

Note: during most of the twentieth century (and earlier), divisions have occurred between brethren due to the implementation of practices not found in the Scriptures. For most of his preaching life, Forrest Moyer preached, debated, and wrote on these issues. The following material was written for and presented at a meeting in which brethren on both sides, divided over matters of authority (e.g., institutionalism), attended. The material was later printed in *Guardian of Truth* (April 2, April 16, and May 7, 1987).

Biblical Authority

Forrest D. Moyer

(With a deep sense of awareness of my responsibility to God and to you, I send forth this message on Biblical Authority. I am doing so with a sincere desire to help “heal the hurt” of God’s spiritual Zion. That God may truly bless our efforts to be drawn closer to His will and to one another is my earnest prayer for this day. – FDM)

One of the grandest chapters in the annals of our nation’s history is that of the great Restoration Movement that took place in the previous century here in America. American historians have not given to it its rightful place. The only movement that has overshadowed it was that of the beginning of the kingdom of Christ in the first century when Jesus had called and commissioned a few humble men to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” Guided by the Holy Spirit, the apostles began to declare the divine message throughout the world. The kingdom grew and spread throughout all lands captivating the hearts of thousands upon thousands of men and women.

But as time passed and the apostles died, men who did not respect the authority of our Lord began to substitute human wisdom for the divine and to institute human practices for the God-ordained worship and work. The church departed from the faith and went into a dark period in which the beauty of Jesus and His plan was no longer seen. As centuries came many valiant men arose in efforts to reform the church of that day. Most of their efforts resulted in the formation of human denominations.

It was not until the nineteenth century that we see genuine efforts to restore the original plan and purpose of God for His church. Godly men determined to “speak where the Bible speaks and to be silent where the Bible is silent” advocated a return to the NT pattern of doctrine, worship, work and organization. They recognized Jesus as the only head of the church (Eph. 1:22-23) and the Bible as truly the word of God (1 Thess. 2:13) and therefore, the only guide in religious matters. The result was that thousands of people obeyed the simple plan of salvation and the kingdom was spreading across this nation like a blazing prairie fire.

Even more tragic than the hideous civil war of the United States was the division that came in the ranks of the churches of Christ. Instead of brethren marching arm in arm in the mighty conflict against sin, swords were turned on one another as a result of the innovations that crept into the church. I think that A. W. Fortune in *The Disciples in Kentucky* summed up the causes of the division as well as anyone could. He wrote:

There were two different interpretations of the church which inevitably came into conflict. There were those who believed the church should move on with the world and adapt the spirit of the New Testament to conditions that were ever changing. They held that, when not forbidden by the New Testament, they were free to adapt their program to changing needs. On the other hand, there were those who believed the pattern of the church was fixed for all time, and the fact that certain things were not sanctioned was sufficient ground for rejecting them. The men on both sides were equally honest, but they had a different approach to these issues that were raised. (pp. 364-365)

He further stated:

The controversies through which the Disciples have passed from the beginning to the present time have been the result of two different interpretations of their mission. There have been those who believed it is the spirit of the New Testament Church that should be restored, and in our method of working the church must adapt itself to changing conditions. There have been those who regarded the New Testament Church as a fixed pattern for all time, and our business is to hold rigidly to that pattern regardless of consequences. Because of these two attitudes conflicts were inevitable. (p. 383)

We should do well to ask, were our brethren in error who believed that the pattern of the church was fixed for all time, and the fact that certain things were not sanctioned was sufficient ground for rejecting them? Were they right in their contention that it is our business to hold rigidly to that pattern regardless of the consequences? Or were those who formed the Disciples movement correct in their advocacy that we adapt the spirit of the New Testament to conditions that are ever changing? Were they right in saying that it was the spirit of the New Testament church that should be restored and in our method of working the church must adapt itself to conditions that are ever changing? Which of these attitudes was really responsible for the division that took place? Do we see both of these attitudes in the churches of Christ today?

