

## Churches of Christ 73rd Annual National Lectureship

### “A Return to Atlanta” June 2-8, 2017

Welcome once again to the city of Atlanta, Georgia, and to the Churches of Christ National Lectureship. The subject matter for this year is focused upon the motif “This Means War: Effective Strategies for Spiritual Warfare” taken from Ephesians 6:10-13.

A primary objective of this convocation is to enlighten the minds of every believer regarding the nature of our adversary whom the apostle Paul identifies as the “devil.”

Hopefully, this series of studies will educate the body of Christ to the various malicious methodologies of Satan that are designed to divide the House of God, devour the Christian faith, and distort the Word of God.

Our intention is to equip the saints for spiritual warfare by solidifying them in the “faith once delivered” and offer effective strategies that will impact a world that has thus become blinded from the light of the glorious gospel of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4).

Furthermore, our expectations for this Lectureship are for it to be an environment of fellowship that will foster connection and commonality. In an effort to achieve this goal, several significant events have been planned that will allow Christians to connect socially and spiritually.

Just as it was in the first century, the visible kingdom of Christ is being acutely assailed by the machinations of men who have ascribed to unethical and unscriptural dubious practices.

This pernicious conduct and behavior often stems from the people of God who

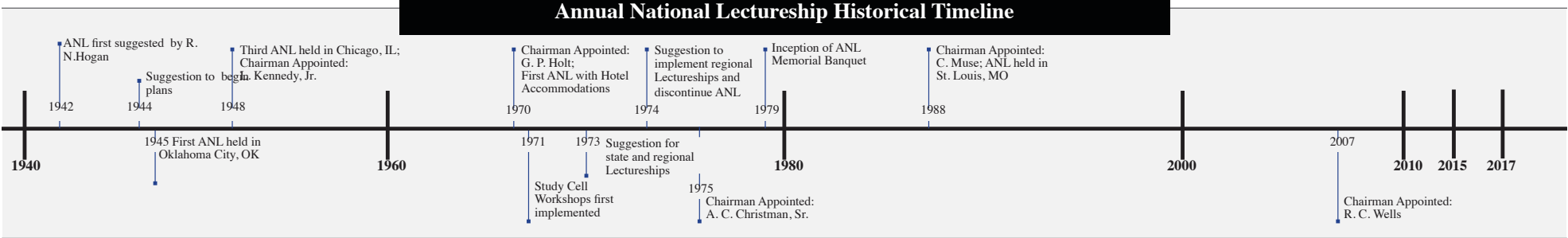
seek to draw many away from the truth. Therefore, we extend an invitation for you to be challenged in every aspect of your walk with the Lord as we explore biblical truths and enjoy Christian camaraderie.

**Because of Calvary,  
The Advisory Committee  
Dr. R. C. Wells**

**PLEASE NOTE:**  
We are asking for your prayers on behalf of Dr. R. C. Wells, Chairman of the National Lectureship Advisory. According to the information we have received, his health continues to improve.



**Dr. R. C. Wells**  
Advisory Committee Chairman  
Churches of Christ  
Annual National Lectureship



“One Lord... One Faith... One Baptism”

## Beware of Dangerous and Deceptive Wolves from Within

Undoubtedly the greatest danger and most significant threat facing the visible kingdom today, actually emanates from false teachers within the body of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ reminded His disciples to “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matt. 7:15). The “Prince of Peace” also stipulated “And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray” (Matt. 24:11).

When the eminent apostle Paul addressed the elders of Ephesus, he declared unabashedly and uncompromisingly “For I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:29, 30). In contemporary language, both Jesus and Paul served notice that the time will come when certain individuals “within the fellowship” will disguise themselves in the regalia of pretentiousness alleging to be something they are not.

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*Notwithstanding, the Lord’s Church today as it was in the first century has become acutely assailed by wolves who “masquerade” in both sheep’s and shepherds’ clothing claiming to function in the name of the Scripture.*

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Furthermore, in his second letter to Timothy, Paul the apostle glances into the future and he warns the young preacher about the devastating effects of dishonest and deceitful purveyors of duplicitous doctrine. He says “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will

accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths” (II Tim. 4:3, 4).

We also hear this same warning from the apostle Peter. Notice what he predicts as it relates to this matter of importance: “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their licentiousness, and because of them the way of truth will be reviled” (II Pet. 2:1, 2).

Have you recognized the pattern in regard to the admonitions given by Jesus and His apostles? These precautionary warnings inform us that the greatest danger to sound doctrine and biblical leadership comes from wolves “within the fellowship” and not from outside.

