Digging Deep

Gary McDade

No, this is not about digging up dirt on the political front runners about which we hear so much these days. (It would be interesting to see statistical facts comparing and contrasting how many people in America say they do not favor that practice but who base their vote on the information). No, this is about something Jesus said during his personal ministry that urges digging down deeply through the many layers of material—intellectual, emotional, and filial—endeavoring to arrive at the bedrock solid foundation of truth upon which real spiritual life may be built. Luke recorded these words of the Master,

> And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep [who digged and went deep, ASV], and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great (Lk. 6:46-49).

In Jesus' time enough religious error had been spread over the truth so as to mask it from sight requiring "digging down deep" in order to get to it. Since then many centuries of religious error have been heaped up over the truth of God's word making the digging process necessary again for the present generation. George Barna, founder of the religious research group bearing his name, in 2005 published a book titled *Revolution* in which he suggested that droves of those who consider themselves Christians are exiting established denominations. The inside cover of the book hints at the thinking behind this "Revolution."

> For thousands of years, Christians have been inventing church, but neglecting to be the Church Christ commissioned. Droves of committed believers are foregoing Sunday mornings to live a 24/7 faith unfettered by the clutter and bureaucracy within the church walls.
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> In stark contrast to both the stuffy, formulaic religiosity sometimes found in the established church and the feel-good, invent-your-own spirituality, the Revolution is casting off any thing that hinders a full, vibrant life of discipleship to Christ.

In a *USA Today* article back in 2002, Cathy Grossman wrote that there are more Americans who say they are not affiliated with any organized religion than there are Episcopalians, Methodists, and Lutherans taken together ("Charting the unchurched in America," March 7, 2002).

When those claiming to follow Christ go about "inventing church, but neglecting to be the Church Christ commissioned" and that reality is common knowledge among them, somebody needs to do as the Lord suggested and get out a shovel and start digging! The more "inventing" that has taken place, obviously, the more digging will be required to get down to the truth of God's will on the subject of the church and salvation in Christ. Not only is desire mandatory to get to the truth, but honesty is also a must. For example, last week I received a nasty e-mail from a scarcely-identified-visitor to the Getwell website blasting the churches of

Christ for what he called a haughty "we've-got-the-truth-and-no-one-else" attitude. It is wonderful that Bibles are readily available in America. They may be very reasonably purchased in easily accessible stores everywhere. There are even societies that will make copies available free of charge to those interested in reading the Bible. Our critic has access to the Internet because that is how he knew of us, and on the Internet you can read the Bible free in several English translations or in the original languages if you can. Clearly, we in churches of Christ are not the only ones who have the truth and no one else; the distinction is in churches of Christ we are very serious about practicing the truth and steering clear of "inventing church"!

This past Lord's day we had a visitor who was is Baptist preacher. After hearing the class and sermon where the Bible was taught, his comment to me was that he preaches only the Bible from his pulpit. He emphasized that he preaches only that which is between the covers of the Bible. When I told him that precisely is why I am a Christian and not a Baptist because I cannot find a Baptist member of the church in the Bible, he stated that the name on the building was put there by his revered father and that is why it is called a Baptist Church. His dilemma is shared by many: which father will you honor?

Perhaps the shifting population exiting established denominations is being swept into the flow of what technically is known as religious pluralism where the effect is each person becomes his own god. Jeremiah warned, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). Or, perhaps many seeking a "full, vibrant life of discipleship to Christ" are becoming aware of the failure of churches invented by men to harmonize with Christ's church. That possibility, however slim or remote, motivates us to hope and pray and work to teach privately and publicly in order that honest people desiring to follow Christ will do as Jesus taught and dig down deep and lay their spiritual foundation upon the bedrock solid foundation of the truth of God's word.