is a conciliator and manager.

From open controversy to closed controversy

The method used to spread the message in a young religious movement, including the New Testament church, is open confrontation. Both in the first century and in more recent times the spread of the gospel has been marked by open discussion and debate. When one is truth-oriented, he has nothing to defend except his teachings and no tools for fighting except his ideas. When one's religion becomes institutional other forces come into play. Open debate (even limited debate) may no longer seem wise if it disturbs the group's peace and threatens the health of institutions. Furthermore, the institutions, capable of exerting pressure in indirect ways, exercise leadership that can be totally divorced from ideology. In short, B. C. Goodpasture's leadership, it seems to me, begins the second period of religious controversy in the churches of Christ in the twentieth century, a period marked by the use of new techniques. Foy Wallace scorched heretics; Goodpasture warned them that they would lose their position in the brotherhood.

From the self-conscious rejection of society to the self-conscious acceptance of society

First-generation religious leaders generally disdain the society they live in and openly attack the dominant religious institutions of that society. This sense of world separation and its accompanying call for conversion is clearly present in the New Testament and in the early history of the restoration movement. Christians knew that the world considered them fanatics; they were not ashamed to be thought strange; they forged no truces with the dominant religions of their time. Second-generation leaders are more apt self-consciously to seek peace with their society as the churches come to crave respectability... “Plain” preachers and those of the next generation who are no longer “plain” generally do not say the same things.

From builders to preservers

There comes a time in the life of all religious groups when evangelists become confused with pastors, when evangelistic fervor turns to revivalistic concern, when debaters and polemicists turn to brotherhood managers, and when local churches become little more than sources of money for promoters. Such changes call for a shift to managerial leadership.

In the 1950s the preservation of the churches of Christ empire became central in the thought of many people. There was still a will to work, but it was directed toward preserving and improving the image of what had been hewn out of the society by the previous generation. There is a vast difference, though not always an apparent one, between preaching the gospel and converting sinners and in promoting the church of Christ.

Seeing Ourselves in Our Leaders

In every time, some men have been widely visible to the Christians of their day. It has always been treacherous to view such men as “brotherhood leaders,” since such thinking almost inevitably conjures up a “brotherhood” to lead. But it also assigns a distorted weight of importance to such men; we tend to overestimate their influence; to see things in terms of what they have done to us.

Actually, these highly visible men are more like speedometers than steering wheels. They are not so much taking us someplace as they are telling us where we are. B. C. Goodpasture did not make the churches of Christ what they were in the 1950s. He was a product of what they had become, perhaps the ablest product. And he led the people in the way that they had determined to go.



Bad Influence

By Zeke Flores

Some 2400 years ago, God's people were confronted with their sins yet again. When Ezra the priest heard about how Israel had broken God's law by marrying foreign women, he tore his robes, prayed, and fasted. When faced with the gravity of disobedience to God, the people committed themselves to faithfulness. And it would certainly take commitment. They separated themselves from their pagan wives and offered sacrifices to God for their failure to obey.

Now, the New Testament doesn't forbid such marriages, but there are two principles that have remained the same throughout man's history:

1. No one likes to be confronted about their sin, and
2. Bad influences still badly influence.

In times past when God's people were brought face-to-face with their disobedience, their instinct was to deny it, ignore it, silence the messenger, or all three! Rarely do we see any real repentance on the part of the nation as a whole. Not that it didn't happen, but it was the exception rather than the rule.

Why were they so unruly? Bad influence, plain and simple. By mixing themselves with their pagan neighbors in friendship and marriage, they left themselves ripe for being reshaped in their thinking and actions according to the ways of those godless neighbors. Of course, the poster boy for this is Israel's king Solomon who married and carried on with a whole passel of pagan women and paid the price of apostasy for it.

Still, some Christians play on the edge of a cliff. They dance near the edge of sin and never notice when they overstep and fall headlong. Famed coach Bill McCartney once said, "Draw a line where there's a danger of being caught in sin and stay ten yards back." Better yet, know where the line is and stay a mile away! Don't even go near the edge.

In the final chapter of Ezra, the men sent their foreign wives and children away. That seems harsh and cold, but the whole situation existed because of their disobedience and it was the only remedy. Sometimes repentance calls for drastic action. If you want God's approval and blessing, acknowledge your sin. Confess it. Then, forsake it.

Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "*You have been unfaithful and have married foreign wives adding to the guilt of Israel. 'Now therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers and do His will; and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.'* Then all the assembly replied with a loud voice, '*That's right! As you have said, so it is our duty to do*'" (Ezra 10:10-12).

"Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?" (II Corinthians 6:14).

