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The Christian In An Election Year

by David L. Burkholder

We are once again in the midst of a presidential election year. The news media are full of ads, polls, surmisings, charges and counter charges. It seems as though nearly everyone has an opinion or a prognostication regarding how they would like to see things turn out. And it's all too easy to get caught up in the hullabaloo and fervor of the campaign. But what should be our involvement as conservative, Bible believing, nonresistant Christians? Our intent with this article is to answer these questions and show how the Christian life and its purpose is incompatible with the realm of politics. We will examine the issues from the biblical, historical and practical perspectives.

The Biblical Perspective

When debating any issue the first recourse for the Christian must be the never-changing Word of God. The first principle we need to keep in mind is that as Christians our primary citizenship is in heaven, not on earth. Philippians 3:20 and 21 (NKJV) spells that out: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."

The ultimate desire of the Christian's life on earth should be to look forward to being eternally transformed into the image of Christ. That desire will affect all we do in the here and now. It will affect our loyalties, our interests, our ambitions, our activities, our speech, our attitudes toward others, our involvement in affairs of this world--all areas of life. As Christians we are to live loose to this world, being as strangers and pilgrims - those who are just passing through - whose focus is on a higher level than this world. As such we must be completely detached from this world system, its appeals as well as its governing politics.

We are, however, to be responsible citizens of whatever

earthly government under which we find ourselves living. Such responsibilities include submission and obedience to its authority in areas which do not conflict with our primary loyalty to God. Romans 13 spells it out: pay taxes, give honor and respect to those in authority, recognizing they are fulfilling a God-ordained function. We are also instructed to pray for those in authority. In I Timothy 2:1-4 we read: "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." This passage not only outlines our responsibility to pray for civil magistrates, but to also seek the salvation of their souls.

We are to be good citizens: upright, above reproach, well spoken of for our kindness and acts of charity toward those in need. We should be uncomplaining, honest and upright in conduct, both in business and social relationships. We must also meet all obligations, both to the state and our fellowmen. Honesty and integrity must be the Christian's hallmarks. It should be clear to all who observe our lives

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that we live with a different motivation than that of general society. We are citizens of the heavenly kingdom, and that should show in our manner of life.

Colossians 3:12 also outlines some characteristics to be exhibited by the child of God. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering." These are qualities not usually found in the life of politicians. Our value system should outshine that of the world. I John 2:15, 16 tell us that we are to "Love not the world [its organized system controlled by Satan] neither the things in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but of the world." The Christian is to portray love for the heavenly Father and things of His realm. The politician, conversely, is intent on elevating himself and calling attention to himself and his abilities, portraying himself as the one to be looked up to and followed. It's a matter of basic loyalties.

The Church's Perspective

One of the major tenets of the Anabaptist movement was the principle of separation of church and state. The Anabaptist reformers held strongly to a two-kingdom theory that ruled out participation by the follower of Christ in civil affairs. They were to be separate. And that separation was complete--no voting, no jury duty, no office holding, no participation in war or the keeping of civil order. Many of these principles became tests of membership by various groups. And rightly so, for these issues define the line between the principles that govern the kingdom of Christ and those of the world system.

The mixing of politics with religion has proven detrimental to the spiritual tenor of the church in that it has tended to dilute spiritual fervor with social action. Neither has it proven to be of significant uplifting moral value to politics. The two stem from entirely different realms and their policies and procedures simply do not mix.

Daniel Kauffman in *Doctrines of the Bible* says:

"The idea that it is the duty of the Church to take hold of Government and run things for God is neither taught in Scripture nor supported by the facts of history. The place for Christian people to take hold and work is in the Church, and the place of most effective power is at the Throne. . . . When Christianity was adopted as the religion of State in Rome, the result was that Rome corrupted the Church instead of the Church purifying Rome. . . . Today the average church member in politics is not one whit cleaner morally or better spiritually than is the average non-church member in politics. Christianity and world politics do not mix. Their spheres are essentially different. Both Government and Church are better off if each remains in its sphere. The idea

that the Christian can render substantial aid in the cause of righteousness by 'mixing in politics' has often been proved a delusion."

