

Contending FOR THE Faith™

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE TRUTH AND HATE ERROR

RICHLAND HILLS, RICK “ABIHU” ATCHLEY, AND MECHANICAL INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Gary W. Summers

“Nation’s Largest Congregation Adding Instrumental Service,” boasts the headline on page 3 of the January *Christian Chronicle*. The Richland Hills Church of Christ near Fort Worth, Texas, reportedly has a membership of 6,414, although their attendance is listed as 4,000 in the 2006 directory. That they might add instrumental music to a Saturday night, Wednesday night, or Sunday service would scarcely shock anyone familiar with them.

Back in 1991, Goebel Music wrote 30 pages about Rick Atchley and the Richland Hills Church in *Behold the Pattern*. (At that time neither Mac Deaver nor Goebel had publicly adopted the “direct influence of the Holy Spirit upon Christians” heresy.) On October 14, 1990, Atchley delivered a sermon, which he titled, “Don’t Bother Your Brother.” He misapplies Mark 9:38-41 to refer to those in denominations, and he further says: “Second, let’s not limit the kingdom of God to the size of our brotherhood” (143).

At that time, Atchley had only been with Richland Hills a year, but the congregation was evidently so far gone that the elders and members did not notice that he placed the Lord’s church, a Divine institution built and paid for by Jesus Himself (Matt. 16:18; Acts 20:28), on a par with religious denominations which were established 1500 years later by mere men. How can any discerning soul—especially those who grew up hearing the Truth—not see the difference between the two?

His “sermon” is filled with quotations and faulty human reasoning. Besides the text, the only other Scripture references are “some verses, spoke of earlier in Mark 9, chapter three and ‘over in the nineteenth chapter of Acts’” (149). He

did find time to mention or quote 14 individuals, including his grandparents, Lynn “Big Sick Denomination” Anderson, and Max Lucado (151-52). To make matters worse, he quoted N. B. Hardeman out of context (152-53).

Music also exposed the dishonesty of false teachers like Atchley, who had previously stated publicly:

I will be open to any opportunity to teach and be taught more fully the way of Jesus. I’ll be open to any chance, any place, any where with any body to teach and be taught more fully.... I will seek any chance...or to be taught because a disciple is, by definition, folks, a learner (160).

Brother Music took him at his word. On July 25, 1989, he sent him a letter, consisting of four paragraphs, which asked but two questions. No reply was forthcoming. On August 18, Music sent a follow-up letter in case Atchley had not received the previous one or had been too busy to answer it. He sent it Restricted Delivery. Three days later it was returned. Atchley, the “learner,” who vowed to “be open to any chance, any place, any where with any body” had the letter stamped with RETURN TO SENDER. He had refused the second letter, after never replying to the first (161). Brethren today ought to be alerted that something is wrong whenever an individual, Christian college, parachurch organization, or school of preaching refuses to answer questions. People with nothing to hide are not squeamish about dialogue.

RESTORATION FORUM, 2002

In October, 2002, Rick “Abihu” Atchley (as I have designated him due to his comments) spoke at Restoration Forum XX in Lubbock, Texas, an outgrowth of the original Joplin
(Continued on page 4)

IN THIS ISSUE...

RICHLAND HILLS, RICK “ABIHU” ATCHLEY, AND MECHANICAL INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC	
Gary W. Summers.....	1
EDITORIAL: WEIGHED IN THE BALANCES	
David P. Brown.....	2
THE FIRST MAN AND WOMAN DID NOT EVOLVE...	
Thoman B. Warren.....	3

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ABIHU	
Gary W. Summers.....	13
FELLOWSHIP SCRIPTURES: 1 COR. 5; ROM. 16:17; EPH. 5:11	
Dennis (Skip) Francis.....	16
I WANT TO BE A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH THAT JESUS BUILT	
Roelf L. Ruffner.....	23

Contending FOR THE Faith™

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Ira Y. Rice, Jr., Founder
August 3, 1917-October 10, 2001

Editorial...

Weighed in the Balances

One of the marks of love is that it believes all things (1 Cor. 13:7). But in the previous verse Paul did not mean that we are to go contrary to evidence in order to believe anything. We are to believe the best about someone until we are compelled by the evidence to believe otherwise. This harmonizes with Paul's admonition to **"Prove all thing, hold fast that which is good"** (1 Thess. 5:21). To this teaching the apostle of love, John, added, **"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world"** (1 John 4:1). Our Lord commended the Ephesian brethren because they could **"not bear them which are evil."** Thus, they tried some that claimed they were apostles and determined them to be liars (Rev. 2:2).

It is not unkind, unloving, harsh, and evil to test the claims of anyone, brethren in particular. It is not sinful to demand evidence that a thing is true to God's Word or not. Thus, Paul warned Timothy to **"Lay hands suddenly on no man..."** (1 Tim. 5:22). Enough time must pass in one's life for one to bear fruit (provide the adequate evidence) and thereby prove to others one's worthiness or the lack of it. It is by one's fruit that we are to know the genuineness or lack of it regarding a person, not solely by one's claims (See Matt. 7:20).

As to how much time must pass before we can determine the character of a person depends on the situation, circumstances, and the person. But whatever the case, we have no authority to accept people's claims without adequate evidence. Sometimes when all of the evidence is in, studied, and the conclusion made, we are greatly disappointed by the caliber of the fruit produced in such a person.

At times all of us have wondered about the genuineness of certain people, but without adequate evidence and/or credible witnesses we could not obey the preceding verses coupled with our Lord's admonition to **"Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment"** (John 7:24). Thus, good brethren have given certain persons the benefit of the doubt, while at the same time not getting into any entangling alliances with them. If the evidence does become adequate in such cases, it may point out that a person is not what he or she ought to be or even what they claimed to be. We then must accept the loss—**"For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world"** (2 Tim. 4:10)—"regroup," and move on in our service to God (Phil. 4:13). There are casualties of war in every conflict, and in the fight of faith it is no different.

—David P. Brown, Editor

THE FIRST MAN AND WOMAN DID NOT EVOLVE—GOD CREATED THEM

Thomas B. Warren

There are two basic ways of completing the statement “Man and woman came into being as a result of. . . .” “Those two ways are: (1) “. . . the miraculous creative act of God” (the Biblical view) and (2) “. . . evolution” (the Humanist view). Point (1) means that God created man and woman full grown and, therefore, that man had no non-human ancestors. Point (2) (affirmed by atheistic Humanists) means that man came into being by some sort of changes from some lower (non-human) form of life and, ultimately, of non-living matter.

These are the two basic answers. It cannot be the case that both the Humanist view and the Biblical view are true, and it cannot be that neither one of them is true. It must be that one of them is true and the other is false.

Can we really know which one is true? We confidently affirm that we can. Since the Bible is the Word of God (this can be proved), then the Bible is infallible (God does not lie, Hebrews 6:18; Titus 1:2). Therefore, if the Bible gives the account of the origin of man, then by studying and properly interpreting the Bible, man can come to know the Truth about his own origin. It is of great significance to note that while the theory of evolution cannot be verified but can be falsified, the Biblical account of the origin of man can be verified and cannot be falsified. God Himself is eternal (having neither beginning nor end). The eternalness of God is noted in this stirring passage from the Bible. **“Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God”** (Psa. 90:1, 2). In contrast, the Bible begins with the precise statement which makes clear how everything, other than God, came into being (God himself did not come into being—He is self-existent). **“In the beginning God created the heavens and earth”** (Gen. 1:1). Further, the Bible says, **“for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day. Wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it”** (Ex. 20:11).

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the seas, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle (live-stock), and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Gen. 1:26-27).

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made (Gen. 2:1).

In accounting for the origin of man, the Bible says: **“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul”** (Gen. 2:7).

In accounting for the origin of woman the same writer said:

And Adam gave names to all cattle (livestock), and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found a help meet (suitable—Editor) for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh instead thereof. And the rib which the Lord God had taken from man made he a woman and brought her to the

man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man (Gen. 2:20-23).

In the New Testament, the apostle John said: **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made”** (John 1:1-3). Of this same matter, the apostle Paul said:

For by Him all things were created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist (Col. 1:16-17).

The same writer declared, **“For Adam was first formed, then Eve”** (1 Tim. 2:13).

From the above statements we learn that the Bible claims that: (1) God is eternal; (2) God is the creator of the universe; (3) the world was created through/by Jesus Christ; (4) God created the first man and the first woman (and, therefore, rules out the theory that man evolved by any process of evolution from some lower—non-human—form of life); and (5) Adam and Eve were the first human pair. Humanists (incorrectly) deny all of this.

The entire Bible is the Word of God. It is therefore just as accurate in giving the account of the origin of man as it is in giving an account of the saving work of Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus Himself endorsed the historicity of the Genesis record of the origin of man (Matt. 19:3-12). In fact, all writers of the Bible, when they touch upon the subject, regard the Genesis record of the origin of man as true.

We plead with every reader to recognize the great importance of this topic. Without any doubt it is the case that not only the welfare of our nation but of the eternal salvation of ourselves and of our children is at stake in this matter.

We seek to lead men to see: (1) that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, (2) that to be saved men must both believe in and obey Him, (3) that the Bible is the inspired, authoritative Word of God and (4) that to be pleasing to God, we must accept what the Bible teaches about the origin of man.

There is no philosophic or scientific truth which anyone must deny in order to hold to this position. On the other hand, the theory of evolution is just that: a theory, and a false theory at that. We confidently affirm (1) that the theory of the evolution of human beings has not been proved to be true and (2) that no one knows that the theory of evolution of human beings is true. We further confidently affirm (1) that the creation of the first human being by God can be a matter of knowledge (and is for many people) and (2) that we know that the first human being on earth did not evolve but was created by Almighty God. We hold that relevant evidence points not to the view that the theory of evolution is true, but to the view that the Biblical one is the true account of the origin of man. We are committed to the Biblical account of that origin because we are sure that the evidence warrants such commitment. We are just as firmly convinced—because we know that God created the first human pair—that the Humanist view of the origin of human beings is false (Golden Gems).

—Deceased

(Continued from page 1)

Unity Summit of 1984. Among other things, he said:

What are you going to wind up with if you follow Jesus? You are going to wind up with a cross on your back, aren't you? Let me just imagine—I don't think anybody with a cross on their back, about to die, fussed about a piano (much laughter). Did they? That's not what you talk about when you are on your way to be crucified. When you and I die to self, we can be of the same mind, even when we are not of the same opinion. I think it is a crucial matter we need to get across. Be of the same mind with one another.

My observations concerning such gibberish were written in May of 2003 but not published in *Spiritual Perspectives* until November 2nd of that year:

The fact is that Jesus spoke about the Father seeking true worship (John 4:23-24). True worship does not fall into the category of opinion. After thinking about such derogatory comments, can the reader not imagine Rick Abihu Atchley telling Jehovah that offering a different fire than what He had specified is not an important consideration (Lev. 10:1-2)? When King Uzziah decided that, instead of the priests, he could burn incense, God struck him with leprosy immediately, and he was a leper until the day of his death (2 Chron. 26:16-21). Atchley says correct worship is not important, but God says it is. Whom should we believe?

Anyone with a cross on his back should be reminded constantly that it is not what he thinks that is important—but rather what God commands. We should be so concerned about pleasing Him that we would never want to do anything that is questionable or that lacks Biblical authority (Col. 3:17). Where is the New Testament passage that authorizes instruments of music in our worship? No one can cite a commandment for its being added to our singing. No one can provide a single example of Jesus, the apostles, or the church using it in the entire New Testament. No verse implies that it ought to be used. Where does the authority come from to include it? It is nothing but “will worship” (KJV) (“self-imposed religion,” NKJV), which simply means: “We will use it because we like to use it.” Atchley’s vision is misapplied: we have no pianos upon our backs while we carry the cross; those who have brought them into their worship without God’s authority or approval are the ones bearing that burden.

