

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers
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Dear Reader

A concern faced by many fundamental groups is young people leaving for almost always, a broader, more naturally pleasing “Christian” pathway. This subject was discussed at a conference about a year ago and then has been discussed several times since, with other thoughts added along the way. We would like to share some of these thoughts in this issue of the Assembly Messenger. This is written more to exercise young and older alike as to this practical and very serious matter, and not so much as “teaching” on the subject. What is written is far from the last word on the subject, and we would like to hear from you as to additional thoughts, which we will publish from time to time, the Lord willing.

There are probably many ways to approach the subject, but we will use the general format as originally discussed. Thus the subject will be taken up under three general headings. In any particular case the real cause of someone leaving may be some combination of all three ... or other factors not even mentioned. Of course we do not believe Scripture *ever* condones anyone leaving an assembly meeting on scriptural principles because of failure to fully carry out every practical aspect of those principles by some or many in the assembly.

WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVE?

The Young Person Is Responsible

Some young people have simply made up their minds **they no longer want a “narrow” assembly pathway.** Demas — probably a fairly young man — is an example. His name means *popular*. He forsook Paul and thus the Pauline pathway, “having loved this present world” (2 Tim.4:10). Demas had proven himself to be a Christian (Phile.24; Col.4:14), but he wanted something more naturally attractive and exciting. Paul didn’t urge his return. Demas knew the truth (Phile.24), but had made up his mind to reject it, and would have to live with his sad decision. We do not hear of his recovery. Likewise, young people are attracted by the world or some “fleshly” activity of the world. Please, please, we urge you, don’t reject truth! The consequences may well be life-long, with much loss of reward (1 Cor.3:9-15).

Then some young people **listen to the wrong people and fail to heed Acts 17:11 and 1 Thessalonians 5:21.** There are many voices out there, all saying different things. We are not to be hermits, afraid to ever hear anything but what “our group” tells us. That is the way to remain “babes” in the truth. It’s also how cults operate. Rather, when we hear things, as did the Bereans, we are responsible to “*search* the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” We are to “test all things” and then only “hold fast what is good.” Without diligent use of God’s safeguards, we are very likely to be led astray, and many have been and still are allowing themselves to be taught wrongly. Once it is evident that someone is teaching wrong things, then that is the time to no longer listen to him.

But, it is argued, those who advocate a different path “have been of great help to me,” or similar expressions. Here the problem is looking to man instead of God. Do you not think Demas had helped many of the saints? He was probably a very nice man, perhaps naturally attractive. And in many things he probably continued with a good ministry: after all, he had been Paul’s companion in service. *But he was going wrong.* While being thankful for all past help, nothing gives the right to follow him in what was wrong. Surely the Apostle Paul was one who could be relied on, couldn’t he? Yet he is the very one the Bereans checked up on, and were *commended* for it by Paul himself. Paul said to follow or “imitate me, *just as I also imitate (or, follow) Christ*” (1 Cor.11:1). And no further!

Paul tells young Timothy that the day would come — and surely it has — when believers “will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have *itching ears*, they will heap up for themselves teachers, and they [the teachers] will turn their [the listeners’] ears away from the truth and be turned aside to

fables” (2 Tim.4:3-4). *Itching ears* has the thought of eagerness to hear what one wants to hear. *Fables* often are moralistic and sound good, but are not the whole truth. Sadly, many younger brothers and sisters are doing exactly this today. And they have no trouble finding teachers who will teach them, often very cleverly, what they want to hear. And these dear young people are being turned aside to fables! How sad to think one has the truth, but to actually only have fables!

Surely, Romans 16:18 fit these false teachers: “By smooth words and flattering speech [they] deceive the hearts of the simple [uninstructed].” JND comments on the word *deceive*. “The Greek word has the sense of seducing *from* what is right and deceiving *into* what is wrong.” We are told to “turn away” (JND) from such teachers (Rom.16:17), but too many young people gladly listen to them, fellowship with them, and are thus increasingly deceived.

Then, some young people are **attracted by a girlfriend or boyfriend** in other groups, or if it appears there is no one for them in their local assembly, they leave to find a mate, as if God is not able to supply just the right person at the right time, if He was only allowed to do so. Other young people and young adults leave for groups that have **more activities** for themselves and their children, as if such things were more important than obedience to the Lord (1 Sam.15:22).

The Older Ones Are Responsible

The accusation is made, too often with a good measure of truth, that we older ones (who should be shining examples) simply don’t walk the talk. Let’s look at some points made by young people.

We are legalistic. It is claimed we often make up rules, apply human “fences” not found in Scripture. It may be with the intent to keep the younger on the “strait and narrow,” out of trouble, or within our personal zone of comfort, but it is man-made law, yet taught and enforced as if it was Scripture. Many young people resent and reject such, and want the Scriptural alternative — *continuing shepherd care* (Jn.21:15). Have we not often failed in this?