Some Practical Considerations

The political climate. In political campaigning there is much personal accusation hurled by candidates at one another. It seems nothing is off limits to make oneself look better than the opposing candidate. All of this harshness, mud-slinging and defamation flies in the face of Christ's command to exercise kindness and love in all human relationships. The dog-eat-dog atmosphere of political campaigning is in stark contrast to the lowliness, meekness, humility and love that Christians are commanded to exhibit towards others. The political climate simply is not conducive to exercising these qualities. That should tell the Christian something of his priorities in an election year.

Biblical injunctions

Romans 13:10 says: "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Is that the way it works in politics? Is love exhibited? Certainly not. Romans 12:10 tells us to "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another." How far would a politician get by following the principles of kindness, love, and preferring others? It is simply opposite of what normally takes place in political campaigning. Philippians 2:3 says: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Would anyone get elected that way? Without strife? Esteeming the other candidate better than himself? Titus 3:2 tells us that we are "To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men." Modern day political campaigns delight in displaying the character flaws, real and supposed, of one's opponent. Meekness is not evident either.

As Christians we take our directives from God's holy word. The principles found therein are at cross purposes to those of politicians and civil authorities. The committed child of God will easily discern the difference between Christian motivation and the political scene of the world and shun that which is unholy and at odds with the principles of heaven.

J. C. Wenger in *Separated Unto God* says: "If we cannot support the government in the maintenance of the police force or in waging war, then we ought not to attempt to control the policies of government by voting. . . . Christians should not seek to regenerate society by employing political methods; rather, the Christian should work at the regeneration of men by individual conversion to Christian faith and life. Since the government cannot operate on the principle of nonresistance, why should nonresistant Christians attempt

to help govern? Furthermore, . . . prayer to God is more powerful than the employment of any political means. The nonresistant Christian also faces the difficulty of electing a man to do what he himself cannot do as a Christian . . . The central fact remains that the central calling of the Christian is evangelism, and that the calling of the Christian is fundamentally to work on a spiritual rather than a political plane.”

Guy F. Hersberger, in *War, Peace and Nonresistance* states: “The mission of nonresistant Christians is not a political one. It is rather a curative mission. It is to bring healing to human society; to prevent its further decay, and that, through a consistent witness to the truth. The same Sermon on the Mount which commends the way of nonresistance to the disciples of Christ also says, ‘Ye are the salt of the earth.’ and if the earth is to be salted, the salt dare not lose its own savor through activities which destroy its essential nature.”

It should be amply clear that the Christian’s responsibility lies in an entirely different sphere than that of politics. Jesus commanded His followers to teach and instruct men in the ways of God. The Christian’s primary goal, therefore, should be first of all to live a life that brings honor and glory to God, and in so doing, point others to His saving grace. The verbal witness of the Christian will do more to change the world than any political agenda. The realm of politics must be left to those with lesser goals than that of the Christian.

Hypothetical Questions and Suggested Responses

In an election year we will be faced with questions from associates and those we rub shoulders with on a daily basis. How should we respond? With love and in humility, leaving a positive witness for our stand, based on the unchanging word of God. We have no reason to be apologetic when we stand on the principles of God’s word.

“Do you plan to vote?” (This question provides an opportunity to give testimony to our basic loyalty to God and His principles. Think it through carefully.)

“Who do you hope wins the election?” (The man God directs the American people to vote for. The one He has chosen as best for the current national and international situation).

“Do you think so-and-so candidate would make a good president?” (While I may, or may not, necessarily agree with all his views, I do believe God could use him to accomplish His purposes in our nation and world.)

