



The Grace Proclamator and Promulgator

“To testify the gospel of the grace of God.” Acts 20:24

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IS A CHURCH TRULY LOCAL WHEN IT HAS CONGREGATIONS MEETING IN SEVERAL DIFFERENT LOCATIONS?

By Wayne Camp

In recent months I have been asked by several brethren to deal with the question which I have used as the title of this message. ***“Is A Church Truly Local When It Has Congregations Meeting In Several Different Locations?”*** Another which I will not deal with in this issue is, ***“Is a church truly local if it has ‘members at large’ that conduct services in their homes and are periodically visited by their pastor who conducts services in their home?”***

A STATEMENT OF POSITION

Before I set out to answer this, let me state my position on the teachings of Scripture on the nature of the Lord’s churches. I hold no view of a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ but the local, visible view. I sometimes use the word “church” in the generic, or institutional sense much as Paul used the words “husband” and “wife” in Ephesians. ***Ephesians 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.*** Paul used “husband” in the generic sense. He did not mean there was one big universal husband who was the head of some universal wife. Nor did he mean Christ is the head of some universal church. He meant that wherever one finds a particular, local husband and wife, that husband is the head of that wife. And, wherever you find a true, local church Christ is the head of that particular church. I do not believe Old Testament Saints, nor John the Baptist, nor unbaptized saved

people are in any church in the New Testament sense of that word. I do not believe the family of God and the church are spoken of in the same sense anywhere in Scripture. I believe that faithful members of local New Testament Churches will compose the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I believe that Christ established his first local, visible New Testament Church while on earth as recorded in John 1:35-51. I believe his promise to that church and all his churches that the gates of hell would not prevail (Mat. 16:18) has not failed and that there has never been a moment of time since that first church was established on earth in which there has not been at least one true church of the Lord Jesus Christ functioning somewhere in this world.

DEFINITIONS

LOCAL. In this message, I will use the word ***“local”*** to refer to true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe a true church is local in nature. According to my unabridged Webster’s the word local means “pertaining to, characteristic of, or restricted to a particular place or particular places. Pertaining to a town or a small district rather than the entire state or country.” When we say a church is local in nature that necessarily infers that it meets in a particular local place. There was the church of God in Corinth, the church in Rome, the church in Ephesus, the church in Pergamos, the church in Thyatira, etc. If one is speaking of churches in

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the plural which meet in several particular places, he may speak of the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 1-3), or the churches of Macedonia (II Cor. 8:1), or **"the churches . . . throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria," (Acts 9:31)**. One might also speak of the churches of Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:41), or **"the churches of Galatia (1 Corinthians 16:1)**.

One can also speak of local churches without designating the specific location in which they worship. Paul wrote of **all the churches of the**

Gentiles. (Romans 16:4) Each and everyone of those churches, you can be assured had a local place to which they could be referred. Paul commanded, **"Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law" (1 Corinthians 14:34)**. Paul referred to **"all churches of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:33)**. Again, note the inference that these are local churches. The very fact that he uses the plural indicates he is referring to specific, local churches, specific local assemblies meeting in specific localities, each meeting in its own specific locality.

VISIBLE. When, in this message, I refer to a visible church I am speaking in contradistinction to the so-called universal invisible church. I mean, as defined in my dictionary, that the particular assembly is an assembly "that can be seen;" an assembly that is "perceptible to the eye." A local, visible assembly then is one which can be seen in its particular locality when it is assembled. If it is a visible assembly it is an assembly "that can be seen." If it is a local, visible assembly it is one that can be seen in its specific locality when it assembles.

NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH. When I use the expression **New Testament Church** in this message I am referring to a church that follows and teaches the things that churches of the New Testament followed and taught that were right. None of the churches of the New Testament period were perfect. Many were very imperfect. Consider all the problems in the church of Corinth. Paul rebukes some 16 or 17 things in that church and says that he would set the rest in order when he got there indicated there were other problems which the Spirit did not move him to include. The church at Pergamos had some problems which were the objects of the holy hatred of the Lord Jesus Christ. **Revelation 2:14-15 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. 15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the**

Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Several in the churches in Galatia had been bewitched into believing salvation required the keeping of the law, and circumcision.

