

Churches of Christ --- Then and Now
Lesson 2 – The Historic Problem of Institutionalism
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Introduction: The people of God are defined by a living faith.

A. When one trusts God they are motivated by the presence and sight of God.

(1 Tim 6:12-14)

1. When men know and fear the living God they will be filled with zeal.
2. These people do not look to “get by” or to let others do their work.
3. As we studied last lesson, it the grace of God moves us. **(Titus 2:11-14)**

B. We are challenged to maintain that faith over time and over generations.

1. The church at Ephesus started with great zeal and sacrifice.

(Acts 19:8-10, 17-20)

2. Paul later warned the Elders about the future. **(Acts 20:28-30)**

3. Many years later we begin to see the first steps away from God. **(Rev 2:1-5)**

I. God has given us the local church for Christians to work together

A. **ἐκκλησία**, ας, ἡ (1) in a general sense, as a gathering of citizens *assembly, meeting* (AC 19.32); ... (3) as the assembled Christian community *church, congregation, meeting* (RO 16.5); ... (5) as the universal body of believers *church* (EP 1.22)

1. The common meaning of the word translated “church” is an assembly.
2. The Greek word “ekklesia” is from two words: **ek** – out and **kaleo** – to call.
3. When you read the word “church” in the Bible always think of people!

B. The Lord Himself established one church. **(Mt 16:18)**

1. He is head of this church and there is “but one.” **(Eph 1:22-23; 4:4-6)**
2. What is the “one true church?” Is it a local church? – No!
3. This one true church is a relationship between Jesus and every individual Christian. Baptism is the final step into the one body. **(1 Cor 12:13)**
4. This one church is not a functional body it is comprised only of individuals.
5. Where is the “headquarters” of the church of Christ? Where is our head?

C. The Lord also ordained local churches. **(1 Cor 1:2; Rom 16:16; Gal 1:2)**

1. How can there be but “one church” and there be “churches of Christ” at the same time? Even though the same word is used (church) the context shows we are talking about 2 very different things!
2. The local church is a functional body that has a beginning and over time an end.

D. The assembly of Christians is also called “church” or “churches”.

1. Sometimes it can refer to a mob of non-Christians. **(Acts 19:32)**
2. It can mean a specific kind of gathering of Christians. **(1 Cor 14:33-37)**

II. The historic first steps in apostasy occur in organization

A. The local church is the only organization that God has given us to work together. **(Phil 1:1; Acts 14:23; 1 Tim 3:1, 8; 1 Pt 5:1-2)**

1. Men have tried to make the universal church a functional body.
2. Consider the progression of Catholicism to eventually having a pope in 606 AD.
3. In the 1800’s brethren tried a partial effort to supplant the local church in the missionary society.

4. Those that opposed these things were “quarantined” and labeled as “anti.”
- B. In the 1900’s another effort was made through the sponsoring church arrangement.
 1. Brethren took passages where churches sent money to another church during a temporary famine and then use these example for a permanent work.
 2. In the scriptures churches sending money to another was always on a temporary basis for the purpose of relieving needy Christians.
(Acts 11:27-20; 1 Cor 16:1-3; 2 Cor 8:12-15)
 3. Churches began assuming works beyond their means to accomplish. One church decided to oversee all the preaching in Germany while another assumed the work of preaching on national radio and TV (Herald of Truth broadcast).
 4. What would you tell one that “assumed the work” of giving beyond his means?
 5. After decades of debate colleges started by Christians began to demand that churches support them.
 6. Preachers and churches that did not go along were marked and avoided.

III. The fruit of compromises in organization

- A. It takes away from the work and oversight of local churches.
 1. When all a church does is give money then it has surrendered its work.
 2. We can in a local church let another man or men do our work as well.
- B. Human institutions come to control local churches. When the institution changes so do the churches.
 1. There is no accountability to local churches.
 2. Men of power often rise to positions of power. It becomes a place to undermine.
 3. How many want a man to preach that is trained by a “church college”?
 4. What has happened to every college set up by brethren after 100 years?
 5. How many preachers have been fired because of a college? Consider the “symbiotic” relationship between local church and a college in the same town.
- C. It always is the beginning of decline.
 1. Which is more powerful, one good preacher or an entire church filled with faith? **(Acts 8:3-4; Acts 17:6; Col 1:23)**
 2. It is very wasteful. Consider the cost of a typical institution that can only exist by successful fund raising. (Ex. Member who gave a dollar and the a dime)
 3. Local churches unencumbered by human institutions and loyal to them can more effectively work together and make needed changes without outside interference.
- D. Consider the Sponsoring churches of the 1950’s and the colleges that sought church support in the 1950’s. Where are they now?

Questions to Consider:

1. What happened to the church in Ephesus over time? What happens when we lose our “first love” for the Lord?
2. Name some differences between a local church and the body of Christ.
3. Why does apostasy often occur in the organization of the church?
4. Did the early church spread the gospel to the whole world with “just” local churches?
5. Why is dependence upon human institutions a sure sign of decay in faith?