But Atchley was far from finished in that Forum. He also vowed: “I figure I’ve got about twenty, twenty-five years of preaching left. I’m not going to spend them pushing brothers and sisters away. And in my lifetime, brothers and sisters, the walls between our heritage can come down.”

He acts as though those who disagree with his approach are pushing people away. The fact is that those who introduced instrumental music into the worship are the ones who pushed us away. If they would give up what they cannot justify, we would be delighted.

An Open Forum followed this session, and Atchley defiantly challenged:

So what it’s going to take from our side is some churches and some leaders and some preachers to stand up and say, “Folks, we’re not trying to make you worship and violate your conscience. We’re not trying to bring in pianos. We’re sayin’, FLAT OUT, it ain’t wrong. You shouldn’t believe its(sic) wrong—because, if you do, you haven’t preached the gospel well here.”

What could be plainer? So far as Atchley is concerned, instrumental music “ain’t wrong.” Many of us are, therefore, scarcely surprised that Richland Hills, under Atchley’s razor-sharp ability to comprehend and explicate the Scriptures, would bring in the instrument (despite the affirmation: “We’re not trying to bring in pianos”).

THE PLAN ANNOUNCED ON DECEMBER 3, 2006

The *Christian Chronicle* article reports that Richland Hills “has decided to add an instrumental worship assembly with communion on Saturday nights” (3). One of the elders described the response as overall “extremely positive.” What a surprise! After seventeen years (1989-2006) of Atchley’s “preaching,” they could probably introduce Hindu chants on Friday night and have 1,000 people show up.

Atchley assured the church that this decision was not a hasty one: “This has been part of about a three-year journey that the leadership has been on” (3). In other words, they started moving this direction shortly after Atchley spoke at Lubbock. Of course, whether it was three years or three days is irrelevant; apostasy is apostasy no matter how much time was involved.

The following information is not hearsay. The three videos of what was taught at Richland Hills are available at www.rhchurch.org, and anyone can watch them. Because it is a video and not a tape recording, some of the quotes may not be precise; those with quotation marks around them, however, are.

The December 3rd class was introduced by an elder, who said he knew all the elders that Richland Hills ever had in its fifty year history and that they were all honorable men of God. He asserted that Rick Atchley was a man of sincerity and wisdom (even though he could not answer two questions posed to him by Goebel Music). He said that Rick cares about the Bible and what it says. “He never steps outside the authority of the Scriptures.” We have already seen enough of Atchley’s comments to know better than that.

When Rick began to speak, he emphasized how that he and the elders had studied, prayed, and fasted over this decision, which apparently means that it must be correct. In his first lesson on their decision, he chose to deal with the either/or versus the both/and principle and then discuss underlying fears.

JOHN WOODEN, AUTHORITY

He began by quoting John Wooden’s devotional thoughts which he wrote at the age of 92. The former UCLA coach gave examples of the idea that there is no progress without change, which constitutes enough authority for Rick and Richland Hills to make the adjustments they had proposed.

Next he explained the difference between either/or issues versus both/and ones. “Was Jesus human or Divine?” presents a false dichotomy since He was both while on the earth. “Is God sovereign, or does man have free will?” is another one in which both alternatives are true. He did recognize that some either/or alternatives are legitimate, such as “Will you serve God or mammon?”

Atchley placed a cappella singing and singing with instruments in the both/and category, but never once explained why

they fail to be diametrically opposed. He next gave a brief summary of his own history, explaining that he had been reared in an anti-instrumental music church. (He now claims to be pro a cappella.) When he was in the student senate at Abilene Christian University, he voted against “Christian” artists coming there to perform. But now he thinks that brethren must accept that it is valid for others to use musical instruments even if we prefer to sing a cappella. In other words, he has made the issue one of preference—not one of Biblical authority.

He made it clear that the leadership at Richland Hills has no intention of forcing instrumental music upon anyone; all will be free to sing a cappella just as they have for years. But Richland Hills must become a both/and church, where people have choices. How absolutely generous and tolerant to a fault!

He finally arrived at a passage of Scripture—Acts 15. He does a *credible* job of explaining the context of the problem and an *incredible* job of applying the passage. The Jews had for centuries observed circumcision; some were requiring Gentiles to be circumcised and keep other parts of the Law of Moses. Many Jewish Christians insisted that circumcision was an either/or proposition: either a convert had to be circumcised or he could not be fellowshiped. The apostles and elders made it a both/and situation. The Jews could continue to practice circumcision, as they always had, and the Gentiles would be free not to do so. In Atchley’s mind (and the elders who gave him full endorsement), this situation is parallel to using instrumental music or not doing so.

What Rick failed to do is to show why the two are parallel. In fact, they are not. The Jewish Christians were born under one covenant and obeyed the gospel under another one. The Christian system has been in effect for nearly 2,000 years, and instrumental music has never been accepted by the church or authorized by God. The two situations are not parallel at all! In the Old Testament, the stranger and the servant could not partake of the Passover unless they were first circumcised (Ex. 12:44, 48). Strangers who chose to live in the land had to abide by the same law as Israel (Ex. 12:49). **“You shall have the same law for the stranger and for one from your own country; for I am the Lord your God”** (Lev. 24:22). God never allowed a both/and view of His Law, while it was in force. It is only after that law had been nailed to the cross and an entirely new covenant put into effect that circumcision became a matter of option.

Atchley concludes by saying: “The simple and wrong solution is to make a law and say everyone must live according to this law.” The Jewish Christians were doing that very thing. But those of us opposed to instrumental music have not made a law; we have simply observed that nothing in the New Testament authorizes its use. Again, no parallel exists.

FOUR PRINCIPLES

Atchley tried to apply to the situation at Richland Hills four principles from this study of Acts 15.

1. “There was clear and respectful communication” in resolving the Acts 15 problem. No name calling was in evidence; such indicates a weak position. Has he forgotten that

Jesus called the Pharisees “serpents” and a “brood of vipers” (Matt. 23:23)? (We refer to Atchley by the name of *Abihu* because he does not respect the authority of the Scriptures, just as Nadab and Abihu did not.) He adds that giving leaders respect in the New Testament was non-negotiable. They were inspired men, unlike the Richland Hills elders, but even so Paul was so respected in Corinth that he had to defend his apostleship to the very ones he converted (2 Cor. 10-13). Diotrephes railed against the apostle John!

2. “The believers listened with an open mind.” They did on this occasion. Atchley praises more than once the Richland Hills church members for their maturity and open-mindedness. What that means is that they do not oppose unscriptural innovations because they have heard his skewed preaching for 17 years.

3. “They turned to the Word of God for confirmation,” which refers to James’ citing of Amos 9:11-12. Rick commends them for looking at an old text in a new way (what does that portend?).

4. “They were more committed to their mission than to their heritage.” The Jews, of course had a 2,000 year heritage. So do Christians, and it begins with the teachings of Jesus and His apostles. Unlike the Jews, however, our covenant will not be changed while the earth stands. Atchley, however, thinks we are tied to the 19th century restoration movement, which is false. Our only tie to them is with their plea to go back to the New Testament for our authority in worship, service, and in our teaching concerning salvation. Who dares to find fault with that idea?

At the end of Rick Atchley’s speech on December 3rd of last year, available on the Richland Hills website, he gave seven reasons why members of the congregation might fear adding a worship assembly on Saturday that served communion and involved the use of instrumental music. Let us observe what is mentioned and what is not mentioned.

Prefacing the remarks was the assertion that most of “our” churches don’t see the practice of using instrumental music as a salvation issue. Of course, such a statement immediately tells us who he fellowshiped—“preachers” and churches that are as liberal and apostate as he and Richland Hills are. Flavil Yeakley of Harding University declared at the 2004 Spiritual Growth Workshop in Orlando that in his opinion instrumental music was not a salvation issue. Brethren might be surprised to find out just how many professors at “our” universities and how many local preachers actually agree with Atchley.

He went on to assert that only a small minority loves our heritage more than our mission, meaning that they are tied more to the thinking of the 19th century than to the mission Jesus gave us in the Bible. Now there is an example of a false either/or statement. He further contends that most brethren have no theological problem with instrumental music. We just avoid using it because we are content for the church to stagnate and decline. Oh, sure, that makes sense. Everyone knows that preachers become ecstatic at the prospect of stagnation. Yes, sirree! Our goals for the new year are to see if we can achieve a 7% decline. Our ultimate goal must be to become extinct!

Rick, the sensitive conscience of the brotherhood, is one of the few that sees the future clearly. The only way to save the church is by adding instrumental music. Is he unaware that those who added the instrument 100 years ago have declined? It is not a savior.

THE SEVEN FEARS

According to Atchley, seven fears prevent us from using instrumental music in connection with worship.

1. “Loss of the beauty of the a cappella tradition.” He added that four-part harmony is already on the way out with young people. The fact is, however, that members of the church do not fear losing any *tradition* unless it is one established by Jesus and the apostles. **“Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle”** (2 Thess. 2:15). We are the ones who oppose the traditions of men, as Jesus did (Matt. 15:1-9), or has Atchley forgotten that fact in his haste to unite with others? We did not obtain either our doctrine or our worship from our spiritual forefathers in the 19th century. Our teachings come from the New Testament. Since instruments of music are not to be found there, by the way, does not that make its use a tradition begun by men?

2. “Instrumental music will discourage congregational singing.” Atchley affirmed that people do sing with the instrument. Well, sure they do, but those of us who have come out of denominations know that the instruments frequently drown out the singing. Anyway, he has made this complaint a matter of personal preference rather than a Scriptural objection.

3. “Use of instrumental music will encourage the performance aspect of worship.” Atchley’s response is that an abuse of a principle does not invalidate the principle. If the principle were a valid one to start with, he would be right, but it is not.

4. “Family conflict.” In other words, some families might be divided if instruments are introduced. He agreed that such might occur and gave himself as a personal example. When he had been at Richland Hills only a short time, his parents came for a visit (from Chicago). The fifth and sixth graders sang about the birth of Jesus in the assembly (which shows how sound the congregation was 17 years ago). His dad disapproved and told him so. They did not speak for about five months. Atchley was scheduled to speak in the Chicago area and called his mother to see if they wanted him to stop by. They did. His dad apologized to him. “I have read the entire Bible, and there is nothing that says one group cannot sing to another group. There is nothing that says instrumental music is wrong, either.” Apparently, Rick’s father overlooked Colossians 3:17, just as Rick has, although he must have heard it a hundred times from those anti-instrumental music preachers when he was growing up.

5. “Loss of Richland Hills’ members to other churches.” He countered by saying that not using instruments has already cost them members. He added: “We have already lost way too many over a question way too unimportant.” Imagine that! Correct worship is way too unimportant a question! Jesus must have been mistaken when He said: **“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and**

truth” (John 4:24). Brethren 100 years ago thought it was so important that they split over the question. If only Rick had been there to tell them it was unimportant! Maybe we should all quit reading the Bible and just let Atchley tell us what is important and what is not, since he apparently knows. It is so time-consuming to study the Bible anyway; we could all watch more movies or play more video games and just trust Rick to keep us informed—not.

6. “Loss of influence among other churches of Christ.” Members of Richland Hills need not really concern themselves with this one. Faithful brethren began counting them as apostate years ago.

7. “Some fear the loss of brotherhood identity.” Again, faithful congregations do not identify with Richland Hills anyway. Atchley added: “If our identity is in the wrong place, it needs to be lost.” He is actually right on this principle, although wrong on the application. Brethren have for centuries said that, if we are wrong on our handling of the Scriptures, we must be willing to change.