It would be wonderful if every church of the Lord were perfect, but none are. And none will be as long as they are made up of members who are not perfect. Churches of the New Testament were composed of saved, scripturally baptized believers who had covenanted together to carry out the work of the Lord as set forth in the great commission.

Having defined these terms, I now set forth to answer the question which I have been asked to answer.

The question is, ***“Is A Church Truly Local When It Has Congregations Meeting In Several Different Locations?”*** According to current tradition, when a church sends forth a missionary he goes where the Lord has called him to go and to which his sponsoring church sends him, preaches the gospel, and baptizes those who are saved into the church back home. Let me set up a scenario of how this may work. Pilgrims Hope is a local, visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ which meets in Memphis, Tennessee, more specifically, at 3084 Woodrow St., Memphis, Tennessee. We assemble visibly each Sunday morning and evening, and Wednesday evening (except on rare occasions).

Let's suppose that in time, PHBC sends a missionary to Canada who sets up a “mission”, in time some are saved and baptized into PHBC. This “mission” that assembles regularly in Canada is, according to the current tradition, said to be a part of the local, visible assembly at 3084 Woodrow, Memphis, TN. We then send a missionary to Mexico and he does as the missionary in Canada. We send yet another to some city in Africa, and another to India, and then another to the Philippines. All of these make disciples, baptize those disciples, and hold regular assemblies in their respective localities. But, they cannot be called a local, visible assembly because they have not yet been organized into a church and are members of the local (?), visible assembly which regularly assembles at 3084 Woodrow, Memphis, TN.

A part of PHBC assembles in Canada; a part

of PHBC assembles in Mexico; a part of PHBC assembles in Africa; a part of PHBC assembles in India; and, yet another part of PHBC assembles in the Philippines. Pilgrims Hope Baptist Church is no longer a local assembly, it is an international assembly which regularly assembles in several different countries. How could we claim to be a local, visible assembly when we are actually six local which meet in six different countries? How can we claim to be a visible assembly when we are actually six visible assemblies which may be seen in six different countries. To the congregation in Canada, the assembly in Memphis is not visible. To the congregation in Mexico none of the other five are visible. There is a sense then in which Pilgrims Hope has ceased to be a visible assembly.

The Roman Catholic Church has long held the Universal Visible theory of the church. The Mother Church is located in Rome and is presided over, overseen, and ruled by the Pope who is the chief pastor of the Universal Visible Church of Rome. The various congregations of Roman Catholics which meet all over the world are merely branches of the mother church in Rome. The pastors of these various congregations are under the authority of Mother Rome and subject to the chief pastor, the Pope. The members of the various congregations are also subject to the mother church in the Vatican, and also subject to and under the authority of the chief pastor of the mother church, the Pope.

In the scenario I set up concerning Pilgrims Hope and her “mission” in several different countries do we not have the same thing in miniature form? PHBC is the mother church and I, Wayne Camp, am the chief pastor. Since the members of the assembly in Canada are members of PHBC, they are under our authority and I am their chief pastor, even though they have a “mission pastor” on the scene in Canada. Although, this “mission pastor” is kind of a second-class pastor since he must work under my oversight. Since the pastor of PHBC has the oversight and rule over the members of PHBC (***Hebrews 13:17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must***

give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.), as pastor of PHBC I have the rule, oversight of the members in Canada, Mexico, India and the other countries where we have branches of our church assembling. As pastor of PHBC, I have the rule, oversight of the “mission pastors” of those various assemblies. I desire to be no pope, not even a Baptist Pope (No pun intended, Bro. Daniel Pope.). I **fear** there is in most of us a certain amount of the spirit of Diotrephes (**3 John 9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.**) and some of us love to have other assemblies and pastors under our rule and oversight.