It should be clearly understood and appreciated that the New Testament Church of contemporary times is not afflicted by political persecution. Neither is the Church of today subjected to overt and covert attacks of other religious denominations or affected by cultural pressure.

Notwithstanding, the Lord’s Church today as it was in the first century has become acutely assailed by wolves who “masquerade” in both sheep’s and shepherds’ clothing claiming to function in the name of the Scripture. These dishonorable and dangerous deceptions arise from among God’s people in an effort to draw away many from the truth.

Allow me to illustrate a dangerous and deceptive practice today in the African American Church of Christ relative to local Church government which is contrary to the New Testament Scripture. The Bible is clear about how the Church on earth should be organized and managed. First and foremost, Christ is the Head of the Church and He has supreme authority (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18). Second, the local Church is to be “autonomous” and free from “external authority” or “outside control.” While

the term “autonomy” is not mentioned in Scripture, the principle is undeniably expressed. “Autonomy” is defined as the power or right of “self-government.”

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*This writer is keenly interested in knowing when the Scripture in particular or the brotherhood in general appointed a “national arbitrator” to usurp the authority of the local Evangelist.*

*This is the most despicable, disturbing, unscriptural and unethical action ever ascribed to in the name of New Testament Church government*

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In writing on the concept of congregational autonomy, Robert L. McDonald has aptly stated: “When the word autonomy is used in reference to the Church of our Lord, it should be understood that each Church has the divine right to govern itself” (McDonald, 2005). The New Testament Church according to the Scripture has the right of “self-government” and “freedom” from the interference of any hierarchy of individuals or organizations (Titus 1:5).

Third, the local Church is to be governed by spiritual leadership consisting of evangelists and elders. The office of “deacon” is not administrative, neither is it authoritative and such is not implicitly or explicitly referred to in the New Testament. The office of “deacon” is derived from the term *diákonos* which means “one who executes the commands of another.” In the genitive case it means “attendant” or “waiter.” Although the qualifications of “deacons” are in many ways similar to those of elders (1 Tim. 3:8-13), their duties and responsibilities are not parallel.

There is no place in the Scripture where “deacons” are instructed to “feed the flock,” “oversee the flock,” “shepherd the flock,” or “equip the saints.” The New Testament ascertains the irrefutable truth that the function of



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Senior Minister  
Robbins Church of Christ

“deacons” is not to “rule over the local Church” or become spurious “enforcers for the Church.” Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit have unequivocally set forth those for “oversight” and “the edifying of the saints” (Acts 20:17, 28; Eph. 4:11, 12). On the contrary, “deacons” should be in every sense of the word “ministers of mercy” assisting those who are in need.

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*Therefore, be sober; be watchful and be aware of he who “disguises himself” and “masquerades” in the “unethical attire” of an alleged self-appointed “national arbitrator!”*

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Another dangerous and deceptive practice recently taking place “within the fellowship” of the African American Church of Christ is that of an alleged self-proclaimed “national arbitrator.” This writer is keenly interested in knowing when the Scripture in particular or the brotherhood in general appointed a “national arbitrator” to usurp the authority of the local Evangelist. This is the most despicable, disturbing, unscriptural and unethical

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action ever ascribed to in the name of New Testament Church government. In the absence of elders (not “deacons” who have no administrative biblical authority), if the local Church has an Evangelist who is duly recognized by the state wherein the congregation is incorporated as its President and Registered Agent, he thus becomes the “spiritual” and “legal” representative for the affairs of that congregation.

Whenever a person “outside” of the local congregation regardless as to who he “claims to be” or “disguises himself to be” orchestrates a “kangaroo court” and interferes in the affairs of a congregation without receiving an invitation from the Evangelist and/or elders (if the Church has an eldership), this person violates the “autonomy” of said congregation. The fundamental tenet of any arbitration process

mandates “mutual consent from both parties” unless it is “so ordered by a judge.” Conversely, a “lack of consent” from either party makes the arbitration process “legally non-binding.” Moreover, where in the Scripture

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*This type of malignant terrorism was not engineered by “Al-Qaeda” nor the “Islamic State of Iraq and Syria” (ISIS) or any cartel from the outside. This unscrupulous behavior exuded from those “within the fellowship” of the Church.*

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are “deacons” empowered to terminate the local Evangelist based upon the heinous advice of an alleged “national arbitrator” without consensus approval of the congregation?

For example, in the month of February 2017, it was revealed that an illegal, unscriptural and unethical “coup d’état” occurred at an African American Church of Christ in the state of Missouri. The incident involved the preacher of this congregation and one who allegedly purports himself as a “national arbitrator.”