After the division had taken place, the churches of Christ were often left without buildings to meet in. Virtually, they had to begin again. But the brethren believed implicitly in the power of the gospel and they preached that gospel with fervor. The churches grew as a result of that gospel preaching. In 1906 the government reported 2,649 congregations with 159,658 members. By 1926 there were 6,226 churches with 433,714 members. By the 1950's churches of Christ were the fastest growing religious body in America. (The 1984 census reported over 13,000 congregations.) But once again the ominous clouds of division loomed on the horizon. Once again, there were two differing attitudes toward authority and the application thereof. It becomes absolutely compulsory that we look once again at Bible teaching concerning authority and to the proper application of it to our practices. How important is it for us to have Bible authority for all that do? When we ask for Bible authority, is it "pattern theology"? Let us address ourselves to this issue.

I. Authority Must Begin With God

A. 1 Cor. 2:9-13.

1. God's will for our lives is in the mind of God. It has not by any natural means come into the mind of man. Man did not think of it; man did not originate it.

2. The only way we can know the mind of God -- what God thinks -- about any subject is by a divine revelation. The Holy Spirit reveals what is the mind of God on any subject.

a. How could I know how God feels about baptism without a divine revelation?

b. How could I know how God feels about the worship He desires unless He reveals it?

c. How could I know how God feels about the work and organization of the church unless He reveals it?

3. Therefore, in order that man may know God's mind, God has revealed what He wants us to know by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit through His apostles prophets (Eph. 3:3-5). This has been revealed in "words taught by the Spirit" (vs. 13). By verbal inspiration, God has made known His will for us. Without that revelation I could know nothing of what God wants His people to do in serving Him. I cannot reason that "surely God wouldn't care if we did this."

B. What we have observed in 1 Cor. 2:9-13 is in complete harmony with John 16:12-13.

1. Jesus had not taught the apostles everything that was in His new covenant. Even if He had done so, they would not remember it all.

2. So He promised to send them the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth. Thus, what Jesus taught plus what was revealed to the apostles would constitute "all truth" -- the all sufficient message for our spiritual guidance. They wrote by divine guidance what was revealed and we

have “all truth” in the pages of the New Testament. We can say with all confidence that if something is not in the New Testament, it is not a part of the “all truth” or “all things that pertain to life and godliness” or that which “completely furnishes us unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Unless something is revealed in the New Testament, then it is not a “good work” for the church to engage in.

C. These passages help us to understand Matt. 7:21-23. Jesus tells us that in order for us to go to Heaven, we must “do the will of our Father who is in Heaven.” Those people who considered themselves servants of Jesus will be ghastly disappointed on the judgment day when they are sent away into hell. When they argue that they had done many wonderful works in the name of Jesus, they only hear Him say, “Depart from me...”

1. I suggest to you that this becomes a very serious matter to each of us. How tragic to labor all of our lives in that which we believed was pleasing to Jesus and yet go to hell. There is no practice so humanly precious that is of greater value than our souls! However dear these “many wonderful works” may seem to us, unless they are in “the will of God,” we cannot, we dare not, practice them! Brother, we cannot just apply these points to denominational people! We must apply them to ourselves as well. We sometimes think that only the denominations are subject to religious error!

2. Therefore, we need to carefully examine our every practice to make sure that it is in “the mind of God” or “the will of God” or in “all truth.” The only way to make sure of such is to be able to read it in the Bible.

II. The “Author” of Bible Authority

A. We cannot talk about “authority” without talking about “author” from which our word “authority” comes. The real question concerning religious practice is, “Who is the author of the practice?”

B. The prime authority is God (1 Cor. 15:27). He has the right to command and to enforce obedience. When He gave the ten commandment Law in Exodus 20, He began by saying, “I am Jehovah your God.” That showed His right to command! That showed His authority! Observe vs. 5: “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, Jehovah your God, am a jealous God...” No man could rebel against His authority without dire consequences (vs. 5).

1. This principle is seen over and over again in the Old Testament.

a. The man who violated Sabbath law was stoned to death (Num. 15:35-36).

b. Nadab and Abihu were destroyed because they brought strange fire.

c. Uzzah perished because of His violation of God’s law.

