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"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Phil. 4:13

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Divisions and Discipline

The apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome,

"Now I urge you, brethren, **mark those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.**" .." not serving our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly...**with fair speeches deceive** the hearts of the simple."

Rom. 16:17-18

Here we find a principle, no matter who dismembers the body of the Lord they must be "marked and avoided." The same apostle wrote young Titus,

Titus 3:10-11

"**Reject a divisive man** after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a **person is warped and sinning**, being self-condemned. I know a lot of sincere, loving and kind people, sympathizers, who will not take a stand for truth, **refusing to "mark and avoid"** those that divide the church but continue to fellowship them.

Today is my 88th birthday. Having spent 75 of those years in the Lord's church it has been my unfortunate experience to be involved in a number of divisions in the church. Bear with me and I will speak of my early years as a child. The Great Depression in the United States lasted 12 years, from 1930 to 1942. Small two room school houses were erected about 10 miles apart so that we, as children, would not have to walk more than 5 miles. Although there were several smaller towns surrounding Abilene, Texas, about 40 miles distant from we lived, it was the center of commerce for this agricultural area. Students from Abilene Christian College often spoke on Sundays at these country school-house churches who, in their worship services, followed the Bible pattern. Congregational singing was beautiful, men spoke one by one, the Lord's supper was observed each Sunday, prayers were offered and a hat was passed around to collect the contribution. Women remained silent. After World War 11, most farmers owned a Ford car.

The liberals suggested that one large building be built creating one large assembly. To the surprise of most, along with the new building also came a full-time paid preacher. Design of the building included class rooms. The assembly was divided into classes, with some of the classes being taught by women, especially the young children. **A great deception had taken place.** No longer were the worship services following the Bible pattern. Now, instead of the sweet fellowship, there are heartaches and tears. Even some families were divided. No wonder God hates divisions. Just horrible!

Valid objections arose over dividing of the assembly into classes, with women teaching some of the classes and having a located-paid preacher to do the teaching.

The apostle Paul's instruction to the Corinthians were either being ignored or **violated by those deceivers. 1 Cor. 14.** Here are some of the phrases, "Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place... Vs 23. For you can all prophesy (teach) one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. Vs.31-35 "Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in the church." Faithful brethren had no options. Obeying Scripture, **they marked those who caused the division and offenses** and built a small meeting house in another town.

The one-container division

My brother, Sewell, and I married sisters. Because of my asthma, we moved from Texas to Tucson, Arizona . My dad bought and shipped to us, two canvass tents, one 16' X 20', the second one was smaller. We paid down on a lot, in the NE part of town where we pitched our tents. Together we had two young boys just a few months old. The local junk yard furnished us with two sets of iron bedsteads and an old kerosene stove for heating and cooking. A number 3 wash tub, filled with water and ice, served as our refrigerator. (ice box). We were very poor but very happy.

Not finding a faithful church in this city of 80,000 people, we held our first worship service, just the four of us, in the 'big' tent. Valta and Oda kept the dirt floor very clean. One day about 8 people drove up in an old car asking if we were 'The Yarbrough's from Texas. They introduced themselves as the Taylor family, assuring us that they too, were members of the church of Christ. They showed us a card from an evangelist who was very well known to us. He had informed them that we had moved to Tucson, Arizona, suggesting they make an effort to find us. How happy we were to have 14, including the children, to meet with.

One Sunday, the Taylors introduced us to two Christian families, known to them, who desired to join in our fellowship. Of course, we were delighted. Our dream of having a faithful congregation in Tucson, with the Lord's blessings, seemed now to be a reality. It was now necessary to rent a room down at our local High School. In time an evangelist, having heard of us, came to encourage us. His name was Odell White. After his sermon, brother Taylor asked him if he believed in using more than one container in serving the communion. He answered. Yes! For two years **They had deceived us.** We had always used 'one container' but we didn't know they made a law on this point. Their doctrine is this: everyone must drink from the same 'cup' no matter how large the congregation may be. If more than one 'cup' is used they will have no fellowship with us. What a tragedy! The Lord only gave us two items to be used in observing the Lord's supper; The **bread and the fruit of the vine.** The apostle Paul wrote,

