

Part One: the New Testament Pattern in Worship and in the Fellowship of Believers

1. History and Background

From the very beginning in Acts 20:28-31, false teaching has confronted the church with controversy. The apostle Paul warned the elders at Ephesus that false teachers would arise:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

20th Century Controversies. The 20th century saw its share of divisive teaching, church splitting efforts, and innovative practices which were introduced into local congregations. Scarcely a decade of the entire 100 years was free from assault by the ministers of the devil: "No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds." 2 Cor 11:14-15.

- The instrument of music brought into the church in 1858, at Midway, Kentucky, was a part of the defining doctrine that set the church of Christ—the body of Christ—apart from the Christian Church which ran to excess in adopting this innovation in worship, along with innovations of organization like the American Christian Missionary Society.
- In the first half of the century, pre-millennial teaching destroyed many churches as these false teachers substituted their opinions for the clear teaching of the scriptures. Centered in Louisville, Kentucky, this false teaching followed that of the denominations: a rapture, a physical war, a 1000 year reign, and a physical kingdom established by the Lord on this earth.
- The first half of the century also saw a threat from the denominationally influenced social gospel. Large efforts were made to separate the congregations of the Lord's church from the true work and mission of the church—preaching and teaching—to more socially relevant works and missions. Hospitals, nursing homes, soup kitchens, recreation and social activities became the primary work of many churches.
- In the late 1950's, controversies grew among the churches as to what extent the church could engage in social fellowship and support of institutions other than the church, such as colleges and homes for older people and orphans. During this period the church divided into approximately three groups. The one group was against support of any institutions by the church and was against any form of social fellowship in church buildings and/or sponsored by the church. Another group—called the sponsoring church group—practiced the support of institutions (homes and missionary efforts) by the church only if local churches sponsored the work. The final group of congregations felt that local churches had autonomy (independence) in the matter of whom to support and how to manage evangelism and benevolent work.
- In the second half of the 20th century, controversy began to arise around the issue of ecumenicalism (true believers are in all churches and unity is the most important issue). At the close of the century this movement produced those who redefined the gospel by advancing their *core gospel* concept. They also redefined the method by which scriptural authority is established through advancing their ideas of a *new hermeneutic*. Many began to believe that the church and its members could participate in interdenominational services and works and that those members of other churches were saved too. Many brethren began to adopt the denominational practices of having choruses and dramatic groups performing in worship, using women speakers, wiring lead singers with microphones, etc. Some thought that the Lord's supper need not be taken every first day of the week or even on the first day of the week. The

argument that baptism unto the remission of sins was no longer an absolute condition of salvation opened the door to open fellowship with members of denominations.

- Also there arose a movement, which at first was called *Crossroads* after the Crossroads church but later was more closely identified with the Boston church. These groups subverted many congregations by a rigorous method of disciplining, using sectarian mind control and pressure to make and keep disciples. In many congregations, elders were replaced with “leaders” who lacked Biblical qualification as elders. The evangelist dominated these churches, insisting on absolute loyalty from the leaders and the congregations. Public chastisement, prayer partners, rejection of family, and continuous time commitments were the weapons used to keep disciples in line. *Multiplied ministries* is a term used to describe these techniques.

21st Century Controversies. Although this has not been a complete accounting of our recent history, it should give us the direction in which the winds of change are blowing.