We have abandoned the ways of Scripture. The accusation is that in some cases, to be more popular, assemblies have adopted the world’s ways. If we older ones have, how can God bless? Numbers don’t equate with God’s blessing. Some young people see through applying human attractions, giving up many of the distinctive truths that marked believers of past generations, and they reject it all. Sadly, most don’t see through it and are at least temporarily lost to the truth.

We have failed to teach the young the principles of Scripture. This includes the principles of assembly walk that is pleasing to God, according to His Word. These things may or may not have been taught in Bible Study meetings, but if so, often with too big words, too much assumption of prior or background knowledge. Have we gathered the young people and young couples together and gone over these things? Have we made room for questions and sought to answer them all, without making anyone feel it was a stupid or poor question? Many of our younger people are dangerously ignorant of why they are where they are. Yes, many times, the ones the most ignorant absent themselves, but have we sought them out, spent an evening together, made them feel comfortable? It’s never too late to begin.

We have insisted on certain Bible translations simply because we have been brought up with them. Many of us older ones were brought up on the KJV, but it isn’t used by the vast majority of at least North American young people. In fact, much of the language of the KJV is foreign to many. We need to explain to them that fidelity to the Greek and Hebrew is the important thing in any translation, and thus give the pluses and minuses of the various common translations, the differences between a paraphrase (Taylor Living Bible, etc) and honest translations (KJV, New Scofield, JND, NKJV, NASB, NIV). We need to point out, in a non-accusatory manner, that a thought-by-thought translation such as the NIV is not accurate enough to use alone for serious Bible study. We need to try to ensure that each at least owns the very accurate JND translation and other Bible helps such as Vine’s Dictionary, Strong’s Concordance, Morrish’s and Unger’s Bible Dictionaries. We need to point out translation errors wherever

found, not as a slam at the translation, but as a help to the dear saint. Have we not miserably failed at this, thus widening the generation gap, so-called?

In many cases we have been a poor parental or grand-parental example at home. And maybe in the local assembly too? Do we ever read the Bible with the family? Do the young people see us pray and study? How do we talk? Do we use the course language of the world? Do we criticize and run down the saints in front of our children? What do we watch and listen to? What music fills the house? What is our after-hours occupation — the things of Christ or worldliness, the good of the saints or personal fun? Do we forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some (Heb.10:25)? This has become epidemic, especially during the week! Are husband and wife consistently together in the Lord's things? Are the priesthood-privileges we speak so much about, actually used by us in the meetings of the assembly, or do we let others do it? Gift too? Are we willing to take on responsibility? Don't we too often fail miserably in these things? Do you not realize how young people and younger families see our inconsistency, our hypocrisy? Will we change, or is their accusation correct, that we don't walk the talk?

We have boring, irrelevant Bible studies. Big words, unintelligible arguments, brethren competing with each other, nothing practical for our lives, going incessantly back over the same ground, no room for questions or questions discouraged, are some of the accusations. Brother R.K. Campbell once argued for a variety in Bible Studies — sometimes going verse by verse, other times taking up subjects, other times answering questions, meeting an immediate need, etc. He used the example of potatoes in our diet. We eat potatoes in a variety of ways so we won't be bored with them — baked, mashed, scalloped, potato skins, french fries, even potato chips. But they are all potatoes! We are in no way violating any Scripture to have variety in Bible studies. While the so-called "open ministry meeting" of 1 Corinthians 14:29 seems to be the major Bible study meeting of Scripture, the door is left wide open for an "assembly" Bible study, Sunday School, home studies, young peoples' meetings, etc. Are we older ones prepared to take these accusations seriously and change as needed?

Too much busi-ness. Young people feel we are too involved with worldly pursuits. Yes, we need to earn a living and care for our families, but do we really need so much? Do we have time for our children and for the Lord? What kind of example are we giving them? Until writing "business" as above, I never realized it really says busy-ness. God says of spiritual things, "Do *business* [for Him] till I come" (Lk.19:13). *That's* the busy-ness *God* approves of!

The older haven't earned the young peoples' respect. If we ignore the young people and then want them to listen to us, what do you think will happen? Turn off! Turn off! Turn off! I remember a dear man in his mid-90's who always greeted each young person by name and had something to say to them. He took my son fishing at 90! The young people shouldn't be *invisible* to us when we are preaching either. They want to know we are interested in them, will challenge them for spiritual excellence, will spend the time to give them the tools to reach towards such excellence. A traveling brother played a game with the young people the evening of a conference. One told me afterwards, "I thought he was an old stuffed shirt, but he's an OK guy: I'm going to listen to him from now on." Have we become a "stuffed shirt" turn-off to the young people? We all can change our image. It doesn't mean giving up any of the truth!

