



The Reflector

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Something Wicked This Way Comes

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There is an ill wind blowing across the landscape of the Lord's church. It is being fueled by disgruntled Christians who chafe at the limits and restrictions of biblical authority. They speak of "Church of Christ traditions" and "Church of Christ doctrines" and say that the time has come for change. Such expressions indicate a misguided and erroneous understanding of the true nature of the Lord's church. Such individuals as F. LaGard Smith, with his book *Radical Restoration*, have given voice to this general feeling of dissatisfaction.

On page 37 of *Radical Restoration*, Smith advocates "not so much restructuring (the church) but actually dismantling it by means of recapturing its original definition and meaning." The problem is that this restructuring or dismantling of the church to recapture its original definition and meaning is actually an attempt to change the Lord's church to fit the picture of it that these individuals have concocted in their own minds. The church that these individuals wish to create is not based upon, nor dependent upon, the biblical pattern but is based upon nothing more solid than what they think the church should be. Viewing first century worship as "spontaneous, mutually participatory, and intimate" (ibid, page 61), these advocates of change attack all aspects of the worship in which the New Testament church was engaged and rebel against the organization that the Lord designed for it.

The by-word of this movement is "change." The means of worship that the Lord's church has always

practiced from the days of the apostles till now are viewed as cold, purely traditional, outdated, and having little meaning for such spiritually enlightened Christians as themselves. As a matter of fact, Smith stated the generally held view of these change-demanding disgruntled Christians when he spoke of the five acts of worship as "mostly an orchestrated religious spectacle for which we have reserved seats each week" (page 154). All five acts of worship as practiced by members of the body of Christ today come under the relentless fire of their weapons of change.

The first act of worship to come under attack by those who sought to bring this movement into the congregation where I attend was singing. It began by their ridiculing the number of songs that were sung, the order in which they were sung, and the manner in which they were sung. These individuals had arbitrarily decided that three songs and a prayer, followed by another song, was somehow not spiritually uplifting. Once again, F. LaGard Smith gave voice to this discontent when he wrote, "The good news, I suppose, is that there can never again be a kind of 'three songs and a prayer' mentality about our worship" (page 142).

There is an aspect of our singing in worship that needs to be addressed and properly understood. When we sing it is true that we are "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Ephesians 5:19) and that we are "teaching and admonishing one another" (Colossians 3:16), but let us never forget that when we

sing together in our worship of God, our singing is first unto the Lord. Colossians 3:16 concludes with “singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God” and Ephesians 5:19 concludes with “singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.” God desires us to give unto Him our full devotion and allegiance. He wants us to sing of Him and to Him. He doesn’t judge the singing the same way man does. Man tends to judge it on the basis of whether it is good or bad, whether we can carry a tune or not. God judges it on the basis of whether it is wholehearted and offered as an act of homage and reverence to Him. Singing in worship to God is a sacrifice to Him, the savor of which rises to the heavens. Hebrews 13:15 tells us, “Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.”

Is it possible for singing in a worship service to be done without enthusiasm? Yes, of course it is. Is it possible that some won’t think of the meaning of the words but just recite them by memory? Certainly. Is it possible that some will actually be singing to impress those nearest to them with their beautiful voice? I suppose so. But when we sing with the right attitude, with God as our focus, it is a wonderful and joyously uplifting thing.

The disgruntled advocates of change began by choosing any number of songs they wanted, regardless of what the elders had said. This, by the way, goes directly to their lack of respect to the God-given authority of elders. They decided that the way the songs were written was not spiritual enough; consequently, they directed the members to sing various verses or parts of verses softly or loudly, rearranged the order of the verses, incorporated different verses of different songs into one, and even occasionally asked men only or women only to sing. All of these “gimmicks”, we were told, made the singing part of our worship more meaningful and spiritual for those involved. What it actually did was confuse many of the members, particularly the older ones, and cause all to focus more on the instructions given than on the words of the songs

as written. When the elders stated that for the good of all members of the congregation, and to enable things to be done decently and in order, the songs were to be sung as written, these purveyors of the ill wind took the opportunity to charge the elders with “lording over the congregation.” What arrogance!

The next act of worship that they believed they understood better than all who had gone before was the act of giving. While one stood up and loudly proclaimed that giving was not an act of worship, the primary emphasis of these who were denying the New Testament pattern of worship was that giving was not a regular weekly act, that there was no such thing as a common treasury, and that all giving was “need” based. As it turns out, they were merely parroting a statement made by Smith on page 245 of *Radical Restoration*. He wrote, “If we could ever move away from the unwarranted idea of ‘giving’ as a mandated ‘item of worship’ and begin thinking of ‘giving’ as a way of meeting special needs whenever they arise, we would not need the same kind of ‘treasury’ to which we are accustomed...When every collection is special – to meet a ‘specific’ need which has come to the attention of the congregation – it can be as simple as everyone digging into their pockets and purses and coming up with the necessary money, which is immediately dispatched to those in need. Maybe that happens even during the week. Or perhaps on two or more successive Lord’s days. Maybe a week goes by where there is no pressing need and therefore no contribution is collected.”

It was surprising to me how many members heard these comments related to the giving of our means upon the first day of the week and were so easily enamored with the idea. It reminded me of Paul’s statement in Galatians 1:6-7 where he wrote, “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ.” It is readily apparent that God has always considered giving as an

act of worship. In Deuteronomy 12 the Lord spoke of legitimate worship taking place at the spot He would designate in the Promised Land. Included in that worship was their burnt offerings, their sacrifices, and their tithes. In Numbers 18:24-29 we find the tithes of the Israelites were referred to as “a heave offering.” And the 1/10 of the tithes that the Levites had received they also had to offer to God as a “heave offering.” The “heave offerings” were part of the peace offerings, offered in worship to God. The peace offerings indicated right relations with God, and expressed fellowship with Him, gratitude and a sense of obligation. The heave offerings were that which was lifted up, dedicated in service to Jehovah, consecrated to Him. Once again, without possible argument, the giving of the tithes, including money as well as other things, was considered an offering, a sacrifice to God. It was an act of worship, which was to be done in the legitimate place for worship.