What is missing with the seven fears Atchley addressed? He obviously did not expect anyone to worry that **they would be engaging in false worship**. The first and main fear that brethren should have is that we are allowing something that is not Biblical to be introduced into worship. Why was that fear not considered? Will no one at Richland Hills ask, “Where does the New Testament authorize us to add instruments of music to the worship?” (Col. 3:17) The congregation did not ask that question when they instituted children’s choirs, praise teams, special servants (translate “deaconesses”). Why should they ask for authority now? The leadership may give lip service to the Bible, but they do not follow its most important principle.

ATCHLEY’S DEFENSE OF MECHANICAL INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

On December 10th an elder introduced Atchley and said of him: “I have never found his equal in his respect for the Word of God....” One wonders if he ever heard Guy N. Woods, Gus Nichols, Foy Wallace, Jr., G. K. Wallace, Thomas Warren, or hundreds of other preachers who actually do respect the Word of God. He affirmed that Rick did his homework, and he is partly right. Rick did an excellent job of presenting every argument that the Christian Church has used over the centuries. What he failed to do was to represent fairly those who oppose the instrument for Biblical reasons. At least twice he used weak arguments to make it look as though our position rests upon flimsy grounds. When he did get around to making our case for us, he gave no proof for his first rebuttal and seriously misrepresented the second point. He did not even reference the most compelling arguments that we have made in debates, although he assured everyone that he had read everything there was to read. Since he is so knowledgeable and so sincere in his position, he will surely want to debate this issue publicly in the Richland Hills church building where someone could fairly represent an opposing view.

Another preliminary statement included that he was getting overwhelmingly positive feedback from brethren all over

the country. We do not doubt that, since so many churches have grown liberal over the years. Of course, the approval of men means little.

He actually claimed that he had known he was going to preach this sermon some day for at least ten years. The Holy Spirit told him during one of his sermons that it was wrong to let people think that the use of instrumental music was wrong when it was not wrong. "I knew then the day would come when I'd have to preach this lesson." Luckily, the Holy Spirit must not have been in a hurry to get this message out and has been patiently waiting more than a decade.

Atchley asserted that "almost no one reading the Bible for the first time would ever conclude that instrumental praise was unacceptable to God." Even if this allegation was true, what would it prove? Many Baptists have been reading Acts for 40 years, and they still have not figured out that the purpose of baptism is to obtain the forgiveness of sins. Why might he be correct, however? We live in a culture that accepts its use in worship. Most "churches" use it; one can listen to "Christian" radio stations; gospel "music" has become a big business. Tapes, CDs, and concerts are constantly being promoted. Most have grown up in this culture associating singing with instrumental music and would probably associate the two in worship as well.

But what about someone reading the Scriptures in the first 1200 to 1500 years after the church was established? It is equally likely that they would *not* have associated instruments of music with singing in worship. The question is, however, not what are we familiar with in our culture, but what does the Bible teach?

THE OLD TESTAMENT

Atchley cites several Old Testament reasons that convince him that instruments of music are acceptable to God. The first is: "God did not just allow instrumental music; he commanded it." 2 Chronicles 29:25 does so state that their use was commanded by the Lord. He also referred to 2 Chronicles 5:13, which informs us that, "**When the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord...that the house, the house of the Lord was filled with a cloud.**" Yes, such a description demonstrates that God was pleased by what was done (see also 2 Chron. 7:6). Atchley went on to claim that the Old Testament lists twenty different instruments that can be used in praising the Lord.

He further stated that instruments were used as part of the worship (Ps. 33:1-3; 92:1-3; 150:1-6). This point is likewise true; God was praised with these instruments. But Atchley made a terrific blunder when he said, "These were not just an aid," as though the "aid" notion comes from us. Actually, that is part of the argument that "instrumental" brethren have made over the years—that musical instruments are not an addition but rather just an *aid* to singing.

So where is Atchley going with these two observations? His first point is: Christians are commanded to sing psalms in the New Testament that we are forbidden to practice (such as "praise the Lord with the harp"). Perhaps the Lord gives us too much credit; He might simply assume that we would

have the good sense not to sing things that were not pertinent to our covenant. For example, David talks about wounding his enemies so that they were not able to rise and beating them as fine as dust before the wind (Ps. 18:37-42). Would we want to sing about that? Would it be appropriate to sing: "**O, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion!**" (Ps. 53:6)? Would the following passages be appropriate for us to sing?

You make us a reproach to our neighbors, a scorn and derision to those around us. You make us a byword among the nations, a shaking of the head among the peoples (Ps. 44:13-14).

Lord, why do You cast off my soul? Why do You hide Your face from me? (Ps. 88:14).

Your fierce wrath has gone over me; your terrors cut me off. They come around me all day long like water; they engulfed me altogether. Loved one and friend You have put far from me, and my acquaintances into darkness (Ps. 88:16-18).

Many fine songs come from the psalms, and we do sing them. This writer borrowed the words of Psalm 92:1-2 for a song but did not use verse 3 which speaks of using musical instruments. The reason is that their inclusion would not be appropriate for our age. God gave us the ability to discern what would be pertinent or improper to use from the psalms.

An appeal was made to Psalm 81:1-5 for God accepting instrumental music before the Law of Moses; he must have really searched hard to find that one; one could simply point to Miriam in Exodus 15:20. The context of Psalm 81 is the exodus out of Egypt. God also taught them about the Sabbath day before it was given at Sinai (Ex. 16:23). What do these verses prove? Polygamy was practiced prior to the law and under the law. Animal sacrifices were practiced prior to the law and under the law. The only question is, "What does God require in the Christian age?"

Atchley waxes passionate. God was pleased with incense under the law. Is there any hint that God is anything but pleased by incense in the entire Bible? Will they be adding that to Richland Hills worship assemblies next? These types of statements are nicely framed to slant matters in the way Rick can get the most mileage out of them.

The final argument from the Old Testament is that messianic prophecies indicated that instrumental music would continue in the New Testament. To establish this claim, he quoted Psalm 45:6-7 and pointed out that the passage is quoted in Hebrews 1:8-9. Then he dropped the bombshell: Psalm 45:8 says: "**All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory the music of the strings makes you glad**" (NIV). One will not find his rendering in the KJV or the NKJV, but it does occur in the NIV (which Rick loves to use) and other translations. The idea is that, since verses 6 and 7 are quoted, verse 8 should be applied to Christian worship also, even though it was not quoted. Well, verse 9 says: "**Daughters and kings are among your honored women; at your right hand is**

the royal bride in gold Ophir” (NIV). Oops! Maybe the Hebrews writer did not quote verses 8-9 for a good reason; that part of the prophecy does not apply. So much for Atchley’s “respect for the Word of God”!

After this piece of razzle-dazzle, Rick finds another passage, Romans 15:8-9, which quote is from Psalm 18:49, although he preferred to think it was Psalm 57:7-9. Even the NIV, which he uses, has a reference to 2 Samuel 22:50 and Psalm 18:49. Why the preference for Psalm 57:7-9? Verse 8 mentions the lute and the harp. The word translated “praise” is from *zamar*, and it refers to playing an instrument. But that word is not quoted. The word translated “sing” is quoted. It is obvious that Rick has worked hard to get instruments of music into the New Testament from the Old, but he has failed because he has no clear argument.

Never once did he mention that Christians are not under the Old Covenant or passages such as Hebrews 8:6-7 or Colossians 2:12-14. Presumably, he knows the difference; he might, however, have said so.

The New Testament is the only document that can authorize what Christians ought to practice in worship (Col. 3:17; cf. John 12:48). Anyone who has ever seriously read the New Testament knows that no musical instruments are ever said to accompany Jesus or the apostles in their singing. No church ever incorporated their use. The Holy Spirit certainly gave no command to play them; neither will the earnest Bible student find any Scriptures that imply that they should or might be part of the sincere worship of Christians. But Rick Atchley of the Richland Hills church finds proof in numerous texts—or so he thinks. Someone (in fact, everyone) needs to carefully scrutinize his “arguments,” which bear no resemblance to anything logical.

FIVE REASONS FOR ACCEPTING MECHANICAL INSTRUMENTAL PRAISE

1. “Jesus never deals with the issue. The anti-instrumental advocates must speak where Jesus never did. You would think He would if this was worth splitting His church over.” If Christians oppose abortion, rape, or homosexuality, are they speaking where the Lord never did? Jesus used the Greek word *porneia*, which includes homosexuality, but He did not use the specific Greek word for that sin. Should we argue, therefore, that these things must be unimportant? Did the Lord say, “Don’t sprinkle people in place of baptism”? For that reason we operate by **what we have authority to do**; we do not look for a *specific denunciation* of a practice.

Anything not authorized by direct statement, example, or implied by a valid principle is worth splitting the church over. Perhaps if some brethren in the early church would have opposed choosing one bishop as head of a congregation, the manmade structure of the Roman Catholic Church might not have emerged. No one knows what might result from an unopposed error (such as voting on whether or not to reaffirm elders).

Besides, our friend “Abihu” has things backward. Perhaps he ought to answer this question. When congregations are not using instruments, and brethren (lacking Biblical authority) have determined to introduce them, who causes

the split?

Atchley argues that music (*symphanos*) was being played in honor of the return of the prodigal son and that, therefore, anti-instrumental people would have a hard time arguing against instrumental praise. Is there some reason Rick does not cite the passage (Luke 15:25)? The older son heard music **and** dancing. No one called an impromptu worship assembly; the household was celebrating. Why is it that the elders at Richland Hills do not see this kind of error as loose handling of the Scriptures?

Jesus taught regularly in the temple in the presence of instrumental praise, Atchley observes, yet He only cast out the moneychangers—not the musicians. Catchy, huh? If musicians were playing music while Jesus was present, it is not mentioned. Furthermore, their doing so would not have violated the Law of Moses. Making money off of religion, however, was despicable; Jesus expressed His displeasure. Although Atchley later castigates brethren for arguing from silence, he does it himself—and incorrectly at that. Nothing he said here relates to the issue; he gave no valid argument.

2. “Instrumental music is a non-issue in the book of Acts.” Right—brethren never used it. Rick makes another argument from silence, however, claiming that the disciples met daily in the temple courts; so they must have been able to worship in spirit and in truth in the presence of instrumental music. One wonders if those temple musicians ever got a break from blowing their trumpets and strumming their harps. Was the place ever quiet? Atchley assumes what he cannot prove.

He adds that nowhere in the New Testament is congregational singing specifically authorized. So, he laments having a lack of Bible authority when it suits his purpose! Later he will take issue with the need for authority. The fact is, however, that congregational singing is one way of following what Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 teach.

3. “New Testament commands to sing neither prescribe nor prohibit instrumental music.” He cites the two Scriptures mentioned above, along with James 5:13. Atchley affirmed repeatedly, as if attempting to convince himself, that these verses speak to the individual and that the corporate setting is not in the context of any of the verses. They are all dealing with daily living. Really? Exactly how is it that one brother is to sing to another if he is alone? He has a point on James 5:13, but the other two involve others [*The context of James 5:13 proves, with all other things being Scripturally equal, that wherever a Christian is he/she has the authority (Col. 3:17) from God to sing. The context of this verse has nothing to do with Christians singing in an assembly convened for worship.—Editor*]

“The only verse dealing with singing in the assembly is 1 Corinthians 14:15, and that brother sang a solo,” which anti-instrumental brethren forbid, Atchley avers. This verse does not authorize solos; in the first-century church brethren had various miraculous gifts as it pertained to the revelation of the Word. Some spoke in another language (not commonly known by those present); some prayed in a different language, and some sang the message. No one is exercising such gifts

today; they were designed to become obsolete when the complete Word of God was delivered (1 Cor. 13). *A cappella* singing means “in the style of the church.” Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 do authorize congregational singing, which is what the church did, according to history.

Atchley asserted that there is no command to sing **only**—that the command is to sing. To say **sing** means “sing only,” he continues, is a human inference that comes dangerously close to speaking where God has not spoken (as Atchley did in his two previous points). He added that we do not use the Word that way today and wondered if we could honestly say that Christians would have done so in the first century. The answer is, “Yes. In light of the fact that Jesus, the apostles, and the church never used mechanical instrumental accompaniment to their singing, it is correct to think that when they read or heard the word **sing**, they understood it to mean “sing only.”