In fact, in Scripture, we always read about and see the younger with the older, such as Elisha with Elijah (2 Ki.2:1-2), Joshua with Moses (Ex.33:11), Ruth with Naomi (Ruth 1:16-19), John Mark with Barnabas (Acts 15:36-39), Paul and Silas (Acts 16:19), and Paul and Timothy (2 Cor.1:19; 2 Tim.1:2). Today, sometimes the younger want to take over, thinking by human reasoning that they can do a better job, or are thrust into positions for which they don't have the spiritual maturity or knowledge, and/or the older brothers miserably fail to mentor the younger. Are we prepared to make the younger our sons and daughters in the faith, as did Paul (1 Tim.1:18-19)?

Pride in our position. While we believe our ecclesiastical position is according to God's Word, we often are perceived as "against others" and proud to be "right." We may indeed wrongly be proud. Each has to answer for himself or herself, realizing how insidious pride is — even being proud of our humility. "So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, We are unprofitable servants. We have done what

was our *duty* to do” (Lk.17:10). Simply obeying our Lord and Savior is our duty, not something for prideful self-exaltation. And who can even say he has done *all* the Lord has asked?

We also should never give the impression that other dear believers not of our persuasion as to the assembly pathway, are in any way the enemy. Rather, we should deeply love them as Christ commanded many times (Jn.13:34-35, etc.), even if we can't go with them in an unscriptural walk and/or in their sins. We will spend eternity with these dear ones. On the other hand, it surely is not wrong or unloving to point out to those less instructed what are the wrong positions of professed believers and make it clear why we thus cannot walk with them in assembly fellowship.

Both Young and Older Are Responsible

Unconfessed sin in one's life. One cannot be spiritual, happy in the Lord, of much use to anyone spiritually, if there is unconfessed sin causing the Holy Spirit to be quenched or grieved (1 Thes.5:19; Eph.4:30). We do not know how much hindrance unconfessed sin is, in an assembly. Sometimes the sin is known and is overlooked, to the public shame of all. Often it is only known by the sinning parties ... and the Lord! To have blessing, confession and cessation of the sin is an absolute must. We need to be spiritually alert to such things and be willing to get involved.

The list of sins of 2 Timothy 3 can infect young and older. The ones which were particularly brought before us at the conference where these things were discussed, are “Lovers of themselves, lovers of money ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (vv.2-4). When one loves self, then he is selfish, self-centered. There is very little care for or interest in others outside one's clique or age-bracket. Thus young and older are split and the divine recipe of the older teaching and mentoring the younger doesn't even get started. The love of money does much the same thing. Money or fame becomes a self-centered goal instead of the Lord and His people. It leads to rampant materialism, lots of toys, the best of everything. Young and older are equally susceptible, with the same spiritually-devastating results.

Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God! Doesn't that describe many Christians at the beginning of the new millennium! Instead of finding their pleasure in the lasting joys of Christ and Christian service as led of the Holy Spirit, earthly, sensual pleasure takes over. There has to be increasing excitement. “Are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” (1 Cor.3:3). Have we forgotten that we have two natures and that the old one is just as sinful as ever, and if we feed it, it will take over. We are to “reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but ... your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Rom.6:11-13). Read all of Romans 6 and 7.

Because of this epidemic-love for sensual pleasure, sexual sin among Christians is also at epidemic levels. If not actually acted upon, it is *watched* in Hollywood's “R-” and “X-”rated movies, or on the Internet. The abuse of alcohol and use of illegal drugs may not be far behind. Since all this is totally inconsistent with the truth, truth is given up by many whenever it interferes with what one [the old nature, that is] likes. It has to feel good, be sensually pleasurable. Why do you think the experience-based Charismatic-type groups have mushroomed in popularity? They can be shown to be *clearly unscriptural*, but among them, there is an ever-increasing “feeling” and “experience” of an exciting “religious” kind. Many mainline “denominations” are not far behind! So people *think* they're getting the best of both worlds, but they're very wrong! They're getting Satan's counterfeit!

Closing Comments

Thankfully, these above things are not true of many dear believers, young and older alike. But just as the warnings to the seven assemblies (which we recently studied) should have searched us deeply as to whether we had fallen into any of the traps of Satan, so we beseech the Lord that these few comments will search the hearts of young and older alike and lead to corrections wherever found necessary, that all may happily go on together in obedience to all of God's Word, in a scriptural assembly walk. It is our earnest prayer that many young people will desire above all

else to be found pleasing their Lord in all aspects of their lives, including their assembly life. May we older ones also pray that we may be consistent in our walk and the right example and help to our young people. RPD

Year 2000 Comments

We have begun our fourth year of the Assembly Messenger and are so thankful to the Lord for the privilege of serving Him and some dear believers in this way. As the primary editor I want to publicly thank Bob Costen for his great help in this work in both writing sections or articles for the paper and providing careful critiques of the written material. We want to reiterate that it has been our exercise from the first that these issues go out as the Lord allows, free of charge. Therefore, we have no legal structure for this work. None of the articles are copyrighted: in fact, we *encourage* copying and further distribution. Thomas Nelson and Sons asks that we mentioned yearly that the New King James Version, used as the primary translation in these papers, is copyrighted by them and used with their permission.

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