

THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

March 11

2018

Editor's Note: I was recently asked to tell of changes, if any, I have seen in the years I have been preaching the gospel. I guess every person who has been a Christian for any period of time could list several things they have seen change. Some good, but most are not. The following article written by a fellow class mate shortly before his death illustrates an unfortunate change that has taken place in far too many places. (JH)



Change of Signs

The pool hall was a hang-out for the local riffraff. The joint wasn't classy enough, so a billiard table was added, carpet was laid over the cracked, wooden floor and the sign out front was changed to read "Billiard Parlor." The same people frequented the place. As always, they gambled and boozed a little on the side and the townspeople knew that "Billiard Parlor" was a highfalutin way of saying pool hall — its practice hadn't changed at all.

Someone persuaded the community, shade-tree mechanic, who knew motors inside and out, that he should present a better image for the sake of community. He went to a mechanics' school and paid good money to learn what he already knew. After graduating, the sign on the fence which used to read "Joe's Garage" said "Doctor of Mechanics — Joseph C. Jones." A certificate hung on the wall to prove that Joe was a qualified mechanic.

Of course, Joe still tuned an engine by sound and smell while the

electronic gadgets stood in the corner gathering dust. And if you stood just right when you looked through the knothole in the new sign, you could still glimpse a worn, chain hoist which hung from the shady, old oak out back of the place.

On some buildings hangs a sign cracked and weather beaten by time — "CHURCH OF CHRIST." This sign is supposed to signify that Christ's people meet there to worship God and do His work. They are supposed to respect His authority, preach just what "The Book" says and give "book, chapter and verse" for everything believed and practiced.

However, in addition to sounds of worship and Bible teaching, one hears kindergarten nursery rhymes, the pitter-patter of tennis shoes in the basement gymnasium, the click of billiard balls in the upstairs recreation room and the banging of pots and pans in the newly acquired kitchen and fellowship hall. These are strange and divisive noises coming from meeting places where once echoed a unifying plea — "*We speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where the Bible is silent.*"

In attempting to defend feeding, recreation, and entertainment programs being conducted by the church, a preacher told me that the N.T. does not say how the "church building" is to be used. I agree, but this is only a quibble — the real issue is determining the scriptural work of a congregation. If a person understands what the work of a congregation is, he has no difficulty understanding how its facilities are to be used.

Neither is the issue what individual Christians may or may not do, but rather what a congregation may practice by God's authority. I do not find scriptural authority for "church" kindergartens, gymnasiums, baseball teams, fellowship halls, etc.

Methinks that not only does the practice not fit the sign (church of Christ) but also that the practice is a sign of change. In this instance there should be a change of signs to fit the practice.

✍️ Jim R. Everett

COME AND SEE

When Philip told Nathanael, *"We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph"* (John 1:45), Nathanael responded by asking, *"Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?"* Philip's reply to Nathanael's question serves as the title of this article. He did not rebuke him for his question or doubt. He simply said, *"Come and see."* Nathanael did as Philip instructed and when Jesus presented the evidence to him he said, *"Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel"* (John 1:49).

The answer Philip gave to Nathanael's question on this occasion has been God's answer to honest doubt through the years. Be willing to give an honest hearing to the evidence. This was the answer Jesus gave to Thomas when he said, *"Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe"* (John 20:25). When Jesus later appeared to Thomas He did not rebuke Thomas for not believing the words of the other apostles, instead He said, *"Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing"* (John 20:27). He was calling upon Thomas to examine the evidence, i.e., "Come and see." Upon doing so Thomas was compelled to declare, *"My Lord and my God."* What other conclusion could any honest individual reach?

Today, as we seek to follow and glorify Christ in all we teach and do we encounter those who question and doubt the things we teach. Some who offer these questions and doubts are like the Jews in John 9 who would not believe even though the evidence was presented to them. However, I am convinced that there are still many like Nathanael and Thomas who are honest in their questioning and doubts. To these, we give the same answer as Philip and Jesus, "Come and see." Come and examine the things we teach and practice in the light of God's word. Be like those noble Bereans who *"received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so"* (Acts 17:11).

The Lord does not expect people to blindly follow Him with no basis to their faith. He wants us to have that honest and good heart (Luke 8:15) that will hear the word and bring forth fruit in our lives.

If the Lord expects us to examine the evidence before believing on Him how much more should we expect people to examine what we teach and practice in the light of God's word before they accept it as truth. How willing are you to have what you believe and practice in religion put to the test? How willing are you to respond to the request "Show me that in the Bible." Some seem to think that if something is said often enough and long enough then it must be true. So, we have individuals saying, "One church is as good as another;" "it doesn't matter what you believe so long as you are sincere," or "we're all going to the same place (heaven), we are just traveling different roads." I know you have heard these statements (and many others like them) but are they true? The only way to determine whether they are true is to examine them in the light of what the word of God teaches. I am persuaded that such an examination will result in the honest individual concluding that these statements are not true.

Let me close by asking another question? Is it possible for people today to believe, teach and practice the same things believed, taught and practiced by the first century Christians? My answer? "Come and see."
✍ James Hahn

Belleville church of Christ

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Schedule of Services

Sunday Bible Study	9:30 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship	10:30 a.m.
Sunday Evening Worship	5:00 p.m.
Wednesday Bible Study	7:00 p.m.

Evangelist

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