“Wouldn’t our nation be a better place if more Christians like you would get involved in politics and help raise the moral level of our society?” (My observation has been that more often the Christian’s witness is negatively impacted rather than the moral level of society being raised.

Furthermore, I believe God controls everything. I also believe that Satan is hard at work in this world’s system, and that only God’s power can thwart him. I believe I can be more effective on my knees than at the ballot box).

Some Practical Questions

Is it possible for the committed Christian to become involved in the political process without violating biblical principles?

Is it possible for the Christian to get involved in politics without compromising his spiritual integrity or relationship to God?

Does the involvement of Christians in politics actually raise the moral and spiritual level of society?

Does becoming involved in politics have a tendency in any way to shift a Christian’s primary focus in life?

Will God be honored by the Christian associating with those whose actions, attitudes and morals are lower than what Christ demands of His followers?

Conclusion

So, what should a Christian do or not do in an election year? We believe it inconsistent for him to vote or politic in any way. Neither should he show overt favoritism for one candidate above another. It can be counterproductive. In 1960 some Mennonites voted for the first time to keep a Catholic president out of the White House. It didn’t work, and probably did more to taint their witness than it did to change the direction of our country. We should do nothing to compromise our personal or corporate witness or to bring reproach to the name of Christ.

We can, and should, be committed, praying, concerned, and helpful individuals, ministering in the name of Christ to the total needs of our sick and dying world. A consistent life, free from questionable entanglements, will go a long way to showing where our supreme loyalties lie. Our lives must be lived on a higher plane than that of the bickering, name-calling and degradation of character employed by those seeking office.

Let’s look again at Philippians 3:20. “For our citizenship is in heaven, from whence we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” That verse establishes our loyalties and outlines our priorities. Our citizenship is in heaven, and that is where the focus of our loyalties and interests must be centered. The attitude of eagerly waiting for our Lord’s return will help keep our focus on spiritual matters and off the matters of this world and its political system. If we keep that verse in focus it will help us keep our thinking and actions straight in this election year. Furthermore, it will see us through life as we live here for the honor and glory of God, and eagerly await our transport into the heavenly kingdom, our ultimate, eternal home. ■

What Happened to the Church?

by Ray Baumann

If you type “emerging church” in Google, it will produce over two million links; but if you go to the Yellow Pages, it’s nowhere to be found in your area. It is because the emerging church is not a building where people go; it is a thought process, or methodology, of engaging the culture. I can’t remember ever meeting a pastor that affiliated the emerging church with where they stood theologically. Nowhere is there a doctrinal statement to which emerging leaders adhere. It is a way of thinking that encompasses a broad audience, and many have put aside their beliefs for the common goal of reaching people.

Reaching people is a very generic term. Corporations reach people with their messages. The Emerging Church Movement is about evangelizing the consumer. This thinking is not new. Consumer evangelists have been around for some time. Here’s what you do: find out what the unchurched (unchurched is a nice way of saying “lost and going to hell”) want and need, and give it to them. Their target audience just so happens to be those in their 20’s and 30’s.

I have been to emerging leadership conferences, and have heard many of the proponents of this movement. It seems to me that the common theme is reaching a people group by repackaging the church to reflect postmodernism. The thinking is that they will be able to reach the postmodern audience that traditional churches have failed to reach.

The emerging conversation didn’t sprout up overnight, and it isn’t anything we should be surprised about because it is a direct by-product of the evangelical thought process that has been around for a long time. Over the last 25+ years, the church has put great value on attendance and less value on discipleship and doctrine. As a result, when Generation X came into leadership in every denomination, they were already conditioned to a thought process of reaching people by whatever means possible. It seems then, that numbers equal success. There is an enormous temptation to sweeten the Gospel message that few can resist.

When attracting people and creating community becomes a primary focus, it is not healthy to stress doctrinal issues. The less that you define your beliefs, the more attractive you become to others. Thus, the emergent conversation is about putting beliefs aside so we can have unity and build community.

