



Preparing Souls To Serve The Lord

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Some Will Depart From the Faith

By

Jackie M. Stearsman

Since we often receive calls concerning preachers and/or congregations and developments in our brotherhood, it is believed that circulating this letter with the accompanying critique will be of value to those who wish to be informed, and to those who oppose departures from the faith.

We are purposefully leaving out personal names and locations. We have done this that the critique may be evaluated without prejudice on the part of any reader. We do not know this congregation personally, therefore it should be understood that our only concern is to call attention to the departures from the teaching of the Bible that are expressed in this public statement.

The letter is addressed "To whom it may concern." The letter should concern all faithful Christians. There is only one faith and one body or church approved by the Bible (Eph. 4:4-5; 1:22-23) and the Bible demands that we endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph.

4:3). Departures are real. The Bible warns its readers that departures would come (I Tim. 4:1-2; II Tim. 4:2-4), and the letter exemplifies how far some have departed from the faith

"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17). "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord."

once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Opposition to such departures is demanded by the clear and explicit teaching of the Bible (Jude 3; II John 9-11; Rom. 16:17-18; Phil. 3:15-19; Matt. 15:9; 7:21-28).

The letter is presented as a position statement by an eldership. It is dated February 01, 2000 and reads as follows:

To whom it may concern:
As the current elders
of _____
Church of Christ ..., we are

offering this letter as a position statement on the expanding role of women at this church. This is not intended to influence the position taken by any other congregation of this fellowship on this issue and is not offered either as a defense or treatise on our conclusions. We believe that each congregation is autonomous and is bound to conduct and govern itself according to its own conscience and the interpretation of scripture.

After much discussion, prayer and in-depth analysis of Biblical scripture it has become our collective conclusion that an expansion of the role of women in our public services is appropriate at this time.

We recognize that the congregation's thinking on this subject has been evolving for the past several years. _____ has significantly expanded its utilization of women members during the 1990's and that trend is expected to continue.

Women make up a significant portion of our worship team. They now teach and co-teach co-ed adult classes. They serve as ministry leaders and coordinators. We have women who are both small group leaders and assistant leaders. Women have been in public presentations, dramatic programs, making announcements, recognition programs and the reading of scripture in our Sunday morning worship services. Their participation in small group discussions and chain-prayers has been strongly encouraged by our eldership.

In addition to these roles, it is our intention to, in the near future, begin using women to serve the communion emblems, preside at the communion table and lead public prayers during our regular worship services. We have no intention of expanding that role any further than this. Additionally, we have no intention of installing women as elders at _____ or using a woman in the role of pulpit minister.

We, the elders of _____ Church of Christ, have collectively reached these conclusions and have unanimously decided on this course of action.

Signed by Four Elders

Influence

The opening paragraph seeks to absolve the elders of their influence on others. This is

an impossibility. Pilate could not wash his hands of guilt (Matt. 27:24). Paul taught the Christians at Corinth and Galatia their actions influenced others (I Cor. 5:6-8; Gal. 5:9). We are to be lights to the world and the salt of the earth. But the salt can lose its savor and the light can be removed. (Matt. 5:13-16; Rev. 2:5).

This Fellowship

Notice that the first paragraph of the letter recognizes a certain fellowship. How extensive is it? When the WEB SITE provided on the stationary is consulted two interesting items meet the eye. A link is provided for the Willow Creek Church. Is this Church intended to be a part of "this fellowship." Also, the writings of Carl Ketcherside are there for reading. Informed members of the Lord's church know the influence of this false teacher, and the extent of his "fellowship." The content of the position letter would enable "this fellowship" to be much larger than that taught in the Bible.

Fellowship is structured in the Bible. Having fellowship with some will lead to condemnation by the Lord (II Cor. 6:14-7:1; Rev. 18:4). It is possible to bid encouragement to those promoting false doctrine and when we do, we do not have God and Christ in our fellowship (II John 9-11).

Fellowship is established and maintained by walking in the light (I John 1:7). "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we

lie, and do not the truth" (I John 1:6).

