

Announcements

Sick & Those to Pray For (James 5:13–16)

Carrell Arrington * Bryan Bailey, Sr. * Linda Bailey * Dorothy Brasiel * Jo Byrnes * Joyce Coones * Sleatha Gore * Essielene Henderson * Ethel Jones * Faye Kilpatrick * Randy McElroy * Gary Ogden

Out of Town

Al & Jo Byrnes * Jack & Prentice Spann

Singing

This Wednesday night.

Gospel Meeting

Bethel congregation in Bell. Today through Friday, 7:30 PM each night (including tonight). John Zellner is preaching.

Secret Pal

Any ladies who are interested in participating in Secret Pal meet in the classroom building next Sunday afternoon at 4:30 PM (February 1).

This Week's Birthdays and an Anniversary

Jack & Prentice Spann (tomorrow) * Linda Jones (Tuesday)
Reilly Hinds (Friday) * Skyler Gregory (Saturday)

Chiefland Church of Christ

Meeting at 211 NE 2nd Street in *beautiful* Chiefland, Florida
PO Box 2539 * Chiefland, FL 32644 * (352) 493-1242

THINGS ABOVE

“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth”

—[Colossians 3:1–2]—

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Worshiping the Temple

By Steve Dewhirst

Despite the great reforms of Josiah, it was too late to turn the hearts of most people (see 2 Kings 22–23). The unparalleled idolatry of his grandfather, Manasseh, had sealed the fate of Judah and seared the hearts of his subjects.

But Judah’s devotion to the Temple was no more sincere than their previous devotion to Baal-altars and Asherah poles. They were superstitious. They had not trust in God, but they trusted in the Temple as though it were a good-luck charm. Even before evil Manasseh, corrupt priests and prophets had said, “Is not the Lord among us? No harm can come upon us” (Micah 3:11). And in Josiah’s day the prophet Jeremiah condemned the hypocrisy of separating one’s religion from his life (Jer. 7:1–11).

Judah came not to the Temple for repentance; they came for an indulgence, assuming that their presence in this Holy Place would offset personal guilt. They had no intention of changing themselves; they simply clung to the Temple as to an amulet with mystical curative powers. In truth, they mocked God by profaning His Temple with such overt presumptuousness.

The case of Judah is reminiscent of some in our day who cling to proper forms and little else. Note the woman who avoids Bible study and worship, but slips in between services to eat the Lord's Supper — as though the mere eating will satisfy the requirement of a legalistic code. Or the man whose presence on the Lord's Day is most conspicuous, but whose presence at the lottery ticket window is hidden from public view.

Few things are as constant as human nature; we are little different from the Jews of Jeremiah's generation. We might not be as blatant in our claims of impunity, yet we display the same spirit when we divorce our religion from our lives.

If we believe we have come to understand what God requires in worship and doctrine, what is left but to maintain the status quo? (Such a view presumes that we really have come to a perfect level of understanding.)

The problem here is clear. Although one generation has studied Bible principles and concepts, making all the proper applications, what about subsequent generations? Too often, the heirs of "Restoration" heritage have been content to retain the practical application of principles without bothering to learn the principles themselves. Such a pattern leads to the revering of forms, rather than God.

Evidence of this problem is seen in the attempt to exercise expedients in local churches. Within the parameters of what is

authorized in scripture, we are at liberty to fulfill our responsibilities in whatever way we deem expedient — or helpful. But some expedient practices have grown into long-standing traditions. And while human traditions are not necessarily wrong in and of themselves, they are abused when elevated to the status of divine law.

This occurs when disciples have been more thoroughly grounded in forms than in the Bible concepts that shape our actions. The owning of meeting houses, offering the "invitation" at the conclusion of a sermon, and exclusive use of the name "Church of Christ," may all be deemed expedient by a local church, but none is a matter of God's law: They are all human judgments. Yet among many brethren, these items have become "sacred cows." To consider an alternate practice — no matter how scriptural in theory — is to be deemed suspect.

The result of a sectarian mindset is seen in church members who bear little resemblance to Christians: Those who feel satisfied by an hour on Sunday morning, as though they've "put in their time;" those whose lives are characterized by foul language or immorality, while still clinging to the "Church of Christ" for salvation; those who attend services consistently, yet never allow God's word to change their lives. Are we merely worshiping the Temple?

God's design for his people is that we be "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29). His word has been given to effect that very change in us. But if our focus in religion is on the maintenance of ceremony, rather than a personal examination of the scriptures that dictate worship and life, we'll soon be resigned to the same denominational status our religious neighbors.