2. Further, we must observe that the laws of a dispensation are in effect throughout the dispensation. We see this when after several hundred years, Ezra and Nehemiah brought the Israelites back to the law that had been given on Sinai (Neh. 9:13ff). Then when Jesus came on the scene, He emphatically told the people to do what Moses in the Law had commanded them. Now, this principle will help us when we come to consider the covenant under which we live that began on Pentecost. The laws of the New Covenant will last until the end of time and we absolutely must observe them.

C. Jehovah has now given all authority to His Son (Matt. 28:18).

1. Jesus has the right to command (*exousia*) and expect obedience (Luke 6:46). Thus, He stressed the necessity of our “hearing these sayings of mine” (Matt. 7:24). It was then that the people were astonished at His teaching because He was teaching them as one having authority (vs. 29).

2. Contrasted with Jesus, man has no right to command, for man is not the author of religious doctrine. This was clearly recognized by Jesus and by the religious leaders of His day. The chief priests asked Jesus, “By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?” (Matt. 21:23) They may not have been thinking about the authority of God, but they recognized the necessity of authority to act. Jesus responded, “I will ask you one thing too,

which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?" They refused to answer His question for obvious reasons. What He placed before them must constantly be in our minds. Is our practice from Heaven or from men? Is it authored by God or by man? This is a legitimate question. If it is authored by God, then it will be in the book that He authored. If a practice is not in the book, it is not authored by God and it is from men. We shall proceed to the application of this as we continue.

D. But another vital question is, what about the silence of the Scriptures? Or putting it another way, what is authorized by the silence of the Word? To be even more elementary, what is authored by silence? When there is no sound, there is no echo; and the echo that comes from the silence of the scriptures is thunderous in its own silence. Nothing whatsoever is authorized by the silence of the scriptures.

Probably the most common religious question asked is, "Why can't we?" The full form of the question is, "Why can't we do this thing not mentioned in the Bible?" "Why can't we baptized babies?" "Why can't we use instrumental music in worship?" The apparent motivation that prompts this question is the desire to have as broad a liberty as possible to do as many things religiously as we possibly can. If we are permitted to do those things which are not mentioned in the Bible, then we can do not only the few things which are mentioned in the Bible but also the thousands of things not mentioned in the Bible. There are two basic answers to this "why can't we" question: 1) "You can do anything not mentioned as long as it is not specifically forbidden in the Bible." 2) "You cannot do any unmentioned thing since one specific thing forbids the thing not specified." For example, the command to sing excludes the use of an instrument. The "why can't we" question is an appeal to the silence of the scriptures, and there is no authority based on silence.

(To illustrate: you can't quote an authority on something if that authority has never spoken on that something. For example, you could not quote C.S. Lewis on some matter regarding which he has never said or written anything. Jesus is our great authority. He is our Lord and Master. We cannot quote Him or His word as authority to act religiously if He has not spoken on the matter in question. Things that are outside of the Bible are things in the area of which God has not spoken; therefore, they are outside of the realm of the authority of the Bible. God's silence is really nothing at all -- that is, it is not a creative act of God. God authorizes by speech -- by His written word.

"The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). There are two classifications of things set forth in this passage: 1) the things that are secret and 2) the things that are revealed. The secret things belong to God and must remain with Him. Man is out of place in authorizing things God has not made known. Our business is involved in the things which are revealed. Silence is not revelation! What He has revealed is ours and we need to diligently study what is revealed and be guided by it. We have no revelation by silence!

