

Things Have Changed

INTRODUCTION:

1. Recently we received a letter concerning a trust fund established by Robert Wickliffe Comer.
 - A. Robert Comer was a member of the church and a wealthy businessman who was born in Kentucky, did some business there, but moved to Nashville in 1905 to find his fortune through the establishment of the Washington Manufacturing Company in 1914.
 - i. This trust was formed from 1,500 shares of common stock in Washington Manufacturing Co. and a \$25,000 note from the New Jacksonian Hotel Corp. of Scottsville, KY.
 - ii. Through the years this trust grew to its present value of about 35 million dollars.
 - B. This letter informed us that we were eligible to receive a portion of this trust to be dispersed to an estimated 2000 churches of Christ and Bible schools in Kentucky and Tennessee.
 - C. The only requirements for eligibility of a church of Christ is that it be in one of these two states and be “a cappella,” or a church of Christ that sings without instrumental accompaniment.
2. I am giving you these details to make a point related to the one doctrinal requirement for eligibility.
 - A. Being an “a cappella” church is it. And, if this seems minimal, which it does to me, here’s why.
 - B. This trust fund and the rules of its dispersal were originally established in **1936** and amended and restated on **December 29, 1941**.
 - i. In 1936, being a church of Christ that *sang without instruments* meant, for all practical purposes, that it was a faithful church of Christ.
 - ii. “A cappella” churches were those that had *separated themselves* from the Christian and Disciples of Christ churches, standing against the use of *mechanical instruments* in worship and the *support of institutions* to do the local church’s work, and generally taught the truth on the work, worship, and organization of the church.
 - iii. So, what seems minimal from our perspective was far more restrictive at the time.
 - iv. But, even in the late 1930s and 40’s the **winds of change** were beginning to blow among churches of Christ, though most didn’t see it that way at that time...or even today.
 - C. I am reasonably certain that if this man were transported in time to today and were to write the rules for this trust’s dispersal, they would be *far more specific* in their requirements. Why?
 - i. Because **things have changed**...a lot...since 1936 in churches of Christ in TN, KY, etc., concerning their approach to Bible authority and its application to the worship, work, and organization of the Lord’s church.
 - ii. These changes are so drastic that I am *confident* that Robert Comer would not desire to disperse this money to a large portion of the churches of Christ that will be receiving it.
 - iii. For, being an “a cappella” church is so limited when compared to the many changes among churches of Christ that it is almost useless as a means of determining faithfulness today!
3. I intend today to:
 - A. Talk about the changes within churches of Christ that show being *a cappella* to be an out of date standard for determining if a church is faithful to the Lord.
 - B. Present *examples* of these changes from the websites of various churches of Christ here in TN and other places. I do not do this to *bash* them, but to show you what they boldly put on display for all to see!
 - C. Finally, I want to show how these changes came about.

BODY:

I. “A cappella” is not enough...concerning music in worship:

- A. Without question, in 1936 churches of Christ were strong in their stand against the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship—there had been division over this issue!
 1. Why? The N.T. is clear that a church’s worship is to have vocal music, or simply singing.

