

Seek The Old Paths

"Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths...and walk therein."

(Jeremiah 6:16)

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WHAT IS THE "INSTRUMENTAL CHURCH OF CHRIST?"

Robin W. Haley

Having come out of the so called "Instrumental Church of Christ" denomination, I feel I am aware of the multitude of differences between that denomination and the Lord's church, and thus qualified to write about them. My parents were a part of that organization and thus, my brothers and sisters and I were raised in that following. Actually, my people were members in name only and it was not until I was 17 that I became more involved with that group.

I was elected as a deacon at the age of 18 (not married; no children — contrary to Bible doctrine as found in 1 Timothy 3) and was placed in charge of various fellowship gatherings between them and the other denominations (contrary to Bible doctrine as found in Ephesians 5) in town for Easter and Christmas programs (more contrary doctrines). I did my job well in that I and my good friend (another 18 year old deacon) were selected to go to the area Youth Conference held in Cincinnati, Ohio. So effective were we in our duly appointed roles that even the Methodist CYF invited me to go as observer to their Annual Youth Conference in Columbus, Ohio. Then one night while working in a gas station, a man from a local congregation of the church of Christ gave me a tract to read. In the wee hours of the morning, I read that tract...took it home and re-read it with my Bible

and learned much of my error. I began that week to ask many questions of the trustees and "elders" of the "Instrumental Church." So varied were the answers (not a one from the Bible) that I decided to take it to "the top!" It was in Mr. Kelly's office (who would later come to be called "Pastor"), in answer to one of my questions, he closed my Bible and said in effect, "That does not matter." I knew that I was not in the church of which I read in the New Testament. It took some searching, but I found the Lord's church and was added then to their number.

If you have stayed with me thus far, I would like to make an observation just here: those who use such language as the title of this article indicates, really ought to study again what the Lord's church is; and, what the difference is between it and the various Christian Church denominations, which includes the "Instrumental Church of Christ." It is the height of denominationalism to speak of the "Instrumental Church of Christ." It makes about as much sense, Biblically, to speak of the Islamic Church of Christ, the Methodist Church of Christ, or the Atheistic Church of Christ. Where in all of God's Word do we find "brands", "strains", or "branches" of the church? There is no such thing! When a group of Christians (thus, a church) cease to walk within the borders of the "new and living way"

(Heb. 10:20), they cease to be faithful to the Lord. Consequently, those who may be added to their number from that time on ARE NOT being added to the Bride of Christ, but to a following of men, invented by men, for the pleasure of men. How can they still be considered as the Lord's church? To say that some (and I do mean only some) of these people have been baptized is of absolutely no consequence. They have been "baptized" into something else. They believe, teach, practice, and hold to a different doctrine, thus a "different and perverted Gospel" (Gal. 1:6,7). They are still lost. Those within the ranks of the various Christian Church denominations are not Christians at all. They have failed to be born again (John 3:5), to be washed of water with the Word (Eph. 5:26) and to be obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7).

The Lord's church **does not** use instrumental music in her worship to God. She **does not** believe in Methodism. She **is not** premillennial, anti-cooperative, etc. and so on ad infinitum. Let us hear an end of such sectarian talk as the "Instrumental Church of Christ" and the "Non-instrumental Church of Christ!" Let us cease parroting the misguided and misleading terms as "Restoration Heritage" and "Our Founding Fathers of the 19th Century!" Those

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Instrumental Church...



Editorial...

EPHESIANS 2:8-10

Garland M. Robinson

I love Ephesians 2:8-10! It is beautiful. It fits perfectly with all the other scriptures of the Bible. It tells us that salvation is offered to man by God's grace — His great favor. But, even though it's been extended to all mankind (Titus 2:11-12), not all will be saved because they do not DO what God says is necessary to benefit from it. Man must comply with God's commands in order to receive God's grace. This brings us to "faith" AND "obedience."

