

Measuring Ourselves As We Measure Others

In 1943 while G. C. Brewer was serving the Broadway church in its old downtown location in Lubbock, Texas, I bought a little book from him. The book by J. N. Rayzor was *A History of the Denton County Baptist Association* copyrighted in 1936. Denton County is north of Dallas. I suspect that we in the Church of Christ might have bought as many of the books as the Baptists did.

Our interest centered on page 87 – just one paragraph which went as follows: “An incident in the Pilot Point church during Rev. J. B. Cole’s pastorate, which involved a point of doctrine subjected Pastor Cole to criticism, and gave the incident much publicity and notoriety. Pastor Cole went fishing one day with a business man who was not a Christian, and he availed himself of the opportunity to talk to the lost man about his unsaved condition, and led him to an acceptance of Christ. Jo Ives, the man converted, said to Pastor Cole, “Here is water, what doth hinder me from being baptized?” Obviously Brother Cole thought of the story of Philip and the eunuch, and, taking that incident as an example, he led Mr. Ives out into the water and baptized him. Rev. Cole had been a Baptist but a short time and was not up on their conception of baptism, and how and when it should be administered. The news of the incident soon spread among the members, and then the show began. The following Sunday Mr. Ives presented himself to the church, asking membership, and his application was rejected and he was hurt at the action of the church and turned to another church, which readily accepted his baptism. The criticism of the pastor caused him to ask a committee of eminent brethren to sit in judgment upon his conduct – Drs. A. J. Holt, J. B. Link, and R. C. Buckner. After reviewing the details of the incident they wrote the church advising it to drop the matter, and Pastor Cole to go his way, but not to repeat the act.”

That candid historian supplied good ammunition for our people to fire at the Baptists! So we bought his book to use against them. I do not recall, however, seeing a great migration of those good people into the Church of Christ as a result of it. And I doubt if we really endeared ourselves to them in the process.

Having said all that, I still applaud Pastor Cole and have to rule in his favor for following such a Scriptural precedent. We in the Churches of Christ would never refuse to accept into our congregation a person who was baptized into Christ, would we? For Baptists to require a person they baptize into Christ’s body to be accepted into a Baptist congregation in the same process is totally unacceptable! Do I hear a unanimous *amen* from all you in the Church of Christ?

So when a Baptist wants to become a part of your congregation, you accept him readily with no questions asked. Right? Rarely! Most of our people would demand that the person be baptized again in order to be baptized into the Church of Christ. The person did not follow our procedure! When they obey Christ’s command to be baptized, we call it *Baptist baptism*, but when we obey the command, do we call it *Church of Christ baptism*? No, we call it Scriptural baptism into the one body. Then the baptized person aligns himself with a congregation denominated as a Church of Christ Good!. They baptize a person into the one body and he aligns himself in the process with a denomination designated as a Baptist church. Bad! Did we drop a thread somewhere there in weaving our fabric?

All right, you seek to escape the judgment we lay on others by saying that Baptists are not baptized purposefully for the remission of sins, hence, it is not valid. So let's talk about those in the Christian Church. They proclaim and practice the same "steps of salvation" that we do. Some of them are even taught and converted by use of the same Jule Miller films that some of us use to convert people. They are not baptized into the local Christian Church but into the Lord's body, the saved, the universal church just as we claim to be. Then they align themselves with a local group of the saved called a Christian Church instead of a group of them called a Church of Christ. But when a brother from the Christian Church asks to be added to our congregation, is he gladly accepted? Even though it is changing now, through most of my long career, our people generally would demand that he be baptized again in order to become a member of the Church of Christ. That is tantamount to saying there is *Christian Church baptism* and *Church of Christ baptism*.

Years ago as I worked in Southern Louisiana, there were quite a variety of Churches of Christ and Christian Churches. When persons from the different divisions came to "place membership," I usually made no mention to the congregation that they came from a different group, for I would have had at least someone to object. So it was no problem. But while serving in New Braunfels, Texas, a brother whom the congregation knew was of the Christian Church "came forward" asking to be a part of our congregation. Knowing the feeling of some in the leadership there, for me to have welcomed him openly would have been "hair in the butter," to use our old farm expression. So, as tactfully as I could, I explained to him and the congregation that we would need to confer later to see that we were on common ground. No conference was necessary, however, for he never came back. And who could blame him? We were the ones at fault, not him. The Lord had added him to the same body he had made us parts of, but we sat in judgment on him because he had not followed our procedure.

Among those who will grant the validity of the baptism of a person in the Christian Church, some demand a confession of sin for his having been in the Christian Church. While admitting that he is a brother in Christ, they classify him as a *brother in error* (as though there are any other kind of brothers!) because he had joined a congregation of the Christian Church instead of one of the Church of Christ.