And, Dear Readers, this sometimes extends beyond the time when those “missions” are organized into churches. I know of occasions where a “daughter” church was having some problems several years after they were organized and the pastor of the “mother” church used the fact that his church was the “mother” as an excuse to nose into their problems. I know of instances where the pastor of “mother” churches told the pastors of “daughter” churches they could not preach in certain Bible conferences. **Matthew 20:21-28 And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. 22 But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. 23 And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father. 24 And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. 25 But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye**

know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. 26 But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; 27 And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: 28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

This is one of the problems faced by the current tradition of starting missions which, after various lengths of time, may become churches. When Paul and Barnabas were sent forth from the church at Antioch and went into a city preaching the gospel, baptizing and teaching they had churches. If my wife did not tell me that its sounds like I am betting, I would offer a \$1000 reward for clear proof that Paul and Barnabas ever operated what, in our day, is called a mission. Paul and Barnabas were the mission of Antioch, not some branch congregation somewhere outside Antioch. One missionary who follows this current tradition suggested that it is necessary today because new converts and “missions” must be well-grounded in the faith before they can be organized into churches and released from the authority of the “mother” church and her pastor.

My question is, “Where is the Holy Spirit who watched over the churches which Paul and Barnabas established and left behind, and that very shortly in some instances? Some were even left without pastors until Paul and Barnabas were returning from their first trip, at which time they led the assemblies in the choosing of their pastors. **Acts 14:23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.**

If I started a company that manufactured snowplows and it was located at an address in Millington, Tennessee, it would be classified as a **LOCAL** company. If I built a second plant in Arkansas and a third in Mississippi, I would have a company that was **INTERSTATE** in nature. If I then locate a plant in Mexico, my company has become **INTERNATIONAL** in nature. The only way I could keep it local in nature would be to

move every thing to that one location in Mexico. If I continue to operate my company in more than one country it is definitely, irrefutably, and legally **INTERNATIONAL** in nature.

A truly local New Testament church is one that meets in a particular locality and it can be seen with the eye when it is meeting. If it regularly assembles in different states it is **interstate** in nature. If it regularly assembles in more than one country, it is **international** in nature.

The local church at Jerusalem never, according to the **Biblical** record, assembled in Antioch. Some have advocated that Antioch was a mission of the church at Jerusalem until that congregation sent Barnabas down to check out the situation. If that contention is true, the church at Jerusalem was not truly a local church. Nor was it truly the church at Jerusalem. It was the **international** church of Jerusalem and Antioch. If, as many believe, James was the pastor of the Jerusalem church, he was also pastor of its assembly in Antioch even though he was not aware of what was going on in Antioch and had to send Barnabas to find out.

The church at Antioch, from the time of its origin, was always the church at Antioch. The church at Corinth was always the church at Corinth. There is no **BIBLICAL** record that Antioch ever operated "branch churches," or "missions" or "prospective assemblies" anywhere in the world. The church at Antioch never assembled in Thessalonica, Corinth, Rome, or any locality except Antioch. If it had, it would have ceased to be the local assembly at Antioch. The church at Jerusalem never operated a branch assembly or mission in Antioch, Galatia, Ephesus, Thyatira, or Smyrna as far as can be clearly ascertained or authoritatively declared from the Biblical record.

Sometimes we get into things much as David got into hauling the ark of the

covenant on a new cart. The Philistines had taken the ark and had hauled it away on a cart. It appeared perfectly harmless so David and his people built a new cart and went to fetch the ark home on it. When the oxen shied and the ark nearly tipped over, Uzzah reached out to steady it and God struck him dead. God had a prescribed way for carrying the ark and no innovation of the Philistines could be substituted.

The Roman Catholic Church has long operated "missions" and "branches" and "parishes" and "dioceses" within what they claim is the universal (catholic) visible church. There is no such thing in their mind as Roman Catholic churches (plural). There is the Roman Catholic church which meets in many locations all over the world. All of these people are considered members of the church of Rome, the Roman Catholic Church. If you challenge their tradition and teaching you can be the object of their wrath and denunciation as I have been recently. I received this letter from a Roman Catholic in Great Britain.