- a. Dealing with the worship at Corinth (1 Cor. 14:15 – “What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will **sing** with the spirit, and I will also **sing** with the understanding.”)
 - b. Eph. 5:19 – “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing** and **making melody in your heart** to the Lord”
 - c. Col. 3:16 – “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing with grace in your hearts** to the Lord.”
 - d. Jas. 5:13 – “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him **sing** psalms.”
2. No mention of *playing* on a mechanical instrument is found in the N.T., which used to be significant among churches of Christ because 1 Cor. 4:6 warns us “not to think beyond what is written...” and, Rev. 22:18 warns that if one **adds** to what God has revealed, “God will **add to him the plagues** that are written in this book.”
- B. Things have changed in “churches of Christ,” even in TN, concerning the music of worship.
1. Many have compromised, having both “traditional” and “contemporary” worship services.
 - a. Traditional: *a cappella*, singing with the *heart* as the only instrument involved
 - b. Contemporary:
 - i. Instrumental music, bands, clapping, etc., all which are *non a cappella* music.
 - ii. Worship teams which perform for the church and promote a lack of vocal participation on the part of the members, who may simply be encouraged to listen.
 2. Examples of this compromise of worship can be easily found here in Tennessee.
 - a. **Harpeth Hills church of Christ** (Brentwood, TN, www.harpethhills.org)
 - i. SUNDAY WORSHIP 8:30 & 10:50 a.m.: Auditorium (a cappella)
 - ii. Our **Caravan Worship meets in the Gym at 10:50**:
 - iii. “Caravan Worship is a unique movement, within the context of a larger established church, intent on displaying the life and light of Jesus in our community and city in relevant and life-giving ways...Caravan Worship is just that, worship, in its various forms. It is a Sunday morning gathering. It is **music and singing**. The kind that erupts in praise to the Triune God...”
 - b. **Fourth Avenue church of Christ, Franklin, TN**: “Every congregation of the Church of Christ is independent and you will find a **variety of worship styles** and **organizational models** among them. Fourth Avenue Church has two distinctives: our worship is mixed — **acapella and instrumental...**” (<http://www.fourthavenue.church/about/beliefs/>)
 - i. Do we find different worship styles or different types of music in the N.T.? NO!
 - c. **Stones River Church – A church of Christ** (Murfreesboro, TN, stonesriverfamily.wordpress.com/about/worship)
 - i. Heading: **Worship in Music (see slide, emphasize “Instrumental Team”)**
 - ii. Article in Daily News Journal about this church.
2. These are churches near us, two of which were once very much like us, the other being a new breed of church of Christ. This is happening in TN now!

II. “A cappella” is not enough...concerning the organization of the local church

- A. In 1936 there were no local elders among churches of Christ overseeing more than one church.
1. Elders oversaw the one church, the local flock, of which they are members. Why?
 - a. It is specifically commanded (1 Pet. 5:1-2 – “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: ² Shepherd the **flock of God which is among you**, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly”).

- b. Each church is to have its own eldership (Acts 14:23 – “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”).
- 2. Things have changed and elders in churches of Christ today see no problem with overseeing various churches that meet and worship in different places, or campuses, etc.!
 - a. The North Boulevard church of Christ, Murfreesboro, TN, has six campuses—six different churches meeting in various places, but **overseen by one eldership**.
 - b. Local church elderships often oversee a Spanish speaking church, etc., with its own meeting times, meeting place, treasury, preacher, etc.
 - c. These same supposedly *local church elders* have no issues with overseeing churches in other cities, states, or countries as “mission/plant churches.” Yet, in Acts 14 they were all “mission churches,” if you will, and they all had their own elderships!
- B. In 1936 no church of Christ was using women as worship leaders, preachers, or ministers.
 - 1. This restriction was never a matter of women’s ability, intelligence, *society*, etc., but one of God’s word that gives different roles to the sexes.
 - 2. Men are command to “**Speak** these things, exhort, and rebuke **with all authority**. Let no one despise you” (Titus 2:15).
 - 3. The role of the Christian woman concerning the worship and word of God is different.
 - a. Women are to take a submissive role in relation to men and the word (1 Tim. 2:11-12 – “Let a woman learn in silence **with all submission**.¹² And I **do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man**, but to be in silence.”).
 - i. Silence means quietness, in a quiet fashion, in stillness, not *necessarily being silent*.
 - ii. This is expressed in submissiveness, not *teaching* or *exercising authority over men*.
 - b. Women are given this same role in the assemblies of the church (1 Cor. 14:34 – “Let your women keep **silent** in the churches, for they are **not permitted to speak**; but they are to be **submissive**, as the law also says.” (1 Cor. 14:34).
 - i. **Speak** is the same word found in Titus 2:15 where Paul tells Titus to “**speak** these things...with all authority...”
 - ii. In the context, **speak** refers to addressing the assembly as a teacher, leader, etc., which is forbidden for women to do.
- C. Things have changed in “churches of Christ,” even in Tennessee, concerning the role of women in the assemblies and holding authoritative roles in the church.
 - 1. Many churches of Christ in Tennessee have expanded women’s roles in worship, including leading prayer, reading scripture, serving at the Lord’s table, etc.
 - a. **Sycamore church of Christ**, Memphis, TN (sycamoreview.org)
 - i. **Gender roles**: “In the summer of 2012, a team of shepherds and ministers was formed to study and discern the role of women in public worship. As we considered the **culture** and **context** of early Christians, we were forced to ask difficult questions about interpretation as we sought answers from scripture...”
 - ii. “As a result, we have concluded that before God, there is a calling and clear examples from Scripture to move in the direction of expanding women’s roles in public worship. We believe it to be in keeping with what would have been experienced in the early church as well.”
 - iii. Where is this “calling” and these “clear examples” found in the N.T?!
 - b. **Fourth Avenue church of Christ**, Franklin, TN (fourthavenue.church)
 - i. “Every congregation of the Church of Christ is independent and you will find a variety of worship styles and **organizational models** among them. Fourth Avenue Church has two distinctives: our worship is mixed — acapella and instrumental — and **women play a larger role in the life and work of our congregation** than they