Many claim that man has absolutely nothing to do with his own salvation. But in spite of their claim, their actions tell otherwise. For example, does anyone believe that God will save a sinner who curses His holy name and despises His grace? Of course not! Does anyone believe that a sinner can ignore God and still be saved? Not at all! All admit that a sinner must desire to be saved. But, when a sinner desires to be saved, he is doing something. He is acting. He is working. So, a sinner IS involved in the process of his own salvation. If a sinner admits he is a sinner and needs salvation, he is doing something. He is acting, working, performing. If a sinner must "accept" the Lord's sacrifice, he is doing something. He is working. By these obvious points, all admit that man must DO something in order to receive God's grace.

Many say salvation is received by "faith alone" which does not include obedience. However, Jesus says "faith" (John 8:24) AND "obedience" (Matt. 7:21; John 12:42-43; Heb. 5:8-9) brings salvation. In the truest sense of the word, Bible faith is an act of obedience. I say salvation is by "faith", but like Jesus, I will not put the word "alone" or "only" after faith because such is contrary to Scripture (James 2:24). I agree with Jesus. "Faith only" advocates deny what Jesus said about obedience being necessary for salvation (Mark

16:16). We need to also point out that "faith" itself is a work. It is something a person must do. Jesus made this clear in John 6:29 when He said that to "believe" is a work. It is an act of obedience if it is true Bible faith. However, faith alone will not save anyone!

What does Ephesians 2:8-9 teach about works? It teaches that salvation is not by "works." Salvation does not come about by man's goodness or performance wherein he obligates God to save him. Man cannot earn salvation. Man cannot merit salvation. I do not teach that works of merit bring about salvation and have never heard that taught by anyone else. Man cannot boast in any work he performs; if so, he could save himself. But man cannot save himself.

But, man must obey (work, comply, perform) to receive God's grace. This is summed up in the word "faith." We are saved by grace "through faith." Faith is a work (John 6:29). It is a work God commands man to do. It is not a work man dreamed up. It is not something he does of his own goodness. When men comply with God's commands "through faith", he is trusting in the saving power of Jesus. All the while, we are still unprofitable servants, we have only done that which is our duty to do.

Ephesians 2:8-9 teaches that God extends salvation to man even though man does not deserve it. God extends to man a great favor because of His love for man. Man deserves to be punished, but God says, I'm willing to forgive him and save him. However, God places a condition on man being saved (otherwise, all men would be saved). Man must respond. Man must act. Man must do something. Not just anything. Not man's own power. Not man's own goodness. Not man's own work. Man must have faith (trust in, reliance upon) in God and all that God commands him to

do. Man accepts the "complete" will of God by FAITH. But, it is more than just a mental acceptance of God and Jesus. It is not simply a belief in the historic record of Jesus' sacrifice for man's sins. It is a faith that "moves," "acts," "performs," "works," "obeys." All the while, man still recognizes these acts of obedience do not mean he deserves God's forgiveness or that he has earned salvation.

Man's humble submission to God's will prompts him to ask, exactly what does "faith" mean? What is involved in "faith?" What does God mean when he says I can be saved by "grace through faith?"

Through a study of God's Word, one understands that Romans four tells HOW one is made righteous before God. It is by "faith" — trust in God. But as he reads the rest of the New Testament, he learns that James gives more specific details about salvation by faith than Paul reveals. James tells us WHEN faith makes one righteous. It is when faith "acts" or "works." James even uses the same example of Abraham that Paul does. Salvation by grace through faith is an active, working faith.

Through more reading of the New Testament, we learn that man must REPENT of his sins BEFORE he can be forgiven of sins (Acts 2:38). This same verse also tells us that man must be BAPTIZED for the remission of his sins BEFORE he can be forgiven of his sins. We also learn from Acts 8:35-39 that CONFESION of faith in Jesus comes BEFORE one can be baptized FOR the remission of sins. These passages make repentance, confession and baptism ESSENTIAL BEFORE remission of sins is granted. Therefore, salvation comes AFTER remission of sins, not BEFORE. Repenting, confessing and being baptized are acts done by faith. Therefore, salvation is "through faith" or "by faith" — a "working faith."

