

THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

December 2

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Changing the "Norms"

A while back we pulled into an "old-fashioned" gas station in a small town. An attendant was waiting at the pump to serve us. He took our order, and while the gas was being pumped, he busied himself cleaning our windshield. The kids were shocked and kept saying, "He's actually cleaning our windows!" What used to be the "norm" is now so rare that it seems shocking!

The same sort of thing happens in religion. Over a period of time gradual and minor changes can lead folks far away from where they used to be. It finally gets to the point that what used to be the "norm" now seems odd, even shocking. Things that never would have been tolerated year's ago were allowed to "creep in," and now they have become totally accepted.

A good example of this gradual shift of "norms" can be seen in the matter of instrumental music. Few people realize that there was a great fight over this issue years ago - even among the denominations where it is now common. For instance, William Posey in his history entitled *The Baptist Church in the Lower Mississippi Valley* writes: "For years the Baptists fought the introduction of instrumental music into the churches ... Installation of the organ brought serious difficulties in many churches." But, if you talk to a Baptist today, he would think it very odd to even suggest a religious service without instrumental music. You see, the "norms" have changed!

It can happen to us, too - and it is. Simply observe how brethren talk and dress, where they go and what they do. Try to call them back to what used to be the "norm," and they will treat you as if you are crazy! It is apparent that many are allowing gradual changes to take them farther and farther away from the absolutes that God has stated in His Word.

We need to "ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein" (Jeremiah 6:1 6) - and stop drifting from God's "norms." Think!

✠ Greg Gwin



“Christians” and the “church”

In a world where the words “church” and “Christian” have been so twisted, it is hard to use either term without being misunderstood. Even among those identifying themselves with these terms – and they are Scriptural terms – it is easy to portray them in an unscriptural way. Because of this we need to constantly remind ourselves of how the terms were used in the first century, as recorded in the New Testament.

Even though “Christian” only appears three times in the New Testament, it is fairly easy to determine who these people were:

1. THEY WERE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST. “And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. (Acts 11:26).
2. AS DISCIPLES THEY WERE BAPTIZED PENITENT BELIEVERS COMMITTED TO OBSERVING ALL THINGS COMMANDED OF CHRIST. “*Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*” (Matthew 28:19-20)

[Notice: what is to be done – “make disciples.” How is it to be done – 1) “baptizing them” ... and 2) “teaching them to observe all things ...” They do not, at the point of conversion, know all things commanded, but they are to be informed that they are committing to do all they find that Jesus commands of them.]

Church ...The term mostly translated “church” (GR: ekklesia) is a group noun – like herd, flock, platoon, etc. Etymologically, it is a combination of two terms: “ek” meaning OUT OF and “klesia” meaning TO CALL, hence it came to refer to an assembly of people called out of the general populace. It was not an happenstance gathering, but an assembly called together for a reason. It appears over 100 times in the New Testament. In Acts 19, it is used three times (verses 32, 39, and 41) to designate an assembly of silversmiths called together by Demetrius (v. 24). In those verses, it is simply translated “assembly.” Though the assembly degenerated into a disorderly mob, it still had been called together by Demetrius for a reason and later dismissed by the town clerk.

It is the term used by inspiration to designate all that host called out of their former state into fellowship with God (Hebrews 12:22-24). These are called together in one body, being united with Christ at baptism (Romans 6:5). This assembly (church) increases in size as often as people are saved (Acts 2:47). It is composed only of those whose names are written in heaven – the redeemed. Thus, every Christian is included in it. We generally refer to this as the “universal church” to distinguish it from local churches. This one church/body is not a confederation of churches. Yet, this is the impression that so many good people leave today as they speak of and discuss “the church of Christ” of which they belong. The one body (church) is made up of individual Christians, not congregations. Only God determines and knows the number on its membership roll.

As the gospel spread from Jerusalem we read of various groups of disciples/Christians in various places. The writers used (ekklesia, assembly) to designate these local groups. (Cf. Acts 9:31; 15:41; 20:17, 28; 1 Corinthians 1:2). When the plural was used, it was

speaking of different groups (churches) throughout a region or the world. (Acts 9:31; Galatians 1:2; Romans 16:16) Unlike the universal body, each of these was an independent functioning organization for doing the spiritual work prescribed in the Scriptures. Each managed its own affairs with its own internal leadership. Each of these local groups was called a church (ekklesia) whether assembled or unassembled. (1 Corinthians 1:1; 11:18; 14:19).

So, it is important to carefully notice the context when reading the word “church” in the Bible. The context determines whether it is referring simply to all the redeemed everywhere; or a local organization of Christians at a particular place; or a physical assembly of these Christians.

✠ Edward O. Bragwell Sr.



“It’s Not About Me”

How wonderful it would be if we could get everyone to learn this lesson. We need to be concerned with pleasing and glorifying the Almighty rather than pleasing ourselves. What I like and what pleases me is still wrong if it is contrary to His will, therefore we need to study His word and conform our life to His will. (JH)

Belleville church of Christ

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www.bellevillechurch.net

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

James Hahn (317) 443-1938