

God's Wisdom on Church Issues

Intro.

A. Divisions in the church at Corinth prompted the apostle to write these words:

1 Cor. 1:10 *Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

1. I'm not sure to what extent they listened and made corrections.
2. At any rate, the exact same problem exists TODAY – contentions over **biblical matters**, which often result in needless divisions that are harmful to the body of Christ that is responsible for reaching the lost.
3. Contention and division often occur when leaders fail to look to God's wisdom to determine their course relating to both **doctrine** and proposals for doing the work of the church.
4. When there is no effort to provide book, chapter, and verse for church action a **sinful attitude** prevails, which is just the beginning of trouble.

B. Elders should be aware of how sin progresses and therefore be very careful not to take that first step toward **digression** and **apostasy**.

Psalms 1:1 *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.*

1. In this passage God is showing us **how sin progresses**.
 - a. A person can listen to the counsel or advice of those who are ungodly and *walk in it*.

- b. When he does, he stands with other sinners.
 - 1) In the passage of time he finds himself seated comfortably with the sinners and looking with scorn upon the things of God.
 - 2) The sin continues to get progressively worse.
 - 3) But we are “**blessed**” if we never start down that path.
- 2. Anytime we leave God out of our lives we get into **trouble**.
 - a. Oftentimes this exclusion involves the progression that is described in the passage we just quoted.
 - c. **Here is the way this often plays out, both in the world and the church:**
 - 1) First, we **overlook** evil.
 - 2) Next, we **permit** it.
 - 3) Then we **promote** it.
 - 4) After that we **make it law** or doctrine.
 - 5) Then we **celebrate** it.
 - 6) Finally, we **persecute** those who still call it evil.
 - i. A church that will not confront sin will eventually end up conforming to it.
 - ii. Then, sadly, they persecute those who seek to bring them back to “**The Old Paths**” or moral values.
 - b. If we want to say out of trouble, we must respect our God, which means we must respect His teachings.

Body

- I. **Let's look at some relevant scriptures that point to the need to look to God's wisdom rather than our own.**

Isa 55:7 *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. 8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

Did it ever occur to you that this passage is saying that if we do not forsake our own thoughts and listen to God then we are among the *wicked* people who God says need to forsake their ways?

1 Cor 1:25 *For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

Perhaps this passage is simply telling us man's wisdom does not compare with God's wisdom.

Prov 4:11 *I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths.*

Oh, how brethren today need to listen to God and allow Him to lead them in the right paths. This would be the “**old paths**” – not the new ones blazed by “change agents.”

James 3:13 *Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. 4 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. 5 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. 6 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. 7 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. 8 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.*

There can be no peace among disciples of Christ when we do not look to **God's wisdom** to assure that we are producing "good fruits."

II. Frank Sinatra sang the song "My Way."

[The song was released in early 1969. It reached No. 27 on the *Billboard Hot 100* chart and No. 2 on the *Easy Listening* chart in the US. It was much more popular in the UK.]

A. Paul Anka has said that he wrote this song to capture the "*me generation*" attitude of the 1960s.

1. I would say he succeeded.
2. The lyrics describe an older man looking back on his years and wistfully and forcefully singing about the ups and downs of his life.
3. The iconic refrains "*I did it my way*" or "*my way*" appear no less than six times in the nine brief stanzas.
4. All commentators on the song, whether Christian or non-Christian, agree that it's **boastful** and **self-exalting**.

B. The song's defiance of God is blatantly stated in the eighth stanza:

*"For what is a man, what has he got,
If not himself, then he has naught,
To say the things he truly feels
And not the words of one who kneels."*

(The Teaching Ministry of Bill Nugent)

C. Much of the problem among those who profess to be Christians is the "**my way**" attitude or mentality.

1. God has been clear as to what He wants and where details are applicable (how to carry out a specific command) the **HOW** and the **WHEN** is not to be *misunderstood* or **ignored**.

2. While He may not have said, “Don’t do it some other way,” or “Thou shalt do it this way, and this way only,” He nevertheless has made Himself CLEAR as to WHAT He wants, HOW He wants it done, and sometimes WHEN we are to do it.
3. If we want to follow God’s way, then we must look not only to **commands** of God but also look at and follow **examples** of how the early church operated under the guidance of the inspired apostles.

III. Unfortunately, many seem to think that they can do a better job of constructing the plan of salvation, building the church, and laying out how to do the churches business than God.

A. God’s design and plan, if followed, brings blessing to men of faith; however, following the *traditions and doctrines of men* reaps a different result.

B. Passages:

Mark 7:9 *And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.*

When men put tradition before God’s commandments they need to be warned of the consequences. Jesus said:

Mark 7:13 *Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.*

And then He made it clear that these people were not going to receive any blessing from God when He stated:

Matt. 15:9 *It is no use for them to worship me, because they teach human rules as though they were my laws! (GNB)*

Isa 45:9 *“Israel, you have no right to argue with your Creator. You are merely a clay pot shaped by a potter. The clay doesn't ask, "Why did you make me this way? Where are the handles?" (CEV)*

Through the prophet, God made it abundantly clear that it is not our place to question what He has done or said.