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"FORBID HIM NOT"

Cade K. Somers

We only ignite problems or throw fuel to a futile fire when we attack personalities and amoral actions of ministering preachers, elders and congregations. Where there is no "thus saith the Lord" there should be no "thus saith me."

The number within the church has never amounted to nearly the majority of the world's population. The church has always been the "few" in contrast to the "many" (Matt. 7:13,14). One would suppose, then, that Christians would see the need to pull together as best as possible and not splinter. Yet, personalities clash and tempers flare, and people who are otherwise united stand obstinately opposed to one another. Past divisions in Christ's body have many times hinged less upon doctrinal disagreements and more upon these forms of arbitrary tumults.

While they were ministering in Capernaum, the apostles attempted to recruit another to follow them. They had witnessed the man successfully casting out devils in Christ's name; and, assumed one of "like faith" and equal miraculous ability would satisfy them with his company. The man refused. John recorded, "and we forbid him, because he followeth not us" (Mark 9:38). Jesus responded, "Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me" (Mark 9:39). The man's message and ministry was obviously approved of God; otherwise, he would not have manifested the supernatural ability of casting out demons. Still, his brethren shunned him and departed, retaining their false presumptions.

True unity is centered around "the faith" (Eph. 4:3,13; Jude 3). It is lost when one changes the word of God into a lie (Rom. 1:25). Unity exists between those who uphold God's word entirely and in purity. We should rejoice in the relationship we have with all of "like precious faith" (2 Peter 1:1), but the joy sometimes fades when ungodly pride or envy obstructs our spiritual perception. Feuds follow. The apostles had previously argued who was the greatest

among them (Mark 9:33-35). Still unsettled, their pride showed face with the man who would not follow them, as they likely thought, "He should follow us. He might learn something."

If the promotion of false doctrine is not the issue, as it was not in this case, we are better to leave matters alone and continue with the good work in which we should be involved. We only ignite problems or throw fuel to a futile fire when we attack personalities and amoral actions of ministering preachers, elders and congregations. Where there is no "thus saith the Lord" there should be no "thus saith me." Jesus said of this brother, "Forbid him not." Why did he choose not to follow the apostles? Though the reason is not given, we may assert some motives:

1) *He may have determined he had a good work and preferred isolation.* While Jesus demonstrated personable traits, John the baptizer enjoyed his privacy (Matt. 11:18,19). Some may have viewed John as dissimilar to many in society, wearing "raiment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle" and eating "locusts and wild honey" (Matt. 3:4). He chose to live humbly and quietly, keeping to self. There was nothing wrong with John's manner of living. In fact, through it he drew quite close to God, but there were still those who mocked his character.

Upon deciding to preach, some very capable men devote themselves chiefly to the local work. They would rather be successful converting people to Christ, strengthening the local church than to be gone four to ten or twenty weeks out of the year holding meetings, lectureships and seminars. It's a choice each preacher must make using wisdom and good judgment. It is not in itself wrong for one to seek more opportunities elsewhere to spread the Gospel — nor is it necessarily appropriate. What is most

important is that Christians are dedicated wherever they are and that they fulfill commitments with whom they are made. Personalities differ, but even those who prefer isolation over inclusion can do much good for the work of the church.

2) *He may have suspected personality or social conflicts and decided he'd rather not get involved.* In Acts 15:37, Barnabas told Paul he would like to welcome John Mark to travel with them for the remainder of the missionary journey. Paul refused (v.38). His reason was because Mark had been with them before, on the first journey, and abruptly quit (Acts 13:13). For what reason, we do not know. Nonetheless, because of Paul's dissention, Barnabas left Paul and joined Mark, and Paul acquired Silas for companionship. With what we know from Scripture, no one could say Paul was wrong for not taking Mark. No one really knows for what reasons Mark left apostolic company before, but many suggest immaturity and fickleness. Supposing this to be the case, Paul possibly foresaw feuding or disagreements between him and Mark. Maybe his decision was the best.