4. “The New Testament refers to instrumental music in heaven.” Shades of Joplin! One of the speakers there argued: “Instrumental music was used in praise of God under the Law, and it’s going to be in heaven. You might as well become accustomed to using it in the Christian age.” Rick rounded up Revelation 5:8 and 15:2-3 to prove his position. Knowing what some might say, Rick tried to head off objections by warning everyone that whether these passages are literal or figurative is irrelevant. Who made that decision? What verse teaches that hermeneutical principle?

Revelation 5:8 also talks about golden vials filled with odors. Are those literal, or does it matter? The other passage speaks of a sea of glass mingled with fire. Will Atchley actually argue that all of the images in the book of Revelation are literal—or that it doesn’t matter?

Atchley claims that the worship of God described in the two passages is going on right now in heaven and then asks, “Am I honestly to believe that God accepts in heaven what He despises on earth?” The point would be more persuasive if everyone was not aware of the fact that Revelation is a book of symbols, which the alert reader senses as early as chapter one.

5. “The New Testament idea of giftedness supports the practice of instrumental praise.” If musicians in the Old Testament could praise God by playing instruments, why may we not do so now? Rick wonders. He cites Psalm 150:3 and 2 Chronicles 30: 21. Could it be that we are under the New Testament and not the Old?

Many churches allow acting and painting, he continued. Why not instrumental music? Hmm! What passage was that which authorizes acting? When did the apostles operate a playhouse instead of proclaiming the gospel? When did brethren paint for one another as worship? Rick stated (incorrectly) earlier that Christians have no authority for singing in the assembly. Apparently, then, a lack of authority does not bother him, since brethren sing anyway—and act—and paint—and dance.

To bolster the notion that, if you have a talent, you should use it in worship to God, Atchley read an e-mail from one of Richland Hills’ young ladies. She had written it a few

months earlier to encourage the leadership there to adopt the alternative service. She reasoned that some people connect with God best when instrumental music is used and that she has found a passion of depth in such praise. The question, however, is: “Who knows best how to define spiritual worship?”—men or God? No one doubts that painters, dancers, and musicians derive satisfaction from their efforts, but God did not incorporate such physical manifestations into New Testament worship.

Atchley bemoaned, “Why do we want to make it difficult for unbelievers to worship with us? Why do we want to make it difficult for our own children? You can’t open your Bible and show me where God forbids it. The New Testament was not even remotely concerned about it. The cross was central in worship, either; what we need is a passage that authorizes dancing, using incense, painting, playing instruments of music, or smoking marijuana in an effort to draw closer to God. The cross is central to our preaching, along with respecting the authority of Christ (Matt. 28:18).

SNIPER FIRE

The material just presented (and refuted) is the best Atchley can do after reading everything that had ever been written (allegedly) on both sides of the issue. It seems doubtful that he is even aware of *The Highers-Blakely Debate*, which occurred only twenty years ago and reviewed the arguments made in favor of instrumental music over the years.

One of those is based on the Greek word *psallo*. Our brethren have rightly taught that this word once included the idea of musical accompaniment but that by the time of the New Testament it just meant to sing. We have taught this fact—not because we made it up in order to sound impressive—but because lexicons say that it happened that way (Thayer, for example). Rick says that the bulk of scholarship disagrees with us, and he mentions the names of Josephus, Suetonius, Chrysostom, and Gregory of Nyssa. Unfortunately, he provided no passage that any of these men wrote so that we might read what they said and understand the context in which they said it. Perhaps you have seen the size of the volume of the writings of Josephus (published in small print). No one wants to read through 1,000 pages in an effort to figure out to what Atchley is alluding.

He says that the Bible of the first Christians used *psalms* and that they clearly understood that the word meant use an instrument. This argument was advocated in 1920 and shortly thereafter defeated when it was pointed out that, if Christians are to *psalms* to one another (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), then each one must sing **and** play an instrument. It is obvious by just reading the two verses that singing *only* is meant, but, if not, then no one could keep the command unless he sang **AND** played a musical instrument.

He poses the question: “Is it any wonder that this explanation seems contrived to anyone except those in an anti-musical instrument tradition?” I attended the Methodist Church while growing up. When it was later explained by members of the Lord’s church that there is no authority for instrumental music in worship, it was one of the easiest principles for me

to understand. Most use it because they like it—not because a compelling argument exists in favor of it.

Next Atchley bemoaned the Law of Exclusion—the teaching that anything not specifically authorized is forbidden. Well, he got that wrong, also. Brethren have never argued in that way. What we have said is that we must have authority for what we teach and what we practice, which Paul himself taught (Col. 3:17). No one has ever required “specific” authority. Implication involves the correct application of Biblical principles. Meeting in a church building, for example, is a legitimate means of keeping the commandment to assemble together (Heb. 10:25). No one has ever said, “I demand to see a Scripture that mentions a church building.” Atchley is wrong in his depiction of us requiring specific authority. He knows better.

Next he lists things brethren have divided over and then says: “Silence is not intentional; it is incidental. Silence is not prohibitive or prescriptive.” The great scholar who allegedly respects the authority of the Scriptures must not have read Hebrews 7:14 lately, in which the Holy Spirit argues that only Levites could be priests because of the other tribes **Moses spoke nothing**. In other words, God was silent.

“Abihu” actually accused the Lord of violating the law of silence. “Where does God authorize a synagogue? Jesus taught in one. Where did God authorize a feast of lights? Such was begun by the Maccabees. Where does the Passover authorize using cups of wine?” Such questions are irrelevant. People were to teach God’s Word; synagogues were simply a means to do so. The feast of lights was a tradition that had begun; so is the Fourth of July. Neither of these is required to worship God properly. We do not know what, if anything, the Israelites drank with their initial Passover. If it was wrong to use the fruit of the vine in connection with the meal, Jesus would not have done so. Evidently, it was a matter of indifference. Atchley does not have a logical argument with any kind of proof to offer. He is like a sniper on an overpass, firing bullets with the desire that, if he shoots enough of them, he will hit something. He has not hit any target yet.

THE TWO PROBLEMS

As he concludes his December 10th speech, Atchley reaffirms that he has no problem with a cappella music and that there is nothing wrong with it (unless as he interpreted earlier, we **must** play an instrument). Then he concludes with two final points.

1. “No one, not already indoctrinated would arrive at such a conclusion” (that instrumental music should not be used in worship). He is obviously ignorant of the fact that thousands of us have given it up. He further claimed that most of our schools do not even try to teach the anti-instrumental position any more (which may be true). Most of our pulpits no longer teach it, either (also quite likely). He said a visitor asked him why we have communion; he opened the Bible and showed them. He wanted to know why we baptize; he opened the Bible and showed him. He asked why we don’t use music; “I did not open my Bible.” Many of us would—to Colossians 3:17, which is not hard to understand.

2. “God does not vacillate, liking instrumental music

under one covenant but not another. Why would He hand someone a harp in heaven after condemning to hell someone who used it on earth?” God accepted the sound of instruments under the old covenant, but this one has progressed to a higher level of worship—one in which the voice is sufficient and the noise of instruments has been stilled. Crowns we knew would be available. Is someone laboring to receive a harp? Atchley assures people that God will not consign people to hell for something He did not say.

“ABIHU” ATCHLEY’S RATIONALE PROVIDED

“What does he do with the historical fact that the church did not use instruments of music for several hundred years?” He provided his rationale on Sunday, December 17th, along with an attempt to justify Saturday evening worship with the Lord’s Supper.

Apparently, the Richland Hills elders thought that Rick’s teaching might be better received if they began each session with an endorsement. The one for this concluding week of the series came from the son of a former elder, who affirmed that his family enjoyed all kinds of music—including gospel music, in which instruments were played. He talked about how his father had an open and intelligent mind that didn’t crystallize his beliefs at the age of 30 and then spend the rest of his life defending it (unlike the rest of you bozos, who don’t ever think, the implication is).

An observation is in order here. Those who listen to songs of praise to God with instrumental accompaniment *outside* the assembly not only do what is unauthorized by Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 (which do not specify, but certainly, include the worship assembly); they are also more amenable to their eventual introduction into the worship assembly. After all, if we can ourselves sing around the piano at home, why can we not do the same thing in Sunday worship? If we can listen to popular “gospel” groups who incorporate it into their songs of praise, why can we not do the same? The fact is that we should not participate in false worship whether in the assembly, in the home, or in the car.

A further thought to consider is, “Did Jesus crystallize His teaching and spend the rest of His life defending it (His Deity, for example)?” Or was He open-minded, constantly changing His views on things?

Two other statements the elder’s son made were that his father did not invest much energy in peripheral matters and that the mission of the church trumps tradition. Both of these should be true for all Christians, but he includes the use of instruments of music in worship as a “peripheral issue.” Obviously, he also thinks that the non-use of instrumental music is simply a tradition. Both of these conclusions are false. Jesus had a high regard for true worship (John 4:23-24), and He cautioned against vain worship (Matt. 15:1-9). One cannot **assume** that instrumental music is a peripheral issue when that is the very thing to be **proved**. As for its non-use being a tradition, we plead guilty, but it is not a tradition of men, which could be discarded; it is a tradition begun by the Lord and His apostles—one of those to which Christians must hold fast (2 Thess. 2:15).

Four Reasons for Its Absence

After rambling about “cultural concessions” for a few minutes, Rick presented four reasons that might explain why Christians did not use instrumental music, a fact he conceded.

1. “It may be that they had to gather in secret to avoid persecution, and the use of mechanical instruments would call attention to themselves.” Really? Jesus was so popular during His public ministry that He could at times not find a moment to be alone (Mark 6:32-34). Why did he not use instruments to accompany singing during these times when there was no persecution? Furthermore, the Holy Spirit reveals that early on the church was “praising God and having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:47). During this time period they were also “continuing with one accord in the temple” (Acts 2:46), and according to Atchley, musicians were busy there day and night. It would have been easy for the church to sing and play instruments from the very start of Christianity. Later persecutions were periodic, not continuous.

2. “The use of instrumental music was associated with pagan worship and associated with debauchery. The guilds were known for their drunken orgies, and bands played music during these. The early Christians may have wanted to distance and distinguish themselves from these events.” This proposal is as lame as the first one. The Jews, according to Atchley, filled the temple with the sound of trumpets and other instruments. It would be the most natural thing in the world for Christians to continue what was already being practiced.

Besides, what are bands associated with today? Even three decades ago, this writer knew a high school student that refused to attend a rock concert because of the smell of the marijuana smoke in the civic arena. Much of rap music contains extremely vulgar language; rock n roll (almost from its very beginning) has been associated with and promoted promiscuous sex, drinking, and drug use. If Christians refused to use instrumental music in the first century because of some of its associations, why would not the same thing hold true today?

3. “Christian worship was modeled after the synagogue, and instrumental music was not used in the synagogue—perhaps because playing the instruments might have been regarded as work.” Surely, the flaw here is apparent to all. Christian worship was not patterned after anything; what Christians do in worship was revealed by the Holy Spirit. If anything, God may have foreshadowed what Christians would do later through the use of the synagogue, but God had the church in mind from eternity. The apostles did not just copy something else because they had no imagination. Jesus said that all authority was given to Him (Matt. 28:18). What Christians did or did not practice was by His authority. He did not authorize instruments of music in worship.

4. “In Psalm 137 the Israelites were saddened in their Babylonian captivity and could not sing the songs of Zion. In A. D. 70 Jerusalem was destroyed. The Jewish leaders actually forbade praise because there was no more temple.” Okay, what does any of this have to do with the church which was

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begun forty years earlier? Would churches of predominantly Gentile composition in various parts of the world cease using mechanical instrumental music in praise to God because the Jews lost their temple?