There is no doubt that the leaders have passion for reaching people, and to me they’re just playing by the same rules as the leaders before them. It’s their worldview that is skewed. The whole thought process came out of the church’s being ineffective. It is essentially a new marketing approach and a repackaging of church. “Let’s make church popular again.

Let’s stress a more popular message of God.” The church has become effective in its attempt to make the Christian walk more casual instead of more committed.

To pick on one group would be unfair when denominations around the country have been doing this for years. Water the Gospel down a lot or a little, it makes no difference. It is still a half truth. Just because everyone’s doing it, does that make it right?

Many view the effectiveness of the Gospel with regard to how many respond to it. Should the Gospel message be popular? Should we use this corporate mentality of gauging the effectiveness of the Gospel? If that is the case, then the apostle Paul was not very effective. He should have adapted to make the message more relevant.

But what was the response that early followers received when preaching the Gospel? It was persecution, imprisonment and death. Why aren’t we faced with persecution? It’s a sobering thought that should bring us to the realization that the church today is not preaching the Gospel in its entirety. In the Old Testament, God instructed Jeremiah not to omit a word in relaying the message of the judgment to come.

Are we afraid to share the Gospel in its entire form? Do we shy away from the mention of hell or the need for repentance, all because we are afraid of the response of this unpopular message? Is it really logical to believe that the true Gospel is ineffective? Or have hearts hardened and become the exact description in II Timothy 3?

When the church attempts to be all things to all people and to eliminate the exclusivity of the church’s being for the believer, the church has forgotten its responsibility to Christ’s followers. If the church isn’t going to use the Scripture as the model, then it is up for grabs as to what church should be and look like. If attendance is the only sign of success, then it doesn’t matter what is being preached because we think God is blessing us because people are showing up. This thinking goes out the window when you look at the growth occurring in Islam, Mormonism, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses... is God blessing those religions? Absolutely not.

I believe in being discerning and contending for the faith, but we can’t single out a movement that is doing the exact same thing the church has done for years; making the Gospel message align with the masses. In this case we are all guilty. Jesus, “please forgive us.”

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Frustrating Fathers and Frustrated Children

by Howard Bean

“No-no,” says Daddy as Junior begins to insert a nail into an electrical socket.

“No-no,” says Mother as Junior decides to nourish the begonias with his glass of milk.

Children need “no-no’s.” So do parents. One such example is found in Ephesians 6:4, “And ye fathers provoke not your children to wrath.” Fathers are clearly warned not to irritate or exasperate their children causing anger and restraint. What are some ways parents might provoke their children to wrath?

1. Inadequate time. Children generally spell love with the letters T-I-M-E. To train children at home, it is necessary for both parents and children to spend time there. I think King David was too busy to get to know the needs and thinking of his children. Absalom tried at one point to spend time with his dad but was unsuccessful. Some jobs, like long distance trucking or moonlighting, make it difficult for fathers to interact meaningfully with their children on a regular basis. Better it is to have jobs like Joseph had, who presumably worked with Jesus in the carpenter shop.

2. Favoritism. Isaac and Rebekah reaped a bitter harvest from the seeds of favoritism they cultivated by word and action. It wasn’t much better in the next generation either as Jacob favored Joseph above his eleven brothers. Children seem to have an innate sense of fairness, and when they are the victim of an injustice, they can feel very frustrated and resentful.

3. Hypocrisy. When parents say one thing and do another, it is perplexing for a young child and exasperating for an older child. Take, for instance, a father who disciplines his son for being unkind to his sister, and then the father is sarcastic and belittling to his wife.

Parents influence children largely by what they do, not by what they teach. One young man told his dad he didn’t pay much attention to him in the little teaching sessions his dad provided. He said, “Your most influential moments were your most inadvertent ones. I imitated what you really were, not what you said.”