McGarvey, And The Course Of Digression At Lexington, Kentucky

Henry S. Ficklin, Owingsville, Kentucky

Lexington, Kentucky, is a place of great historical interest for those studying a movement to restore New Testament Christianity, which began about 150 years ago. Many significant events in the early days of that movement took place at Lexington. And, at Lexington, I am sorry to say, a great battle was lost in that effort to restore New Testament Christianity. There is more than one movement to restore New Testament Christianity. For restoring the faith and practice of the New Testament is something that ought to be going on everywhere, and all of the time.

The most influential figure living at Lexington in that restoration movement during the past 100 years was John W. McGarvey, who was a teacher in the College Of The Bible for 46 years, and its President for the last 16 years of his life. He died in October, 1911. He was outstanding for his Christian manhood, his knowledge of the Bible, and his impressiveness as a teacher and a preacher. It has been aptly said of him that he was: "Easy to hear; hard to forget". In the three former articles of this series, I have given an account of McGarvey as a man, as a preacher, as President of the College Of The Bible, as a teacher, and as a preacher. I have recounted his opposition to the introduction of the organ into the worship, and how he withdrew his membership from the Broadway Christian Church, just before that congregation, by majority vote, decided to use the organ in the worship. I have also pointed out that McGarvey did wrong in defending the American Christian Missionary Society, organized in 1849 with Alexander Campbell as its first President. This digressive action opened the door for other departures from gospel simplicity. Brother McGarvey opposed the use of mechanical instruments in the worship to the end of his life. But his associates were those who upheld the Missionary Society. And almost all of the advocates of the Society were also advocates of the use of the organ in the worship. And would we not naturally expect that they would? For there is a very close kinship between these two unscriptural positions. Thus, McGarvey's opposition to the use of the organ in worship was hampered by his fellowship, much of the time, with those who used it. And McGarvey's association with the officials of the Missionary Society, and the great number of preachers who supported it, was partly the cause of the subversion of the College later on. For there is a natural kinship and affinity between digression and **modernism**. Modernism loves centralization. Digression creates centralization.

The New Testament, of course, does not authorize the organization of a seminary, or a college. As a private institution it has the right to exist, if right in other ways. But as an ecclesiastical institution, it is unauthorized. The College Of The Bible seemed to be regarded as very much like the Missionary Society. We cannot expect the teaching of a college to remain Scriptural, if it is founded in an unscriptural way.

It is indeed sad — even tragical — that McGarvey departed from gospel simplicity when he supported the Missionary Society. But in many, many ways he upheld the truth of the gospel. One day, as the session was closing for the holidays, he said to us students: "I don't wish you a "merry Christmas". There is too much merriment about it already". In an ironical tone, he spoke about a preacher who was going to take charge of a church. He taught us that the elders were to take charge. In Lard's Quarterly, Volume II, page 311 in an article on "**Pastors**", McGarvey shows that, in the New Testament, an evangelist is not a pastor. He would doubtless object to a man who spoke of himself as "the" minister, and, even more to an "associate" minister. Is it not hard, brethren, to find a Scriptural name for an unscriptural thing? McGarvey, too, pointed out the vanity of calling a preacher "Doctor". He taught against all affectation and all pretense of any kind. He opposed all bally-hoo, all synthetic religion. A preacher's power, he taught us, is to be the power of the Lord, the power of the gospel. And he lived and preached as he taught us to do. In many ways he upheld gospel simplicity and purity.

But already the current was going against McGarvey; during his lifetime like Paul, he might have said; " — the mystery of lawlessness does already work". (**II Thessalonians 2:7.**) The "leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" was spreading. A great part of the student body and of the faculty had conformed. If any preacher was to have any "future", as worldly-minded preachers think of it, he would need to adapt himself to digression. In 1906 a new professor began to teach in the College Of The Bible. He had graduated from the College Of The Bible in 1898. Between that time and his coming in 1906 to Lexington he had studied at Harvard and Yale. All of us students expected a great deal from him, from what we had heard of him. But it was evident that a great change had come over him. His faith had been blighted at Harvard and Yale, and he had lost his singleness of heart. He began to "bore from within". He introduced as a text-book a work by a modernist that had a great deal that was unbelieving. He was one of the first in the modernist movement to destroy the College's faith and integrity.

During the years that I was at Lexington there was a great deal of interest in foreign missions among the students. I remember some earnest young men who were preparing for work in the foreign field. The sincerity of a number of them was evident. But there was also this sinister argument — that if you oppose the Society, you are "Anti-missionary". The advocates of organized societies of that day had a sentimental argument — "the lost heathen". And, is it not a significant thing, that those who uphold institutionalism today, use a similar emotional appeal: "Who COULD BE opposed to caring for widows and orphans," thus beclouding the issue with a sentimental appeal?

Brother McGarvey thought that he had arranged the method of choosing the Trustees of the College Of The Bible so that the faith of the College in the integrity of the Word of God would not be undermined I heard him say one day: "I would rather see this building leveled to the ground than to have it fall into the hands of higher critics". He tried to avoid that tragedy. But men became members of board of Trustees who were sympathetic toward modernism.