One wonders about how open and intelligent the members of Richland Hills are to swallow this tripe and applaud Rick when he finishes these jewels of wisdom. Not one of these four explanations makes any sense whatsoever, nor could any one of them be defended in a serious discussion. Where did he even get such information? Having raised these four possibilities, he then concludes that in the first century—because of their culture—it was expedient NOT to use instruments of music in worship. No basis for such a conclusion exists—except that he needs this culture theory to justify using instruments of music in worship.

THE FIFTH REASON

“Abihu” only gave four reasons in his vain attempt to explain the reason that the church did not use instrumental music for hundreds of years. The most obvious reason either did not occur to him, or he simply does not wish to even acknowledge it. **God did not design New Testament worship to include the use of instruments of music!** Wow! That idea would explain why no mention is made of them and why the church never used them. Can it be that simple? Yes, and it is the only explanation that fits all of the facts. And since brethren have been making this claim for centuries, it is surprising that it never crossed Rick’s mind. All he can say is that “scholars” are not sure as to the reason.

Perhaps those whom Rick classifies as “scholars” should read the New Testament. Those who obeyed the gospel immediately **“continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine...”** (Acts 2:42). The Christians in Jerusalem learned what was authorized in worship and what was not. As Paul taught in Colossians 3:17, whatever we do in word or deed must be authorized by Jesus. It should be obvious to anyone who reads the New Testament that, if Christians only sang and never used instruments of music, the reason is that Jesus never authorized them to do so, nor did His apostles.

CULTURE

Atchley argues that many of our customs are based on culture. Keeping worship to about an hour is one such concession, as is less formal dress than we once wore. He pointed out that we use more contemporary media and technology than we once did, as well as more modern translations. Even if all of these things are true, it does not establish his case because these are all matters of option. At one time, worship lasted longer than it currently does, but the Bible does not specify a length of time. The dress of members has changed over the decades, and while the matter is somewhat subjective, it is still the case that God deserves our best and that we ought to dress modestly.

Employing PowerPoint or the Internet is no different than flying somewhere by jet instead of traveling by mule. Modern translations can be helpful—especially for some who are not very proficient in Elizabethan English—but they need to be accurate; the NIV that Atchley uses is poorly and inaccurately done in many passages. He could provide a list of 2,000 items

that relate to our culture, however, and it would not in any way put our singing into that category.

Atchley quotes some church expert, who says that music is the first and last impression that visitors have of us. Is that what people are looking for when they visit? Some want to know if anyone is going to be healed. Some are interested mainly in the message presented. Some have questions about the Lord’s Supper. All that a few people are interested in is: “Do you have a kitchen in your building?” Do people really visit, wondering what kind of music program there is?

MUSICAL WORLDVIEWS

One of the strangest statements anyone has ever made follows. Atchley admitted that our parents viewed instrumental music as entertainment. Then he added that the younger generation turns to music to obtain their worldview. That’s not good, if true. In the world of rap, a woman (any woman) is regarded as nothing more than a “ho.” Is that the kind of philosophy Christians are willing to let the world dictate to them? Is that what the younger generation relates to? What kind of an argument is this? People have always been influenced by music, but are they so shallow as to get their deepest thoughts from Beyonce, Snoop Dogg, or 50 Cent?

Atchley assured his audience that in this postmodern world people do not arrive at truth propositionally, but through experience. He may be right as such efforts pertain to the vain attempts of a great segment of the population to arrive at truth, because many are misguided by their feelings rather than by evidence. However, the nature and laws of truth will not allow these persons to be successful in their quest. Such people are not coming to the *truth* through their feelings; they are obtaining error that way. **“He who trusts in his own heart is a fool...”** (Pr. 28:26). **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?”** (Jer. 17:9).

When people decide to sin, do they follow their feelings or think logically? Dierks Bentley had a popular song that contained the words, “Well, I know what I was feeling, but what was I thinking?” Even in the song his actions were governed by his emotions (despite the question). People have been advised by both music and Hollywood to “follow their heart.” Look at the misery in society that has resulted from doing just that! Despite all of Rick’s claims, music is not the only way to appeal to people; perhaps it is not even the best way. But to hear him tell it, the church is doomed if we don’t give society the music they want in worship.

Say, Rick, guess what? You might be the next casualty. In Sunday’s (1-28-07) *Orlando News-Sentinel* is an article about a new church meeting in a gymnasium. According to the scoreboard clock, the “preacher” has 15 minutes to complete his sermon (F-3). This day was predictable. Brethren once protested 45 minute sermons by saying: “If you can’t strike oil in 30 minutes, quit boring.” Now there is a new breed on the horizon. The “Rev.” Lou Mercer has opined: “If you can’t tell it in 15 minutes, you might as well go home.” How long will it be until the number shrinks to 10 or even 2 minutes?

Although we have the liberty to make certain adjustments to worship based on culture, we do not have the right to delete

prayer or add instrumental music or restrict the effectiveness of a message. Whom do we seek to honor: God or self? It is obvious, from the fact that people arrive late, dress overly casual, and desire to inculcate their musical preferences, that people think more of themselves and their own comfort and likes than they do of God's.

A Cappella Singing Hinders Evangelism

More than two decades ago I had a discussion about divorce and remarriage with some Crossroads advocates (before they became the Boston Movement). When questioned about their position on divorce and remarriage, they said that they could not take the truths taught in Matthew 19 and apply them to unbelievers: "It gets in the way of evangelism." Sin frequently does. If a person has a problem with gambling, showing its sinfulness will probably get in the way of evangelizing those folks. The same thing could be said about those using drugs, cigarettes, or alcohol.

Rick adopted this approach, also, when he affirmed: "Our exclusive a cappella music *hinders* our evangelistic efforts." He added: "This fellowship is not doing well; it's in decline. We're getting smaller and older." So what happens when jazzy musical programs and state-of-the-art theatrical productions lose their luster? Someone will introduce yet another innovation to capture the crowds that basically have no interest in things spiritual?

Rick asks the question in places where he speaks: "How many of you have children that no longer attend churches of Christ?" He said that invariably a number of hands are raised. He further observed: "God is not honored by dying, irrelevant churches." God is not honored by false worship, either!

One would think that the absence of instrumental music in worship is the key reason that young people decide to leave the church. Has he done a survey? He knows better. Most of the denominations have experienced a loss of young people, also—and they have it! Many different reasons could be assigned to young people leaving the church, but the chief reason is sin—the willingness to exalt emotion over principle. Many young people who have been taught better are now divorced and remarried. Some have become engulfed by worldliness, despite persistent warnings. Many of them have had excellent parents, who loved them and set the proper example for them—especially in their worship attendance and in their good works.

The comment about irrelevant churches is a throwback to Rubel Shelly, who once said that his children would not grow up in an irrelevant church. The Lord's church is not irrelevant, and to insinuate so is to cast reproach upon Christ, who gave His blood for it (Acts 20:28). Society may deem it to be irrelevant, but it is accomplishing what Christ wants it to do, if it is faithful to Him.

Shame on Atchley for so lightly regarding the church and saying, "I know the kingdom of God is larger than the churches of Christ." Not only is such a statement illogical (equivalent to saying, I know that the church is larger than the church); it is indefensible. But in case Atchley thinks he can defend such a statement, he is invited to debate this propositional truth. Many are willing to defend the identity of the New Testament church. [*What does it take to make a lawless person such as Rick Atchley? In the article to follow Summers answers the preceding question.—Editor*]

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ABIHU

What makes a person lawless? What is the motivation? True, a person derives a short-term benefit if he beats the risk, but long-term misery can result. When a person runs a red light, for example, he may save two or three minutes, but if that practice becomes a habit, he will either have his picture taken and be sent a ticket, or a loud siren will greet his ears; he may also harm someone. The person who violates God's law by unscripturally divorcing his wife and marrying a younger playmate will before long experience disappointment.

Those who violate God's law eventually suffer for their choices—whether here or in eternity. Why do men become false teachers? It may be for the adoration they gain—the applause of men (Acts 20:30). It may be for the money; Paul gave up his right to be supported of the gospel so that no one could even possibly think such a thing (1 Cor. 9). Some expect fleshly advantages from a position of prominence (1 Thess. 2). Others may simply be perverse. They have no stake in the way things are or should be; they just like to throw in a monkey wrench to disrupt the status quo.

A few of those teaching false doctrine may actually be sincerely mistaken, but probably the vast majority know what they are doing. Some in Corinth claimed to be apostles and challenged Paul's authority (2 Cor. 10-13). Diotrefes had the temerity to berate the apostle John, who was beloved by

the Lord (3 John). These men knew what they were doing.

How can we know today who qualifies as a bona fide false teacher? We will define what it takes to make an Abihu (a lawless one), and Rick "Abihu" Atchley will serve as the prime example. Having already examined his lame defense of instrumental music, we will draw primarily upon his defense of a worship assembly on Saturday evening, in which the Lord's Supper is served, which he attempted to justify in his December 17, 2006 speech (see the website of Richland Hills).

1. A false teacher contradicts himself and does not deal with the implications of his doctrine. Atchley said that few Greek scholars agree with us that *psallo* had changed its definition by the time of the New Testament to mean "sing only"; he says *psallo* still retained the definition of "to pluck" or to play an instrument. If true, then the command in Ephesians 5:19 for each Christian to *psallo* demands that each one play an instrument. Furthermore, Rick said that a cappella singing is beautiful, and there is nothing wrong with it. So, which is it? Are those who sing a cappella violating the command to *psallo*? Atchley never deals with any of these contradictions. **False teachers lack consistency.**

When he attempts to justify weekly worship on Saturday evening, he argues that the Jews reckoned a day from 6:00

p.m. in the evening to the same time the next day. Therefore, a Saturday evening worship would be permitted, since Jews would regard it as the first day of the week. Romans calculated time as we do—from midnight to midnight. This might be a great argument for Jewish Christians to meet on Saturday evening after 6:00. Unfortunately, the service is designed for Gentile Christians and visitors—not Jews. Oh, and the service will begin at 5:00 because *The New York Times* reports that this hour on Saturday is the most unstructured hour of the week.

What kind of argument is this? Does no one at Richland Hills catch that the justification of the Saturday evening service has no relation to what they decided to do? At best, Atchley had made a case for Jewish Christians to meet after 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, yet they are meeting at 5:00 p.m., and as far as anyone knows, not a single Jew will be present! Hello! The man violated the principles of his own argument almost in the same breath.

2. False teachers do not handle the Scriptures correctly, and it is usually not too difficult to tell it. Rick said that it was all right for the church to meet on Saturday because in the first century they met everyday (Acts 2:46). Surely, he must be aware that a great deal of excitement existed over the establishment of the church (the kingdom of prophecy). Many Jews had gathered together for the Pentecost observance, and they stayed because of the extraordinary circumstances. Where else in the entire New Testament is there a mention of Christians meeting daily? His handling of the holy Word is sloppy here, but he gets worse.

Atchley told the thousands present on this day that the Scriptures did not teach that communion was to be observed on Sunday *only*. Citing again Acts 2: 46, he explained that Christians were remembering the Lord's death *daily*. The phrase, *break bread*, he asserted, is used in the New Testament for the Lord's Supper, which is true, but is also used to describe a common meal. Consider the following examples.

When Jesus fed the 5,000, the text says: “...**And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples...**” (Matt. 14:19). What did Jesus do? He broke the bread for all to eat as a common meal. In Luke 24:30, Jesus had been talking about the kingdom to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, who wanted to share a common meal with Him. “...**He took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them.**” They later said that “**He was known to them in the breaking of the bread**” (Luke 24:35).

It is also true that the phrase is used of the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:23-24). One cannot assume, therefore, that when brethren are breaking bread they are taking the Lord's Supper; the *context* must determine whether disciples are eating a common meal or partaking of the Lord's Supper.