Sometimes the Christian who is the bigger person must swallow pride and allow the other to continue a good work while he does likewise — separately. If you know your personality does not well-accompany another's, you should do your best to be temperate. It hurts when churches of our Lord shatter because two or more people can't control themselves. It may be best to be the one who goes or concedes, determined not to be involved in strife over unimportant matters. Once the dust settles, you might see the real value of the individuals with whom you've differed. Paul later did. While Barnabas remained unmentioned, Paul later said of John Mark that he was "profitable to [Paul] in the ministry" (2

Tim. 4:11) and that the Colossians should welcome and employ him (Col. 4:10).

3) *He may have been teaching truth but not be doing so with the right attitude.* To understand this better, consider Philippians 1:12-21. In this passage, Paul wrote of some preachers who were burdens to him, “preaching Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds” (v.16). There were also those who preached lovingly, knowing Paul’s steadfast faith (v.17). So Paul commented, “*What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice*” (v.18). Most commentators misapply this statement to the supposed unity that can be had regardless of denominational party lines. Thus, for example, the Presbyterian preacher can say of the Pentecostal preacher, “I rejoice in your teaching, though it differs with mine.” Honest Bible students will note the interpretational fallacy: the preachers’ messages were the same — they each preached Christ (vs.16-18; cf. Acts 8:35; 1 Cor. 2:2). It was the attitudes with which they preached that were different than Paul’s. As brotherhood politicians, they marked a faithful brother as an enemy and, while maintaining sound doctrine, they sought to harm his image and influence. Even today, there are brethren who attempt mercilessly to disparage another who teaches the same things only because of a bad attitude toward him.

The disciple who did not follow the apostles may have had a bad attitude toward them. He may have been jealous of their position or angry at their approach. Yet, the apostles should have remained content, for the man obviously was a minister of righteousness.

Christians should not forbid those who are teaching truth and striving to live godly. They should not act as if everybody should follow them or place membership with the congregation where they are members. If a brother does not follow me, it doesn’t indicate a problem. I can trust he has good reason. It may be for the best.

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SAVE US FROM ARROGANT PREACHERS!

Rusty Stark

“One of the greatest proofs of the divine origin of the church is the preaching it has endured through the centuries.”

I do not know the origin of the above statement, nor can I endorse it fully. Certainly the Lord intended for evangelists to have a place in the church (II Tim. 4:5). But even though the statement is cynical, there is a glimmer of truth hidden in its depths.

In recent conversations with people in the Lord’s church, one criticism has been repeatedly leveled against preacher after preacher — “He comes across as arrogant.”

Granted, it is possible for a truly humble person to be misunderstood and misjudged as arrogant. Also true is the fact that preachers are particularly liable to the false accusation of arrogance. They often have to rebuke others, to point out error in the doctrines or lives of others, and when they do, they can be falsely accused of acting out of pride and arrogance. People don’t like being told they are wrong, and they often lash out at the bearer of the news in an effort to avoid dealing with the truth (Matt. 7:6).

However, it is also true that many preachers are simply arrogant. In spite of the fact that we do not elevate clergy, they see themselves as above others and above certain things. This attitude is very damaging to the cause of Christ, and must be shameful to the Lord, who was himself meek and lowly (Matt. 11:29). If the creator of the universe can wash His disciples’ feet (John 13:14) and can humble Himself even unto death (Phil. 2:5-8), is it not clearly wrong for us as evangelists to have arrogant attitudes?

ELEVATING ‘CLERGY’

Some preachers think they are above. They don’t wear a title elevating them, but they expect others to treat them as if they exist on a

higher plane.

