



Preacher's Pen by Gene McCoy

They sat down in my office. The pleasantries and chit chat completed, it was now time to discuss the matter for which they had requested the conversation. They wanted to ask some questions about our congregation before they committed themselves to affiliating with us.

Most readers — maybe all but the preachers — probably think this is the preacher's delight. What preacher wouldn't eagerly welcome such an inquiry and such interest? It isn't a matter of liking or not liking the interest and the inquiry. It is the context in which such interest and inquiry is couched. Allow me to explain.

In most instances like this, the interest and inquiry is all about what the church has to offer them in terms of services. Single adults want to know what social programs and opportunities are afforded them. Many select a church on the basis of programs that cater to their specific stage in life or situation (e.g., divorce care, child care, women's groups, men's groups, youth groups). Others' choice is predicated upon the offering of a "name brand" curriculum (e.g., Awana).

In one of my previous ministries, one couple actually quit coming because our small congregation's nursery was not adequately equipped to provide their baby with his own crib in which he alone was allowed to sleep and play! That is an extreme example, of course. One older gentleman quit coming to another congregation I served because we did not provide social outlets among senior adults.

We want people to know who we are and what we are trying to accomplish. It isn't that we expect people to blindly choose us. The concern is the fact that most people who visit a church are not basing their consideration on the right criteria. Most make the decision based upon their felt needs or their selfish desires.

But the couple sitting before me did not ask about any special programs or services to cater to them.

Having read the Bible, they recognized the discrepancies between apostolic teaching and practice and those of the religious group with which they were affiliated. After their first visit with us, they remarked that they were delighted to see many indicators that the teaching and practices here match those of the church described in the Bible.

Among these is the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper. Despite the fact that the religious group in which they were involved

did not teach or practice baptism for the remission of sins, both had

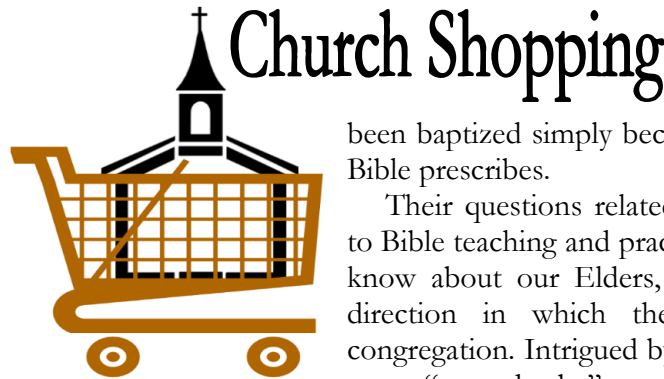
been baptized simply because that is what the Bible prescribes.

Their questions related to our compliance to Bible teaching and practice. They wanted to know about our Elders, and specifically the direction in which they are leading the congregation. Intrigued by the fact that we are not "owned by" or beholden to a denominational organization, they wanted to know about our beginnings, our heritage, our associations with other congregations, and our government. Satisfied that everything was consistent with Bible teaching, they expressed their desire to fellowship with us in work and worship.

I was refreshed by their approach that places the authority of the Bible and apostolic practice above selfish preference. I was also renewed by their allegiance to God and His Word and not to a pet dogma or denomination.

The thought also occurred to me that this is what the Restoration Movement is all about — calling people out of denominational division into unity that is founded upon the deity of Jesus and the authority of the Bible.

The movement of which we are a part sprung from the realization that the unity for which Jesus prayed could never be enjoyed



until and unless each individual renounced the divisive designations in favor of the one name that truly unites — “Christian.” It is the only designation that glorifies the Savior.

How refreshing and reassuring it is when people come to the realization that they do not need to be encumbered by denominational division and dogma, but can be a Christian, pure and simple. And how satisfying it is when the primary concern of those seeking fellowship among other Christians is based upon what the Bible teaches rather than the familiar programs and traditions that serve their selfish interests.

Selecting a congregation with which to associate should be based upon how it corresponds to the church described in the Bible. Is the Bible regarded as the sole authority to the exclusion of human writings? Is the

Lord’s Supper observed each first day of the week? Is every Christian regarded as a priest, a minister of reconciliation? Is baptism into Christ for the remission of sins taught and practiced?

Our concern should not be what the church can do for us, but rather upon what service we may render to the Lord and His people. Choosing a congregation should not be predicated upon how well it lines up with our thinking, but how closely it corresponds to the church in the Bible. We should select the congregation where we may serve in the confidence that the Lord’s mission is being advanced to His glory. To borrow a famous line from Pres. Kennedy, “Ask not what your church can do for you, but what you can do for the Lord in and through this congregation.”