

Rom. 14:19 So then let us follow after things which make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another.

John 8:32 and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

# THE LENEXA EDIFIER

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## ARE YOU A GIVER OR TAKER

Jim Stauffer

One of the primary functions of being a child of God is to love. We are to love God with all our heart and soul. **(Matt. 22:37)** We are to love our neighbor as ourselves. **(Matt. 22:39)** Jesus said these are the basis of the Law of God. John teaches us further that we cannot claim to love God and not love our brother. **(1 John 4:20)**

We have just finished a season in our country where the consensus of the population devotes time, energy and messaging to motivate people to show such love by gift giving. It is concluded, and properly so, if you love and care for someone you will give or contribute to their welfare.

This seems to be one of the easiest principles of discipleship of Christ for man to understand and yet one of the most difficult to obey. **Acts 20:35** *In all things I gave you an example, that so laboring ye ought to help the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.* Nearly everyone I have known has experienced the great joy of giving. The joy of giving to others exceeds the joy of receiving. This is a level of maturity one must reach to be a disciple of Christ. We all experience this with relatives, loved ones and very close friends.

The teaching of the Lord, however, extends beyond those we know personally. In the second letter to the Corinthians, chapters eight and nine, Paul describes the process of Christians in one part of the world giving to those far away, unknown to them. The one thing they had in common was their faith. The example before us is the Christians in Macedonia. Paul says, *in much proof of affliction and out of the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty that beyond their power they gave of their own accord.* **(2 Cor. 8:2,3)**

These people were already in poverty themselves but when they learned the brethren in Jerusalem were suffering even greater poverty they gave beyond their ability out of their love for brethren. Paul says the way to accomplish such a feat is to imitate their process. He says they *first gave their own selves to the lord and to us through the will of God.* **(2 Cor. 8:5)**

Paul then emphasizes many simple steps to our giving. We should plan to give. This he calls 'purposing

in our hearts'. **(2 Cor. 9:7)** When Paul wrote to the Ephesians he indicated one of the reasons we work and earn a wage is to help others. **Eph. 4:28** *Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need.* This is described as part of the *new man that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness in truth.* **(Eph. 4:24)**

The greatest gift ever given was, of course, when Jesus died for all men to redeem us from the bondage of sin. **(2 Cor. 5:14,15)** If we then choose to be His disciples we must in fact be like Him. **(Eph. 5:1,2)** We must have genuine concern for others. **(1 John 3:17,18)** We must train ourselves to walk in His steps. **(1 Pet. 2:21)** This happens when indeed we allow Christ to live in us. **(Gal. 2:20; Rom. 8:5)**

Jesus offers an example of one who gives from the heart. One who gives not of his excess or abundance but from the love in his heart for that or whom he gives. **Mark 12:41** *And he sat down over against the treasury, and beheld how the multitude cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. 42 And there came a poor widow, and she cast in two mites, which make a farthing. 43 And he called unto him his disciples, and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, This poor widow cast in more than all they that are casting into the treasury: 44 for they all did cast in of their superfluity; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.* This is the type of giving the Psalmist says the Lord will recognize and recompense. **Psa. 41:1** *Blessed is he that considereth the poor: Jehovah will deliver him in the day of evil. 2 Jehovah will preserve him, and keep him alive, And he shall be blessed upon the earth; And deliver not thou him unto the will of his enemies.*

Consider this. Are you giving to a cause or person out of the kind of love the Lord teaches and commands? Or are you giving because others expect you to, or to be seen of men? Are you giving with the hope of receiving something in return or because you have planned and purposed to give for the benefit of the person or the cause?

Answering these questions will go a long way toward learning if you truly love as the Savior did.

## THE CONVERSION OF SAUL OF TARSUS

by Randy Harshbarger

Arguably, your conversion to Jesus Christ is the most important conversion that has ever taken place. From a personal standpoint this would certainly be true. Allow me though, to say that the conversion of Saul of Tarsus to his Lord and Savior is, likewise, one of the most significant conversions in all of human history. The man who would later be known as the Apostle Paul occupies such an important role in the early history of New Testament Christianity, that we can ill afford to overlook a study of his life. Too, since much of the New Testament was written by him, we must consider the many contributions he made to the faith of God's people.

References to Paul's early life can be found in **Acts 21:39, Acts 22:3, and Philippians 3:5**. Read these passages carefully. Paul was born in Tarsus, an important city in the province of Cilicia. Tarsus became the capital of the Roman province in 67 B.C. and was a free city, meaning it did not have to pay any import taxes. Tarsus could easily rival Athens and Alexandria in being the center for Greek culture. Its geographical location made it a city of great commerce and wealth. The linen industry was a major source of commercialism. The Cydnus River ran close by, providing a convenient waterway for transport. There was a statue honoring the goddess Aphrodite in Tarsus, marking it as a center for idolatry. The ancient historian Strabo said that Tarsus was a city of luxury, levity, and innocence.