1) *Some preachers are above being questioned or corrected.* As a child I saw a preacher get red in the face and snap at someone who questioned what he had preached, as if it were a personal insult to question what the preacher said. We should pray for and rejoice at the idea that people are not following us and our authority. We should see it as a noble thing that some want to check out what we say rather than following blindly because we are “preachers” (Acts 17:11).

2) *Some preachers are above saying, “I don’t know.”* They wrongly believe that being instant in season and out of season (II Tim. 4:2) means having an immediate answer to any question without study and reflection. Preachers like this see themselves as oracles rather than speaking as the oracles of God (I Peter 4:11). They do not hesitate to come down on one side or the other of an issue about which they have incomplete knowledge. They give advice when it is not sought, and they are never so flattered as when someone calls them up about some thorny congregational problem from the next city or from several states away. They answer from afar, and they often shame themselves by answering before they hear a matter. “*He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him*” (Prov. 18:13). Preachers need to be more humble. They need to stay out of matters of which they have little knowledge. They need to acknowledge their own limited knowledge and wisdom. And, they need to see the folly of coming down on a matter when they have only one side of the issue. Proverbs 18:17 says, “*He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.*” The one who first

presents his case seems right, but there is usually another side.

3) *Some preachers are above visitation.* They are taught in many schools that preachers have no more obligation than any member of the congregation to visit the sick or the aged. While this fact is true, it doesn't take the whole matter into account. Members of the church are to be concerned about and involved with each other (Rom. 12:15; I Cor. 12:26). Preachers, as full time workers in the kingdom, have more time to give to this work, and they have a great opportunity to set an example to the congregation of the kind of care we should have for one another. Instead, many arrogant, "professional" preachers act as if they are above these common things that all members should be doing.

THE SIN OF PRIDE

We are not supposed to be prideful people. Pride is always presented in Scripture as a sin. It is never a good thing for man to be lifted up with pride. A simple study of the book of Proverbs would be helpful to proud, arrogant preachers (Prov. 8:13; 11:2; 13:10; 16:18; 28:25; 29:23). Especially appropriate for preachers to take as warning is Proverbs 16:5 — *"Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished."*

CONCLUSION

Save us from arrogant preachers! Arrogant preachers set a bad example. Arrogant preachers encourage false attitudes about elevating "clergy" above other members. We have no clergy in the Lord's church, and there is no excuse for acting like an elevated clergy. Arrogant preachers shame themselves and deny the power of humility. In fact, arrogant preachers are far from being disciples (followers) of our meek and lowly Savior.

Preachers, like all other men need to remember these verses: James 4:6, *"God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."* James 4:10, *"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up."* I Peter 5:5-6, *"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the*

elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."

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Instrumental Church...

(Continued from page 81)

who are Christians indeed are **no part** of a "branch" of the church or "branch" of some "movement" of men. Rather, they are members of the body of Christ, added by the Lord when they obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine, namely, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ as depicted in baptism unto the remission of their sins.

What is the Instrumental Church of Christ? Who knows? It certainly is not found within the Bible. Therefore, it is not of God and is thus sinful! Let us study together and learn from the Bible what truly is the Lord's church, the church of Christ. Thanks for reading.

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[Editor's Note:] In the October 2006 issue of STOP, we printed the name "Instrumental Church of Christ" in the front page article. We did so "only" in the sense that is a descriptive name or identifying mark, just like the Methodist Church, the Baptist Church, the Catholic Church, or even the denomination called the "United Church of Christ" (which has absolutely NO affiliation with the church of Christ whatsoever — the only similarity is the name). We did not intend to give this religious group any credibility as if they were a branch or segment of the church of Christ (the Lord's church). Please read brother Robin Haley's article beginning on the front page.