The preacher did not seek mediation from this perpetrator and neither was the perpetrator “invited” by the preacher to provide conflict resolution. Yet, at the behest of the “deacons” and without consensus approval of the congregation, this ostensibly and alleged “national arbitrator” led a dubious meeting among a few malcontented parishioners and proposed to those present that the preacher should be “terminated immediately.”

For the record, this alleged “national arbitrator” who spearheaded a so-called “arbitration team” (which in reality consisted of only himself) also refers to himself as the “Resident Retired

Minister” of an African American Church of Christ in the state of Texas.

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Conjointly, a “threatening” email was sent to the preacher by the “deacons” stating that he would be “marked” and “withdrawn from” if he attempted to plant another congregation within the same geographical

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## "The Dream Lives On"

### African American Churches of Christ National Lectureship Serving the Brotherhood Since 1945



**G. P. Bowser**  
1874 – 1950



**R. N. Hogan**  
1902 – 1997



**J. S. Winston**  
1906 – 2001



**Levi Kennedy, Jr.**  
1899 – 1970



**G. E. Steward**  
1906 – 1979

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## Chicago Area Churches of Christ Acknowledges Their Passing

### Dr. Jules Hutton – Dr. Robert M. Woods – Dr. Nathaniel Dean

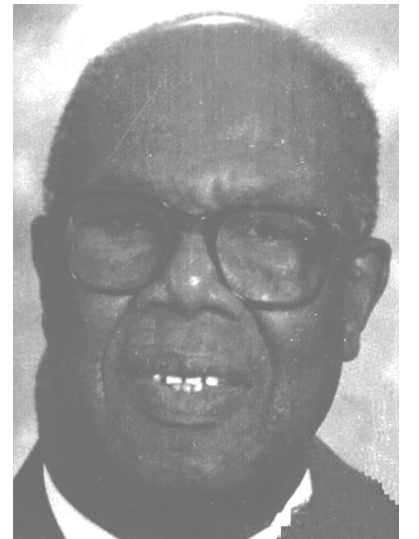
#### Dr. Jules Hutton

The churches of Christ in Chicago have experienced the transition of three distinguished Ministers during this past year. Funeral services were held on September 24, 2016, for the late Dr. Jules Hutton, Minister Emeritus of the Harvey Church of Christ in Harvey, Illinois. As a native of Bolivar County, Mississippi, Dr. Hutton was baptized in 1949 by the late A. J. Colston and began preaching in Clarksdale, Mississippi, in the year 1956.

Dr. Hutton along with his family relocated to Chicago, Illinois, and in 1959 he established a congregation which initially worshipped in his home. In 1965, the congregation was able to purchase a church building located at 15021 S. Page Avenue in Harvey, Illinois.

With the blessings of the Lord and continued numerical growth, it was necessary for the congregation to find a larger edifice. Therefore, in the year 1975, the congregation relocated once again to their present facility at 153rd and Marshfield.

Dr. Jules Hutton, Sr., was known and respected throughout the brotherhood as a man of great courage and strength. After retiring from pulpit responsibilities, he served as Minister Emeritus of the Harvey Church of Christ and was the eldest living gospel preacher in the African American Church of Christ until his death at the age of ninety-five. Because of his commitment to the “Living Logos” and Christian education, a Doctorate of Humane Letters was conferred upon Jules Hutton in 2015 by Metropolitan Christian University.



#### Dr. Robert M. Woods

On February 18, 2017, funeral services were conducted for the late Dr. Robert M. Woods, Minister Emeritus of the Monroe Street Church of Christ in Chicago, Illinois. Dr. Woods was a native of Gallatin, Tennessee, who began preaching at the age of eleven. Dr. Woods traveled with the late Evangelist Marshall Keeble and became one of his “Boy Preachers.” He moved to the Chicago area in 1952 and became Senior Minister

of the “Old” Maypole Avenue Church of Christ. The congregation relocated to Claremont Avenue in 1957 and then to 3300 West Monroe Street in 1965. The last National Youth Conference to be held in a church building was hosted by the Monroe Street Church of Christ in 1965 as well.

Dr. Woods served as Senior Minister of the Monroe Street Church Christ for a total of forty-five years. After retiring and relocating to Villa Rica, Georgia, he became the Minister of the Hayes-Glass Church of Christ in Bremen, Georgia. He

retired from this congregation in 2014. Dr. Robert M. Woods was the tenured member of the Southwestern Christian College Board of Directors and received a Doctorate of Humane Letters from this institution. In addition, he was a member of the Executive and Advisory Committee for the National Lectureship held by the African American Church of Christ.