do in some others. The link below will take you to our statement on Women in Worship and Ministry.”

2. Women serve on **worship teams**: **North Boulevard church of Christ**, Murfreesboro, TN, has women participating as worship team members and leaders the worship (see pic)
3. Women **ministers** are quite common in *many* churches of Christ in TN:
 - a. Women serving as *ministers* in the form of being an Associate minister, Student Minister, Associate Student Minister, Children’s/Kids’ minister, Middle School Minister, and High School Minister.
 - b. I easily found **9 churches** in **Nashville** and the **surrounding area** that have women in authoritative positions, women ministers, etc., including Tusculum Church of Christ!
 - c. I would say, conservatively, 50-70+% have women ministers in the Nashville Area.
4. Women leading in worship and serving as ministers inevitably leads to women preachers:
 - a. **Highland church of Christ**, Abilene, **TX** (highlandchurch.org)
 - b. **Highland** has now accepted the use of women preachers: (www.reporternews.com)
 - i. They were not the first to do so in Texas, seeing the *The Refuge church of Christ* and *Minter Lane church of Christ* in TX started earlier in 2019 than did Highland.
 - ii. In 2001 Highland began allowing women to read scripture, lead prayer, and participate in worship, *which naturally led to allowing them to preach*.
 - iii. In September 2019 Highland announced that both men and women will preach in their worship services!
 - iv. This may seem so far away from us and churches of Christ here in TN, but the compromises that led to it are in our area—in Nashville, Franklin, and Murfreesboro!

III. “A cappella” is not enough...concerning to the work of the church

- A. In 1936 there were very few issues, if any, concerning what the work of the church because the N.T. is very specific concerning what that work is.
 1. Churches **evangelized**, from euaggelizo, meaning to **proclaim/announce good news/gospel**.
 - a. Supported preaching (Phil. 4:15-16 – “Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. ¹⁶ For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.”).
 - b. Sounded for the **word** of the Lord (1 Thess. 1:7-8 – “so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For the **word of the Lord has sounded forth from you**, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.”).
 2. Local churches **edified** their members by teaching God’s word:
 - a. Paul in addressing the elders of the local church in Ephesus spoke of his work of edifying them with the word and the need for the church to continue this (Acts 20:26-28, 31-32 – “Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷ For I have not shunned to **declare to you the whole counsel of God**. ²⁸ Therefore take heed to yourselves and to 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...³¹ Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to **warn everyone** night and day with tears. ³² “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the **word of His grace**, which is able to **build you up** and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”).
 - b. Note how elders and leaders of the local church must assure that the other members are *edified*, or *built up*, through the teaching of God’s word. That is how it is done.
 3. Local churches practiced **benevolence**:

- a. Churches practiced benevolence among their members (Acts 6:1-6).
 - b. Churches sent benevolent funds to Christians in other churches to meet their needs (2 Cor. 8:1-4 – “Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: ² that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. ³ For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, ⁴ imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.”).
- B. Despite biblical simplicity concerning this matter, things have changed with churches of Christ concerning the *work of the church*.
1. Churches are no longer satisfied to draw people to the Lord and keep them saved through teaching the word and through scriptural worship and bible classes.
 2. Churches today provide all sorts of recreation and entertainment for their members, whether it is in a “fellowship hall” for eating meals, etc., together, or more commonly in providing a full blown recreational program for the youth, adults, and senior citizens.
 3. Gymnasiums are no longer a left-handed notion of some far-out segment of churches of Christ, but a common part of their facilities.
 4. Tusculum church of Christ when building their new facility built a gym instead of an auditorium so they could worship in it on Sunday and play the rest of the week!
 5. And, as you can see from their church website, Tusculum, like so many other churches of Christ in TN and the USA, have full blown recreational programs with talent shows, carnivals, and Christmas plays!

IV. The Point: Why have the changes come?

- A. The *winds of change* began blowing in the 1940s when brethren began to *think differently* about *biblical authority* and how to apply it.
1. They continued to claim to believe and respect it as they always had.
 2. Yet, a “thus saith the Lord” had previously been the standard, while brethren began to speak of “no pattern” in the scriptures to open the door for their newly desired works/organizations.
- B. “No pattern” meant churches in the late 1940’s began supporting *institutions* to do the work of the local church.
1. They had fought *institutionalism* like this in the form of the Missionary Society 90+ years before.
 2. But now brethren were speaking of institutions for benevolence as “brotherhood homes” (aged, children) and institutions for edification as “brotherhood colleges.”
 3. This was a departure from Scripture which shows *local churches doing their own benevolence and edification under their own oversight!*
 4. Brethren warned these churches/brethren concerning this departure from the old paths!
 - a. Guy N. Woods, **Abilene Christian College Lectureship**, 1939: “The ship of Zion has floundered more than once on the sandbar of institutionalism. The tendency to organize is characteristic of the age. This writer has ever been unable to appreciate the logic of those who affect to see grave danger in **Missionary Societies**, but scruple not to form **similar organizations** for the purpose of **caring for orphans** and **teaching young men to be gospel preachers.**”
 5. The irony: These very *institutions* churches decided to start supporting 70 years ago are now pushing these liberal changes on to those same churches!
 - a. All the colleges that churches of Christ determined to support to “train their preachers” and “benefit their young people” in the 1940-50s now offer **degrees** in *local church recreation/social programs* for the members, with many or all programs open to *women!*