The so-called "Instrumental Church of Christ" is a branch of the Christian Church, not the church of Christ of the New Testament. In different parts of the country, some Christian Churches wear the name Church of Christ. From their sign on

the building, you would think they are associated with the Lord's church. However, this is a denominational group that just happens to use the name "Church of Christ" and is not to be confused with or associated with the church of Christ of the New Testament. We included the word "instrumental" to make it clear that they are not the church of Christ of the New Testament. If you were to walk into one of their buildings, the first thing you would observe would be mechanical instrumental music. But, the instrument is not the ONLY difference. There are many others as well. Any one of which brings God's disapproval.

—Editor

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DOES THE BIBLE TEACH THAT GOD CALLS MEN?

Roger D. Campbell

While some might want to give an answer that is based on their own personal feelings, our feelings are not the standard of authority to which we should appeal when answering questions that deal with serving the Lord. The Bible says, *"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death"* (Prov. 16:25). Others may be convinced that God calls men simply because that is what they have heard someone else say. The reality is, what people say, even sincere people, can sometimes be wrong. Again, what other people have to say about a matter does not determine what the truth is. God's word, and God's word alone, is our truth in the spiritual realm (John 17:17). Thus, in answering this question about God's calling, we need to turn to the Book of books for accurate information.

The Fact of God's Calling:

There are a number of New Testament verses which indicate that the Lord does, indeed, call men. Here is a brief sample of quotations: *"That ye should walk worthy of God, who hath called you..."* (I Thess. 2:12). *"...That ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness..."* (I Peter 2:9). *"...The power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us..."* (II Tim. 1:9). This list could be expanded, but the point is clear. Yes, God does call men. While we have already answered the question that serves as the title of this article, it will be helpful to look further at what the Bible says about God's calling.

The Bible's Description of God's Calling: Here are some ways the Bible portrays the Lord's calling. It is "His calling" in that He is the Caller (Eph. 1:18). At the same time, it is "(y)our calling" because we (humans) are the ones that are called (Eph. 4:4). The Bible also calls it a "high calling" (Phil. 3:13), "holy calling" (II Tim. 1:9), and "heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1). If the Holy One gives us a high, holy, and heavenly calling, then surely we need to count this as a serious matter.

Into What Does God Call People? According to the Bible, God

"hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (I Thess. 4:7). In addition, we read that the Lord calls men *"out of darkness into his marvelous light"* (I Peter 2:9). It is further written that He calls us *"unto His kingdom and glory"* (I Thess. 2:12), *"unto His eternal glory"* (I Peter 5:10), *"unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord"* (I Cor. 1:9), *"to peace"* (I Cor. 7:15), *"into the grace of Christ"* (Gal. 1:6), and *"unto liberty"* (Gal. 5:13). One that denies the reality and significance of God's calling is virtually casting aside multitudes of clear Bible statements. And, from the verses that we have just noted, one that disregards the calling of God loses out on the opportunity to be in His glory, kingdom, light, fellowship, peace, grace, and liberty! That brings us to another major question.

How Does God Call People?

Many who hear the expression "calling of God" automatically think of some miraculous or irresistible calling. First, let us note that it is true that God did miraculously call men to serve as prophets and apostles. At other times, as in the case of Abraham (Heb. 11:8), God called men to carry out certain tasks, that is, He gave them direct instructions. The days of such miraculous calling, however, passed away with the completion of God's revelation to mankind in the first century (I Cor. 13:8-10). It follows that there is no such thing as God directly speaking to or directly calling humans today. That goes for all people, including those who claim that God has secretly "called" them to preach. Folks, it just does not happen in our day.

Second, when it comes to God calling people unto His glory, light, liberty, etc., He has never done this in an irresistible manner or in a way that sidesteps or overrides man's freedom of choice. While great masses of religious people believe in some type of "irresistible grace" by which the Holy Spirit miraculously opens a sinner's heart and calls him/her unto salvation, the Gospel of the Christ teaches no such thing. Do you want to hear God's truth about this? The

truth is, the Holy Spirit and His calling can be resisted. Stephen (an inspired preacher) said so, telling the Jews that eventually killed him, *"...ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye"* (Acts 7:51). For those that accept what the Bible teaches, "Enough said."

