

YEAR END INTERLUDE
"The 'Church Direction' Issue"
(Acts 2:42-47; Eph. 4:11-13; Acts 6:1-7; Rev. 3:14-22)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

The sermon topic today is a special interlude entitled, "The 'Church Direction' Issue", and there are seven reasons why I believe the Lord wants us to cover this subject. They are as follows:

- (1) The subject arose at our Board Meeting on December 17th.
- (2) At that meeting, I was pointedly asked by Duane Doot, the Chairman of the Board about my ideas on the issue.
- (3) At the time of the meeting, I was wondering what I should cover for this sermon as I had finished both the Household Renewal series and the Christmas Trilogy, leaving this last Sunday in 1997 open.
- (4) Over the years, the issue of "Church Direction" has been batted about, with some wondering **if** we have such a direction, and **if** so, just **what** it was!
- (5) I have turned a 180 degrees about-face on the issue from where I was in first entering the pastorate 21 years ago. My view is **pointedly** different from that of many other pastors, so I owe it to you to explain it.
- (6) We happen to be a month away from our Church's Annual Meeting, and doing a sermon on this issue **now** gives you as a congregation ample time to digest this material, to respond to it and interact with it in view of that meeting. The **timing** is perfect!
- (7) In the Men's Breakfast study we have, the issue of ministry direction has come up in the study guide, "Experiencing God," and Sean Coughlin who leads the study briefly discussed it with me just before the start of the Christmas Caroling ministry last Sunday night. I told him then that I felt I was being led of God to talk on this subject this Sunday, and he seemed very affirmative regarding my doing so.

Accordingly, concluding that I have been led of the Lord to deliver this message this day, we turn to the sermon "Need" section . . . !

Need: "Over the years, there has been a STEADY discussion on the 'direction' for our Nepaug Church body! Well, WHY has there been this discussion, and WHERE do we go for 'direction' from here?!"

I. Answering: "WHY the discussion on 'church direction'?"

- A. There was no such discussion in the Early Church because "direction" was viewed as **God's** general **product** of all other church functions:
 1. The Early Church was a spiritual "biosphere", a protective, **nurturing** environment to mature people in Christ, Eph. 4:11-13.
 2. Now, that "biosphere" functioned so that "church direction" was **GOD'S PRODUCT** of His involvement in other church functions:
 - a. First, the overseers majored on fellowship with God and Bible study to nurture other believers in the Body, Acts 2:42; 6:2b, 4.
 - b. Second, the **WHOLE congregation adhered** to this teaching so that its application deeply affected **ALL relationships**, 2:42b, c.
 - c. Third, these functions led to reverence (2:43), giving (2:44-46), fellowship (2:46b), worship (2:47a) and outreach (2:47b, c).
 - d. Fourth, as **GOD added** more to the body via **outreach**, a "direction" **developed** as a **result**, Acts 6:1-7: (1) A "hospitality effort" to help the **increase** in widows was **discerned to exist** by the **BODY**, 6:1. (2) Thus, the **apostles delegated** men to lead a program to meet the need so **they** could **continue** teaching, 6:2-4; 2:42. (3) The resulting "direction", that of the body, being a "hospitality ministry" (4) impressed many **priests** (who would have **known** of these widows' needs) to be saved, Acts 6:5-7!
- B. However, error has led many in churches today to expect **men, NOT God** to produce "direction", sabotaging God's work in the church:
 1. Often **today's** church **doesn't** adhere to Bible teaching or its Acts 2:42 format due to ungodliness (wheat & tares, Mtt. 13:24-30)!
 2. With this departure from the truth has arisen the **errant** belief that **leaders** must **create** a church "direction" and that by manipulating to win the congregation's respect so as to preserve their **jobs**!
 3. Well, as God **never** gifted **man** to do **His** work of providing a "direction", even godly leaders **can't** produce such a "direction"! Thus, "laymen" may wrongly follow and pastors errantly **try business** practices to manufacture a "direction" as in the **workplace** (Rev. 3:17's "have need of nothing" as described in 1 Th. 4:11-12)!
 4. Attempting to run God's "biosphere" this way **spoils** its vitality, so the "biosphere" **deteriorates**, and **with** it "direction"! (Rv. 3:16-17)