- b. Second, most of these colleges that churches of Christ chose to start supporting from their treasuries **70 years ago** now allow women full participation in their on-campus worship services. (authentictheology.com)
 - c. Lipscomb, Abilene Christian, Lubbock Christian, Oklahoma Christian, Pepperdine, Rochester, York, and there may be more, have women preaching, reading scripture, leading prayer, etc., in their on-campus worship services.
 - d. These schools are producing young people and preachers who are bringing women leaders/preachers and church recreation and entertainment with them to the churches!
- C. “No Pattern” allowed brethren to change their view concerning eldership authority.
- 1. Brethren began to harness multiple local churches together under the centralized control of one eldership, calling it a *sponsoring church*.
 - 2. The sponsoring church had been introduced and defeated 30+ years earlier through the **GA** and words of David Lipscomb.
 - a. **David Lipscomb**: “All meetings of churches or officers of churches to combine more power than a single church possesses is wrong. God’s power is in God’s churches. He is with them to bless and strengthen their work when they are faithful to him...But for one or more to direct what and how all the churches shall work, or to take charge of their men and money and use it, is to assume the authority God has given to each church. Each one needs the work of distributing and using its funds as well as in giving them.” (**Gospel Advocate**, March 24, 1910).
 - b. Ironically, Lipscomb University is a big supporter of the abuse of eldership authority today!
 - 3. When it came up again in the 1930-40s, brethren warned of the seriousness of this departure.
 - a. **Foy E. Wallace, Jr.**: “For one church to help another church bear its own burdens, therefore has scriptural precedent. But for one church to solicit funds from other churches for general distribution in other fields or places, thus becoming the treasury of other churches, is quite a different question. Such procedure make a sort of society out of the elders of a local church, and for such there is no scriptural precedent or example.” (**Gospel Advocate**, May 14, 1931)
 - b. Yet, most of the churches didn’t listen and opened the door for the abuse of eldership authority we see today (i.e., eldership over many churches – *Catholicism*)!
- D. Brethren in the 40’s began to change their view of the work of the church.
- 1. Churches began to entertain their youth and members, using their church building’s classrooms, *which were already there*, for eating together, etc., which was warned against!
 - 2. **B.C. Goodpasture**: “For the church to turn aside from its divine work to furnish amusement and recreation **is to pervert its mission**. It is to **degrade it mission**. Amusement and recreation should stem from the home rather than the church. The church, like Nehemiah, has a great work to do; and it **should not come down on the plains of Ono to amuse and entertain**. As the church turns its attention to amusement and recreation, it will be shorn of its power as Samson was when his hair was cut. Only as the church becomes worldly, as it pillows its head on the lap of Delilah, will it want to turn from its wonted course to relatively unimportant matters. Imagine Paul selecting and training a group of brethren to compete in the Isthmian games! Of his work at Corinth he said: ‘For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified’ (1 Corinthians 2:2).” (**Gospel Advocate**, May 20, 1948)
 - 3. Despite the warnings, using the building for gatherings to eat, etc., led to churches designing their buildings to have fellowship halls, kitchens, and ultimately gyms, as well as to supporting all sorts of recreation and entertainment!

- E. Here is the interesting thing:
1. Brethren and churches that wanted these changes claimed they were **scriptural**, and that they **would go no further**.
 2. Faithful brethren warned that supporting institutions and the sponsoring church, as well as changing the uses of their buildings ever so slightly, would lead to instrumental music in worship, women preachers, church kitchens, fellowship halls, and gymnasiums, and all kinds of church recreation and entertainment!
 - a. At that time, by just walking into their building couldn't tell the difference in a church that accepted these early changes and one that didn't, except by seeing a budget.
 - b. Today, the differences are clearly displayed for all to observe, seeing that these churches have proved the predictions of faithful brethren to be true!
 3. To understand how true this is, consider an article entitled, "**Why I Left the Christian Church,**" which was originally penned by a man named Floyd Decker after he left the Christian in the early 1940! Churches of Christ today have become the Christian church of yesterday, the church brethren divided from because of their liberalism! (follow slide)

CONCLUSION:

1. **There are no "small" departures from Bible authority!**
 - A. We must take the authority of the scriptures seriously, refusing to accept any departure from what is revealed, no matter how *small* it might seem to be.
 - B. We need to understand that the issues that divided brethren, although that was 70+ years ago, are still very pertinent today, and must be addressed from this pulpit, understood in the pews, and stood firmly against if we are to remain faithful to God!
2. So, as I often do, I ask you what you will do with Jesus.
 - A. But know that what you will do with Jesus is determined by whether you will accept Him as your **Lord** and **listen** to **his word** and **obey** it in **faith**.
 - B. This must begin in F-R-C-BP, in which you receive forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life. Will you come to Jesus today?