Autonomy

The elders of this congregation believe in the "autonomy" of the local congregation. This is true only in judgment matters. It is false to conclude that because we are an autonomous congregation that we can evolve our doctrine. The Bible states that there is but one faith (Eph. 4:4-5).

The conscience and interpretation of scripture are cited as binding elements in church government (first paragraph). However, truth must fix conclusively our interpretations. The conscience must have a true standard from which to operate. Given a wrong set of premises and/or assumptions and the conscience can lead us astray. Saul of Tarsus lived with a good conscience, but persecuted the church in ignorance (Acts 23:1; I Tim. 1:13).

Defenseless

The elders state in the opening paragraph that they are not offering the "position

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statement either as a defense or treatise on our conclusions.” In this they are wise. The position they occupy in this letter can not be defended and it is woefully lacking as a treatise on the role of women in leadership from a Biblical perspective.

I have observed over the years that when publications and writers depart from the faith one thing is always noticeable—the absence of the Bible in their writing. Some are very sensitive to their non respect for the Bible. It is exemplified by their non appeal to it for justifying their actions. In fact many of them would declare as unfit “proof text” preaching and teaching.

How many passages are cited for “justification” of the position occupied in the “position statement”? Do we not know that when we cite a text for justification that consistency would demand that we do all that the source cited demands (Luke 6:46; Gal. 5:3)?

Evolving Churches

It should be understood that change like we are seeing does not just happen. It is engineered by careful and systematic calculations. Ketcherside and his followers know what they are doing. Please observe the evolution engineered by these elders as they describe it.

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Brethren, we must not ignore such slow and methodical acts in a given congregation. Are there congregations that you know that are implementing these same practices? How long will it be before a “position

statement” such as we read here will be offered as the present status of other congregations?

Women Preachers and Elders?

It is interesting that these elders are not for women in the pulpit or in the eldership, why not? Their words are: We have no intention of expanding that role any further than this. Additionally, we have no intention of installing women as elders at _____ or using a woman in the role of pulpit minister.

They offer no justification for this opposition. It certainly is not due to any consistent respect for the Bible. If they appeal to the Bible to justify their restriction, they will find themselves exposed to prejudicial inconsistency. What they are evolving in leadership will only be maintained by sure male dominance with no principal to justify it.

Perhaps if a woman becomes “dramatic” enough in her “public presentations” she will some day be able to provide such profound leadership as these shepherds of the flock.

Women in Leadership

Much of this letter has to do with the “expanding role” of women in that fellowship. However, let it be understood that no “in-depth analysis of Biblical scripture” (second paragraph) can do away with what Paul taught in the following passage: “Let the



woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp (have, NKJV) authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety" (I Tim. 2:11-15).

Paul warns all of those who would pervert the gospel (Gal. 1:6-9). In this passage he states that neither angel, nor apostle, nor any man may change that truth. The apostles themselves were subject to the inspired word and could depart from it. When they did they were corrected and called upon to repent of their departures (Gal. 2:11-14).

Somehow the words of God to Jeremiah seem to be a proper closing for this critique. "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that

hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What *is* the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. *Is* not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer *that* breaketh the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I *am* against the prophets, saith the Lord, that steal my words every one from his neighbour. Behold, I *am* against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He saith. Behold, I *am* against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord" (Jer. 23:28-32).

Higginbotham Charts Available

Frank Higginbotham has graciously sent copies of the transparencies he used for each of the lectures ("Preachers and Longevity" and "Understanding

Tradition") he presented during our 2000 lectureship.

If you would like black and white paper copies of these charts (a total of nine), please send us your name, address, and \$1.00 (to cover materials & postage).

If you would like transparency and/or color copies of these charts, please call the school (ask for Brian), and we can arrange it. However, the cost for materials and postage will be much higher.

New Web Site

Visit our new WEB SITE at FSOP.NET. Carl Chambers at Dizzy Rambler Productions at dizzyrambler.com has designed the new site.

Carl is a member of the Orange Street Congregation in Auburndale, Florida. We appreciate his assistance, and for others interested in such services we highly recommend his work.

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