But HOW does the Lord call men unto His grace, fellowship and kingdom? Hear the Bible's answer: *"But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (II Thess. 2:14). How is it that the Lord called these people unto salvation? "By our gospel." That is, through the Gospel which the apostle Paul preached, which is the one, true Gospel of God's Son (Gal. 1:6-10). Jesus also taught that God attracts or draws men unto Him (Jesus) through the teaching of God's word. People come to the Christ only when the Father teaches them through His word (John 6:44,45). Faith is produced by the word of God (Rom. 10:17; John 20:30,31).

Thus, God calls men (through His inspired word) out of sin and into His Son, and He keeps on calling the faithful to remain faithful in order that they might enter the heavenly kingdom (II Peter 1:10,11). This may not seem like the most fancy or effective method to human minds, but it is God's plan! The Gospel is, and will always be, His power to save a person for the first time and to keep him/her saved (Rom. 1:16)!

Does the Bible teach that God calls people? Yes, it does, and we have noted some of the Bible's descriptions of that calling, what it is that God calls men into, and the method He uses to call the lost. Thanks be to God for His grace and love that have provided us with such a wonderful calling and bountiful spiritual blessings in His Son (Eph. 1:3).

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LESSONS LEARNED FROM NEHEMIAH

Marvin L. Weir

Most remember that the children of Israel were carried into Babylonian captivity because of their lack of faith in the true and living God. In 605 B.C., Babylon conquered Israel. Among those deported into captivity were Daniel and his friends (II Chron. 36:6-7; Dan. 1:1-3). In 598 B.C., Ezekiel and about 10,000 others were carried into captivity. In 586 B.C., the temple of Jerusalem was destroyed and the city burned, and all except the very poor were taken to Babylon (II Kings 24:20-25:21; Jer. 39:1-10). When the time came where God saw fit to allow a remnant to return to Jerusalem, they managed to restore true worship, but did not rebuild the walls.

In 536 B.C., Zerubbabel led the first return from Babylonian captivity. In 457 B.C., Ezra leads the next return of God's people. In 444 B.C., Nehemiah leads the final return. While in captivity, Nehemiah learned about the conditions of his brethren and the temple. He prayed to God that he might be able to return to Jerusalem. His prayer was answered. Upon Nehemiah's arrival, he set about the task of repairing the walls and God's house.

The Lord's church today can learn valuable lessons from Nehemiah's plan to rebuild the temple walls of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah **investigated** and saw the great need to restore the walls of the temple. The work was too important to ignore. God's house had been in disarray far too long. Thus, Nehemiah led the effort to begin the task.

We need brethren today who will take a serious look at the needs of the Lord's church. Some congregations carefully maintain the physical structure but are in spiritual shambles. More people are needed who will insist that God's pattern for worship and Christian living be followed. We need brethren like Nehemiah who will take the lead in encouraging others to do God's will.

Nehemiah called for **volunteers**. No one was coerced to help. No bait was dangled before people to

entice them to help. Nehemiah wanted people to help who truly loved God. He knew that one who willingly volunteers to do God's work will be a happy worker and devoted to the task at hand.

It is no different today in the Lord's church. God's wants willing laborers in the kingdom who lovingly respond to His commands. Unless one is willing to "*deny himself, and take up his cross daily*" (Luke 9:23), he is not likely to volunteer to do much work in the Lord's vineyard.

The people were **united** in their efforts to repair the temple wall or they would have not been successful. The brethren worked side by side, cooperating one with the other, and steadfastly remained dedicated to the task at hand. They refused to be distracted by worldly people and worldly matters.