Long live the Holy Romano-Catholic Church! Death to all heretics!

Having read your heretical condemnation of Promise Keepers and the Holy Romano-Catholic Church, I must tell you that you shall be broken to pieces and the greatest pain will be brought to you. You need to know that God will send you to Hell as a heretic agent of Satan. You, (vulgarity), claim that Churches should be separate from each other, thus breaking the word of Jesus who says there should be one Church.

Who the (vulgarity) are you anyway? Some (vulgarity), somewhere in a small town, maybe some priest of a heretical

Church who enjoys democracy for being allowed to pour his (vulgarity) on God's work. What (vulgarity) power can such a small Church have anyway? How can you claim that Christians shouldn't be one body? Or are you afraid that true Christians will burn you as heretics were burnt by the Holy Inquisition?

One day, the old feudal order will be revived all over the world. Heretical liberals like you will be destroyed in the name of the King and the Church. As you probably live in the US, you must know that each state of the US shall become a colony of England as it was before (vulgarity) Washington and his revolutionary gang rebelled against their legitimate master, George III. There will be no representation for the (vulgarity) nation, just the hereditary rule of nobles. Heretics like you, liberals, Pagans like Moslems, democrats and other (vulgarity) who love to think and not blindly believe will be killed, taking care that the greatest pain is inflicted on them by the monks of the Holy Inquisition.

Hoping in your immediate painful death, hoping that you'll suffer the loss of those you love and that you yourself will hurt more than all of them combined.

This man's main attack on me was because I attacked, in an article on our WebSite, Rome's idea of being the mother church and all these "missions" or "branches" being a part of the mother

church at Rome. This struck at the roots of their hierarchial system.

Where did our independent, associational, and convention Baptist churches get this idea of having a mother church that has one or more "branches", "arms," or "missions" operating in various parts of the world who are allegedly part of the mother church somewhere else? We did not get it from the Bible, that is certain. Did we get it from Rome?

As painful as it may be, we need to take a good long look at this practice and see if we can find where it came from. We have, among us, a lot of little hierarchies. Let us not try to eisegete or superimpose it upon Scripture. Some who do not like this message may, as Rome has long done, seek to kill the messenger. But, until someone can show me **Biblical example or mandate** for this practice of having an international or interstate church and calling it a local, visible assembly, I will continue to ask for one Scripture in all of God's book that clearly shows that any church of the New Testament ever operated a mission with assembling members in another locality while still maintaining their local and visible nature. I will be waiting patiently as I have for the last 25 or more years. Twenty-five or more years ago I offered a \$1,000 reward for one clear example of a "mission" in the New Testament. At the time I would have had to borrow the money to pay the reward, but no one ever claimed it.

Therefore, I will patiently wait for someone to show me clear evidence that Paul and Barnabas first started missions which were later organized into churches. And, if this can be shown, then I challenge the argument that the church at Antioch was a local visible body. How could it be local, if it assembled in several different localities in

RELIGIOUS INNOVATIONS PRODUCE SPIRITUAL DETERIORATION

By Wayne Camp

TEXTS: II Kings 16:10-20; II Chron. 28:16-27

The reader is encouraged to read these two passages of Scripture. For the sake of space I have left them out of the message but will be using a number of them in the message.

INTRODUCTION

Under the Godly king, Uzziah, God greatly blessed the nation of Israel. This prosperity continued under Jotham.

But, changes came when, at the age of 20 Ahaz came to the throne. The country was abounding in wealth. ***Isaiah 2:5-9 O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD. 6 Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers. 7 Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots: 8 Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made: 9 And the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself: therefore forgive them not.*** Before Ahaz died, however, the country was reduced to poverty. The land was steeped in idolatry.