“For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. **1 Cor. 11:26**, ‘We drink ‘the cup’, the fruit of the vine. Our Lord said to some Pharisees, “ Thus you nullify the commands of God for the sake of traditions.” **Matt. 15:6.**

The inspired Luke wrote, “Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "**Take this and divide it among yourselves; Luke 22:17.** They, being divisive, we had to reject them after the first and second admonition. **All things must be done in love. Tit. 3:10.**

Here is a long story made short. In the early 90's brother Harry and I met with some wonderful brothers who believed that the fruit of the vine had to be blessed in one container, then, after the blessing, several drinking vessels could be used if necessary. Brother Kent Dickenson, a beloved brother, also worked with this fellowship, having supported him for several years in the Africa work. We were privileged to meet with him and his brethren. Everyone were very cordial to us. Brother Kent described to us a Lord's Day morning service, how the fruit of the vine and the bread was served.

He said about 1500 brothers and sisters were present. I asked him kindly, “Brother Kent, if we are to bless the fruit of the vine in one container, and afterward divide it, how was this done?” Kent was so humble and honest, he said, “Brother Bill, We had 8 large jars full of the fruit of the vine. There were eight men, with their ladles filled their cups and began passing them to the congregation.” This part of the service, including passing the bread, took several hours. From this time forward, we have had wonderful fellowship with these honest and humble servants of the Lord. All glory and praise be to the Lord.

Marriage, Divorce and Re-marriage

I trust you received my December presentation on this subject, if not, please let me know and I will send it to you. But I wish to continue this subject in order to share with you some **personal experiences** which may be of benefit to you. My brother Sewell and myself, with our wives, met in his home for the first four years of our move to Tucson, Arizona. We practically died on the vine, spiritually speaking, but we were raised very different than the practice of the big Sunday-school church in our city. They had a full-time paid preacher, women taught some of the classes and evidently they had no position on the subject of marriage.

God was with us. Working in the construction trade we were able to construct a new, red brick building, opening the doors in February of 1951. Sewell and I were both in our twenties, but we soon learned that the responsibilities of being considered leaders in the Lord's church was somewhat overwhelming. The one subject we were not well versed in was the subject of Marriage and Divorce. Soon, some of the well known evangelist came our way to preach for a few nights. We were delighted.

Our oldest brother and his wife were baptized. Both had been married before. Sewell and I had personal knowledge of the events in their lives. Another evangelist came and baptized two couples, both of them were divorced and remarried. Soon, there were five couples in our congregation, each one insisting their situation was no different than the first who were baptized, these men also taking part in the services. After all, who were we to judge as to which of these cases were acceptable and those which were not. But their stories were not all the same. One sister admitted she had been married five times but now single.

One Sunday she came and announced she just married Slim. Number 6. Out of love we showed her from the scriptures that this marriage was an adulterous marriage. Without hesitation, she replied, "If I have to choose between the church and Slim, I'll stay with Slim." Soon, there were more members in the church with questionable marriages that those that were not. What were we to do? The evangelist didn't want to get involved by visiting them in trying to figure out what the scriptural course should be.

We invited a respected elder from Texas to come and help us. By this time my brother and I had learned our lesson the hard way. We had now come to the truth of the Scriptures with help from the Phoenix church. We wanted this elder who was well respected, and who held the same doctrinal view that we had learned from the Bible, to come and help us with these many problems. But again, he said he didn't want to get involved. It took a little time, but Sewell and I went from family to family, pleading with them to keep coming to the services, asking the men not to 'take part' in the services.

Most defend their re-marriage position calling attention to "the cause". We learned in my December discussion that "the cause" was under the Law of Moses. And speaking of divorce Jesus said, "in the beginning of creation it was not so." So the admonition I wish to pass on to you, is that, in the church assembly, if one brother is accepted for whatever reason, and permitted to take an active part in the services, then you may just as well **get ready to accept all** who come to you no matter what their questionable marital situation may be.