Rather, we should do as James commands:

James 4:10 **Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.**

A humble man with Bible knowledge seeks to please God always.

A wise man never **presumes** but always looks to **God's wisdom** (the Scriptures) for spiritual guidance in corporate worship and in life.

IV. It was in 1809 that Thomas Campbell uttered what has been dubbed as a Church of Christ slogan:

“Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.”

A. While this was not the beginning of the church it was the beginning of a **movement to *restore* the unity, peace, and purity** of the church we read about in the New Testament.

B. **It has been more than 200 years** since that movement began, but unfortunately many need to be reminded of Campbell's plea for unity.

C. Let me be very clear: I am no “Campbellite.”

1. I am simply a Christian.

2. But I do believe Campbell's plea is biblical and I believe it is one we would do well to listen to today.

D. Even with our plea...**unity among churches is lacking.**

1. The **biggest problem seems to be** that some believe they are justified in doing whatever Scripture **does not expressly condemn.**

- a. Perhaps they do not understand the need for authority, or understand how it works.
 - b. Or maybe they just don't really care – they have the “my way” attitude.
 - c. At any rate, with this philosophy in place and accepted, they can **introduce** and **keep** their human inventions.
 - d. The Restoration plea is to **abandon** all such practices for the sake of not only **truth** and pleasing God but also for the sake of unity.
2. The prophet Jeremiah wrote:
"O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23).
 Because this is true, God has given us the Bible to direct our steps and our lives, not only individually but as the church.

V. God's design for church government is *simple, effective, and protective*.

A. Let's consider church government from the standpoint of these three terms that describe the Lord's church, which we read about in the pages of the New Testament.

1. God's design for church government is *simple*.

1) elders (plural) who meet certain qualifications (1Tim. 3);

2) deacons, who also meet certain qualifications (1 Tim.3);

3) and members (1 Cor. 12:12).

a. Each church is independent and autonomous (1 Pet. 5:2).

b. While an evangelist may temporarily exercise a certain amount of oversight, he is not the "pastor" because a pastor is simply another name for "elder."

2. God's design for church government is *effective*.

- a. When a local church is overseen by men who meet the qualifications God has required, that congregation contributes significantly toward accomplishing the universal church's purpose (Eph. 3:10-11).
- b. When it is overseen by someone, or some **organization** (resulting in giving up autonomy) and maybe being controlled by such an outside force, not only is it **likely** that that local church will apostatize, but it is likely that eventually ALL the others under the same control will also fall.

3. God's design for church government is *protective*.

- a. God had the wisdom and foresight to leave *centralized control* out of His plan.

- b. *Centralized control* of church resources puts all the eggs into one basket, so to speak.

(A good example is the *Watchtower*, which tells its members what to believe, what to do and not do, etc.)

- c. But the wisdom of God is seen in His decision not to authorize this *centralized control* concept.

1) Let me see if I can illustrate this wisdom with a physical matter:

2) When I was in grade school both sides of the building had lots of windows, which were probably for light and to let air in during the warm days.

a) But the windows were composed of numerous panes about 8x12 inches in size.

b) That was **WISE** because it was inevitable that someone would throw a ball or a rock that would do damage to the window.

- c) If/when that happened only **one pane would be destroyed**, whereas if the window had been one huge piece of glass the **whole thing** would be destroyed.
 - i. The application is if error is taught in a local church all the other churches in the world **are not affected**; whereas, if all the local churches are ONE or tied together to the point that they all must stand or fall together, that would be an **unwise** form of government.
 - ii. This evidently was the reason God did not authorize centralized control.
- d. Imagine what the situation would be like in the religious world if **one man** were allowed to seize control of all:
 - 1) --one man who was so self-righteous that he allowed, and encouraged, others to refer to him as "**Lord God**" (or "**that is worshipped**," 2 Thess. 2:4).
 - 2) According to Jesus, the idea of a "**Father**" (earthly religious leader) on earth is contrary to God's plan (Matt. 23:9).
- e. Many people in various parts of the world who are under the control of the Roman Catholic Church don't have to **imagine** what this is like.
- f. They have experienced it having been under its tyrannical control.

Conclusion:

- A. How much better off the church would be if **we sought the council of the Wise** (God) instead of charting our own course in religion and in life!
 - 1. This is true in individual lives but is especially true when it comes to what God would have the church

to be and to do.

2. Churches that are directed by an organization smaller or larger than the local church should dissociate themselves with these humanly designed organizations and follow God's **simple**, **effective**, and **protective** form of government.
3. This is the **right way** and the **only way** to have **unity** among local churches and within the universal body of Christ and to slow the progress of digression from New Testament Teaching.
 - a. **Forced unity** is not unity – it is UNION.
 - b. You tie the tails of two cats together and throw them over a close line and you have UNION, not unity.
 - c. Union is what we have when we follow men who devise their own system.
 - d. We have unity that is pleasing to God **when we look to God** and follow His divine guidance.