Saul spent his early days in the city of Jerusalem, being schooled at the feet of Gamaliel. This is a probable indication that Saul's father was wealthy, since he was able to send his son away to school. Gamaliel was the grandson of the famous Jewish teacher Hillel. Both of these men were Pharisees. It is said that Gamaliel was recognized as one of the seven greatest teachers in all of Judaism. When Paul tells us that he studied under Gamaliel, he is saying that he received a first-rate education. Was Paul a good student? Listen to his own words. *And I advanced in the Jews' religion beyond many of mine own age among my countrymen, being more exceeding zealous for the traditions of my fathers (Gal. 1:14)*. He learned his lessons well! Saul was not a Hellenist, i.e., a Jew that had adopted the Greek way of life. Saul was the name of Israel's first king. Rather than being just an Israelite, he was a *Hebrew of Hebrews*. He was a descendant of father Abraham. Concerning the Law of Moses he was a Pharisee, the straightest of the straight. Saul of Tarsus had some early contact with the Lord's church in the city of Jerusalem. We first encounter him in Acts chapter seven, when Stephen was stoned by the bloodthirsty mob. Stephen was charged with teaching against the Law of Moses, and any respectable Jew would heartily agree that justice was served with Stephen's death (**Acts 8:1**). Saul increased his opposition against God's people, doing everything within his power to obliterate those of the Way from off the earth. With all of the zeal and energy he could muster, he was unquestionably

dedicated to the persecution of Christians. He would later say: *For ye have heard of my manner of life in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and made havoc of it (Gal. 1:13)*.

Saul of Tarsus was an important, wealthy, powerful, influential man. Yet, he was lost and he needed to hear about Jesus. Would the good news of salvation effect change in this champion of Judaism? Would the simple, yet compelling story of a lowly carpenter from Nazareth wrest the shackles of prejudice from the heart of this man? Would the drawing power of the cross be enough to turn the persecutor into one who was persecuted? Such a story and such a change can only come from the Lord!

## Local Church Autonomy and Exposing Error

When speaking of the church, we refer to it in either the local or universal sense. From looking at the biblical record, we find that local churches were organized to be independent from each other (**1 Pet. 5:1-3**), answering only to Jesus, the Head of the church (**Eph. 1:22-23**). In passages where the universal church is under discussion (**Eph. 5:23-27**), scripture is silent concerning any formal organization. The Lord's church has been organized without earthly headquarters and bureaucracies. Jesus is the head of the church and elders in local congregations answer directly to Him. While "autonomy" is not mentioned in either testament, the principle is understood. Autonomy is defined as the power or right of self-government. In writing on the concept of autonomy Robert L. McDonald has written: "when the word autonomy is used with reference to the church of our Lord, it should be understood that each church has the divine right to govern itself." In the New Testament we find: Autonomous congregations supporting the preaching of the gospel. Philippi, (**Phil. 4:15-18**), Corinth (**2 Cor. 11:8**), and Jerusalem (**Ac. 11:22**) are good examples. Autonomous congregations providing benevolence for its needy. The Jerusalem church is an example. See Acts 2 and 4. Autonomous congregations selecting their own elders, deacons, servants, and messengers. For example, in **Ac. 14:23** Luke says they appointed elders in every church. Epaphroditus was a servant of the church in Philippi ministering to Paul. (**Phil. 2:25-30**)

**Text Box:** Church autonomy is not violated by teaching the truth whenever and wherever the opportunity presents itself. We may properly conclude that each local church did its own work, under the oversight of local elders, without outside interference or control. Over the last decade and a half, there has been much written on the subject of autonomy and exposing error. Some believe that since congregations are autonomous, the only criticism they receive should be from members within. Others maintain that preachers should have full reign in exposing error wherever and whenever they see it. Can preachers expose error in congregations in which they are not a member? Within scripture, we find Paul warning the Colossians of false teachers in general (**Col. 2:4, 8**). We know he was not a



member of the church of Colosse when writing these words. We also observe Paul rebuking the Galatians for allowing Judaizing teachers to advance their error within the congregations of Galatia, even though not a member in any of these congregations (**Gal. 1:6-9; 5:4**). The conduct of the false teachers was well documented and they had publicly slandered the motives, character, and teaching of Paul. He had the right to directly respond to their charges, and did so effectively. Those who teach publicly may expect to be criticized publicly if their teaching does not align itself with truth.

These passages prove that church autonomy is not violated by teaching the truth whenever and wherever the opportunity presents itself. Truth should not be harnessed. But, while preachers have the right to expose error, it does not give them the right to make blanket assumptions and accusations, judging motives and creating suspicion and fear about brethren they do not know. I recently read about an article where a preacher referred to "churches of Christ" that decided to abolish the evening service. In his writing, the preacher asked what reason would justify such a decision? And by the usage of quotation marks around "churches of Christ" he questioned the faithfulness of churches who made that decision. He then concluded his remarks with the short sentence, Brethren, we are drifting. Never mind the fact that each local, independent, autonomous congregation can be presented with unique reasons and circumstances for determining the number of times they meet on the Lord's Day. (A good example would be a congregation in a remote area where brethren are forced to drive many miles to worship.) Meeting more than once on Sunday is a matter of judgment. And, the congregation who decided to meet only once on the Lord's day should not be forced to justify to the entire brotherhood as to the reasons behind their decision. Remember, we are autonomous!