#### Dr. Nathaniel Dean

Funeral services were held for the late Dr. Nathaniel Dean, Minister Emeritus of the Maypole Avenue Church of Christ in Chicago, Illinois, on March 25, 2017. Dr. Dean was a native of Tate County, Mississippi, and was baptized into the body of Christ at an early age in Mississippi. In 1955, he relocated to Chicago, Illinois, and in 1959 placed his membership with the Pulaski Road Church of Christ on the West Side of the city where the late Dr. Cardie L. Harper served as Senior Minister.

After a short period of time, Nathaniel Dean became interested

in the ministry and soon began preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. In 1965, the congregation relocated to its present facility at 4400 West Maypole Avenue and thus became known as the Maypole Avenue Church of Christ.

Upon the retirement of Dr. Harper in 2002, Dr. Dean was appointed as Senior Minister of the Maypole Avenue Church of Christ and served in this capacity until 2015. Dr. Nathaniel Dean was a charismatic and spiritual minded individual who never thought twice when it came to helping others. He was a member of the Chicago Area Churches of Christ Ministerial Alliance and a consultant for the Chicago Area Churches of Christ United Bible Class.

As a community activist, Dr. Dean was instrumental in establishing numerous outreach programs and he was always willing to assist when issues arose that impacted the general populace. Because of his unfaltering dedication to the cause of Christ and commitment to the visible kingdom, a Doctorate of Humane Letters was conferred upon Nathaniel Dean in 2015 by Metropolitan Christian University.



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## Postscript of a Pioneer Preacher from the Past

### “The Responsibility of Membership to the Work of the Church”

#### The Late Dr. John Steve Winston, Sr.



**Dr. J. S. Winston, Sr.**  
**1906-2001**  
**Cleveland, Ohio**

**I**certainly believe the New Testament Church as ordained by God must be active or functional in its existence as designed by God. Since the congregation is the only unit of organization known in the New Testament for carrying forward the work of the Church, it follows that for a Christian to be in full fellowship he or she must be associated with and amenable to a local congregation along with its work. There is no such thing in the New Testament Scripture which describes “Membership at Large” in the Church of God.

The apostle Paul in his work always associated himself with a congregation of Christians (Acts 9:26-30; 13:1-3; 14:25-28). The so-called Christian who does not hold membership with a congregation but floats from congregation to congregation, violates the system of divine autonomy because they are not subject to Church leadership and cannot be held accountable for their stewardship (I Pet. 5:1-5; Heb. 13:17, I Tim. 5:17-19).

The Church of Christ is engaged in the greatest mission under heaven. Our mission is to preach the gospel to the lost and care for the needy saints. Every member is responsible to the Church for this work. Participation and fellowship

in the work of the Church is not optional, it is clearly taught throughout the New Testament. Paul in writing to Titus says: “Put them in mind to be ready to every good work” (Titus 3:1). Furthermore, membership in the body requires that each member should be accountable for encouraging others of like precious faith to be zealous (Heb 10:24).

Other areas pertinent to membership responsibilities include the demonstration and work of supporting the preacher, the declaration and work of personal faith, the dedication and work of benevolence, and the determination and work of edification.

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*The so-called Christian who does not hold membership with a congregation, but floats from congregation to congregation violates the system of divine autonomy because they are not subject to Church leadership and cannot be held accountable for their stewardship (I Pet. 5:1-5; Heb. 13:17, I Tim. 5:17-19).*

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#### **The Demonstration and Work of Ministerial Support**

God has ordained that when a man gives his life to preaching the gospel, he has a divine right to be supported both spiritually and financially. Because of the poverty of a congregation, a preacher may forgo his right to be financially supported; but no congregation has the right to demand that a preacher make such a sacrifice. “Even so did God ordain that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel” (I Cor. 9:14). Again, Paul said “I robbed other churches taking wages of them that I might minister unto you” (II Cor. 11:8). It is the duty of the Church to demonstrate their love for Jesus Christ by supporting gospel preachers to the extent of its ability.

#### **The Declaration and Work of Personal Faith**

The evidence of Christian membership is manifested by faith and works. However, we do not perform good works in order “to be saved.” On the contrary, we perform good works by faith because we “have been saved.”

There is no better declaration or argument of proof set forth in the New Testament than made by James. “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works... But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” (Jas. 2:17-20).