Silence is not above speech. Silence is not equal to speech. Silence is not even under speech except all the way to the bottom at zero, for it is nothing. If your religious practices are in the realm of silence, there are two very significant problems: 1) the nonpermissiveness of silence verses the permissiveness of speech; 2) the worthlessness of silence verses the pricelessness of speech. We might further observe that there are only two possible reasons for God's leaving anything out of the Bible: intentional omissions or inadvertent omissions. If God deliberately left something out, by what authority do you dare to put it in? One would hardly want this alternative. The only is certainly no better. To say that God inadvertently left some things out of His word would charge Him with being incompetent -- He didn't know what He was doing. But the God of the Bible is the Almighty! He won't let even one thing in that He doesn't want in, nor will He leave a thing out that He wants in. If a thing isn't in the Bible, then we must know that God left it out for good, divine reasons, and that we must not meddle with things left out of the Bible. Our

options form and either/or situation. We must either show that our practices are in the Bible, i.e., authorized by what is said or admit that those that aren't are not there and give them up.)* (Some of these thoughts from an outline by Almon Williams) To say, "The Bible does not forbid it" is sectarianism gone to seed! The Bible authorizes by what it says not by what it does not say. In fact, there can be no faith without there being the spoken or written word (Rom. 10:17). We cannot believe that something is from God unless God has authored it! We cannot speak religiously unless there is faith (1 Pet. 4:11). As it is written, "I believed, therefore I spoke" (2 Cor. 4:13). One cannot truly say, "I believe in counting beads in worship" since there is no word of God to that effect. Since the New Testament does not authorize instrumental music, one cannot truly say, "I believe in using instrumental music in worship." "I believed, therefore I spoke."

1. But brethren have often turned to the silence of the Bible to seek to justify their practices. In the Otey-Briney Debate, brother Briney said in defense of the missionary society:

"I allege that where the Scriptures require this to be done, and are silent, in regard to the method by which it is to be done, this silence authorizes these men, whether they be many or few, whether it be one congregation or a hundred congregations, to meet in the name of the Master, and under the commandment to go, inaugurate such a work and carry it on; and whenever you have that, you have a missionary society" (p. 169).

Brother Pendleton in defending the society said: "You say, 'Your Missionary Society is not scriptural' -- and you mean by this, that there is no special precept in the Scriptures commanding it. We concede this without a moment's hesitation. There is none; but what do you make of it? Is everything which is not scriptural therefore wrong?" (W.K. Pendleton as quoted by Earl West, *Search for the Ancient Order*, Vol. II, p. 50)

Brother Otey responded to brother Briney: "He says that the 'silence of the Scriptures authorizes these societies.' ... that these societies are 'authorized by the silence of the Scriptures.' It (the proposition) says that these organizations are 'authorized in the New Testament Scriptures.' How is he going to prove it? By silence? We can prove anything by silence, so far as that is concerned, that is not specifically mentioned in the New Testament." (p. 204)

2. But what is wrong with the appeal to silence? I believe that we should give an answer to this vital question. The writer of Hebrews illustrates this point vividly. In Heb. 1:5, he asks, "For to which of the angels did He ever say, 'Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee?'" The silence of God on this subject proved that no angel could occupy the position of being the Son. He proved it by showing that there is silence concerning the matter. God never authorizes by silence!

3. The Hebrew writer continues in 7:14: "For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests." His argument was that Jesus could not be a priest on earth because He was of the tribe of Judah. And there is silence concerning the priesthood of those from Judah. There was no OT authorization for one from Judah serving as priest. The silence of the scriptures not only did not authorize it, but did not allow it.

4. Another salient point along this line is seen in Acts 15:24 in regard to the circumcision of the Gentiles: "Forasmuch as we have heard that certain who went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls; to whom we gave no such commandment..." The absence of apostolic commandment meant that it was wrong for these teachers to teach what they did. The fact of silence authorized nothing and they were in error in presuming to teach something on which the apostles had not taught. So likewise today! We dare not teach or practice anything that is not taught in the Scriptures. Absolutely nothing is taught by silence. Nothing is authorized by the silence of the Scriptures!

F. Those under this age must follow the authority of Jesus. Brother Wayne Jackson wrote it so well:

“In the New Testament, scores of passages demand adherence to the divine pattern.

Consider the following:

1. The early church is commended for ‘continuing steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine,’ etc. (Acts 2:42); moreover, as a consequence of such, ‘the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul’ (Acts 4:32). These passages suggest a unity of practice in religion.

