

“LIKE ALL THE NATIONS....”

Please turn with me to 1 Samuel 8:6,19,20 NKJV 6 But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, **"Give us a king to judge us."** So Samuel prayed to the LORD... 19 Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, "No, but we will have a king over us, 20 **that we also may be like all the nations,** and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."

We know that this was a rejection of God being their king, and the results were not as they had hoped. But it seems that in every generation of the Lord's People, there is the recurring cry for us to **"be like all the churches round about us."**

One of the motivating forces to introduce the orphan homes and colleges into the church budget was the fact that the denominations were deep into the practice before them. On and on it goes to the "Joy Bus Ministry." Long after the denominations gave it up, many churches of Christ continued to use it. So many innovations have reared their ugly heads among the denominations, and year after year, attempts are made to introduce them into the Lord's church.

When someone questions them, invariably someone is heard to say: **"Something is not wrong just because the denominations are doing it."** While this is TRUE, we have to be careful when we realize that **the reason why they ARE denominations is that they have no real respect for Biblical authority!**

In 1965, brother **Roy Cogdill** wrote an article that was published in a gospel paper called **"Denominationalizing the Church."** He concluded the article with these words: **"And then how long have the churches of Christ been putting on "campaigns for Christ, " "youth forums," "youth camps," and "youth rallies"? How many years have "retreats" and "workshops" and "youth revivals" and "women's meetings" been around? "Youth fellowship" gatherings and "fellowship dinners" are newcomers on the scene also. These all have accompanied other departures that have marked the inter-marriage of many of the churches with "spiritual Ashdod" and characterize a generation of spiritual offspring that has lost its identity as the children of God. Rather than "glorying" in such things, we should rather be "mourning" because of defiling and corrupting of the Lord's church."** And so it goes, we continue to see innovations

making their way in the lives of Christians and the work of the church.

Over the past few years, there seems to be a blossoming of something that has been done in the denominational world for many years. That is, the **Men's and Women's Retreats**. Since I believe that God has given us "all things that pertain to life and Godliness" (2 Peter 1:3) in His word, I searched the Scriptures; and try as I might, I could not find out how to conduct a retreat. So, I went ONLINE and here is what I found: "The meaning of a spiritual retreat can be different for different religious communities. Spiritual Retreats are an integral part of many Buddhist, Christian and Sufi (Islamic) communities. In Buddhism, retreats are seen by some as integral for reconnection to one's self. **Retreats are also popular in Christian churches, and were established in today's form by St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), in his Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius was later to be made patron saint of spiritual retreats by Pope Pius XI in 1922.** Many Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox Christians partake in and organize spiritual retreats each year." Catholic Encyclopedia says: "With a view to organizing and facilitating retreats for women, there were formed, particularly in Brittany, congregations of Ladies of the Retreat which are still in existence... The principal reason of the success of these retreats, called cloistered to distinguish them from the parochial retreats open to all, is their very necessity. In the fever and agitation of modern life, the need of meditation and spiritual repose impresses itself on Christian souls who desire to reflect on their eternal destiny, and direct their life in this world towards God."

Well, this is quite revealing. So-called St. Ignatius of Loyola gets the credit for being the patron saint of spiritual retreats! Now that helps to understand the origin of this practice. And this is the only way we can learn what they are all about.

Now, what do we find going on today?

The 2011 Southern California Women's Retreat is advertised in this flyer. Turning to the **Inside, we find the location and the Itinerary**. You will note here that they have a "7pm Evening Session" scheduled on Friday. Then on Saturday, "10:00 Sessions," "4:00 Closing" and "7:00 - 8:30 Evening Activity." Now, **what do you suppose these "Sessions" and "Activities" are all about?** Guess we are left to

wonder. But, in the center of this page, we learn that **“Our goal for this weekend is that God will be glorified and our sisters will be edified.”** Now, this would lead us to believe that something spiritual was planned for this affair. But, Under Pricing, we note that the amount charged includes “all sessions and activities, etc.” Now, **are we to conclude that the Edification and Glorifying of God comes at a price? By what authority?**

Going **BACK to the outside of the flyer**, we find that money is raised by a Retreat Scholarship Auction, but they will “gladly accept” “plain old donations.” This, coupled with the statement on the inside, “The Southern California Women’s Retreat is under contractual obligation,” makes us wonder if they are a non-profit corporation, or just **how are they handling and accounting for the funds they collect? Again, by what authority?**

But there is another issue that arises under **“Saturday Evening Option.”** This says that the second night option, “will allow time to fellowship with your sisters in Christ in a less structured setting.” Now, what does the Bible say about Fellowship? Acts 2:42 NKJV 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Here “fellowship” is clearly used in the setting of spiritual activities among disciples of Christ. Throughout the New Testament, “fellowship” is never used to describe social or secular activities. BUT - under the “time to fellowship with your sisters” in “a less structured setting” what do we find? **“You may choose to use the extra time to hang out with friends, shop, go to a movie, read, SWIM, relax in your room, catch up on sleep, or anything your heart desires.”** Does this mean that the people who are coordinating this **“Retreat”** believe that fellowship is had in **“shopping?”** Going to a movie? Reading? Swimming in a public pool where people are immodestly attired? This poses all kinds of problems.

Invariably the reply we hear when raising concerns and objections to Women's Retreats is, **“well, we aren't the church”**... While it is true “they aren't the church”, that begs the question. No one said they are, but **that doesn't mean the activity is free from Scriptural scrutiny** (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 NKJV 21 Test all things; hold fast what

is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil.)