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#### **The Dedication and Work of Benevolence**

Benevolence is a work of the Church which provides temporal service and help to others. It has reference to being compassionate and showing kindness. The Church in Jerusalem engaged in this ministry (Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37; 6:1-3). The Church at Antioch (Acts 11:27); the Church at Philippi (Phil. 4:15, 16); and the Church at Macedonia (II Cor. 8:1-10) were highly commended for their work of benevolence.

In each of the preceding texts, it is shown that the membership of these congregations dedicated themselves to this work of the Church. In addition, Paul states “For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem” (Rom. 15:26). The work of benevolence is obligatory

not only for individual Christians, but for the entire congregation as well. “As we have therefore opportunity let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10).

#### **The Determination and Work of Edification**

Edification is another work of the Church which rests upon every member. Each Christian must be determined to build up and strengthen fellow members of the Church. Paul reproved the Corinthian believers when he said “Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the Church” (I Cor. 14:12).

Following the ascension of Jesus Christ, the Church in its infancy was given apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors [and] teachers. For what purpose? “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ...” (Eph. 4:11-12). Consequently, every baptized believer should embrace these responsibilities of membership and involve themselves fully in the work of the New Testament Church of Christ.

Dr. John Steve Winston, Sr., was a co-founder of Southwestern Christian College and member of the SwCC Board of Trustees from its inception until his death. His most pronounced evangelistic work was with the University Church of Christ in Cleveland, Ohio. This sermon was presented by Dr. Winston at the 1961 Churches of Christ National Lectureship held in Detroit, Michigan. He was also in attendance at the first National Lectureship held in 1945.

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## “And How Shall They Hear Without A Preacher?”



“One Lord... One Faith... One Baptism”



## “And How Shall They Hear Without A Preacher?”



“One Lord... One Faith... One Baptism”

**42nd Annual Minister's Institute**  
**January 13-18, 2018**  
**"The Case for the Holy Spirit"**  
 Fort Lauderdale Marriott Coral Springs  
 Hotel and Convention Center



Plans are currently being made for the 42nd Annual Ministers' Institute that will convene January 13-18, 2018. The venue selected for this illustrious and celebrated event is the Fort Lauderdale Marriott Coral Springs Hotel located in Coral Springs, Florida.

The objective of the Ministers' Institute is to provide genuine fellowship among gospel preachers and Church leaders from across the brotherhood. The Annual Ministers' Institute is also designed to examine theological precepts and various biblical exposition models that will positively impact New Testament Christians.

A series of convocational lectures, daily high noon chapel addresses, evening vespers, seminarian presentations, and the prestigious Wednesday evening "Honor Banquet" are also components of the Ministers' Institute.

The clarion call is extended to all men and women of God to prepare NOW to attend the 42nd Ministers' Institute. You are encouraged to send your registration early so you will be assured of Institute gifts, packet, banquet ticket and breakfast. For detailed information please visit [www.ministersinstituteconference.com](http://www.ministersinstituteconference.com)

**Because of Calvary,**  
**W. F. Washington, Ph.D.**  
**Ministers' Institute Founder and Director**

- In matters of doctrine ....UNITY
- In matters of opinion .....LIBERTY
- In All Matters .....LOVE

**Past Recipients of the "Humanitarian Service" Award**

Franklin Florence, Sr.  
 Dr. Andrew J. Hairston  
 Dr. Harvey M. Jackson  
 Dr. Richard L. Barclay  
 Dr. Arnelious Crenshaw, Jr.

**Past Recipients of the "John Henry Clay" Award**

Dr. James Michael Crusoe  
 Samuell Pounds  
 Leroy Butler, Jr.

**Past Recipients of the "R. N. Hogan" Award**

Dr. Jules Hutton  
 John Harris  
 Dr. Orpheus J. Heyward  
 Peter Martin  
 Dr. Jefferson R. Caruthers, Jr.

**Past Recipients of the "J. S. Winston" Award**

Dr. Freeman T. Wyche  
 Dr. David Shanks  
 Dr. Shelton T. W. Gibbs, III

**Past Recipients of the "Living Legend" Award**

Dr. John Henry Clay 2004  
 Dr. Humphrey Foutz 2005  
 Dr. Nokomis Yeldell 2006  
 Dr. Clyde Muse 2007  
 Dr. Roosevelt C. Wells 2008  
 Dr. Eugene Lawton 2009  
 Dr. Jack Evans, Sr. 2010  
 Dr. W. F. Washington 2011  
 Theaster Maloy 2017

**2015 Recipient of the "W. F. Washington Distinguished Evangelist Award"**

Samuell Pounds

**2015 Recipient of the Ministerial "Longevity Award"**

Ralph P. Smith

**2016 Recipient of the "W. F. Washington Distinguished Evangelist Award"**

Dr. Orpheus J. Heyward

**2016 Recipient of the Ministerial "Longevity Award"**

Elijah Bush, Sr.

