

THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

March 29

2009

Editor's Note: Our meeting with Steve Niemeier begins April 12. The following article is reprinted from the January 18, 2009 issue of the bulletin of the Greenwood church where Steve preaches. (JH)



“A Worldly Congregation?”

When Paul told the Christians in Rome (Romans 12:2) to be *“transformed by the renewing of their mind, and not to be conformed to this world”* was he only mentioning this as a warning to individuals? We know that he had just mentioned in Romans 12:1 that their bodies were to be presented as a living sacrifice that was holy and acceptable to God. If this is what an individual that is a child of God is to do would it not apply to congregations who are made of these individuals? When Paul writes in Ephesians 5:22-33 and includes that the church (the body) of Christ is to be glorious without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish isn't he instructing every member of the body (individual Christians) to be this way?

The instructions for individual members carry over to the local congregation being made up of these individual members doesn't it? When we study the letters to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2 & 3 do we not read where some individual members of the congregation were singled out for their wickedness and in turn that was detrimental to the whole group? While some of the members were holding fast some were not and the Lord warned the whole congregation. The church in Sardis was told that they should strengthen that which remains because there were some whose garments were not defiled. Yet, the whole congregation received the

letter.

When we talk about worldliness we seem to always focus upon the individual and by scripture we should focus on the individual. But many times we fail to focus on what worldliness can do to a congregation by the members participating in this sin who also continue to be actively involved in the congregation.

Many congregations who are made up of those who have obeyed the simple plan of salvation and at one time were working according to the commandments and instructions found in the New Testament have now left that first love. Whether it is taking the Lord's Supper and making it a “love feast” or “celebration of His resurrection” or “just a social gathering” with a “casual atmosphere” or changing worshipping in “spirit and truth” to “casual and comfortable” congregations of the Lord's people are looking more and more worldly.

It has become such a struggle to teach the instructions from the Holy Word of God because so many “scholars” want to put their “take” on things that more and more are enticed by the thought process of “brother so and so” over the true written and inspired word God has given us. This seems to be exactly what Paul warned Timothy about in 2 Timothy 4:1-5. He also instructed Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:1-9 about individuals (who of course make up congregations) denying the power of godliness (living like God wants us to live). Again in 1 Timothy 4:1-3 Paul has warned a younger Timothy about basically the same thing.

We could go to Acts 20:17-38 and read of the warnings that Paul gave the elders from Ephesus about individual members who would try and take away other individual members of the church at Ephesus. Time and again the warnings are given in the New Testament concerning those “among you” who will stray. Paul even stated that Demas a fellow worker with Paul had forsaken him having loved this present world. The writer of Hebrews warns us about the difficulty in bringing one back who has obeyed but has gone back and tasted the ways of the world (worldliness).

It is sad that many in the Lord's church today want to not only look like the world as an individual but want the congregation they are a member of to look like the world also. The idea is that we might be able to attract more people if we did things differently. We

might be “too traditional.” In Hebrews 4:12 we read that it is the word of God that will discern the thought and intents of the heart. In Romans 1:16 Paul stated that he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 3:1-23 we are instructed that our responsibility is to “plant and water” the seed (the gospel) just like gardeners do the seeds they plant for their crops. However, just like the farmer all we can do is plant and water. The Lord gives the increase.

Many today seem as if they want to “help” the Lord out as if He can not handle the increase part. Therefore we make decisions to look as much like the world as we can because this will help bring people in. If we can bring people in then our attendance numbers go up and possibly our giving. Then our “brag” boards in the front of our auditoriums look good and everyone thinks we are alive and doing well. This may have been some of the problem the Lord saw with the church at Sardis.

Some have decided to drop the name of Christ from the name of the church. It carries too much controversy. We certainly would not want to cause controversy would we? Jesus Himself stated that he came to bring a sword and that sword would divide families — bring controversy to families. It seems as if many refuse to accept this and think they have a better idea to do the Lord's work than the Lord Himself had. That way is a way of “worldliness.” Looking like, talking like, worshipping like, thinking like, and in general being camouflaged in such a way no one can tell the difference between them and a worldly group.

This all starts with worldly ideas generated by men and women who believe that the old paths are boring and not exciting. Thus they fill the need to create more excitement and center it on the idea “this is probably the way it was done back then.” These new ways seem to always lead down a path leading to extreme differences to what the scriptures teach. That path unfortunately takes on the look of many worldly religious groups instead of the called out body of Christ.

Worldliness is a terrible thing to fall victim to for both individuals and congregations. Yet it is running rapid among those who call themselves brethren. We must take heed of this and guard against this in our personal lives and congregations must guard against this in their members. Remember the words of Paul in Galatians 1:6-8?

“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.”

✠ Steve Niemeier



"SOUND DOCTRINE"

When we think of "sound doctrine" we usually think of the truth being taught on the plan of salvation, the worship or work of the church, etc. However, as important as the subjects are, much more is involved in "sound doctrine." When Paul told Titus to speak the things becoming sound doctrine (Titus 2:1) he includes conduct in every relationship. When husbands and wives are not conducting themselves as God instructs (Ephesians 5:22-31) their conduct is not becoming to sound doctrine. Being faithful and acceptable in the sight of God is not accomplished by just being in attendance with regularity. Our conduct and behavior in our everyday activities and relationships must reflect the fact that Christ is Lord of our lives. What about your home life? Read again Titus 2:1-9 and Ephesians chapters 5 and 6. Now answer the question again; "Is my life becoming to sound doctrine?" (JH)

<i>Belleville church of Christ</i>	
<i>5635 S County Rd 200E - Belleville, IN - (317) 539-5258</i>	
www.bellevillechurch.net	
Schedule of Services	Elders
Sun. Bible Study... 9:30 a.m.	Charles Carpenter... (317) 839-3873
Sun. Morning Worship... 10:30 a.m.	James Hahn. (317) 745-1507
Sun. Evening Worship. 5:00 p.m.	
Wed. Bible Study... 7:00 p.m.	
Evangelist	Deacons
James Hahn. (317) 745-1507	Leon Nevins (317) 272-2966
	Don Perry. (765) 676-5825
	Alvin Stanley. (317) 831-3514