

**18 May 2018**

**“A House Divided Against Itself”**

Since this coming Sunday is Pentecost, I thought I would write about the church—since it is its birthday. Friedrich Nietzsche was a provocative, and still much quoted, 19th Century German philosopher. He was a severe critic of religion, especially the Christian religion. He once suggested that “The last Christian died on the cross.” And, concerning Christian evangelism, he said: “If the church wants the world to believe in redemption, then the church ought to look a little more redeemed.”

There is enough truth in that criticism to trouble those of us who have been involved in the effort of evangelism. Most of us could easily recite an occasion or two in which the church has not looked very redeemed. There are extreme exponents of the individualism who in their determination to “have it their way” all the time provoke dissension continually. Their failure to get along with others is more often than not a reflection of their inability to be at peace within themselves.

I read about a man who was stranded on a deserted island for several years. The rescue party noticed that he had built three separate huts next to each other. When asked what the huts were for, he said: “I live in the one in the middle, and I go to church in the one on the right.” When asked about the one on the left, he said: “Oh, that’s where I used to go to church.” Some people can’t even get along with themselves.

Once there was a church out on the edge of town named the “Wego Baptist Church.” Intrigued by this name, he called several of his Baptist pastor friends and asked about the church. None of them knew how the church got its name. Pressed by his curiosity, he stopped at the church one day and asked the church secretary about the name. She told him an interesting story.

Back in the 1940’s there had been a conflict that divided the church’s membership evenly down the middle. Half of the people wanted the church to take one ministry approach while the other half wanted a different approach to ministry. They could not decide. The conflict devastated the church. After much debate they decided to separate. One group said to the other, “We go and you stay.” In order to commemorate this moment in the history of the church, the dissenting group decided to call their new congregation the “Wego Baptist Church.”

Sometime the church does not look very redeemed. It is strange—and encouraging—that God often uses our failures to the purposes of the Kingdom—no credit to our hard-headedness.

Lest my Baptist friends think I am casting aspersions on their great denomination, let me tell you that I have seen a few “Wego” Methodist churches in my time—and Episcopalian, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, etc.

**Come, Worship  
Stay, Learn  
Go, Serve**