2. Paul reminded the brethren in Rome that they had been made ‘free from sin’ due to the fact that they had been obedient to a certain ‘form (pattern) of teaching’ (Rom. 6:17-18). That is ‘pattern theology.’

3. The saints in Rome were admonished to ‘mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them’ (Rom. 16:17). If there is no set pattern of NT doctrine, how could one ever be required to ‘turn away from’ those who do not practice it?

4. The inspired Paul taught those at Corinth that they were not to go ‘beyond the things which are written’ (1 Cor. 4:6 ASV). This clearly shows that spiritual activity is circumscribed by the Word.

5. To the brethren at Thessalonica and also to Timothy, Paul warned of a ‘falling away,’ indeed, a ‘departure from the faith’ (2 Thess. 2:3; 1 Tim. 4:1ff; 2 Tim. 4:1ff). The expression ‘the faith’ denotes the body of doctrine proclaimed by inspired teachers (cf. Gal. 1:23; Jude 3). If the church has the option of continually modifying biblical truth, how could one ever fall away from the faith?

6. The apostle informed Timothy that there is a ‘pattern of sound words’ (2 Tim. 1:13), and the young evangelist was to abide in the things he had learned from Paul (2 Tim. 3:14). Timothy was to commit that same to other faithful brethren (2 Tim. 2:2), and charge men not to teach a ‘different doctrine’ (1 Tim. 1:13). Paul states that those who digress from the ‘sound words’ are merely ‘puffed up, knowing nothing’ (1 Tim. 6:3, 4).

7. The writer of Hebrews affirms that Moses, in constructing the tabernacle, was warned by God that he must ‘make all things according to the pattern,’ was showed to him at Horeb (Heb. 8:5). Do we, as recipients of the ‘better covenant’ (Heb. 7:22; 8:6), have a lesser responsibility as we minister to God in his church, of which the tabernacle was but a type (cf. Heb. 9:1-10)? It is unbelievable that anyone would even suggest such!

8. John plainly declares that those who go beyond the ‘doctrine of Christ’ have no fellowship with God (2 Jn. 9).

In view of the foregoing passages (and a host of others), the notion of an ‘evolutionary church,’ a sort of plastic Christianity, is demonstrated to be totally false. The plea for a restoration of first century religion is valid. It is thoroughly biblical, and those who repudiate it have sorely drifted from the Holy Scriptures.” (Wayne Jackson, *Christian Courier*, May, 1986)

Brother Jackson and I may differ on some applications of authority, but we are totally agreed on the points just quoted, and I appreciate what he had to say.

III. On Authority and Expediency

A. We have, I believe, sustained the fact that everything authorized for God’s church is in the N.T. We must have book, chapter and verse for everything we do religiously. Problems, however, arise in the realm of expediency -- that is, in carrying out God’s orders in ways that are decently and in order and without violating God’s order.

1. God’s teaching, whether to the individual or to the congregation, authorizes everything that is necessary to obedience to the command. For example, we realize that the command to baptize authorizes water in which to baptize. The command to assemble authorizes a place of assembly. The command to sing authorizes the words that we sing.

2. May I suggest that there is no such thing as a “law of expediency.” There are expedients because there is law. Where there is no law, there can be no expedients.

a. The Bible is not “silent” regarding the words of a song -- it authorizes them written in a book or projected on a screen. The expedient is authorized by a Bible command.

b. The Bible is not “silent” regarding a place of assembly -- it authorizes a place to assemble by the command to assemble and by the fact that early Christians assembled in “places.”

c. The Bible is not “silent” regarding a congregation’s “means” of giving aid to the saints in need. There are adequate examples of this in the practice of the early church. It is silent concerning another organization’s receiving contributions from churches to do this work for the churches.