One must consider Acts 2:42 and Acts 2:46 in their proper context. Even though the two verses are used in close proximity, we cannot assume that both verses refer to a common meal or that both refer to the Lord's Supper. The first of these follows the statement that 3,000 gladly heard Peter's preach-

ing and exhortation and were baptized. “**And they continued steadfastly in the apostle' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer.**” Doctrine (the apostles' teaching) and prayer definitely involve worship. Some think that fellowship implies giving. It would be natural here to assume that breaking of bread refers to the Lord's Supper.

However, the context of Acts 2:46 is entirely different. The apostles were doing signs and wonders (v. 43); believers were together and had all things common (v. 44); they sold possessions and gave to those who had a need (v. 45). Then we read: “**So continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.**” This verse is clearly talking about regular meals; it even designates what they were doing as *eating food*. Whereas the Lord's Supper is called *breaking bread*, it is never frivolously termed as *eating food*. How closely did Rick study this matter? Did anyone at Richland Hills look up the verse, or do they just trust Rick to get it right because the Holy Spirit speaks to him and tells him what to preach?

The other passage Atchley abuses is Acts 20:7-11. He teaches that the disciples here were primarily Gentiles, using Roman time; therefore they met on Sunday evening, which they regarded as the first day of the week. Many Christians had to work during the day in their culture, which explains the reason for the evening assembly. Paul preached until midnight, when Eutychus fell out of the window and was taken up dead, but Paul restored his life to him. He then ate, and Rick interprets these words to mean that he had the Lord's Supper (it now being Monday morning). Then Paul talked until daybreak and departed.

Just as Acts 2:42 and 46 designate two different actions by the same phraseology, so does this passage. They met together to break bread, which we assume they did *before* Paul began speaking. It would be strange indeed to come together to observe the Lord's death and then put it off for several hours, not getting around to it until the next day. Paul spoke for some time. After the break in his teaching, due to Eutychus falling out of the third story window and Paul resurrecting him, the apostle came back up (presumably to the third story), broke bread, and ate. Why would anyone assume that verse 11 is speaking of the Lord's Supper? In the first place, the text only says that Paul ate—not the entire church. Second, if the whole church did eat, the reason may have been that they were accustomed to having a common meal when they met for worship, but they were waiting until Paul finished speaking. Rick admitted in this very speech that brethren shared a common meal when they met for worship.

A false teacher ignores the text in order to make his point. He may cite a verse but ignore the parts that do not fit his theory. In that way it sounds as though his teaching is Biblical, but if the hearer will read the passage referenced, he will find that it does not clearly teach what has been claimed for it. Even Satan can make a Scriptural argument. He told Jesus to throw Himself off the pinnacle of the temple because, according to Psalm 91:11-12, God would not allow Him to be hurt. Satan knew the verses, but he misapplied them. Jesus

answered that doing so would tempt the Lord God, which was forbidden (Matt. 4:5-7).

3. A third stratagem of the false teacher is to **misuse historical references** or make an argument based on some **technical aspect** of the Greek language. Several times, in the course of these three lectures, Atchley has quoted from church “fathers” to show what the early church did. On the notion of Saturday evening communion, for example, he cites Cyprian, Ambrose, Chrysostom and Basil in an attempt to prove that Christians in various places may have had the Lord’s Supper up to four times a week. Of course, since he does not give his listeners a specific work that can be verified, we do not know if he is reporting these sources accurately. But say that he is right. What happened from 50 to 300 years after the apostles died does not constitute Biblical authority. Paul arrived in Troas on Monday, and he waited seven days for the disciples to come together on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:6-7). Atchley never mentioned verse 6, which provides a time frame and shows that the custom of the church was not to come together some other day for the Lord’s Supper—but only on the first day of the week.

Furthermore, with all of the historical quotes he uses, he apparently saw no significance in the knowledge that historians point out that singing was always a cappella, which is pertinent in light of the fact that it is consistent with the teaching and practice of Christians in the first century. Rick even admitted in this very speech that history is a guide and not authoritative, but he quotes sources to prove that they observed the Lord’s Supper on other days. Did anyone notice this disparity?

Atchley quotes Greek scholar A. T. Robertson concerning the Greek word *hosakis*, which is found in 1 Corinthians 11:25-26 and translated “as often as.” According to Robertson, *hosakis* is only used with the notion of indefinite repetition. The only other time it is used in the New Testament is Revelation 11:6, where it obviously means “whenever,” rather than a specified interval of time. Atchley’s point is that the disciples did not just share communion on the first day of the week but at any time they so desired.

Most commentators and Greek reference works do not even comment on *hosakis*. One wonders how long Rick had to search for this information to try to establish his case. The word itself may not specify a certain interval, but Paul does in 1 Corinthians 16:2. Paul instructed brethren to lay something aside on the first day of the week. The reason for doing so is that, just as the brethren in Troas did, the church in Corinth also met on that day. In other words, even if the word *hosakis* means “whenever” and does not refer to a specific interval of time, the New Testament **defines** this interval. There is no conflict here. Atchley is trying to create one where none exists. False teachers typically use and **manipulate evidence** to try to support their positions, rather than follow where the evidence leads.

Another feeble argument Rick used to authorize communion on other days of the week was to claim that Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper on a Thursday evening. Jesus did not “institute” the Lord’s Supper at that time; He showed His

disciples the way He wanted to be remembered. They would in turn teach the church (Acts 2:42). *When* Jesus showed them what to do is not the important thing; *when* they taught the church to observe His death (under the Christian system) is the crucial fact, and we know that day was the first day of the week.

4. **Most false teachers do not defend their doctrine** in either oral or written discussion. As long as Rick can speak before sympathetic crowds and draw applause, why would he debate his views? He knows no one will challenge him at Richland Hills. Jesus and the apostles met verbal challenges frequently. Max Lucado, Rick Atchley, and others of that stripe NEVER have. If Rick would like to change this pattern of behavior and put his beliefs on the line, he will be accommodated.

OTHER COMMENTS

Atchley alleged: “Some of our fellowship emphasize the plan over the Man.” He had to reach back 40 years for that one (which echoed throughout the ‘60s). What he fails to grasp is that this is not an either/or situation; one would think that a “both/and” church would know better. The Man gave us a plan. Do we really need to be reminded that God gave Israel precise details and told Moses to follow the pattern given on the mount (Heb. 8:5)? Did God give us no details concerning salvation and correct worship? Of course He did!

Rick also said: “Salvation strategy produces anxiety and division and tremendous inconsistency.” A number of factors can lead to division, but the Word of God should not be blamed. When taught correctly and received by honest hearts, unity results (Acts 2:42-47).

Atchley complained about people who insist that their inferences and silences must be right. While it is true that some might infer something not implied and misapply a silence, those errors do not negate legitimate inferences and correct applications of silence, such as the one the Holy Spirit made in Hebrews 7:14.

The Richland Hills “preacher” also complained about the insistence of correct teaching: “If you don’t get it right, you’ll burn in hell.” What is the opposite of this “argument”: God revealed His Word to us, but we can get it wrong and still go to heaven? Folks might wonder, “So why do we have it?” Two men were burned for not getting it right—Nadab and Abihu. They offered profane fire before the Lord, and “fire went out from the Lord, and devoured them. And they died before the Lord” (Lev. 10:1-2). The translation Rick uses (the NIV) says it in a way even he should be able to understand: “...they offered unauthorized fire, contrary to his command.” A failure to respect the silence of the Lord (they did what was not authorized—Colossians 3:17) cost them their lives. It also costs people their souls.

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FELLOWSHIP SCRIPTURES: 1 COR. 5; ROM. 16:17; EPH. 5:11

Dennis (Skip) Francis

The difficulty of improper fellowship cannot be ignored, especially in the current crisis the church finds itself embroiled. Over a generation of dealing with the inroads of change agency has brought the church into a circumstance not unlike the division that occurred in the past century. Though the issue that was most noticeable during that period was that of instrumental music, the heart of the problems the church experienced was really over Bible authority and from where it is derived. The old notion that somehow Bible silence entails authority was the problem back then and is the same problem we deal with today.

Many have looked at the current issues dividing us as simply allowable matters of opinion. Some have gone so far as to say that issues like the re-evaluation/reaffirmation of elders, “everything we do in life is worship, except for sin”, Children’s church/worship, small groups ministries, and the numerous para-church efforts, are simply not worth dividing over as they are, in the eyes of some, “matters of opinion.” The reality, however, is quite different.

That which falls into the realm of “matters of opinion” in the Scriptures are those areas of application of the Holy Writ, and not just anything we would like to believe and practice. The imprimatur of Colossians 3:17 cannot be ignored: **“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”** (Colossians 3:17 NKJV) To do that which is in the “name” of the Lord is to do that which the Lord authorizes, thus any “matter of opinion” needs to be authorized in the Scriptures before one can begin its practice. There simply is NO authorization for the aforementioned doctrines in the scriptures. They are the **“doctrines of men”** and thus will make our worship of God “in vain” (Mat. 15:9)

No study of the issue of fellowship is complete without a good definition of the term itself. Many today have differing views on that which constitutes “fellowship.” Some have even suggested that they can be involved in various venues where false teachers are as long as they are not with them at the same time. Others believe that there are measures, or levels, of fellowship. Still others believe in a sort of “unity in diversity” wherein Christians may differ considerably on a number of vital issues and still be in fellowship as long as certain “core principles” or “bullseye” areas remain the same. None of these views is consistent with the Bible meaning of the word “fellowship.”

The most common word translated “fellowship” in the scriptures comes from the Greek word “koinonia”, which, according to Strong’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, means “partnership, participation, intercourse, or benefaction.” The idea being expressed is that any joint

participation wherein spiritual or financial support is provided is “fellowship.” Most other words that translate the word “fellowship” are derivations of “koinonia”, such as “sug-koinoneo”, which is translated “co-participation, to share in company with.” Any “co-participation” is fellowship.

We will examine these practices and others in the light of the Scriptures, and then examine some of the arguments being made as to why some are not obeying these Scriptures.

1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-13

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person (1 Cor. 5:1-13, NKJV).

This passage, that begins by introducing a specific problem found in the Corinthian church, goes on, in this chapter and the next, to address an entire list of sins that are to be purged, like leaven, from the church. These sins include: fornication, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, sodomy, thievery, covetousness, drunkenness, reviling, and extortion (1 Cor. 6:9-10, NKJV). Both chapters are dealing with sin in the church, as opposed to sin in the world. It demonstrates the need to maintain the purity of the very bride of Christ in an evil and adulterous generation. The very act of purging demonstrates the dangers of allowing such behavior to go on

without discipline. Purging is an entire elimination of the offense so that not one scrap remains. Such would be necessary regarding leaven since, as shown in verse 6, **“a little leaven leavens the whole lump.”** It is necessary to eliminate even the tiniest amount or it will grow to fill the entire lump.

What is also evident from this passage is that, when there is “sin in the camp”, invariably false doctrine will result. This is shown in that they “gloried” at having such a sinful person in their midst. I recall brother Randy Mabe preaching a sermon entitled “Be Quiet, Do Good Works, and Go to Hell by Yourself.” The context of this sermon was dealing primarily with those who did not meet the Scriptural criteria for marriage and were not willing to repent. As is so often the case, instead of just keeping their sins to themselves, people will politic their personal views in the church, and try to get others on their side. Most often, this manifests itself in various false doctrines.

Such is often the case today. The problems in today’s church regarding sexual immorality, and particularly as it relates to unscriptural marriage, are not unlike the very circumstances of Paul’s writings to the Corinthians. In this day of the disposable marriage, the problems relevant to divorce and remarriage have so plagued the church that there are literally dozens of different beliefs and doctrines being preached from our pulpits, even to the dividing of the body of Christ.