Parents cannot lift their children to a higher level than the one on which they live. If a father wants to teach his

children to apologize and ask forgiveness, he must be ready to humble himself and set an example. Someone said, “Till a boy is fifteen he does what his father says; after that he does what his father does.”

A certain family went to a church that prohibited its members from going to the movies. (Good idea.) But the father regularly took his family to the movies in a city some miles away. (Bad idea.) The parents told the children not to say a word about it. The child, in adulthood, reporting this happening, was scarred by this hypocrisy.

4. Lack of genuine interest. Parents might communicate that children are a bother, an interference with their social life and happiness. Children can tell, not so much by parental words as by intangible attitudes and body language. Job’s interest was great in his offspring. He offered sacrifices for his children regularly.

A young man found himself in trouble with the law. His father was contacted. At 4 a.m. the unhappy parent arrived at the police station. His major concern was that his car was being held as evidence. An incredulous detective said, “Your car? Aren’t you concerned about your son?”

The father shrugged his shoulders. As he left he said, “Make sure the windows of my car are closed in case it rains.”

5. No discipline. Rearing children is similar to drafting a blueprint: you have to know where to draw the line! Abraham did – God knew he would command his children after him. (Genesis 18:19). Samuel didn’t – “his sons walked not in his ways” (I Samuel 8:3). The remainder of Ephesians 6:4 instructs fathers to “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

6. Inconsistent discipline. A child is sure to lack security if for the same offence he sometimes is punished and sometimes it is obviously overlooked. Someone observing twenty-first century parents said, “Among those things which are so simple that even a child can operate them are parents.” Parents dare not smile at misbehavior, when a child is young and consider it “cute” if they hope to eradicate it later.

7. Harsh discipline. “Let your moderation (sweet reasonableness) be known unto all men” (Philippians 4:5).

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TXT MSGNG: Trial by Their Peers

by Brian Forrester

It promised to be a pleasant evening – a usual excursion with the youth of our church. But little did I realize how “educational” the evening would end up being and the grim lesson I, as an adult in charge, would be forced to learn on the bus that night.

One of the young people grew gradually louder and more disturbing as time went on. Every youth worker has encountered this scenario at one time or another, a young person who continually pushes and yet seems to get away with as much as he can, undetected, until the person in charge has to step in.

This is exactly how the scene played out. But it finished very differently from the way it had for me in the past. This time, rather than meek acceptance, reluctant outward-but-not-inward compliance, or simple rebellion, I got in reply – text messaging. Had I realized then, as I do now, what was going on, I would have temporarily confiscated the offending party’s cell phone, but I was new to this phenomenon and not versed in the best way to respond.

Cell texting, I now realize, had become this particular young person’s three-pronged weapon of choice. First, by withdrawing immediately without any verbal acknowledgment or apology, he would “reprimand” me for having the gall to call him on his actions. The silent treatment was intended to be my scolding and his cell phone was the facilitator.

Secondly, choosing to text message in response meant he would not have to squirm. By escaping into the texting world, he didn’t have to weigh his actions or endure, for any length of time, the discomfort of a guilty conscience. He picked up the phone and he was “outta there.”

But the third, and perhaps most ominous element, that makes text-messaging worse than other forms of escape, such as putting on headphones and listening to a CD or cranking up the radio, is that the whole scenario can be immediately presented to a “jury” of the offended party’s peers. “Texting” is private, thus heightening the temptation to engage in unfavorable commentary. It is a whole new dimension to note-passing.

While a case can be made for many positive uses of text messaging, its dangers for being used in the wrong place and at the wrong time and for the wrong reason are clear. Making parallels between inopportune texting and the use of the tongue so strongly warned of in James 3 comes easily, as does relating the account of King Rehoboam given in I Kings 12:8 – showing a proud ruler choosing the counsel of his peers over the counsel of wise experience. Now more than ever, we need to be instilling into our students the principles that will serve them in any communication medium.