3. Thus, general authority includes the ways and means of obeying the command (understanding that these ways and means do not violate God’s order).

a. We must take care lest we violate an order of God in our claim that something is expedient. Beyond doubt, David thought that his bringing the ark on a new cart pulled by oxen was an expedient of carrying it. After all, other parts of the tabernacle were carried on wagons (Num. 7:3-8). But David sinned by putting the ark on the wagon. The reason is stated in Num. 7:9: God gave no wagons to the sons of Kohath because theirs was the service of bearing on their shoulders. Again, there was an absence of authority for wagons. They could not reason that it was expedient.

b. We cannot use the idea of expediency in any area that violates an order of God. For example, we might reason that it is expedient in our society today for women to preach or lead in public prayer. They might be quite effective in doing so. Yet, such would violate an established order of God as stated in 1 Tim. 2:8-12.

c. Instruments of music cannot be classified as an expedient because they are not a part of God’s order and are not in any way necessary to our obeying the command to sing. They are an additional kind of music and are without New Testament authorization. The kind of music God authorized is singing. Words from a book or on a projector expedite our obedience to God’s command and are not another kind of music. Instrumental music is another kind. It is without authorization and cannot be expedient.

d. The local church is a body of people that is authorized to support gospel preachers (Phil. 4:15-16). It might be expedient for a messenger to deliver this money in person (2 Cor. 11:9) or for it to be delivered by the mail service. There is no violation of the oversight of elders in so doing. But the missionary society is not authorized in the N.T. and is not in any way necessary to our obeying the command to take the gospel to the world. I most emphatically believe that men like David Lipscomb and a host of others were Biblically right in their opposition to the missionary society.

e. Benevolent societies among us cannot be classified as expedients since there is no N.T. authorization for the church to donate money to another organization. Benevolent societies are not authorized and are not necessary to our obeying the command to give aid to saints in distress. The church uses expedients when it provides a house or the care necessary for its needy saints such as the widows of 1 Tim. 5:16. Donating money to another organization is not an expedient. That organization must use expedients itself such as a house or the care necessary for those put in its charge.

B. The truth is that before anything can be expedient, it must not in any way violate God’s order. It must be in the realm of that which is authored by God. Therefore, anything that the church does must be authorized (authored) by the Lord in the pages of the New Testament. Will any of our brothers disagree with this?

IV. Application

Brethren, we must get down to the brass tacks of application of Bible authority. We are here today because we recognize that there are differences between us on some vital issues. The way for us to be united is for us to discuss and resolve these differences. The only way we can is by the application of Bible authority to our practices. Now we all recognize each other as brethren, and we truly do love one another. But however great our love may be, that alone does not solve the problems any more than love alone will solve problems that may arise between husband and wife. The problems have to be addressed.

A. We must allow to N.T. to teach us what the work or function of the church is. Are we not agreed that the church has an obligation to carry the gospel to those lost in sin? Are we not agreed that the church has a responsibility in edifying its members? Are we not agreed that the church has a responsibility to aid saints in distress?

However, many congregations have gotten involved in providing recreational facilities for their members, their children and others. But can the church scripturally provide the recreational activities of its members and of the community? Can we spend the money from the church treasury for facilities for recreation? I am sure that we would agree that money collected by the church can only be used for that which is its work. A church building is but an extension of the money given into the treasury of the church. Thus, it is a legitimate question to ask, What did God assign the church to do?

B. Can we choose for the church to function in other areas than set forth in the N.T.?
Remember the principle: from Heaven or from men!

1. The early church sang -- can we choose to play? Is such from God? or is it authored by men?

2. The early church had the Lord's supper on Sunday. Can we choose another organization to do this work and receive donations from the church? We are not talking about the means such as a place or food. We are talking about the organization that provides the means. Is a human organization authored by God or by men?

C. Is there a way by which we can be united and yet do all the work effectively, as well as scripturally? If I didn't think we could, I wouldn't be here.