We can see gaps in the logic of others while blind to our own. Would Jesus not poke fun at us like he did the Pharisees for trying to pick specks out of the eyes of others while we have a stick in our own? We don't like such candid talk about ourselves. If my mention of these things rankles you, it may be that it is because it is so true! We have to meet the standard that we demand of others. "*Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get*" (Matt. 7:1).

In the judgment, if God asks you why you rejected most of his believers on earth and you explain that they had errors in belief and practice, do you think he will welcome you because you had no errors in belief or practice? Or will he measure you by the rule you measured others by?

If we could be flawless in belief and practice, we would need no grace.

Study For Yourself!

In our zeal to change people from what we have considered to be error, we have urged emphatically that they study the Bible for themselves instead of accepting teachings already formulated and handed down to them. We have made that plea to those within our own congregations also. And who will take issue with that? Religion is personal rather than conforming to a system developed by fallible men.

When someone studies for himself, learns of misdirections in the system, and offers corrective teaching, how do you react to him? The roadside of my life in the church is strewn with those honest people who dared to go beyond simplistic pronouncements of the system and tried to enlighten the group. They have been beaten down, rejected, frozen out, misrepresented, maligned, and disfellowshipped. Organized churches in general have their written constitutions, laws, and by-laws, while we have our set of unwritten laws, to control teaching and practices. Churches do not hire preachers to reform them! The *powers that be* in the churches act as watchdogs to make sure that the status quo is maintained.

Another Book

I have another little book which may be rare, for it was rescued from a sort of book-burning. It is of The Living Word series of adult study literature titled *The Lord's Supper*, by Warren Lewis, copyrighted in 1966 by R. B. Sweet, Inc.

This *mature study for adults* did not repeat all our traditional concepts and cliches about the Communion. It was not an indoctrination giving ready-made answers which would provoke no study. Though there are a number of points in it that I question, I recognize it as a provocative treatment of the Lord's Supper. But such cannot be allowed! If the powers that be in the church do not tell people what to believe, they may be led astray. Nothing should be left open-ended. So some of the brothers who are *somewhat* cried aloud. Wary and loyal congregations would not order their literature from a firm that published such unsound stuff. The book was recalled! I don't know how they disposed of the stock. Do you suppose the city of Austin might have considered them toxic waste unsuitable for the garbage dump? ☺

We have no church creed, we have insisted, but everyone should study for himself/herself to find the truth. Then we have closely controlled by the reigns of criticism, intimidation, and denunciation what is taught. When disciples learn a new concept and teach it, they rock the boat. Preachers lose their jobs for introducing corrective ideas. Teachers in church-related institutions have to be cautious not to roil the critical supporters. I have heard speakers at lectureships and seminars *almost* challenge some of our basic concepts, only to be left void. We call loudly for others to change but block it among ourselves. One of the derogatory terms now attached to reformers is *change agent*. Anyone trying to change the status quo is a dreadful *change agent*. Just indoctrinate! Catechize! Drill! But don't open the doors to real learning!

I owe much to many teachers who have dared to question and think. Among them are Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett. Braving the censure of our brethren, twenty and thirty years ago, through their journals they were saying things courageously that we desperately needed to heed. Carl spoke by invitation on the campuses of 250 colleges and universities including Harvard and Yale, and Leroy has been a respected university professor and lecturer who conducted many weekend seminars. To put it mildly, though,

these men were not given exactly what we might call the red carpet reception in our own congregations, colleges, and universities, and journals.

Much of the good change now working in our congregations was initiated by the teachings of those two men. Some of their concepts are now being repeated from pulpits and in the academic setting – from speakers who still consider it indiscreet to mention their names or give them any credit.

In the last decade, however, a growing number of our people are rising up to call them blessed. Their materials may be accessed at my web site. The Lord is working great corrective change among us. Disciples are becoming aware that we have demanded of others what we did not demand of ourselves. So many of us who have refused to measure ourselves by the rule we impose on others are recognizing that none of us are correct in all matters of doctrine and practice so that we must cut slack for others as we wish for it to be given us. Our wish for ourselves and others is like that expressed by a man toward God in an old Scottish epitaph:

*Here lie I, Martin Elginbrod,
Hae mercy on my soul, Lord God;
As I would do, were I Lord God,
And Ye were Martin Elginbrod.*

No, we do not approve all things taught and practiced in all other Christian groups. Are we in the Church of Christ perfected in all teachings and practices, or is it just easier and more comforting to see and judge the flaws in others than our own?

Paul's searing rebuke to his Jewish brothers should quicken our consciences today. *"Therefore you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who do such things. Do you suppose, O man, that when you judge those who do such things and you do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God?"* (Rom. 2:1-3).

Read all of Chapter 2 which includes this withering sarcasm, *"...if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth – you then who teach others, will you not teach yourself?"* (2:19-21).

Let's let God be the judge, *"For God shows no partiality"* (v. 11). []