**Text Box:** If one reads something, or hears someone speculating about another preacher or congregation do not Christian principles teach that we assume the best and not the worst out of our brethren? Preaching the truth does not excuse a person from common courtesy. Jesus said, *So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.* (**Matt. 7:12**). Later Jesus would teach that brotherly love is an identifying mark of the Christian. *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another* (**John 13:34-35**). Paul wrote that we should let our love be genuine and to love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor (**Rom. 12:9-10**). If one reads something, or hears someone speculating about another preacher or congregation do not Christian principles teach that we assume the best and not the worst out of our brethren? Is that not the honorable thing to do? Do not Christian principles teach that we attempt communication with the other party before we address an issue publicly? There can always be misunderstandings. Things may not be as they seem. But yet in case after case we hear of those who launch

out in accusing others of error, when no direct communication has been made to find out otherwise. When godly principles are ignored and accusations are made it amounts to little more than evil suspicions (**1 Tim. 6:4**). Having evil suspicions involves the impugning of motives. This person wants nothing good to come out of the other person, and only expects and hopes for the worst. In his comments on this verse Hendrickson says, all looks yellow to the jaundiced eye. In this case, brethren are turned into adversaries and every action is suspect. It is imagined that there is something behind every move of the person and/or congregation. Such an attitude is dangerous because it is contagious. This is why it is forthrightly condemned. When motives and intentions are judged without investigation, reputations of good brethren and churches are damaged. These attitudes may be more prevalent than we'd like to admit. We must always apply **Rom. 12:9-10** in our attitude. How can we correct the problem?

Here are four simple suggestions:

1. Open up the lines of communication. Are there not principles we can apply from **Matt. 18:15-17**? Giving the benefit of the doubt involves talking about the situation and not assuming anything. When these situations arise we must remember we are working with Christians! They are brethren!
2. Once communication has taken place, accept what they say. Our word is to be our bond (**Matt. 5:37**). If others are relating false information; tell the truth and exhort them to correct their story. It is not our place to judge motives! (**Matt. 7:1-2**) Judgment can be made on deeds and attitudes expressed (**John 7:24**).
3. We must learn to keep our mouths shut. Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger (**Jas. 1:19**). The temptation to talk negatively about someone else can be great. It is easier to be negative than positive. And yes, it can take effort to see positive, but it is absolutely necessary if we wish to glorify God. The last thing we need to do is to be the talebearer of something that is fabricated, exaggerated, or embellished.
4. Put forgiveness into action. *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.* (**Eph. 4:31-32**) I am convinced that this passage is not practiced as much as it should, and it is to our detriment. Imagine how much more vibrant, joyful, and unified the church would be if we fully embraced and practiced what is contained in these verses.

We are reaching a critical point within the church today. Great damage is being done, young Christians are being discouraged, and souls are in danger. We need to take the microscope off of each other and once again turn our focus onto the lost. We must slow down and stand down on the desire to ramp up the suspicion about good men and congregations who work in their respective areas. We need to once again renew our commitment to work with one another as opportunities present themselves. We be brethren!

**by Matthew Allen**

**Eph. 2:19** *So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, 20 being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone; 21 in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord;*

**1Pet. 2:9** *But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:*

**Psa. 1:1** *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; But the way of the wicked shall perish.*

## **HOURS OF WORSHIP**

Sunday A.M. 9:30 Bible Study

Sunday A.M. 10:20 Assembled Worship

Sunday P.M. 5:00 Assembled Worship

Wednesday P.M. 7:00 Bible Study and Worship

**Visitors welcome**

**We conduct in home Bible Studies**

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## **OUR ADDRESS IS:**

7845 Cottonwood Dr.

Lenexa, Kansas 66216

913-764-9170

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## **NEWS AND NOTES:**

PLEASE REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING IN YOUR PRAYERS: J.R. DANIEL, GRANT CLOTHIER, MARY CZIRR, AND JAN PATRICK. LORETTA TAPP HAS RETURNED HOME.

OUR CURRENT STUDIES ARE: SUNDAY MORNING: EVIDENCES AND WEDNESDAY: THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

SERMON SUNDAY AM: LET US CONGREGATE (TO WORSHIP)



## **What Must I Do To Be Saved?**

**Hear** the gospel - Romans 10:17

**Believe** in Jesus Christ - Hebrews 11:6

**Repent** of sins - Acts 17:30

**Confess** Christ as Lord - Romans 10:9,10

**Be Baptized** for remission of sins

Acts 2:38

**Be Faithful** unto death - Revelation 2:10