This principle of giving as an act of worship (and yes, there are acts of worship—indeed, worship can be partially defined as an act of reverence or homage) is also found in the New Testament and reemphasized as such.

Most Bible students are familiar with 1 Corinthians 16:1-2. However, I am afraid that many have not gone deeply enough in their study of this passage to understand or know all of its ramifications. It says, “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.”

We first consider the word “collection.” That word is “logeia” and was thought to have been derived from “lego” and to be a word distinctive to the New Testament. This is a point made in Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon. However, additional work by archaeologists, particularly Adolf Deissmann, has produced papyri that tell a different story. We now know that the word “logeia” was derived from the word

“logeuo” (I collect) and was commonly used in Paul’s day. Deissmann wrote, “We find it used chiefly of religious collections for a god, a temple, etc., just as St. Paul uses it of his collection of money for the ‘saints’ at Jerusalem” (Adolf Deissmann, *Light From the Ancient East*).

What is the big deal? The importance of this discovery is to prove that Paul used the word just as his contemporaries used it. The normal usage of the word was that of a collection in the “formal” sense. He wasn’t telling the Corinthians to put a little money away every week in a jar at home. Rather, just as faithful Christian scholars had asserted all along, he was instructing them to take a formal collection on the first day of every week.

God has given His church a three-fold work in which to engage -- benevolence, evangelism, and edification. These are continuous works, and the need for funds to enable a congregation to carry out these works is constant. Indeed, the amount of work that can be done in some of these areas is dependent upon having the financial resources available. As Brother Robert Turner so well put it in the February, 1967 edition of *Plain Talk*, “To question the whole idea of a ‘church treasury’ is to question the God given privilege and obligation of saints to function collectively.” With these advocates of change, all such in-depth Bible study means nothing. If it doesn’t fit their notion, they just say they disagree and pay it no attention.

What these demanders of change want to do to the glorious memorial of the Lord’s Supper is heartbreaking. They are determined that the Lord’s Supper was part of a fellowship meal -- a separate and important part, but part of a fellowship meal nonetheless. The Lord’s Supper, as practiced by faithful congregations of the Lord’s people today, is ridiculed. Smith wrote on page 281, “It wasn’t crackers they broke in their fellowship meals, but bread. The bread of a common meal. In the end, it’s not just that the evidence to support our use of unleavened bread is wafer thin. What’s important is to understand that our ritual pinch

of unleavened bread bears no resemblance whatsoever to the robust first-century practice of actually eating together in memory of our Lord.” Despite the fact that 1 Corinthians 11 indicates otherwise, those within this movement insist that the Lord’s Supper was part of a common meal, based upon no more significant evidence than “it certainly seems so”, “surely this must be the case”, or “it is reasonable to assume.”

In addition to advocating that each individual take a large portion of bread, as one would in a meal, when partaking of the Lord’s Supper, there was something else that one of these riders of the ill wind of change suggested. When asked what other things needed to be done to make the Lord’s Supper more spiritual he responded with the idea that each member, man and woman, be given the opportunity to testify beforehand what the Lord had done for them that week. When further asked how that might be practically and scripturally done, he responded by saying, “That’s what the church in Corinth did.” I have searched and searched and have not found that to be so.

There is so much more that could be said about their attack on the New Testament pattern of worship, but the confines of this article prohibit it. One other point that must be made is that those who are pushing these ideas also deny the validity of the final step of New Testament discipline for any “doctrinal” issues. Those who demand that the New Testament teaching on this subject be followed are derided as unloving, lacking compassion, and harsh. Those involved in this movement that I have encountered are characterized by an attitude of spiritual arrogance. Those who do not hold their views are simply not as spiritually enlightened as they are.

This is a dangerous, dangerous movement, brethren, and it is gaining momentum. If you have not encountered it yet, pray that you do not. However, be prepared in case you do.

Are They In Your Midst? Beware of the following tactics:

1. Initially, they are very friendly, yet, comments

made indicate they are seeking out like-minded members who wouldn’t mind “a little change.”

2. They will ask the elders how open they would be to change but are not specific as to what they mean.

3. They will try to institute small changes without authority from the elders in order to gauge the response from elders and members (see comments about singing in the above article).

4. By comments made and questions asked as brethren socialize both at services and in their homes, they try to judge who supports the elders and who does not.

5. They will begin individual Bible studies in their homes with specific people invited and specific people excluded. Focus of the studies may be “different ways of looking at worship” or “how to make the worship more spiritual.”

6. Eventually, having identified the disgruntled and weak members, they begin to focus upon them to bring them to their side: very attentive and flattering to them.

7. They will attempt surreptitiously to create ill will toward the preacher.

8. Failing that, a concerted effort will be made to attack the eldership, including false accusations against them.

9. Failing that, they will seek to find the most vulnerable link in the eldership and use that link, through flattery and attention, to divide, conquer, and stymie the work of the eldership.

10. When all this fails to turn the congregation to their way of thinking, they will leave with their recruits and continue their recruiting efforts from afar, via phone calls and emails.

11. Moreover, these agents of change, even while using F. LaGard Smith’s words verbatim, will deny that their suggestions are derived from his book.

The above informative and timely article by brother Greg Litmer, in addition to warning of the specific problem he deals with, serves to remind us that we can never let our guard down in the great spiritual war against Satan and his forces that will last until Jesus comes – Ed