This downward spiral did not come over night; it was gradual. Some things that aided in this spiritual decline are mentioned in our texts. The main reasons for this decline were the innovations which Ahaz introduced into their worship and service. Anytime men tamper with the God-given order of things they invite spiritual decline.

We live in a day of religious innovations. The ecumenical movement is not very new but it has reached new heights through the new evangelicalism that is sweeping the nation. This movement essentially says that it makes no difference what a person teaches in the name of

Christ, we should never speak negatively about them nor their teachings lest we ***“divide the body of Christ.”***

The mixture of psychology with Scripture plagues the preaching of many. The popularity of psychology is seen in the success of James Dobson and others. Charles Stanley saturates his preaching with psychological babel, as do many others.

The sudden increase in radical Pentecostalism is also alarming. In fact, it is so radical that many Pentecostals are warning of its dangers of demonic activity. When people laugh like hyenas, roar like lions, bark like dogs, and cackle like hens and call it godly and Holy Spirit movement, there is no doubt that demonism is involved.

And, we Sovereign Grace Baptists are not immune to this. Only recently I heard of a Sovereign Grace Baptist Church which rescinded the vote upon which they received members as much as three years earlier (subject of another article I may publish). Not wanting to grant these folks letters, and not having grounds to exclude them, they rescinded the act of receiving them. There is absolutely no biblical ground for such action. I have just purchased six Baptist church manuals and not one of them mentions this action as a way of dismissing members. What makes the matter even more interesting is that one of these members was their pastor. He had administered and participated, as had the others, in the observance of the Lord's Supper. By rescinding the act of receiving him they are saying, in effect, he was never a member. Yet, they gladly partook of the Lord's Supper with him and the others who ***were never members*** since the rescinding of the act of receiving them. That makes this church an “open communion” church. And, to think, they did all this in the name of “church truth” and actually threw themselves into error.

Years ago Baptists picked up a practice from the Episcopalians. In that Anglicized Catholic

movement one of the steps toward being a pastor is being a deacon. So, as a part of their preparation for the pastorate, deacons sat on presbyteries. The Northern Baptist Convention picked it up from them, the Southern Baptists from the NBC, and from there it spread into other Baptist groups, including some Sovereign Grace Landmark Baptist churches. In many areas of Baptist life this has resulted in deacon boards running the church and the pastor.

I have said all this to warn us all of the danger of religious innovations. They lead to spiritual deterioration.

Now let us consider this truth as seen in the case of Ahaz and his new altar.

A NEW ALTAR FOR WORSHIP

Ahaz was very impressed with the idolatrous altar at Damascus. He decided that was just the thing needed to spice up the worship at Jerusalem. **2 Kings 16:10** *And king Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar that was at Damascus: and king Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the fashion of the altar, and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof.* The old altar, the one made after the pattern which God gave to Moses in the mountain, was not good enough. Ahaz felt he could improve upon it.

The accommodating priest, Urijah, set about building this new altar as soon as he received the patten from Damascus. It was patterned after a pagan altar but that made no difference to Urijah. Whatever the king wanted the king must have. He was not the man of God he should have been or he would have tolerated no change from the Divinely given pattern. Without authority from God he proceeded to build what the wicked King Ahaz desired. He was certainly cut from a different mold than was Azariah who withstood Uzziah when he wanted to burn incense on the altar in the Lord's house. **2 Chronicles 26:17-20** *And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the LORD, that were valiant men: 18 And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee,*

Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the LORD God. 19 Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense altar. 20 And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the LORD had smitten him.

God placed judges over Israel to govern them. But, Israel was impressed with the monarchies of the world. They began to cry out for a king. **1 Samuel 8:19-20** *Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; 20 That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.* The nation of Israel was chosen by God and set apart to be a people different from the nations of the world but they said, **"We will have over us a king that we also may be like all the nations."**

Going along with the crowd is never good. It is not good for a nation, a church, or an individual Christian. The crowd is usually going in the wrong direction and it behooves us to stand for Biblical truth and example and pattern regardless of what others do or have done. Not even antiquity can make something biblical that is not set forth in the Bible.