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This includes naughty children. Godly parents want to correct misconduct, not crush the spirit. Don’t be like one father whose son said, “My father would use a cannon to kill a mosquito.” In being firm, fathers must be reasonable, kind, and sympathetic.

8. Attempted discipline by threats. Nagging, irritable scolding, or empty threats exasperate. It is not enough to teach children right belief; parents must ensure as far as possible right behavior. Eli chided but didn’t chasten his wicked sons. “He restrained them not” (I Samuel 3:13).

9. Anger in discipline. Always correct others with control of self. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath;

and let not the hand of wrath come down upon your son. Inappropriate anger is probably the most common parental error in discipline.

10. Lack of preventive discipline. Preventive discipline is like preventive dental care – it means less pain and loss. It includes interest not indifference, firmness not favoritism, affection not apathy, confidence not criticism, kindness instead of crabbiness. It involves not only good exhortation but a good example.

Reprinted by permission from DLM Newsletter, August 2007.

Going Under the Knife

by John Meador

Every preacher experiences at one time or another the hard, stinging words of a critic who expresses some unfavorable opinion of a message you worked long and hard to prepare.

If we're not careful, that penetrating criticism can frustrate, embitter, and discourage us. We can become gun-shy in the pulpit and begin to see preaching as something other than the delight it ought to be.

In my opinion, the one group of people who have had the greatest impact on my preaching is that very group: the critics. I learned long ago that those who compliment my preaching have a variety of motives – some pure and some not so pure. There are actually people out there (you know this) who would tell you what a great message it was just to encourage you because it was not, in fact, a good message that day. Others may say it was the greatest message they've ever heard because it touched them in some sincere way. Are we to go away from those encounters thinking we've revolutionized the art of preaching that day? I don't think so.

Neither, however, are we to go away feeling we've failed God and man when someone criticizes our message. All critics have one thing in common. They say something that other people are thinking. And if we take criticism wisely, we may be able to allow the Lord to use those words to do a little surgery on how we preach. I know – it has happened to me.

Each church I've pastored (four in all) has had a progressively more discerning group of people. I have preached to those with little education and I have preached to those who have the greatest of theological educations. In each congregation I've pastored, there have been individuals who sat under my weekly teaching who were nationally known as communicators and scholars of God's Word. If I take all criticism as the work of the enemy, and if I perceive all criticism to be negative, I cease to be teachable.

Allow me to share a few principles of "going under the knife" in our preaching.

1. Remember that God has gifted you in a unique way. Sometimes criticism comes because we do not measure up to the former pastor, or to some renowned Bible teacher. Don't try to be someone that your critic admires! Be yourself, and let God teach you to speak in the style and personality that He has given you. I've found myself emulating people that

I have no business mimicking. Be yourself.

2. Instead of resisting criticism, embrace it. It is difficult to find fault in a humble, teachable person. Sure, some can still do it, but remember what God said: He gives grace to the humble. Someone once told me that every criticism usually has at least a grain of truth. Find that truth and deal with it honestly. This has served me well.

Some years ago, one of our church members came to me and shared at least five faults he found in my preaching, in general. Instead of getting mad, I set about to evaluate my preaching on the basis of what he shared. It turned out that he was right about some of his points, and within a few years, I received a letter from him telling me how much he appreciated the way I preached. Something changed, and I'm pretty sure it was both of us.

3. If someone points out errors in the way you interpret Scripture, listen to him and check carefully! In my experience, only those who care deeply about accuracy will make such statements, and since I am accountable to God for the truth, I need others to help me. It is so easy to be sloppy, and takes so much time to be fully accurate. I love it when I know there are those who will catch hermeneutical errors. They are on my side! If you are correct, help them see why you believe that, but if they point out legitimate errors, thank them for their discernment. You will win a friend for life.

I can recall mentioning one day that one particular chapter of the Bible contained 39 examples of faith. A certain Bible teacher came to me afterwards and told me he could only find 38, and would I help him find the 39th one? Whatever else happened, it certainly caused me to be very, very diligent to be correct in my statements.