One such incident of fairly recent history was the doctrine espoused by brother Stan Crowley when he was working with the Buda/Kyle, TX congregation, and nearly split that congregation over his false doctrine. Currently, Crowley remains as the preacher for the Shertz, Texas church, though one of his elders, Ken Ratcliff, publicly stated that he would not remain an elder if Crowley remained there as preacher. Neither has left thus far.

After I left the Sarnia, Ontario, Canada church, they hired a Sunset graduate by the name of David Dunn. Shortly after his arrival there, it became evident that he did not stand with the Scriptures on the subject of marriage/divorce/remarriage (MDR). He said, concerning Matthew 19:9, that the “correct” translation of the passage is that the man “has adulterated himself”, and NOT that he “commits adultery.” He also taught that verse 6 does NOT teach that man “cannot” separate what God joined, but only that he “should not” do so. In fact, he says that the idea that “since God joins a couple in marriage, man cannot unjoin is incorrect” (Dunn). The result of this man’s false doctrine is chronicled in a resolution signed by 10 of the men of that congregation stating that:

Finding no evidence from Scripture to support the position that divorced persons are prohibited from remarrying, the Sarnia Church of Christ resolves to accept such persons into fellowship in their current marital state based solely on repentance from past sins and a pledge of submission to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour (sic) (Proposal on Church Resolution).

Further result of this “resolution” was their continued acceptance, in full fellowship, of a man who committed adultery, divorced his wife, and was living with the woman with whom

he had committed adultery. Several families and individuals left the Sarnia church after this doctrine was accepted by the membership there.

ROMANS 16:17

“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them” (NKJV).

The proper way to deal with a heretic is expressed in this passage, yet such is not being properly practiced by so many today. The term “note” or “mark” refers to the need to identify, point out, recognize those who cause divisions contrary to sound doctrine. In a similar manner, we are told to identify those who walk correctly in the doctrine of Christ. **“Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern”** (Phil. 3:17, NKJV). If it is acceptable to identify those who walk correctly, it is just as acceptable and desirable to identify a false teacher.

“Forewarned is forearmed” is the old adage. Never does this hold more truth than in the case of a false teacher. Those who would divide the flock of God merit our warning, and those who would remain in the good graces of our God should not be offended by that warning. No one was the target of more negativity in the church than the apostle Paul, yet the answer that Paul gave was one that any gospel preacher today may, at some time or another, need to give: **“Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?”** (Gal. 4:16, NKJV). As was expressed some years ago by another preacher of my acquaintance; if a rattlesnake slithered into the church building just prior to services, would you want the preacher to mention it, or just to go on about his business? How about all those spiritual snakes in the grass that masquerade as preachers of the gospel? Are not these more everlastingly dangerous than the viper previously mentioned? Those who will not warn others about false teachers are in clear violation of the Scriptures. Those who will not avoid a marked false teacher are one and the same as the false teacher himself.

Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds (2 John 1:9-11, NKJV).

One that “shares” in another’s evil deeds becomes an accomplice in the evil being done, thus they are not worthy of Christian fellowship either. It might be expressed in this way: if A = B, then bidding godspeed to B is equal to bidding godspeed to A. Also, it is not only important what you teach and do, but also what you approve of. Romans 1:32 clearly addresses this approval.

EPHESIANS 5:11

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (NKJV).

The way many of our brethren act, this passage should

be written, “And have *some* fellowship with **what I THINK are good works**, and say nothing about them at all.” Some of our brethren have even tried to redefine the meaning of “fellowship.” Rubel Shelly speaks of two kinds of fellowship that he calls “big F” and “little f” fellowship. F. LaGard Smith has 5 different levels of fellowship. *The Bible has only two: you are either IN fellowship or NOT in fellowship.*

Some brethren have tried to play around with the word meanings of this passage in order to ignore the force of it. They suggest that the word “darkness” only refers to those things that are patently of the devil. In this vein, one could have fellowship with any number of denominationalists because, after all, “look at the **good** they do!” Unfortunately, this ignores the idea that the only truly “good” things are those that come down from the Father of Lights, and that result in the saving of the soul. This cannot be said of those who teach error, as they will only lead someone to believe they are saved when, in reality, they are lost.

To sum up the strength of the three Scriptures, 1 Corinthians 5:1-3, Romans 16:17, and Ephesians 5:11, we are to “**purge out**,” to “**mark and avoid**,” to “**have no fellowship**” with those who live sinful lives, who divide the church with false doctrine, and who are involved in unfruitful works. The Scriptures are too plain to simply be ignored; however, they are being ignored by many of our brethren.

Let us examine some of the “arguments” that brethren are giving today when confronted by their own inconsistency in applying these scriptures.

“IT IS A GOOD WORK

AND WE SHOULD SUPPORT IT!”

In July of 2005, a public scandal was aired in the apostate publication known as the *Christian Chronicle*. It came on the heels of the firing of the Director of Apologetics Press (AP) over his previous scandalous behavior, as indicated in a letter sent to “Contributors and Friends of Apologetics Press”, dated May 31, 2005, from the Palm Beach Lakes church of Christ of West Palm Beach, Florida. He had been involved in “personal sin” for a number of years, and this resulted in the loss of his former position. Formerly, AP had indeed been “a good work.” The folks involved in it had soundly dealt with such important issues as Creation vs. Evolution, and other matters of Christian Apologetics. Unfortunately, it was the only institution of its type in the brotherhood.

Some questions had begun to arise over the fellowship practices of those involved with AP, but few would deny they taught soundly. The one major concern began to be aired when the former Director had hired a marked false teacher, brother Dave Miller, to be on the writing staff. Miller had been “**marked**” for teaching and practicing the reaffirmation/reevaluation of elders, and for error on the subject of marriage/divorce/remarriage (MDR) with regard to the idea that marriage was not “really” marriage unless there was an “intent” to enter the marriage bond (i.e. a “green card” marriage was not “really” marriage in the eyes of God).

When it became known throughout the brotherhood that AP was in trouble, 60 men put their signatures on a “Statement of Support” to show their belief that “*Apologetics Press is on a firm footing that will insure its continued work of excellence*” and to encourage others to contribute both financial and moral support to that effort. This “list” included directors of preaching schools and lectureships, several authors of well known books, editors of “sound” publications, and notables from all over the brotherhood, most of whom were, and are, well known to the brethren-at-large. Within days, the Board of Directors at AP had placed a new “interim” Director over the work of Apologetics Press: Dave Miller. At this point, what should have been done was not done by all the note worthies on that list: *They should have been up in arms in protest.* Instead, in an effort to keep what was perceived as a “good work”, they were all willing to compromise the Lord’s commands regarding fellowship with error, and not only did not withdraw their support but made every effort to try to justify what Miller had both preached and done.

The “arguments” used are somewhat diverse, though not one of them are consistent with the evidence or justify what has taken place. Some of them are as follows:

1. Dave Miller repented (In fact, Miller himself denies this statement).
2. Dave Miller did not do it (The evidence, all in writing, contradicts this notion).
3. Dave Miller was misunderstood (Words do mean things, and Miller has had literally years to clarify himself).
4. It happened 16 years ago (It happened twice, most recently

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in 2002, and Dave was involved in some sense both times. There is no statute of limitations on error).

5. Few people know about it (Error is error no matter how many know).

6. It was a local matter (Local error is still error).

The fact is that a “good work” can only remain such if it adheres to certain principles. It must be: 1. consistent with the will of God, 2. based on sound doctrine, and 3. in fellowship with sound people. Though the first two may continue to be true, the third principle cannot be ignored. Brother David P. Brown says it this way, “A work is “good” only when (1) it is authorized by the New Testament and (2) when those involved in it are thinking and acting as the Bible authorizes them to think and act.” Just as Pepperdine, ACU, OCU, Harding, DLU, and other “Christian colleges” began as good works, none of these would be considered sound today. Just as the “Herald of Truth” program was begun as a “good work”, it cannot be so considered today. Just as publications like the *Gospel Advocate*, *Firm Foundation*, and *Spiritual Sword* were once considered “good works”, the proclivities of their editors, and/or writing staff, have brought them into highly questionable status. Many a “good work” has fallen into error in the past, and will continue to do so in the future.

“MEN OF GOOD REPUTATION ARE INVOLVED”

One of the frequent problems that we run into over the years is in recognizing that men who were once sound do go off into error. At one time, one of the most notable young men in the brotherhood was a man named Rubel Shelly. Rubel wrote for the *Spiritual Sword* when Thomas Warren was its editor, and his articles and writings were as sound as they come. When the first signs of “strange and uncertain” sounds began to come from Shelly, few would believe it. The evidence stands today as testimony that we should never ignore such signs in our brethren but rather should be on our guard for signs of such strangeness.

Homer Hailey was once touted as a good, sound, gospel preacher. In fact, many of us have his books in our own libraries. While it was fifty or so years ago that he embraced “anti-ism,” it was relatively late in life that Homer Hailey wrote his new position on MDR, and thus demonstrated that the sound do not always remain so.

Buster Dobbs, current editor of the *Firm Foundation* magazine, has, in times past, been a stalwart defender of the faith. He has dealt with error in ways only rivaled by Ira Rice and David Brown. He was the most vociferous contender against the likes of Rubel Shelly, Jeff Walling, and Max Lucado, rank liberals all. In times past, for me, he was almost the face of one “set for the defense of the gospel.” This was until 1998 when his “everything we do in life is worship, except for sin” doctrine became known.

The entire Deaver family has been touted for their stand for the Truth over the years, until Mac Deaver began to publicly proclaim his take on the work of the Holy Spirit, and then drew various other family members into the fray on his

side. His father, Roy, was considered one of the scholars of the faith in the Koine Greek, yet this “new” take has brought the entire group into question.

Would the apostle Peter have been considered “**sound**” by the majority of brethren in the first century? Undoubtedly! The facts are, however, that at one point in his ministry, Peter “**stood condemned**” (Gal. 2:11, ASV). Why? Because even Peter was not always perfect in his actions, especially in his obvious prejudices toward the Gentiles. Paul was forced to confront Peter “**to the face**” and do so “**before them all.**” Fortunately for the first century church, Peter repented. We could only hope that men of our day would do so. If Rubel Shelly, or Dave Miller, Buster Dobbs, the Deavers, or such “notables” would simply repent today, the church would be in far better condition than it is, and the angels would rejoice in heaven.

In addition to these arguments about others, some of our brethren use certain arguments about themselves when confronted with spiritual inconsistencies with regard to fellowship practices.

“NO ONE EVER ACCUSED ME OF BEING UNSOUND!”

This is a favorite little “bon-bon” of those who begin to be loose in their fellowship practices. The implication is that, because they are *fellowshipping* error they are being accused of *preaching* error. This is the “straw man” that many erect in order to have something to, like Don Quixote, spiritually “tilt” at. When one is “tilting at windmills,” the danger is only one that is perceived rather than real and any harm one may receive is largely the result of their own folly. It is often

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easier to joust with the perceived danger than to confront the real problem. The real problem, in such cases, is NOT what one teaches, but rather who one fellowships. As previously addressed, when one bids “godspeed” to those who practice error, they become a “partaker of his evil deeds” (2 John 11).

Such is the case with those who will jointly participate with men like Dave Miller in lectureships and support of his work. Though few would accuse Curtis Cates, Jim Dearman, or Robert Taylor of “teaching” error, these men have no problem being on the infamous support list for the work directed by bro. Miller, and they have no problem being on programs where Dave preaches, or having him for meetings where they work and worship.

In a similar way, Glenn Colley, third generation gospel preacher and author of the book *Loose Change*, jointly participated this year at the Tahoe Family Encampment, along with men like Truitt Adair of Sunset School of Preaching (which has taught error on MDR for years), and Tex Williams, a regular participant at the Tulsa International Soul Winning Workshop. When questioned as to why he was involved in this venue, Colley answered, in effect, “No one ever accused ME of being unsound!” Though that may be true, none the less, he was in fellowship with error, and thus a “partaker of” their evil deeds. It was also Colley who followed this statement with, “why, I wrote a book about change agents.”