Then, after McGarvey's death, changes for the worse followed in rapid order. Two prominent modernists wanted to teach at the College and were chosen. Brother Hall L. Calhoun was then Dean, as I recall. I wrote him, protesting against the choice of these men as teachers. He afterwards told me, personally, when he was in Kentucky in a meeting, that he examined one of these men very thoroughly on all matters pertaining to the infallibility of the Bible, the Virgin Birth, and the resurrection of the body, and that he answered every one of them satisfactorily. And then he asked him if he was making any "mental reservation", as the Jesuits have taught it, and he said he was not. But, afterwards it became evident that Bro. Calhoun was misled about this man; he himself told me.

On January 23, 1923, a preacher who was for years a professor in the College Of The Bible, and for several years, its Dean, preached a sermon before one of the Christian Churches at Lexington, in which he said: "It is immaterial whether a man accepts evolution or not". This man also sneered at a student who stated that he believed in the resurrection of the body. Now, this remark about evolution just about expressed the attitude toward the Bible that the men held who took over control of the College Of The Bible, following McGarvey's death. Yet these men knew that the endowment of the College Of The Bible had been solicited largely by McGarvey himself and was given to uphold the integrity of the word of God. But they did not hesitate to break faith with dead men who had given this money. They did not blush when they used this money in a way that was exactly contrary to the will of the donors. This is Jesuitry, pure and simple. Why did they do it? Simply, because modernism has no conscience, and only one fixed principle, and that is self-interest.

As I thought about this "decline" of the College Of The Bible, of this departure from the faith, I was like Gibson musing among the ruins of Rome. It was then that I saw digression as it really is. My mind had not been fully made up until I saw what took place after McGarvey's death. I then saw that the only way to control unbelief is to be exactly on the New Testament position.

In 1929 the College Of The Bible held a "Centennial" of the birth of Brother McGarvey. It was supposed to be in his honor. A number of good things were said about him. But these were in the minor strain. The main theme of the Centennial addresses was that McGarvey had been out-grown, and that the churches and the College had advanced since his day. McGarvey was "wounded in the house of his friends". The very school which he helped to establish, and in which for over half of a century he was the most influential person, was used to attack the faith that McGarvey held. Right thinking people among his former students disapproved of this method of detraction, and of this sinister way of undermining the faith.

In 1940, the College Of The Bible celebrated the 75th Anniversary of the founding of the College Of The Bible. W. C. Morro, in behalf of the College wrote the 75th Anniversary with a biography of McGarvey, entitled: "BROTHER MCGARVEY". Professor Morro was a teacher at the College Of The Bible from 1906 until 1911, then a teacher in Butler College, at Indianapolis, and during his last year a professor at Brite College Of The Bible, Texas Christian University,

Fort Worth, Texas. I was a student in some of the classes of Professor Morro, and remember him well, as a very scholarly man, and a polished gentleman. But he lacked convictions, and so, was unimpressive as a teacher and as a preacher, and far less influential than McGarvey. Professor Morro undoubtedly had the ability, but he did not have the faith. As some expressed it "Artifice cannot charm the Devil out of humanity". The evil spirit answered the exorcists: "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" (**Acts 19:15.**) No modernist can speak with authority. Professor Morro says many kind things about McGarvey as a man. But he finds much fault with him as a teacher, and for the inflexible attitude that McGarvey took toward the Bible, and the faith which was "once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 8) Professor Morro cannot understand why McGarvey would oppose the use of the organ in worship. He tells us that when McGarvey began preaching people were poor and did not have organs in their homes, but with better economic conditions they had them, and it was then hard to show them that it was wrong to use them in the worship (Pages 133-136). And he tells us that "Here in Texas, there is a preacher who, on Sunday morn-big condemns the use of pianos, but who spends the time from Monday till Saturday tuning and selling them" (P. 133). It is hard to believe that a man could be a Professor in a Seminary of people professedly advocating a return to the faith of the New Testament and have so little spiritual discrimination. Professor Morro regrets the sharp criticism that McGarvey had for modernist preachers. On page 166 Morro criticizes McGarvey for ever expecting that we would ever have a "perfect" text of the Bible. Instead, Morro insists that the scholarship of today asserts only "probability" in regard to the text of the Bible. He cannot endure McGarvey's positive convictions, for Morro had more tolerance for error than he had for the truth, as all modernists do. There were three things that Morro had no conception of: (1) Divine authority, (2) Faith, and (3) Fixed principles. Such a man could never understand the Bible, until he changed; nor could he even understand McGarvey.

What has followed among the churches that digressed from the New Testament teaching about 100 years ago? Well, more and more of them receive "the pious unimmersed" as members. There is more observance of lent, of Good Friday, of the "Holy Week", and there is more pride. There is less of the divine in the worship all of the time, and more of the human. There is more wealth, but less spiritual power, among Christian churches. There is less emphasis on the gospel and more emphasis on gaudy, unscriptural ritual. A son of Karl Barth, after teaching in the country for some months, remarked that, among Protestant churches there was a "movement from the pulpit to the altar", a ceasing to preach the gospel, and a dependence on Romish worship.

What happened at the College Of The Bible since McGarvey's death is surely a lesson that we should study. For digression, once started, goes farther away from the New Testament, all of the time.

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