**One Change Too Many**

*by Harry Osborne*

### Below is a report from Kentucky detailing the ordeal of a Presbyterian church that refused to accept the denomination’s decision to accept homosexual unions into their fellowship. This is not a unique situation, but one seen in recent years within a variety of denominational groups. As you read the story, ask yourself: “*Where did the problem originate?*” [from *Local congregation says no to same-sex marriage, could face eviction*, by Brianna Clark, WPSD online, 4/14/17]:

CALVERT CITY, KY. - A local congregation is searching for a new place to worship after talking about the possibility of splitting away from the Presbyterian Church.

In 2015, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church approved an amendment that says it's okay for same-sex couples to get married in the church. That didn't go over so well with some members in Calvert City, Kentucky.

Paul Ambler, the clerk of session at First Presbyterian Church, says the congregation was given the option to leave the denomination under what's called the "gracious dismissal" policy. But he says the eviction notice he got is anything but gracious.

"It makes us feel discriminated," says Ambler. "They're not treating us fairly. We're not leaving the Presbyterian Church. The Presbyterian Church left us."

Ambler says he doesn't agree with the church's decision to allow same-sex marriages.

"Out in the secular world, people can do what they want. I don't have an issue with it," says Ambler. "But it's when they try to bring that within the church context, that's where we had the issue."

After the General Assembly voted to allow same-sex marriage, Ambler says his congregation agreed to the possibility of separating from the denomination.

"So, at that point, we entered into negotiations to come up with an agreement that the congregation could vote on whether to actually dismiss or remain, and we haven't reached that point yet," says Ambler.

Instead, Ambler says, the Presbytery of Western Kentucky made the decision for them. The Presbytery owns the building and Ambler says the group wants his congregation to get out.

"It's very stressful," says Ambler. "Very stressful. A lot of our congregation is older. They don't want to leave."

Ambler says he's scared this could break up his church family. He says, ideally, they'd like to rent out the church and one day buy the building.

Tom Miller, the attorney representing the Presbytery of Western Kentucky, sent this statement:

*The departing group was not 'excommunicated' as has been reported. Rather, they announced that they wanted to leave the Presbyterian denomination and start a non-denominational community church that would then meet at the same location. We respect their decision to leave and we wish them the best with their new endeavor. However, the Presbytery of Western Kentucky owns the church building and wishes to maintain a Presbyterian church at that location, as they have done for so many years. At this point, this is essentially a real estate matter, which we believe will be resolved amicably.*

The congregation must be out of the building by Wednesday.

Well, how did this group get to this point? What was the decision that started the process that ended with this predicament? Did the separation begin with the decision of this congregation to reject the Presbyterian denomination’s commitment to accept homosexual unions? Or was it the Presbyterian denomination’s acceptance of homosexual unions that started the problem? Or was it the Presbytery of Western Kentucky that served the eviction notice from the building that started the trouble? Let us notice that none of these specific actions were actually the starting point for this division. Instead, the division was the inevitable result of decisions made long ago.

The origin of this problem actually came with the acceptance of a denominational structure that claimed the power to issue and enforce its own edicts on doctrine rather than following the Bible plan. Long ago, the Presbyterian Church began by formulating its own man-made creed and organizing its humanly devised structure rather than letting God’s word be the final authority in all religious matters. When people invent their own organizations and create their own doctrinal views, they make such divisions inevitable since they submit themselves to the ever-changing whims of human thought rather than the never-changing will of God.

The word of God plainly claims to be the complete and final authority for all matters of doctrine and practice. *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Tim. 3:16-17). No changes were allowed in the Old Testament law God gave to Israel (Deut. 4:2) and no changes are allowed to the gospel of Christ in the New Testament (2 Jn. 9). In contrast to this requirement, denominations add and subtract from God’s law by making their own creeds, manuals, by-laws and other forms of human edicts. When men decide they can change God’s law to meet their own desires, they assure divisions such as the one in the story above. At some point, the changes made by the majority are not acceptable to some of the members. Since the changes were based on human will and not founded upon God’s word, there is no recourse of studying the Scripture to bring about unity. Nor is there an option of objecting to the new edict as being in conflict with God’s word because the whole process of human changing of God’s will is in clear conflict with Scripture. There is merely the option of submitting to the human law or division.

The denominational practice of changing God’s will by human law has also led to other practices that make divisions inevitable like the one from the above story. Denominations exist because of a structure or organization that has been invented by man, not God. Where in the New Testament would one go to find a “General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church” as noted above? How about the Scripture authorizing a “Presbytery” of a region that owns the property of all congregations under its authority? The word “presbytery” is a transliteration of the Greek word *presbuteros* translated “elders” in most English versions of the Bible. Peter spoke of the extent of the authority of elders in these words: *“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:* ***Shepherd the flock of God which is among you****, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock”* (1 Pet. 5:1-3). When men change the organization that God gave, they make possible the situations seen in the above account.

In short, the division seen above and others like it did not begin with the events immediately surrounding them. They began when men formed denominations of their own will rather than depending on Scripture as the complete and final authority in all religious matters.