**2016 Recipient of the "Congregation Highest Attendance Award"**

Dr. Jefferson Caruthers, Jr.

**2017 Recipient of the "W. F. Washington Distinguished Evangelist Award"**

DonBurnell Holly



## Mission Statement and Platform of the *Christian Courier*

The *Christian Courier* is a bi-annual publication established in the year 2012 by the Churches of Christ Annual National Lectureship. The overall and fundamental objective of the *Courier* is to share relevant information which pertains to the National Lectureship in particular and the African American Church of Christ in general.

### Vision Statement and Intent of the *Christian Courier*

It is the visionary intent of the *Christian Courier* to publish articles that reflect sound biblical doctrine and those which emphasize the following frameworks:

- Theological foundations impacting New Testament doctrine and biblical interpretation.
- Historical perspectives pertaining to selected individuals and current issues in Christian ministry.
- Empirical and quantitative research that furthers our understanding of sound ministry practice.
- Acknowledgment of past and present ministerial contributions on behalf of the visible kingdom.
- Compassionate efforts performed by various individuals to help heal the hurts of humanity.

Let it be understood that the *Courier* does not promote any specific policies or ideologies that conflict with the Word of God. The Bible is our only standard of measurement in matters relating to religious faith and practice. Therefore, all articles submitted to the *Christian Courier* for publication should be thought-provoking, trustworthy, insightful and engaging. The editorial staff reserves the right to refuse any articles for publication in the *Christian Courier* that does not meet these standards set forth.

### *Christian Courier* Contributing Staff Writers:

W. F. Washington, Ph.D. | Dr. R. C. Wells | David C. Penn, Ed.S., Ph.D. | Dr. Eugene Lawton  
Jefferson R. Caruthers, Jr. | Samuel Pounds | Dr. Harvey M. Jackson | DonBurnell Holly  
Willie L. Rupert, Jr. | Conley Gibbs, Jr. | Dr. Steven N. Thompson, Sr. | Dr. Luis R. Lugo [Next Edition]

## Dissension, Disputation, and Settling Church Disagreements: The Church at Antioch as Instructive (Acts 15:1–35)



**Dr. Jefferson R. Caruthers, Jr.**  
Senior Minister  
Carver Road Church of Christ

The churches of Christ are God's elect people. They are tasked with the challenge to be salt of the earth, the light of the world, a city set on a hill, and lamps on a lampstand (Matt. 5:13–15). They are given the privilege to allow their lights to so shine so that men and women will see their good works and glorify the Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

With such great expectations, what is the Church to do when it faces trouble within its fellowship? How is it to maintain its ability to allow its light to shine when

preachers and other leaders disagree? What is it to make of its effectiveness as salt when elders and members fight, when there is trouble from within a congregation and when trouble comes from outside of the local fellowship?

In addition to the considerations above, there is recent news where a preacher from outside of a local congregation and uninvited by the Evangelist coming into a congregation and conspiring with certain members to disrupt the unity of the Church.

What are God's people to think of leaders and congregations that permit such behavior and allow themselves to sink to less than godly presentations of the unity we are to have in Christ? Are there any Bible teachings or a scriptural precedent regarding help being sought from within or from without a congregation?

There are Bible teachings about the Church at Antioch that can guide God's people today. The Church at Antioch serves as a great example and model of how the Bible addresses conflict. We should all remember that there were disagreements, disputations, and

dissensions during the days of the Apostles and other early leaders in the Church.

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*It is not New Testament practice for anyone to come into a Church from without and ignore the man of God, the Evangelist, who works to establish, build up, encourage, and mature the Church. A preacher, elder, or anyone who would do such, violates Scripture and must be corrected.*

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Let us understand some truths about the Church in Antioch. The narrative in Acts informs readers of where some scattered after the persecution of Stephen. The text reads: "...and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1).

The text engages this thought again when we later discover how far they traveled. It reads: "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the

persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but the Jews only" (Acts 11:19). Further, "And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus" (Acts 11:20). Antioch becomes an important center of church activity in the first century.

The impressive news of the progress of the Church in Antioch reached the Church in Jerusalem. The Church sent Barnabas (Acts 11:22). Barnabas eventually brought Saul to Antioch. Together they assembled a whole year with the Church. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch (Acts 11:26).