In the first church that I pastored we had a problem. Each time elections came around, the candidates would gather in our church building and give their speeches and smoke their cigarettes, and all that goes on at political rallies where as many as 20 candidates are speaking. This had been done for many years but I led the church to vote to stop it. My life was threatened. Bloodshed was threatened. Two men in the church had their lives threatened. The Sunday

morning after we have voted the previous Sunday to stop this practice, one of our members with the backbone of a sweet potato vine showed up early for church. He and I were the only ones there. My wife was on the verge of having our second child and could not travel the 200 mile round trip to the church. This fellow brought up the vote of the previous week and asked if we could not change that. His argument was, "Bro. Camp, if we had never allowed them to meet in the building for these rallies, it would be wrong to allow them to start. But, I have lived here 30 years and they have always done it this way. Since it has been done all along, it seems to me, it would be alright to let it continue."

I asked him, "Willis, are you ready to die."

"What do you mean," he asked.

I said, "Are you ready to die right now, this morning."

"Well, I am saved, if that's what you mean."

"No," I said, "I am going out to my car and get my 32 automatic and kill you. There won't be anything wrong with it. After all, men have been killing one another since Cain killed Abel. If antiquity makes a thing right, there is absolutely nothing wrong with my killing you as soon as I can get my pistol."

Needless to say, Willis decided quickly that antiquity cannot make right something that is wrong. And, antiquity does not validate something as law that must be observed, regardless of how long it has gone on without protest. Baptists need to learn that tradition should never be superimposed upon Scripture, even if it is a practice of long standing.

Another instance of religious innovation is seen in David's new cart. **2 Samuel 6:1-7** *Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. 2 And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the LORD of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims. 3 And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart. 4 And they brought it out of the house*

of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. 5 And David and all the house of Israel played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals. 6 And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. 7 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.

God had very clearly set forth a particular way in which the ark of the covenant was to be transported when Israel needed to move it. There were rings of gold on the four corners. Two rails of wood overlaid with gold were to be in those rings. Four men were to carry the ark with these two rails, but were never supposed to touch the ark. However, when the Philistines took the ark away from Israel they hauled it away on a cart. When David sent Uzzah and others to fetch the ark home, someone came up with the idea of copying the example of the Philistines. After all, they hauled it away on a cart; surely God would not mind David's men bringing it home that way. There was just one problem. God had laid down the specifics and you do not meddle with God's word. On the way home, the oxen shied, the ark rocked back and forth, and Uzzah, in all sincerity and concern, reached out to steady the ark so it did not turn over. When he touched it God smote him dead. This religious innovation brought spiritual deterioration. Uzzah died for his error. David got mad at God because he did not go along with him on this matter. And, it was a long time before they were able to bring the ark home where it should have been. Disobedience is no small thing with God.

Not everything new is wrong. The first churches did not have buildings. They met in synagogues, caves, homes, and on river sides. According to what I have read in history, the first real church house was built at Philippi about 150 AD. There is nothing wrong with having a

church building though the Lord never commanded us to build one. But, many have erred on this very matter. The building, to many, is the church. The building is often treated with such “pious” superstition that one wonders what is in the mind of those who treat it that way. Some treat the pulpit area as if it was the area of the burning bush which Moses saw. The church is the people. The members of the church are the church if they meet in the concession stand of a drive-in theatre or in a cave in the mountains.

The moment that a building begins to take on these things in the mind of people, it becomes a means of spiritual deterioration. A tradition which may not be wrong in itself becomes wrong when some begin to treat it as law that is binding upon all who would be brethren if they only kept the tradition.