II. **Answering: "Where do we go from HERE for a 'direction'?"**:

- A. Because of this *deterioration*, God must redraft local church ministry:
1. Ministering *Biblically* in *today's organized* church is a "Catch-22"! Wayward "laymen" & leaders view "success" as measured by what "direction" the *leaders* can **create**. Well, since leaders *won't* create one if they obey *Scripture*, **enmity** will thereby exist *against* them!
 2. Thus, God must **redraft** a format for one to **minister in His will!**
- B. God's **revamped** plan is a *sub-biosphere* within the organized church:
1. As **Christ suffered** rejection by not meeting Israel's idea of a King (Rev. 3:21b), so Biblical leaders are **rejected** by carnal people in the organized church for not creating a church "direction".
 2. **Well**, as with **Jesus, God** gets **mileage** out of it all: He arranges events so that the ungodly will **unleash** their *enmity* to persecute the upright leaders and their supporting "laymen", yielding *eternal "gold" for them*, 18a; 1 P. 1:7; 4:12-19; Mtt. 5:10-12; Acts 2:23, 36
 3. Then **GODLY** "laymen" and leaders alike *in* these *sufferings* are *personally GIVEN* ministries ("white garments" 3:18b & 19:8) & **insight** ("eyesalve") by Christ. God then bestows great, effective "direction" for this *sub-biosphere* group, 18c, 20-22; Lk. 12:36-43!

Application: (1) *EACH of us has a CHOICE to make: (a) EITHER we put pressure on others and the leaders to set a "direction", getting frustrated when it doesn't work out (b) OR we trust GOD and minister in the body, looking for God to "direct" these ministries via suffering. (2) The RESULTS are that (a) the FORMER approach leads to God's arranging for us to vent our frustrated animosity by afflicting the godly! (b) Conversely, that leader and individual in the pew who heeds the LATTER view will suffer trials from carnal opposition for looking "weak", but lay up heavenly "gold" for it! Next, God will GIVE them very effective ministries ("white garments") and SUPPLY encouraging Bible insight ("eyesalve") to KEEP them GOING in faith in this mindset, Rev. 3:18. The result will be God's expanding the influence of these godly both IN the church AND in Christ's WORLDWIDE "direction" of discipling others, Rev. 3:20-22!*

Lesson: *Today's challenge is to follow Jesus' example in His earthly ministry: TRUST GOD with personal ministry efforts, looking to HIM while persecuted to mold these efforts into a "direction", 1 Peter 2:23-25!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

Here are just *two* illustrations that I offer today out of many to verify the view of ministry just presented to you:

(1) **Regarding my own experiences:** A number of years ago, Don and Marthe Ereminas got to know a Gospel preaching pastor at the China Lake Baptist Church in Maine. He, like many pastors, was besieged by false expectations from others.

Knowing that I have experienced similar trials, Don asked if I would be willing to talk with this pastor by phone. I of course agreed, and in time the pastor gave me a call. I could tell over the phone that he was spiritually shell-shocked. Based on the view of Revelation 3:14-22 I just presented in this sermon, I proposed that he consider himself answering ultimately to Christ, not the congregation, and that he should use his spiritual gift and just leave the results with God. If the Lord wanted him at the China Lake Baptist Church, its people wouldn't be able to remove him. If God didn't want him there, he wouldn't be **able** to stay, and neither should he then *want* to stay!

Since nothing else had worked, the pastor applied my proposal!

As a result, many people left the church, but a new group came in and responded warmly to his ministry! Today it is a thriving work! (I can relate two other similar illustrations with the same lesson!)

(2) **As it affects people in the congregation who will follow this view**, here is one from just this *last week*:

In faith that God had led her to Nepaug and to teach her class, Gayle Kitchin had her Sunday School class made 100 Christmas cards for the Prison Fellowship ministry. The sayings on a number of the cards were priceless. One read, "I like to **prey** a lot!" Since Gayle's instructions to the children in making the cards mentioned filling out the address to "Dear So-and-so", one of the cards read, "Dear So-and-so"!

Dave Johnson gave one of these cards into a prisoner who was in solitary confinement. The man was so deeply moved by the card that Dave was able to lead him to accept Jesus Christ as his personal Savior!

These are just TWO cases that God is working among those in our body who look to Him in faith -- whether he be a pastor, Sunday School teacher or child who makes Christmas Cards for a prisoner in solitary confinement he doesn't even know -- a ministry based on letting the LORD lead to give us HIS "direction"!