All Scriptures considered, Matthew, Mark and Paul agree with Luke, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery." **Luke 16:18**. Plain and simple. **Romans 7 and 1 Cor. 7:39-40**. Another thing which we seriously considered was this; We were being asked to judge cases which happened many years ago and probably in another State as to the truth of the situation. We hear only one side of the case. It is usually not possible to hear the 'other side'. But one time we did have that opportunity to talk to the 'guilty party.' We were greatly surprised to find out that his story was much more believable than the so-called 'innocent party' had conveyed to us. We concluded, prayerfully, that God would not put us in the position where we had to

make a judgment between who's the guilty party and who is innocent. **We do know the Lord expects the church, the Bride of Christ, to be holy, to be without spot, wrinkle or blemish.** This is made possible by having our spiritual garments **washed often by the blood of the Lamb.**

A Study Of The HIRED PREACHER TRADITION

The word 'minister in our Bibles simply means, 'one who serves, a servant'. Are the sisters in our congregations ministers.? Do they not serve in many capacities? Yes, they surely do. Any faithful church of our Lord Jesus has as many ministers as it has members, men and women. Most of the churches in the United States would find this very hard to believe. The Catholic churches have their priests, the protestant churches have their pastors, while most of the churches of Christ have their 'minister'. I have seen many signs, and I am sure you have to, that reads, similar to this "The Spring Hill Church of Christ" Hours of worship are given, then down at the bottom it reads, "**Joseph Smith, Minister.**" Does this church have only one member? I'm being foolish! Of course not!

The clergy and the laity system had its beginning in the mid-eighteen hundreds, when churches of Christ began to build Colleges, they offered a course in Bible as part of their schedule. Young men graduated receiving a degree and a diploma in Bible Theology. It is common today to read in a church of Christ advertisement, "**WANTED: A MINISTER WITH AT LEAST A MASTERS DEGREE IN BIBLE THEOLOGY.**"

Jesus, the apostle Paul or any of the apostles would not qualify to be The Minister of this church. I just now looked up the definition of the word, 'theology'. A short description is: A study of God's relationship with man and the universe. Often it is said, "My son is studying to become a minister. I am so proud of him." There is a man, just retired from serving 35 years as the minister of a large church of Christ in Amarillo, Texas. According to the Bible, who is a minister?" **Now those who were scattered** after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, **preaching the word** to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. Thousands left Jerusalem, the new converts went everywhere preaching the gospel. **Acts 11:19-21**

What about the church in Thessalonians? This church was full of preachers,

1 Thess. 1:6-8

"And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. **For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth,** not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place.

Rom 15:14

“Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, **filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.**”

1 Cor. 14:29-31

The apostle Paul instructed the church at Corinth during the days of inspiration, “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy (the word prophesy is used for the word teach) one by one, that all may learn and all maybe encouraged.”

Rom 16:1-2

“I commend to you Phoebe, our sister, **who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea**, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a **helper of many** and of myself also.” Phoebe was ‘a servant’. Every Christian enters the ministry the moment they enter into Christ. These verses show that every saint is to be a teacher, including women in their private capacity.

Alexander Campbell, one of the great men involved in the Restoration Movement in America, made these comments,

“To hire men to preach the gospel in a Christian congregation is a reproach upon the congregation which employs them. It is the duty of every Christian to proclaim the word to those ignorant of it...” Again, he said,

“Any man that is to be paid at all for preaching, to make and pronounce sermons, or that any man is to be paid for a stipulated sum of money to preach and pray, and expound scriptures, by the day, month or years, I believe is a relic of the popery.”

Let us read what David Lipscomb wrote on the subject, (One of the Reformers).

“Only that church is strong which is able to conduct all the worship services and do all the work of the church within itself. That church is doing well that is able to live without the preacher, that is able to edify itself, encourage and exhort one another...it is only a weak, helpless church that needs, as the babe, a constant nurse.” (Preacher)

MEXICO. Brother Harry Cobb, **doing the work of an evangelist** since he was 17 years of age, has no equal among the churches who follow the Bible pattern as. I have no idea how many countries he has worked in, but for the past 25 years I have had the privilege and pleasure of working with him in 7 different countries, beside our work in the United States. Five years before I met brother Harry he had been going down to Guaymas, Mexico, to encourage a small group of Christians meeting in that city.

Even though he could not speak one word of Spanish, there was one language that is universal, that everyone understands; a humble attitude, kindness, a gentle spirit, smiles, and a sincere interest in their well-being. Here is brother Harry’s report,

“There was a Mexican evangelist working there by the name of Arturo. He did a very effective work among the young brethren. **In this he did a very fine example which I encourage all churches to follow.** While brother Arturo did speak in the assemblies, he provided plenty of opportunity for the younger brethren to develop their own speaking abilities. He never dominated the pulpit but encouraged participation in others. Meetings were conducted, almost daily, in various homes, where a different young brother would speak. This was very wise preparation for the well-being of the church of the future, and in doing this he was following the instructions of the apostle Paul to young Timothy.