REVISED ORDINANCES

Like a child with a new toy, Ahaz, upon his return home, abandoned the affairs of state and pleased himself with his new altar. He offered his own sacrifices upon it. He offered his own meat offering. He poured his own drink offering. He sprinkled the blood of his own peace offerings upon the altar. He had taken the money that was in the Lord’s house and given it to the king of Assyria as a present. **2 Kings 16:8** *And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king’s house, and sent it for a present to the king of Assyria.* It was not enough to rob the Lord’s treasury, he now invaded the priests’ office and offered sacrifices as had his grandfather, Uzziah. **2 Chronicles 26:16** *But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense.* One sin seems to just lead to another until one is found defying the Lord himself. Religious innovations certainly produce spiritual deterioration.

RELOCATION OF THE BRAZEN ALTAR

As I pointed out earlier, the altar which Solomon made by God’s pattern was not good

enough for King Ahaz. **2 Kings 16:14** *And he brought also the brasen altar, which was before the LORD, from the forefront of the house, from between the altar and the house of the LORD, and put it on the north side of the altar.* The brazen altar had always been before the Lord in the forefront of the house. But, Ahaz had that moved to a less noticeable location. He wanted to lead Israel further away from God. To do this, he must wean them from the worship at God’s altar and have them worship at the altar of Ahaz. To accomplish this the old altar must be shifted aside, the new altar must take its place. In arrogance in doing this, Ahaz dared to do what no king in history had yet assumed to do.

Ahaz felt the service of the temple needed the spectacular, the artistic, the novelty. It needed his new altar. It should be remembered that when a service degenerates into a mere artistic performance, it is hateful in God’s sight. The perfection of the artistic often conceals the lack of true spirituality and life.

When doctrine is watered down or abandoned and uncertain sounds go forth, God’s people must stand for the **“faith once delivered to the saints.”** When tradition begins to infringe upon the authority and sufficiency of the Word of God, spiritual deterioration is sure to follow.

THE IMPROVISATION OF NEW SACRIFICIAL ARRANGEMENTS

2 Kings 16:15 *And king Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying, Upon the great altar burn the morning burnt offering, and the evening meat offering, and the king’s burnt sacrifice, and his meat offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, and their meat offering, and their drink offerings; and sprinkle upon it all the blood of the burnt offering, and all the blood of the sacrifice: and the brasen altar shall be for me to enquire by.* He commands that all regular and occasional sacrifices be transferred to his new altar—the “great altar.”

This usurpation and innovation was tamely submitted to by Urijah, the priest. **2 Kings 16:16**

Thus did Urijah the priest, according to all that king Ahaz commanded. It appears he raised not a word of protest. He simply complied with the king's wishes without objection. A few changes here and there would not matter even if not authorized by the word of God.

Ahaz pretended great spirituality in all this. He said, in effect, I need this brazen altar, the old altar, for my own special praying. “. . . **and the brasen altar shall be for me to enquire by.**

Alterations were also made in the arrangement of the temple. **2 Kings 16:17-18 And king Ahaz cut off the borders of the bases, and removed the laver from off them; and took down the sea from off the brasen oxen that were under it, and put it upon a pavement of stones. 18 And the covert for the sabbath that they had built in the house, and the king's entry without, turned he from the house of the LORD for the king of Assyria.** Note that he did this to please the king of Assyria. He was not concerned with pleasing the Lord; he must please the king of Assyria.

COMPLETE CORRUPTION—THE FINAL STEP OF AHAZ

2 Chronicles 28:22-27 And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD: this is that king Ahaz. 23 For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him: and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel. 24 And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the LORD, and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem. 25 And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger the LORD God of his fathers. 26 Now the rest of his acts and of all his ways, first

and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 27 And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, even in Jerusalem: but they brought him not into the sepulchres of the kings of Israel: and Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead. Regardless of his efforts to please the king of Assyria, the king was not impressed and he helped the Ahaz and Judah not at all.

In distress he transgressed even more. He sacrificed to the gods of Damascus. He thought they would help, but they were his ruin. He destroyed the vessels of the Lord's house. It is interesting to note that Ahaz first began his slide by trying to please men. He first went against the teachings of the revealed will of God by removing the altar of God's design and inserting his own in its place. Then he changed the interior of the temple. Now he destroys the original vessels of the house of God.