The church was effective in the work of the kingdom. The ability of the church to respond to the prophecy of Agabus, a prophecy about an impending famine in Jerusalem is evidence of its effectiveness. The effectiveness

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of the church is exemplary in its ability to respond to the prophet Agabus, and his information about an impending famine in Jerusalem. The Church raised famine relief and sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem with it (Acts 11:29). They delivered this relief to the elders in Jerusalem (Acts 11:30).

The Church in Antioch later separated Barnabas and Saul to go on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:2). The two missionaries enjoyed a successful ministry and returned to Antioch, calling the Church together to inform it of their work in southern Galatia (Acts 14:27). They then continued assembling with the Church. One might be tempted to conclude that a Church this busy with good works might avoid trouble that comes to modern-day churches.

## Dissension and Disputation

It is not certain how much time elapsed, but we are informed that men came down from Judea teaching that believers must be circumcised and keep the law (Acts 15:2, 5). This caused dissension and disputation in the Church (Acts 15:2). What follows is instructive. The believers determined that Paul, Barnabas, and certain other brothers should go to Jerusalem about the matter (Acts 15:3).

We should learn from this that though there may be qualified and capable men in a congregation, sometimes it is good to hear other trusted and respected voices. The determination to send Paul and Barnabas to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem did not diminish the powerful and successful capabilities of either man.

The Church in Jerusalem received Paul and Barnabas. The two informed the brothers of what God accomplished with them (Acts 15:4). If there is going to be godly resolution to differences between leaders, preachers, elders or others, there is the need to recognize the need to receive each other. On this

matter, the Church, apostles, and elders received Paul and Barnabas.

In some first century churches, the man of God while developing the church is the one who receives those who are from without. On the island

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*In addition to the considerations above, there is recent news of preachers from outside of congregations coming in and conspiring with certain members to disrupt the unity of those churches.*

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of Crete, Titus is given instruction regarding Artemas, Tychicus, Zenas the lawyer, and Apollos (Titus 3:12–13).

It is not New Testament practice for anyone to come into a Church from without and ignore the man of God, the Evangelist, who works to establish, build up, encourage, and mature the Church. A preacher, elder, or anyone who would do such violates Scripture and is to be corrected. Paul writes to Titus, “Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you” (Titus 2:15 ESV). Then, “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned” (Titus 3:10–11 ESV).

What is revealing is that the men who disagreed with Paul and Barnabas also had opportunity to voice their concerns (Acts 15:5). There is often a question about the settling of any dispute when only one side is heard. Too often, brothers and churches desire only to hear the side of a few, or even of a majority; but no detractors. We certainly do not learn this practice from the New Testament and it does not match the level of fairness in the secular community.

In the secular community, voices for the prosecution are not the only ones heard; voices for the defense are heard as well. What is clear is that there were no persons who forced their ways into the Church to settle matters irrespective

of the man of God and others who led the church. We must conclude then that the man or men who so function intentionally violate the teachings of the Bible.

## Gathering and Consideration

The brothers who taught that believers must be circumcised and keep the law stated their position. It is then that we read that the apostles and elders came together to consider their teaching (Acts 15:6). Note that the apostle Peter, the one whom the Lord identified to teach the Gentiles, was present (Acts 15:7).

But he does not use heavy handed tactics to settle the dispute. He does not say, “Since I am the one who brought the gentiles into the Church who were not circumcised, this is my decision.” It is amazing how many brothers believe their voices alone should settle a dispute. Peter did not and the truth is that Peter knew that he had God on his side.

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*What is clear is that there were no persons who forced their ways into the Church to settle matters irrespective of the man of God and others who led the Church. We must conclude then that the man or men who so function intentionally violate the teachings of the Bible.*

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The discussion continues. This time, Paul and Barnabas, men who had worked with the Gentiles, spoke of how God wrought miracles and wonders among the Gentiles (Acts 15:12). Students of Scripture do not read at this point, “Well, then, the miracles settle the issue.” Again, we have some who believe the great success they experience should settle an issue. Peter spoke about whom God chose. Barnabas and Paul spoke to how powerfully God worked.

James is the next to speak. He recognizes what Simeon (Peter) has said about God but he does not end with that observation. Luke records

the words of James: “And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my mane is called, saith the Lord who doeth all these things” (Acts 15:15–17 KJV).

James demonstrates that no decision in a dispute has validity unless it is based in Scripture. This includes decisions related to what the Scripture teaches concerning the role of preachers and other leaders in the Church.