Brethren today must understand the necessity of speaking the same thing and being "*perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment*" (I Cor. 1:10). Protection from false teachers is needed just as badly today as was protection from Nehemiah's enemies, "*Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites...*" (Neh. 4:7-8). Nehemiah says of his devoted workers that "*they all builded the wall and they that bare burdens laded themselves; every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other held his weapon*" (Neh. 4:17).

In doing the Lord's work today one must not forget to have in his hand the "*the sword of the Spirit*" (Eph. 6:17). May we always strive to "*give diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Eph. 4:3).

Nehemiah's volunteers **cooperated** in rebuilding the wall. All had a job to do, and each one did his individual task.

Each member of the body of Christ today has a job to do as they contribute to the needs of the kingdom (cf. I Cor. 12:13-27).

Nehemiah did not allow his people to become discouraged. Enemies from within and without did not deter the workers from their task.

The devil never wants God's work to succeed. A stumblingblock will always be provided courtesy of Satan.

Some today say that the work of the Lord's church cannot be accomplished in the way the Lord intended. Such is false thinking and far from the truth. Let us never become discouraged in building upon a solid foundation (cf. Acts 4:12; I Cor. 3:11; Matt. 27:24-27).

Nehemiah's volunteers had a **mind** to work. They did not show up for only two hours per week. They did not possess the attitude that someone else could and should do the task. They prayed to God that they could be used for His service and glory — and God used them!

If we as members of the body of Christ possess the proper attitude and have a mind to work in His vineyard, the Lord will also use us to His service and glory. May we all have the spirit of Nehemiah!

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[EDITOR'S NOTE: the 2006 lectureship book of the Garfield Heights church of Christ in Indianapolis, Indiana, is now available. There are 24 chapters (over 300 pages) in this book that are devoted to a study of COVENANTS. The material is excellent and will provide the reader with a rewarding study. You can get a copy of it from

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and later to the Gentiles. Jesus came to fulfill the law. His death would end the covenant for the Jews only and begin a new covenant for the world. John 1:11 shows their misguided zeal. The Jews wanted to cling to a temporary and dead covenant that left no hope for salvation. They were too proud in the traditions of their forefathers to obey the Gospel. True, misguided zeal, according to Romans 9 and 10 will cause one to lose his soul. But, at the same time, many churches are zealous with their unscriptural teachings, like the prescribed sinner's prayer, confirmation, man made creeds, celibacy, deifying Mary, praying to saints and voting converts into the church. Paul wrote in Galatians 5:4 that to revert to the Law of Moses will cause one to lose his soul. Brother Hoff ends by stating that zeal of what the Bible really teaches is good. Our zeal should be to instruct non believers to: hear the truth, believe the gospel, repent of sins, confess Christ, be baptized into Christ and live a separated life" ...**Leslie Putman, El Dorado, AR.** "We enjoy your publication so very much. I would appreciate your sending it to my sisters. I know they will enjoy them as much as we do. Keep up the good work" ...**Andrew Lancaster, Albertville, AL.** "Please remove from your mailing list" ...**Neal Pollard, Mechanicsville, VA.** "I love your paper" ...**Bettye Zumbrun, Deltona, FL.** "Please delete David Stampfly from your mailing list" ...**David Stampfly, Pulaski, TN.** "Appreciate it very much" ...**Shawn Triplett, Mineral Point, MO.** "I work with the Oakley Street church of Christ. We are a small group of Christians struggling to do the Lord's work. On a good Sunday we may have 25 in worship. Please put me on your mailing list. I find STOP to be very helpful for my own knowledge and to teach" ...**Johnie McCallister, Thibodaux, LA.** "I look forward for my STOP each month. I wish it came every week. Thank you" ...**Barbara Morris, Lampe, MO.** "I look forward to STOP. There are so many articles to gain strength from. Thank you very much. May God bless you in this work" ...**Ron Shandor, Death Valley, CA.** "Thank you" ...**Bill Lester, Jonesboro, AR.**

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