

THE GREENWOOD BULLETIN

Church of Christ
371 W. Main Street
Greenwood, IN 46142
(317)888-8288

www.churchofchristatgreenwood.org

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Could the Church

Be Wrong?

By Robert F. Turner

Could "the church" be wrong? Is it possible that a portion---or even all of the members of a congregation (including their elders) could be in error with respect to doctrine and/or practice? Could several congregations be wrong? Could a majority of congregations be wrong?

One of the most basic fallacies of Roman Catholicism is its conception of the "infallible" church. But someone says, "The church of the New Testament could not be wrong!" WHICH ONE will you use as your example? The one at Corinth? Ephesus? Laodicea? But you say "I'm referring to the 'whole' church, the body of Christ." And I remind you that this organism, this relation of individuals to

Christ, does not exist as a functional organization. The characteristics of the perfect church must be gleaned piece by piece from the divine records. By command, example, and necessary inference we learn what Christ would have us be and do as a local church. The divine purpose and intent alone is without fault. In all functional churches---and here the N.T. allows us to speak only of individual congregations---the human element is present, and we are forbidden to use such a church as a pattern (2 Cor.10:12).

The New Testament, the covenant or law of Christ, is that which was set up on the first Pentecost after the resurrection (Isa. 2:1-2; Joel 2; Acts 2) and the body of people who accepted this law, and by a practice of its instructions brought into being the Jerusalem

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congregation, were the product---not the makers of a divine standard. The same principle continues to this good day, and both the First and Twentieth Century churches could and do err. (See Rev. 2-3).

In every century, in every generation, each church must prove its right to the name "church of Christ" by showing identity with the divinely approved church characteristics found in the New Testament. We must pay more than lip-service to this principle. When we begin to think a thing is right because a "Church of Christ"---or a majority of the "Churches of Christ"---or ALL of the "Churches of Christ" do or teach it, we have become sectarian in our conception of the church, and need to revise our thinking. God's word is the pattern by which a true church must be cut. Did you ever cut 2x4s to frame a wall, or pickets for a fence? If you obtained a pattern, cut the first by that pattern, then threw the pattern aside and cut the second by the first---and so on---you learned the fallacy of identity by succession.

Any slight difference in the second was passed to the third---and the slight difference of the third was added to the error of the first, and passed on. To cut a true wall, or fence, we must measure each cut by the original pattern. This is no less true with reference to the church.

A crying need of our time is a firm resolve to determine right by an appeal to God's truth, rather than to "a well defined and clear-shown majority of the Churches of Christ in Texas." Cancellations will be received with as much grace as we can muster.

Would You Be Missed?

Golfer, 89, Stuck Overnight in Swamp

An elderly golfer searching for lost balls in swampy woods bordering a golf course got stuck in the muck and spent the night there before being rescued by a search party.

More than 30 Pasco County sheriffs deputies and firefighters and a helicopter

began searching for him Sunday afternoon, about 24 hours after he'd last been seen arriving at the Forest Hills Golf and Country Club. The search was organized after friends missed him at Sunday church services.

—Via Associated Press—
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Last Things First

By Dan Shipley

The scene is Shechem. The occasion is Joshua's farewell address just prior to his death. All the tribes of Israel are assembled to hear the aged Joshua, now 110, as he begins recounting God's dealings with their great nation. Showing that God has continually been with and helping them, he concludes, "Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth..." (**Josh. 24:16**).

The scene is Jerusalem. David is nigh unto death as he gives this last charge to his son Solomon: "...I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man; and keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his

judgments, and his testimonies..." (**1 Kings 2:2, 3**).

The scene is a Roman prison. Paul is writing his last epistle. In giving his final charge to Timothy, he reminds the young evangelist not to be shamed of the gospel (**2 Tim. 1:8**); to hold the pattern of sound words (**1:13**); to suffer hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus (**2:3**); to give diligence to present himself approved unto God (**2:15**) and to persevere with urgency in preaching the word (**4:2**) with the assurance that a crown of righteousness awaits all the faithful (**4:8**).

Such are the words with which these great men of God conclude the final chapter of their earthly existence. The last words of any dying man are generally regarded as having special significance, but the words of these men ought to be especially so regarded--not so much because of being last words necessarily, but because of who they were and what they said with those words.

Joshua, David and Paul were men who had given most of their lives in consecrated service to the Lord. God had used their tongues and talents extensively to serve His

purposes among men. Through experience and revelation they accumulated such wisdom as experienced by few mortals. Joshua, for instance, knew how the lack of faith could prevent one's entering into God's rest. David understood about temptation and sin, and Paul himself had made the transition from "chief of sinners" to ambassador for Christ. As few others could, they perceived how the will of God complements the greatest needs of man--so their last words deserve an attentive hearing.

And what do we hear? Though different in expression and separated by hundreds of years, we hear messages that are strikingly similar. All emphatically recommend to others the same course they have now finished. All emphasize serving the Lord. Essentially, they are saying to all who shall come after them, "Live for the Lord!"; or, as another wise man put it, "fear God and keep his commandments." After all, that's what living is all about. There is a lesson we must learn! Apart from truly reverencing God and walking in His ways, man can have no meaningful existence here or hope of life in the

hereafter. As those destined to go "the way of all the earth," may the last words of these godly men find priority in our lives.