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*It is amazing how many brothers believe their voices alone should settle a dispute. Peter did not and the truth is that Peter knew that he had God on his side.*

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## Judgment, Validation, and Consolation

James continues. He gives his judgment about what would make the fellowship between the Jews and Gentiles more acceptable for Jews who might be concerned about fellowship with persons who formerly had unholy practices. James does not provide new teaching, but teaching that will govern all believers.

Luke records the words of James: “Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled and from blood” (Acts 15:19–20 KJV). There is no command to circumcise. There is no command to keep the law. The false teachings have no affirmation.

Peter spoke. Paul and Barnabas spoke. James also spoke. We



next have agreement between the church leaders, the apostles, the elders, and the whole church. They agreed to send men of their own company, Judas and Silas, to Antioch with Barnabas and Saul (Acts 15:22). This was a particularly wise move because this gave human witness of the decisions made. We learn that there will be both human bodies (oral testimony) and a letter. James wrote that this was a decision that seemed good to them and the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:25–29).

As important as everything that occurred to this point is, there is the necessity of informing the Church. We read, “So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle; Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation” (Acts 15:30–31 KJV).

### Observation and Application

The faithful should know that after dissension and disputation, consolation is possible. We need to

apply, however, the principles gleaned from the observations above. First, church life is not absent of times when men and women will disagree and have strong disputations among themselves. This is not the time to believe that

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*The Church is encouraged to allow biblical models, such as the Church at Antioch, to instruct all who love the Lord, who love the Church and who plan to work for the advancement of the visible kingdom of God in this world.*

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God is not with His people. Second, sometimes issues cannot be settled with the persons within a local congregation. Appealing to respected and agreed upon persons outside of the context does not take away from the godliness of persons involved in disputes and disagreements.

Third, believers should consider that when there are disagreements, it is important that opposing positions have opportunity to be stated before responsible brothers.

Fourth, neither the status of a person nor the success of his ministry provides license for one to be a determining

or singular voice. Fifth, what solves disputes is what is scripturally correct. It is not about who serves with greater tenure, who supervises money, who can point to the activity of God in his life. Scripture determines what is truth, what is just, what is right. Sixth, persons involved in a resolution and representatives of agreements, help to give verification of decisions made.

Churches should not feel that they have been invaded when respected men come to their assemblies to give testimony to truth. Seventh, documentation of what is scriptural should be provided.

Eighth, the Church should be called together to make sure all are reading the same page of agreement. Ninth, the Church should thank God for consolation provided through godly processes. And tenth, the Church must get back to the work of the Lord.

Finally, it is quite telling that there is no evidence of lay leaders who have been accused of infractions, being disregarded (like many preachers) and not given an opportunity to be involved in a remediation process. There is ample evidence however, that individuals and groups of men like elders, deacons, or trustees, settle church disagreements without receiving

input from the one with whom they disagree in contempt of the Scripture. This certainly becomes sin. At that time, faithful men and women should identify the offending person or group, mark those who are involved and admonish the person to repent.

The Church must continue to allow its light to shine. It must glorify the Father who is in heaven. How a congregation responds to dissension and disagreement certainly affects its light. The Church is encouraged to allow biblical models such as the Church at Antioch, to instruct all who love the Lord, who love the church, and who plan to work for the advancement of the visible kingdom of God in this world.

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region of this city. Needless to say, numerous gospel preachers across the brotherhood along with the Senior Evangelist of this area have dismissed any such notion and have given full support in writing to this preacher. Let it be understood that no person or persons on this earth can prohibit a man from fulfilling his calling to “preach the gospel” and serve the people of God wherever there is a need to do so.

It is unconscionable and unprincipled for the so-called “deacons” of this congregation to have “threatened” this preacher with a “disciplinary letter of marking and withdrawal” given the unscriptural circumstances that were led by an alleged self-proclaimed “national arbitrator.”

This type of malignant terrorism was not engineered by “Al-Qaeda” nor the “Islamic State of Iraq and Syria” (ISIS) or any cartel from the outside. This unscrupulous behavior exuded from those “within the fellowship” of the Church.

Again, we affirm that dangerous and devious deception in the name of Church government is upon us. Therefore, be sober; be watchful and be aware of he who “disguises himself” and “masquerades” in the “unethical attire” of an alleged self-appointed “national arbitrator!” We concur with the sentiments of Dr. Jack Evans, Sr., President Emeritus of Southwestern Christian College in Terrell, Texas, who addressed a similar concern in his article “Wolves in Shepherds’ Clothing and Somebody Ought to Say Something” (Evans, 2011).

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\*Scripture quotations are taken from Nestle-Aland Greek-English New Testament

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