2 Tim 2:1-3

“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” If young men are not allowed to put their talents to use their interest will soon die. If young men are not encouraged to study and assume a part of the leadership, the congregation will dwindle as older brethren fail in body and mind. If this should be allowed to happen, our long and hard efforts will have been in vain, and the noble cause of our Lord will suffer. Let your young men now begin to assume a greater part in the leadership, for the future of the congregation lies in their hands.”

As I mentioned earlier in this presentation, the church in Tucson has never had a “located-paid-preacher”, but we could not escape being involved in a division of the brotherhood that happened in the late 1940’s. Here is the story: A brother G. Shelburne began a **preaching school** in a church of Christ building located in Kerrville, Texas. Although we were still meeting in my brother’s house, we did not become involved in the division until the mid 50’s. I knew brother Shelburne personally. He was a Bible scholar, very kind and gentle. A great teacher. Our younger brother Leland attended his school so this gave us first-hand knowledge.

There were a number of meetings among church leaders, elders and evangelist from all over the brotherhood to try and see if there were scriptural grounds for this ‘preacher school’ to be accepted. All efforts failed. In a few short years our entire brotherhood was divided. Unfortunately, for those of us who wish to follow the Bible pattern, **we came out as the minority**. The larger segment of our fellowship followed brother Shelburne. The leaders of those who followed him, for the most part, were college graduates and many held the position of ‘minister’ in their own congregations. Again, with every division, there is untold grief, sorrow, pain and many families divide, some going this way and some going that. But in every division there are untold members who become discouraged and leave the church. Some never return.

The apostle Paul called the elders at Ephesus to meet him on the island of Miletus. He didn’t call the ‘preacher’ or ‘their minister’ but he called for the elders. After a long discourse he gave them the following warning, “ **Acts 20:29-31**

“For I know this, that after my departure **savage wolves** will come in among you, **not sparing the flock**. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.”

What is all the fuss then, what is the real issue? It all boils down to HIS WORK! Plain and simple. It is not whether he can be supported, but rather what is he being supported to do? He's got to survive, “A laborer is worthy of his hire.” His income should be based on his needs. He should not be expected to live as a beggar, but neither should he expect to live above that of the average family. He can work with a local congregation, large or small, with no time limit set for him to leave. Two things must be considered: What does the congregation expect of him? To be scriptural, they should expect him, in the assembly, to be in subjection to the elders, to take his turn in speaking, not to intentionally rob the brothers and sisters of their own responsibilities, and to evangelize in their community.

Second, he should understand his work is to work, as we have stated, to be under the direction of the elders, or leaders, if there are no elders, taking his turn speaking if there are brethren capable of teaching. If he is working with a new congregation then he should be making every effort to “work himself out of a job” and move on to other areas where he is needed. In this case, no one can put a time limit on just how long his work should be there. The apostle Paul gave the following instructions to Timothy, “Preach the Word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine... Watch, be on guard in all things, endure afflictions, do the Work of an evangelist, make full proof of your ministry.”

I mentioned earlier that brother Sewell and myself opened the doors of our new church New church building at 21st. Street and Country Club Road, Tucson, Arizona, in 1951. After 20 years in Tucson, Valta and I, with our family moved to Sierra Vista, Arizona in 1965. You could hardly call in a town, at that time, we didn't even have one stop light. I had traded my equity in an apartment house in Tucson for 153 acres of land here in Sierra Vista. I built a mobile home development **called Cloud 9**. (Cloud 9 church of Christ).

The first thing I did was to donate 2 acres of land to the Church of Christ, just in case the Lord Blessed our efforts to establish a congregation here. If not, within a year, we plan to move on somewhere else. I baptized some friends of our children. Then in 1968 we built a small log cabin. In 1979 we bricked it in, and doubled the size. Now 45 years later, with some problems, we follow the Bible pattern. Praise God! No Divisions.

“May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you.” **2 Cor. 13:14**