

THE RURAL ARKANSAS DISCONNECTION

David Halbrook

God has been “connecting” with His creation since the beginning, speaking understandable words to His intelligent creation—mankind (Hebrews 1:1). All who desire to maintain a connection with God willingly listen to, meditate on, and follow His teachings. Here we find a firm foundation of documented evidence to establish and maintain faith in Jesus that leads to life (Luke 24:44; 2 Peter 1:16; Mark 16:16).

On the subject of marriage, Jesus spoke clearly. God joins one man to one woman (Matthew 19:4-6, 9). Unconditional divorce and remarriage demonstrates the American disconnection from the plain teachings of the God who is over all marriage.

The gap left by that disconnect was widened this past week with our president’s support of same-sex marriage. John Brummet, an Arkansas columnist, thinks that survey numbers revealing a lack of Arkansan support for same-sex marriage “demonstrate the rural Arkansas disconnection from the bold generational change taking hold nationally.” He’s right—and what else should we do? If the rural Arkansan (and American) will cling to God’s revelation about marriage, we will be disconnected from the bold practice of sin. Does God expect otherwise? (Rom. 12:2)

-- *Editor’s Note:* The erosion of respect for God’s law on marriage did not begin with the same-sex marriage controversy. “No-fault divorce” is more at fault for this cancer in our culture. Use our *Arkansas Weekly* article to help someone think about what God has said about marriage.

We assemble each Sunday at 10AM, 10:45AM, 5PM & Wednesday at 7PM

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The Exhorter

Acts 11:23 *Exhorted them all... cleave unto the Lord*

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SUCCESSFUL EVANGELISM

Larry Hafley

What is the key to success in converting the lost? If I knew a secret formula, if I had an unfailing plan, I would be a millionaire. Multitudes of saved people would hover around me, but, alas, I do not have a magic system, a guaranteed program. No one else does, either. (The ones who claim they do usually have their system for sale. Does that tell you anything?) No, I am not opposed to literature, CDs, films and tapes which are neatly arranged, attractively presented and scripturally sound. But the answer is not to be found, bound, and sold. It cannot be packaged. We are used to instant oatmeal, instant coffee, instant pudding. Just plop it in the oven and presto, there it is. But there is no microwave gospel conversion kit. The answer is not to be found in better buildings or more dynamic preachers. A "good depression" is not the solution, either. What, then?

“And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42). “You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching” (Acts 5:28). “They lifted up their voices together to God And when they had prayed ... they ... continued to speak the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:24, 31). “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:2, 4). “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:20, 27).

Do you see the answer in the passages cited? It means more work, more preaching, more home Bible studies, more gospel meetings, more debates, both public and private, more efforts to initiate conversation about spiritual matters. The work will not be done by merely attending every service. It will not be done by increasing your

contribution. It will not be done by subscribing to a gospel paper or any other periodical. There are no short cuts. Success is not to be found in less controversy.

Conversions to Christ are products of pointed preaching and teaching. Bigger, broader smiles may gain access, but they do not save a soul from death.

Confrontation with error and evil was at the heart of all successful New Testament preaching. Check and see, if you doubt it. Conviction and conversion is always personal and often painful.

The following is not a slap at churches that have excellent personal work programs. There are some good ones, and there ought to be more. However, there is no substitute for plain old vanilla personal work. Sometimes we unwittingly make “Personal Work” into an institution itself, into a “Church Program.” That defeats the basic concept which is truly individual, personal work. Again, see the verses quoted earlier.

The need for greater, intense teaching is apparent. Generally, it is as simple as doing it. Talk to a neighbor, a friend, or a relative. Tell them. Awaken them. Shake them, if necessary. Teach them what the Bible teaches about their sin, their soul, and their Savior. That is the essence of “successful evangelism.”

ARE ANY NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES BINDING?

David Halbrook

Add this to your list of reasons why you cannot assume a church which claims to be “of Christ” really is. Within a day’s drive of Batesville, some churches of Christ are eating the Lord’s Supper in a Saturday assembly and playing musical instruments to worship God. There are several different ways by which they attempt to defend these changes to the worship identified in the New Testament. Some defend these changes by saying something like “New Testament examples are not God’s commands. Since God did not say ‘You can only eat the bread on the first day of the week’ or ‘You cannot play instruments to worship Me’ then our practices are acceptable to Him.”

If the examples of the worship of the Christians who were inspired or guided by inspired teachers are not equally binding upon us today, then notice some other areas in which we have no divine guidance--

1. Worship on the first day of the week. There is no verse which says precisely “thou shalt assemble on the first day of the week.” And if examples are not binding, then Acts 20:7 adds no weight to show that we must worship on this day making worship on the first day of the week a matter of opinion, not revelation. So, if a church decided to only have an annual assembly, then as long as the members of that congregation did not forsake that annual assembly then all is well.

2. Studying God's word when we assemble. There is no verse which says precisely “you must study God's word when you assemble to worship.” So, may we stop reading and teaching God's word when we assemble? Is that an option? We have *examples* of such being done but no explicit command. In Acts 2:42 and 20:7, in addition to breaking bread, we find the preaching of God's word on the first day of the week (“the apostles' doctrine,” “Paul preached”). The pattern of the worship of Christians on the first day of the week includes reading/teaching of God's word-- unless NT examples are not binding.

3. Prayers when we assemble. There is no verse which says precisely “prayer to God must be offered each time you assemble to worship.” We have examples of Christian's praying when they assembled (Acts 2:42) and of Paul giving instruction concerning *how* they were to pray (1 Cor.14), but nowhere is there an explicit command that prayers “must be” offered at the public assembly on the first day of the week. Prayer on this occasion stands on the same authority as does the Lord's Supper and preaching-- divinely approved examples (Acts 2:42). No assembly on the first day of the week is acceptable to God without it-- unless no NT examples are binding.

4. Identifying ourselves as “Christians.” There is no verse which says precisely “you must identify yourself as a Christian to please God.” Therefore, may we lay aside the name Christian? Yet how many people who follow the example of the disciples in Antioch (Acts 11:26) would rebuke someone who claimed to follow Christ but preferred not to be identified as a Christian? They like this example and expect others to keep it.

In fact the only explicit command of which we read concerning worship on the first day of the week is related to giving: “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come” (1 Cor. 16:1-2, emphasis mine). Note that this order is not instruction only for the Corinthians but included the churches of Galatia. Each Christian is to “lay something aside” on the first day of the week. So if we are only bound to keep explicit commands, then on the first day of the week we can assemble, give something to God, and go home! For most other ways we worship, we rely upon New Testament examples.

When men forsake God’s revelation and authority revealed in the practice, not just principles, of righteousness, they are headed down the broad path of the way that seems right to them, the end of which is certain death and destruction (Prov. 16:25; Matt. 7:13).