1. First, let's look at supporting gospel preachers throughout the world. This is something in which each one of us is interested. We want to see the world taken for Christ! Can such be done without forming a missionary society -- a separate organization from the church? Yes, it can be done. Can such be done without our forming a sponsoring church kind of arrangement through which churches funnel their funds? Yes, it can be done. How? Let us look to the Scriptures for the answer since there is no other place for us to get a proper answer.

a. Did N.T. churches support gospel preachers? Yes, 2 Cor. 11:8-9; Phil. 4:15-16.

b. How did they do so? They sent support to the preacher! (Same verses)

c. Will any brother deny that it is scriptural (authorized by the scriptures) to send support directly to the preacher? When brother W.W. Otey debated J.B. Briney on the missionary society issue, they discussed this issue. Briney defended the society by saying:

“Now, is there any objection to those small congregations cooperating with each other? I ask my friend how small congregations that are not able to send a missionary each are to cooperate? How are they to take part in this work? Now, the society provides for that” (Otey-Briney Debate, p. 199).

Brother Otey replied:

“How can a church that can give but ten dollars work without working through a society?” “Now, my friends, we are going to tell you exactly what the Word of the Lord says about it. We are going to turn to Paul's letter to the church at Philippi ... Phil. 4:15-16 ... Now, who sent it? Was it some great missionary society or organization? Oh, no, but the church in Philippi, sent directly to Paul, the man in the field. Could the weak church now do that? That church did it.” (p. 280)

d. The same answer can be given today. Brethren, we believe whole heartedly in congregational cooperation. The church in Cayucos where I preach helps currently in the support of eight gospel preachers other than myself. Other churches are also helping in the support of some of these preachers. We send directly to the preacher. This is being done throughout the world. Will it get the job done? Yes. Is it scriptural? Yes. Can we unite on this? My answer is yes. Can we unite on a missionary society? No. Can we unite on a sponsoring church arrangement? Not unless we see God's authorizing such a practice in His word. Brethren, we want to do everything that God has authorized us to do.

2. Can we take care of all needy saints without forming a human institution to do it? Yes. The local church can provide the means in caring for the needy saints. Such was done in Acts 6. If the care was provided by a human organization, it would still have to provide the means of such care. The question is which organization shall provide the means? We would do well to ask, "Why were human institutions called into existence in the first place?" Was it because we read of such in the Word? Or was it because men decided such? Are they authored by God or by men?

a. In the Otey-Briney debate Briney made an appeal to prejudice as he sought to defend the societies in their care of aged preachers and little children by speaking of "...the dear little orphans, under the fostering care of these insitutions, and there because the hearts of good people have moved them to make an arrangement like this..." (pp. 272-273).

b. Otey replied: "I am not denying that it is right to care for the aged preachers. That is not the question. It is not what you do, but the organization or channels through which it is done ... My opponent's position is that God has authorized people to organize such institutions as these societies through which to do it. That is the issue between us." (p. 257).

c. "1 Tim. 5:9. What institution or organization is in view here? The one body of Christ, the church." (p. 274)

d. We can respond exactly as brother Otey did. Let the church do its own work without donating money to a human institution.

3. Whenever a work or obligation is one that belongs to individual Christians rather than the congregation then let individuals do it in whatever way they see fit without infringing upon the work of the congregation. Paul set forth this principle in 1 Tim. 5:16. "Let not the church be charged" in matters that belong to the individual.

a. If the brethren want to build a college in which they teach Bible classes along with arts and science, let them do so. But it is not the function of the church and we need to keep the church out of the college business.

b. If the brethren want to get involved in recreational activities for themselves, their children, or others, let them do so as individuals, but keep the church out of the recreation business.

4. The church can do its own work of preaching, edifying, maintaining worship, and aid to saints in distress. We can spread the gospel to the whole world. We can be united, but only if we seek for and follow the authority of the scriptures in all things.

Conclusion: The church of our Lord can spread like wildfire without societies, machinery, or central headquarters. Brethren, we have a message; it is the greatest in all the world and fills the greatest need of the world. Let us diligently work to lay aside all our differences and join arm in arm in the greatest conflict that this world has ever known. Let us march shoulder to shoulder fired with the zeal of discoverers. Let us preach God's message with love for one another and for our fellow man and with a sincere desire to "speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent." Our hearts can beat in spiritual unison. Let us "Back! Back over the commandments and doctrines of men! Back to the worship ordained by God! Back to the truth in its original power and simplicity! Forward — back to Jerusalem!"