The flyer says, **"Our goal for this weekend is that God will be glorified and our sisters will be edified."** Do they know that edification comes through the nourishment of God's word and not through social activities (Acts 20:32)? If they do, then we may assume they will have Bible classes, etc. in these sessions. (But, **we don't know what will be taught in the classes – and neither does anyone attending the event – the flyer doesn't say!**) If they do not understand the Biblical teaching on edification, then they are advancing the notion that social gatherings constitute spiritual edification. Either way, serious problems.

Another point that bears consideration is the fact that **THERE IS NO OVERSIGHT OF SUCH ACTIVITIES.** True, it is not a work of any congregation, but it is an assembly for the purpose of being "edified" which means that they will be teaching something that is of a spiritual nature. **God's order, from the beginning,** is expressed in 1 Corinthians 11:3 "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." **There is a reason given for this in 1 Timothy 2:14** "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression." With **no oversight, this is an open invitation for Satan to slip in some of his teaching.** Do elders fail to give good oversight in some matters? Most assuredly! But this does not negate the fact that God gave the church Elders to oversee and look out for the flock of God. **Going outside their oversight to conduct "edification" and to have "fellowship" is asking for disaster.**

I am concerned when **women become "preachers" to audiences of women.** We see this all the time in the denominational world. But it concerns me, for example, when one lady at a recent event in Texas spoke on **"A Leader's Walk" from 1 Thessalonians.** **What leadership role has a woman been given by the Lord?** Indeed, she is to "manage" the household (1 Timothy 5:14) and to teach younger women and children (Titus 2:3-5). All the while, she is to be obedient to her own husband, indicating she is under his headship (Titus 2:5 (above); Ephesians 5:23). God has established man as the head of woman, not the other way around (1 Corinthians

11:3). So again, **I wonder why women are assuming leadership roles among themselves to do the things God has assigned men to do: Preaching the gospel, leading singing and leading prayers in a worship assembly – yet, without men? Why then, the need for Women’s Retreats? What neglected need do they fulfill? Could it be a "need" to be more involved than the Scriptures allow in a Setting (congregational or otherwise) where men are present?** After all, it is only when men are absent that women can take an active leadership role in Bible study, prayer and teaching. **Should we conclude there is a buried desire to lead that is at the root of these gatherings?** It must be, since leadership is being practiced and "preached" at these gatherings – all without the oversight of men.

The apostle Paul **warned about women usurping authority over men** in 1 Timothy 2:11-12, and he explains why in the next verses: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression" (1 Timothy 2:13-14).

Another problem that inheres in such events as this is that **women from a number of congregations are thrown together in a social/spiritual situation without regard for soundness in the Faith.** In the case of the Southern California Women’s Retreat, the women who are on the committee for this retreat are from a congregation where the truth on Divorce and Remarriage is not welcome. In 2000, this church was split when two of the five elders wanted to accept into membership a couple living in adultery. Eventually, both preachers and three elders left, along with a great number of the members. This is not a rumor, it is fact verified by those who were there. Now, **why would women who are sound in the faith want to have this kind of association with those who are in fellowship with adulterers and adulteresses?** You can be assured that they will not be given a platform to address the truth on the matter. **Won’t their participation indicate some level of acceptance toward those who are in fellowship with sin?** This flies up in the face of plain Biblical teaching. Ephesians 5:11 NKJV 11 And **have no fellowship** with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.” There can be no doubt that adultery is numbered as one of the unfruitful works of darkness - Galatians 5:19-21 NKJV 19 Now the

works of the flesh are evident, which are: **adultery**, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that **those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**” Throwing Christians from various congregations together, without regard for whether they are doctrinally sound or not, is precisely what these retreats are all about. This is why the only ones who can be found online defending retreats among those who claim to be connected with the ‘churches of Christ’ are two men who are teaching Open Fellowship with the Christian Church, as well as denominations. (Al Maxey & W. Carl Ketcherside) When **women involved in these retreats partake of the “I’m Ok and You’re OK” attitude** that pervades such activities, they tend to take that home with them. Then we **start hearing** things like **“We need to be cautious about making judgments of others, simply based on the fact that it might be something different from what we are accustomed to. AND “We need to be careful not to think we are the only ones doing right.”** "Thinking we are the only ones doing right" is not the issue here. **Knowing what is right and doing it is the issue. Having fellowship with people who are in doctrinal error involves you in their error - like it or not** (2 John 9-11 NKJV 9 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. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; 11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.). When you put yourself in such an environment, it says to them that you think they are practicing the truth, and that you endorse them as faithful sisters in Christ. The evidence proves they are not. **With such thinking, it isn’t long until sound gospel preaching will no longer be welcome in their home congregations.** As brother Cogdill warned some 36 years ago, **such things “have accompanied other departures that have marked the inter-marriage of many of the churches with "spiritual Ashdod" and characterize a generation of spiritual offspring that has lost its identity as the children of God. Rather than "glorying" in such things, we**

should rather be "mourning" because of defiling and corrupting of the Lord's church."

NO! We do NOT want to be like the denominations round about us! We have a profound reverence for Divine Authority in all we say and do. (Colossians 3:17) They do not! That is the very reason why they ARE denominations.

There is much more that could be said about endeavors such as this, but this should suffice to cause us to keep our eyes wide open, and ears attuned to God's Word. And **not to let ourselves be caught up in the excitement of doing something different, simply because others are doing it. Remember:** Matthew 7:13-14 NKJV 13 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Matthew 7:21-23 NKJV 21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'