4. Keep in mind that most of the people whom you preach to already appreciate your ministry. They are still there, aren't they? The last I checked, church attendance was still a voluntary activity. Don't let the criticism of the few get you down, but let them build you up. Take it as a challenge to be the best you can possibly be.

It may feel like you're going under the knife in surgery, but the surgery isn't radical – simply a nip here and tuck there. It is likely to bring great improvement when you take it the right way.

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Bitterness Kills

by Shea Oakley

There is a certain cold logic to bitterness. Bitterness appeals strongly to our sense of right and wrong, to our sense of fairness. Bitterness says that we have a permanent right to hate those who have hurt us or allowed us to be hurt by others. Bitterness is more interested in past losses than present and future gains. It forfeits hope and doesn't care. When we are caught up in the self-indulgent throes of bitterness we would rather lash out at a loving God who would "restore the years the locust has eaten" than allow Him to restore those years to us.

Unrepentant bitterness is the biggest barrier to our healing. To be bitter is, by definition, to remain unhealed. Just as we cannot be healed of physical infection unless we are willing to let the doctor touch and cleanse the wound, so our souls cannot heal unless we surrender what ails us to God. Bitterness is a sort of spiritual infection. If we are not truly willing to let God put His hands on this angry, hateful contamination of our soul, He cannot and will not heal us.

In fact, the wound analogy can be taken a step further. Imagine having a cut and purposely putting dirt and filth in it. The result of such an action is to make the infection worse and potentially cause it to spread throughout the body. Every time we choose to entertain bitterness we are making the infection stronger within us. This is the patent insanity of holding on to angry unforgiveness. Nursing a grudge is, in effect sickening ourselves.

Actually, this spiritual illness will eventually spread even if we do not actively make it worse by dwelling on it. Ignoring an infected injury ultimately has the same effect as feeding it. Acting as if it isn't there just draws out the period of time in which it does potentially irreparable damage to our lives. Bitterness simply cannot be allowed to be present at all if it is not to destroy us. It must go!

But it cannot go if we are not finally willing to let it go. The problem is we get a certain perverse satisfaction in clinging to our hurts. Perhaps it is the stubborn tendency to want to judge others. We do not want to release them to the one true Judge so we hold onto what they have done to us and blame them for it in perpetuity. We would rather hate them than give in to a forgiveness that takes their punishment out of our hands.

We get some terrible false gratification from letting a grudge define us. This is a particularly evil form of insanity.

The self-inflicted curse of bitterness spits in the face of both the healing and the Healer. It perpetuates wrong relationship with God, others, and ourselves. It is idolatry because the "right" to be bitter is elevated above our absolute imperative to be obedient to God and forgive as He forgives. It is deeply wicked and incredibly destructive to our very souls.

Bitterness kills.

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Change Service Requested

The Executive Committee of the FCM Board: Chairman: Todd Neuschwander; Vice Chairman: Simon Schrock; Executive Director: Paul M. Emerson; Secretary: Art Hershberger; Fifth Member: Melvin Paulus.

Board Members: Walter Beachy, Lloyd Gingerich, Christian Good, Ernest Mummau, David Showalter, Richard Swartzentruber, G. Terrill Yoder, Leon Yoder.

The Shepherd's Institute

Holmes County, OH
October 13 – 17, 2008

A great opportunity for ordained or licensed ministry to come aside for a week of intensive training and mentoring! Credit is available for those who choose to do the extensive follow-up assignments.

◆ **Day Class Offerings:**

Leadership and Brotherhood
Man and Redemption
Introduction to Theology

◆ **Instructors** will include Walter Beachy, Paul Emerson, Chester Weaver, and Milo Zehr

◆ **Evening classes** will be offered for the local Christian public.

◆ **For more information and applications please contact:**

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Email: chesterweaver@pcfnet.net

◆ **Local Coordinators:**

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