He closed the doors of the Lord's house. He made altars in every corner of Jerusalem. He made high places in all the cities provoking God to jealousy and holy anger.

He was so wicked and the people were so disgusted with him that they would not bury him with the other kings of Israel.

CONCLUSION

Innovations in the Lord's services may seem harmless or nearly harmless at first. What will they lead to if unchecked and unopposed? Let us learn from the examples of Ahaz. Let us follow as closely as possible the clear-cut teachings of Scripture. Sometimes when a person introduces something new and we ask for Scripture for it, he answers, "What Scripture does it violate?" It does not matter if it does not violate Scripture. If one is teaching it as essential, he must have mandate or example from Scripture. Every time we permit an innovation in our services or in our teaching, we are inviting spiritual deterioration. May God give us the grace to resist innovations in the worship and service of our Saviour and God.

Bouquets and Brickbats

NEVADA: No brother, I am not who you are thinking of. Thank you for the subscription. It is a breath of fresh air to read some good material and I must tell you, I enjoyed the article on regeneration that was attached on the Baptist Symposium mail list.

VIRGINIA: We are very much opposed to pk. We would like copies of the Articles you wrote; An Introduction to the Promise Keepers & Their Faulty Foundation Exposed We have had trouble trying to download. Please tell us how to obtain.

WWW: I have read your two papers on PK's and I can tell you that you have bastardized and misinterpreted their work. Does your church belong to a denomination or are you an independent? You are guilty of twisting their purpose and meaning. I attended the SITG on October 4, and God was truly honored and praised. I felt the hate in your heart for those brothers, believers who are more charismatic in their worship. I was raised in the Evangelical Free Church and my father was a pastor who finished his career in a Baptist church as a visitation pastor and he would have been ashamed of your writings as he

was of Jimmy Swagert, Jim and Tammy, and Bob Jones. I have learned to accept my brothers who worship differently than I do. The only thing that matters is one's belief that Jesus is indeed the son of God and he calls us to accept him into our hearts and follow his leading in our lives. John 3:16 is quite clear and spiritual gifts are mentioned all over the new testament. I am not a charismatic believer!

You are repeating lies and have taken out of context things like the comment about the Beatles. What was said here is that talent is from God, even musical talent! The point of the sermon was the point that if the Beatles had known the Lord can you imagine what they would have been able to accomplish! Your work is filled with lies and half truths as well as hate and I suspect jealousy. You have set yourself up as a judge when we are called to discern, not judge! **(Note that this Promise Keeper has been very careful not to judge me. He just felt the hate in my articles)** I have meet other people like you who would unloving explain tragedy in Christian lives (like the death of your son) as due to their own sin totally insensitive to the love of Christ.

There are thousand of men who don't know much about doctrine but know a lot about asking the Lord into their hearts because of PK's and their lives have changed. I believe that the Lord will act upon their hearts and lead them to the doctrine he wants of them. Let me give you example; when a man ask Christ into their heart he doesn't change all of their habits at once, as they grow he convicts them as their spiritual maturity increases. Take smoking for instance, first Christ enters their heart and then on his own timing he challenges them to quit. He certainly doesn't need humans like you and me to judge them and look down on them because of their habits.

PK's is supportive of the local church as long as it believes in Christ and the message of the gospel. For you to say that Mormons are acceptable in their beliefs is a total lie! PK's calls you to only one God and one savior the same as Billy Graham. PK's makes it quite clear that there can be no eternal life without a belief in Jesus Christ! By the way I have meet many Catholics who believe in Christ and have accepted Jesus as their personal savior in spite of their church. 1.8 million men gathered on the mall in Washington from a variety of church backgrounds, we were united in believing that Jesus was sent by God to wash away our sins and to allow us a personal relationship with Christ. Jesus Christ Lord of Lords, King of Kings was worshipped . . .

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