“I WROTE A BOOK ABOUT....”

This is also a favorite saw that is used to justify current action with past reputation. Brethren seem to forget that it matters not who you *were* but who you *are*! That someone wrote a book is commendable, but it only tells us where they were spiritually when the book was written. It says nothing about who they are NOW!

Dave Miller “wrote a book” called *Piloting the Strait*. The book is well written and well researched. It says volumes about the problems of change agency today. The problem is that Dave Miller is better about dealing with the problems of others than he is about identifying similar problems in himself.

James Meadows wrote a series of workbooks, one of which was called *A Study of Church Discipline*. In this book, he effectively lays out the Bible standards on the subject and the methods we should use in dealing with aspects involving personal sin, false teachers, walking disorderly, etc. In his Lesson 7, “Upon Whom is It to Be Administered? Part 1,” under “Those That Teach Things Contrary To Sound Doctrine”, he uses some of the same scriptures in this manuscript, and shows that withdrawal is required when the false teacher does not repent. James has been a friend for many years, and I would like to know why he has added his name to the AP Support Statement and has not rescinded said support with Dave Miller at the helm.

William Woodson wrote a book entitled *Change Agents and Churches of Christ*. It also deals with many of the errors being espoused today and how to deal with the errorists

involved. His final paragraph is telling:

The time to be alert to danger is now; the encouragement of our great and good brotherhood is that with love, with full regard for the nature of the problem, but with loyalty to Christ and His body, it will insist that these change agents, and their allies and converts, will be obliged to repent of their hurtful efforts and desist; if not, “It is time for them to go.”

Unfortunately, in this case, Woodson put his allegiance to a body led by a false teacher over his loyalty to Christ. Brother Woodson should read his own book and rescind his support for AP under the guidance of Miller.

Curtis Cates wrote a book entitled *A Comprehensive Study of Unity*. In that book, Cates’ fellow-worker at MSOP, Garland Elkins, wrote in the forward, “*God condemns unity in error*” and goes on to identify a variety of such errors (Cates, 17). He commends Cates book in identifying these very things, yet Cates seems to be practicing something different today than he wrote in 1998. In Chapter 14, on page 110, Curtis writes:

False teachers and false doctrines constantly endanger the peace of God’s people. The maintenance of peace requires constant vigilance, courage, exposure of error, and the promulgation of the pure Gospel. God’s people are to think, love, teach, seek, and pray for peace. Yet, in all of this, we must never stoop to the pursuit of “peace at any price”. We

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must remember the words of the Lord: "I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Mat. 10:34).

He seems to have no problem today having unity in error with Dave Miller and the AP crowd. Is Cates "maintaining peace" in so doing? In fact, more division has occurred in the last 18 months, especially over Cates' involvement in this current mess than at any time in the brotherhood in recent history. Is "peace at any price" worth it?

Glenn Colley, as previously mentioned, "wrote a book." In his booklet, *Loose Change*, he outlines the church's response to change agency, and recognizes that we are to "mark and avoid" false teachers. It is a shame that he is not following his own advice and having "no fellowship" with the unfruitful work of the Tahoe Family Encampment, and all the false teachers involved in that endeavor. He is also a "regular" at the "Polishing the Pulpit" program, which not only had Dave Miller as a speaker last year but had Phil Sanders this year. Although Phil was allowed to continue to be on the program though I, personally, notified two of the directors over six months in advance that, according to the *Christian Chronicle* article entitled, "News - 1906 - 2006: 100 years later, can we converse across the keyboard?" (Feb. 2006, 4), Phil accepts members of the Christian Church as "his brethren," and the congregation where he preaches practices several unscriptural practices, such as Children's worship, and supports several unscriptural parachurch groups; like the Churches of Christ Disaster Relief Effort, Inc., Apologetics Press, "In Search of the Lord's Way", "Lads to Leaders/Leaderettes," and even Heartlight Magazine.

What would improve this entire situation is if more of these brethren spent more time reading **THE** Book instead of bragging about how they wrote **A** book!

"WE NEED BALANCE"

More and more of our brethren are touting the "balance" mantra as though this excuses unscriptural fellowship practices. Recently, Alan Highers, the Editor of the *Spiritual Sword*, said that "balance" was "one of the MOST important themes we have ever featured" (emp. mine) (Highers, 2). Similar quotes have been made by those involved with *The Gospel Journal* under its new editorship, and in many other publications and lectureships. It is interesting to me that this topic has only become this popular a discussion theme since the current controversy over the Directorship of Apologetics Press has caused so much division in the brotherhood. Those that would continue in fellowship with those involved with AP are said to be "balanced", while those who are trying to practice scriptural fellowship where false teachers are concerned are said to be "toxic."

Balance is, indeed, an important thing, but cannot be used as an excuse to allow fellowship with error. One wonders why Highers feels this issue is so important, what with all the error being espoused within the body of Christ today. His recent appearance at the David Lipscomb University summer lecture series, entitled "Summer Celebration 2006: A Festival of Faith & Fellowship—Life in the Spirit; A Study of Ephesians," along with noted false teachers, Jeff Walling, Joe Beam, and Lynn Anderson, has left many brethren wondering what Higher's definition of "balance" really is.

Brethren, balance is important in that we must not overly focus on any one aspect of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Too much emphasis on church problems, on worldly issues, on persecution, or any negative thing, will only cause many to become discouraged. Thus it is important to preach on the plan of salvation, the heavenly home, the hope of eternal life,

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the love of the brethren, and other similar uplifting topics. That said, we simply cannot ignore the importance of the scriptures on Biblical fellowship in favor of only that which is spiritually or emotionally palatable.

On the topic of "balance," my greater concern is with those 60 signers of the now infamous AP support document. So many of them have had such sound reputations in the past, I cannot help but wonder if some of them have become "un-balanced," at least spiritually so. It is my hope that many of them will wake up and tip the scales back to true Biblical "balance" before it is everlastingly too late.

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Roelf L. Ruffner

I consider myself an observer of religion in America. Its endless myriad of churches and religious ferment is fascinating to me. But I am not impartial in that regard. I love my country but I love the Truth of God's word more. I cherish America's freedom of religion yet I see Satan's hand at work in the wholesale departure from the Bible by most of American religious life. Sin is like that. It can corrupt and transform the purest of humanity's impulses – the pursuit of God and His Truth. **“And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth”** (Babel – Gen. 11:4).

I saw that demonstrated the other day when I received, unsolicited, a magazine put out by the Crossroads Church of Corona, California. This church is part of the “mega-church” movement with over six thousand in attendance each Sunday. What they were promoting was not the church of the New Testament but a church/shopping mall complete with a Food Court and Multi-media presentations. It was obvious that their goal was to give people what they want and “pack-um-in.” Their “pastor” (they also have elders) and center of attention wants the worship experience to be “fun” and “non-judgmental.” I found one of his observations most revealing: “I try to find the secret of what makes a thing a success. I had a business background. A successful business does not have to be corrupt. It is the same as a church. A successful business means a person has understood the market, and that is a big part in ministry: understanding where people are. So, I look a lot to the secular world.” Did you catch that? It is all about marketing and promotion. It is all about “success”. He does not look to the New Testament as his pattern but the world. He feeds at the trough of religious liberalism and worships at the altar of worldly success.

On one page of the magazine in small print were these Quick Facts concerning Crossroads Church: “Founded: 1892 by a small group who wanted a non-denominational church. Original Name: Church of Christ.” It struck me that this church was probably a child of apostasy. Long ago they had left the spiritual safety of New Testament authority (Col. 3:17) for the unknown waters of rebellion and whim. I do not care how much fancy technology they have or how “caring” their staff is or how lofty their goals are. They are in a tragic spiritual state. **“I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead”** (Jesus Christ to the angel of the church at Sardis – Rev. 3:1).

The church that Jesus built does not reside in starched white clergy collars, theatrics, multi-media presentations and entertainment but in the submissive hearts of those who have been bought by the blood of the Lamb (Acts 20:28). She does not proclaim a watered-down gospel woven from a community poll. Rather her gospel is acknowledgment of the bloody cross and submission to the watery grave of bap-

tism. She does not flinch at warning of the eternal horrors of Hell, **“where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched”** (Mark 9:48). She gladly preaches of the wonders of Heaven, **“an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens”** (II Cor. 5:1) and the **“difficult”** way to it (NKJV – Matt. 7:14).

The church that Jesus built strives to “go back to the Bible” for its authority (Col. 3:17), not their religious neighbors across town or the latest fad. Using the two thousand year old pattern of the New Testament the church of Christ worships God **“in spirit and in truth”** (John 4:24). By the world's standards the lights are not dim enough, musical accompaniment is only by the human voice and Sunday worship centers around two simple emblems – an unleavened loaf and fruit of the vine. This is because the church of the New Testament does not worship to please a human audience but an august presence of one – Jehovah.

The church that Jesus built does not appeal to everyone. It is rare to find attendance over a few hundred in any one of her scattered congregations. But her aim is to draw men to Christ with the Truth that can make them free (John 8:31-32). When Jesus was on this earth, He ended his ministry with only a handful of followers huddled around His pierced, beaten body. By the world's estimation, He was an utter failure and a crackpot. But the Father was well pleased with the Son and raised Him up to sit on David's throne (Acts 2:32-36). He rules over a kingdom of priests **“which shall never be destroyed”** (Dan. 2:44). All that I want to be is a member of the church that Jesus built not a man made organization lifted up to the heavens with pride and rebellion. Her Quick Facts are simple: “Founded – A.D. 30 in Jerusalem by Jesus Christ”.

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Denton area—Northpoint Church of Christ, 5101 E. University Dr. (Greenbelt Business Park). Mailing address: Northpoint Church of Christ, Greenbelt Business Park, 5101 E. University Dr., Box 12, Denton, TX 76208. E-mail: northpointcoc@hotmail.com. Sunday: 9:30, 10:30, 6:00; Wednesday 7:00. Contact: Dub McClish: 940.323.9797; tgj@charter.net.

Houston area—Spring Church of Christ, 1327 Spring Cypress, P.O. Box 39, Spring, TX 77383, (281) 353-2707. Sun. 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 6:00 p.m., Wed. 7:30 p.m., David P. Brown, evangelist. Home of the Spring Contending for the Faith Lectures beginning the last Sunday in February. www.churchesofchrist.com.

Hubbard—105 NE 6th St., Hubbard, TX 76648, Sun. 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 6:00 p.m., Wed. 7:00 p.m. Delbert J. Goines; DJGoines@Valornet.com.

Huntsville—1380 Fish Hatchery Rd. Huntsville, TX 77320. Sun. 9, 10 a.m., 6 p.m., Wed. 7 p.m. (936) 438-8202.

Hurst (Fort Worth area)—Northeast Church of Christ, 1313 Karla Dr., P.O. Box 85, Hurst, TX 76053. Sun. 9 a.m., 10 a.m., 6 p.m., Wed. 7:30 p.m. (817) 282-3239.

New Braunfels—1130 Hwy. 306, 1.5 miles west of I-35. Sun: 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 6:00 p.m. Wed. 7 p.m. Lynn Parker, evangelist. (830) 625-9367. www.nbchurchofchrist.com.

Richwood—1600 Brazosport, Richwood, TX. Sun. 9:30; 10:30 a.m., 6 p.m., Wed. 7 p.m. (979) 265-4256.

-Wyoming-

Cheyenne—High Plains Church of Christ, 421 E. 8th St., Cheyenne, WY 82007, tel. (307) 638-7466, Sunday: 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 5:00 p.m., Wed. 7:00 p.m., Tel. (307) 635-2482. evangelist: Tim Cozad.

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