

AN OPEN LETTER TO MY FELLOW 1995, AND OTHER MSOP GRADUATES*

*There are two slight amendments in paragraphs 4&6 from the original version.

Brethren:

As was true with me, one of the highlights of your life was undoubtedly the two years you spent at Memphis School of Preaching. The verse by verse study of the Bible in our classes was greatly beneficial. The related curriculum, including Bible Archeology, Logic, The Preacher and His work, and Greek has also proven to be helpful through the succeeding years. In many ways, we will always recognize a sense of gratitude for those two years of study.

Even though I look back on the two years I attended MSOP with appreciation, I was not entirely comfortable with everything at the school then, and am now gravely concerned over the direction our alma mater is headed. My concerns began the very first day of the fall initiation process for new students. If you recall, we were told that even if a student preached on a regular basis for a congregation in the area, the bulk of his contribution should go to Knight Arnold (now Forest Hill). I never abode by that suggestion, because I personally believed it was unscriptural as well as dictating a rule that neither the school nor its director had the authority to make.

I was personally privy to a discussion that dealt with the Holy Spirit error of Mack Deaver. The gist of that conversation was to take a wait and see attitude instead of taking a stand. One comment that was made was, (and I am not putting this in quotes because I cannot remember it word for word), let's let those crazy brethren in Texas fight it out. We will see then where to come down on the thing.

Do you remember when we were told singing hymns with the accompaniment of mechanical instruments of music outside the worship service was a matter of scruple, and after the instructor said that in class, he categorically refused to even discuss it? He would not have answered had any of us asked, but have you ever wondered why he refused to discuss it? I have, and cannot reason to any good answer he could have given.

Surely, you must remember that one of the human innovations often condemned, was the use of dramatic skits. How many of you are aware that while we were students, a dramatic skit reenacting the conversion of Eunuch was presented at the youth day on Saturday preceding the lectureship? I am well aware that was not a regular worship assembly, but still it was hypocritical.

How many of you know that an instructor took the position that Rahab was justified in lying about the spies according the so-called concept of the greater good? That was not in our class, but in the one that followed us. Is that not either the human philosophy of utilitarianism or of pragmatism? I was told about this by a student in the class immediately after it happened.

None of you know this, but while I was a student at MSOP a sister in Christ, who taught me in Bible class when I was four or five years old, had gotten herself caught up in the error of the Richland Hills Church of Christ. I went to an instructor and had him listen to an awful tape of a "sermon" preached by Rick Atchley that was a defense of instrumental music. The aforementioned sister had given the tape to my parents, and they passed it on to me. I hoped the instructor would be some help in dealing with the situation. What did he do? He wrote a letter to Rick Atchley, read it to me, but then never even mailed it. I was left alone to write the sister a ten page letter (which I would have done anyway). From that day forward she would turn her back on me, and refused to even speak to me from then until the day she died. Perhaps the help of the instructor would not have changed anything, but couldn't he at least have tried?

Brethren, how many times were we made to feel that we had an obligation to raise money for the school once we graduated? You know as well as I do we were told we had a debt to Knight Arnold and

MSOP that we could never repay. Since our graduation, the school has been more and more about money. Money was important enough to compromise the lectureship roster in order to secure the N.B. Hardeman library. What the enormous amounts of money MSOP has spent on the present facilities, and must spend on upkeep and maintenance I am not even willing to guess. MSOP, through its extravagance, is redirecting enormous funds from hundreds of congregations that ought to be spent funding efforts to spread the gospel. Instead, Forest Hill and MSOP are intent on building expensive facilities in which to turn out robotic preachers, who have been virtually brainwashed to toe the institutional line and back and promote the school no matter how far it moves, especially in fellowship, to the liberal left. How many of you knew that as far back as 1987, MSOP was willing to accept funds from a congregation that had hired a preacher who had been withdrawn from for his rebellion against his elders. While MSOP claimed to honor the withdrawal, they nevertheless accepted the funds from the congregation. A portion of those funds went to a student the entire time he was in school. As an older and wiser man, the student now regrets that he accepted that support. Don't let B.J. Clarke know that he now understands his mistake; he would be chided for not coming to his present knowledge 23 years ago!

Brethren, you know as well as I do that MSOP does now, and always has, been as intent on producing graduates who see their task as promoting the school as much as the Gospel of Christ. Consider this statement from the July 1, 2008 Forest Hill News:

When these men (over 1,000 of them now) complete their studies, they go out and spread the word concerning the Memphis School of Preaching. As they faithfully discharge their duties as evangelists, they represent the Lord Jesus and the school very well.

Before I entered the MSOP, I attended one session at another school of preaching. I started over at Memphis, because the director in the other school had decided to leave, and the future of the school was in doubt. Brethren, not even once in the other school were we ever told that we owed them and the host congregation a debt. Why? Because they at least realized that if they were conducting a school of preaching, it is because the debt was theirs. They understood they owed the cause of Christ the work of training preachers. It was never suggested that once we graduated that we had any responsibility to raise money for the school. Why the difference at Memphis? Because brethren, as much as I hate to say it, Memphis is, and for too long time has been, too much about money. I was informed that a past director of Memphis insisted on having a \$1,500.00 office chair purchased for him. Not only was that at a time when the school could hardly afford such an extravagance, no one needs a chair costing that much!

In recent months, your fellow graduate has adopted a saying I wish I had realized and applied a long time ago: **“Foot dragging is the gait of the lame.”** I should have begun speaking up a long time ago, and am writing this letter to you now in an attempt to redeem the time I lost. As you all must know, there is now a controversy surrounding MSOP'S continued support of Dave Miller who preached a sermon advocating, and was involved in, the unauthorized practice of reevaluation/reaffirmation of elders, at the Brown Trail Congregation in Bedford, Texas. Contrary to some things that have been said, he was involved by preaching a sermon and active participation in that unscriptural practice undermining the authority of the eldership. Also, contrary to what has been said by some of the same ones who deny he was involved, he has never repented of that involvement. It strikes us as odd that individuals would claim a man has repented of something they allege he never did. Brother Miller also contrived what has been called an intent doctrine in the matter of marriage, and attempted to justify the act as a scheme by which a foreign student was brought into this country to attend Brown Trail School of Preaching. Some students at Brown Trail objected, and one was even thrown out of school for making criticisms in related matters. That act, if not an outright violation of federal law, was at the very least blatantly deceptive. Those who continue to support brother Miller, including GBN, MSOP, and of course, Apologetics Press, who made him director, despite the warnings of many brethren to the contrary, are guilty of fellowshipping his error, and thereby under the condemnation of 2 John 9-11.

How many of you brethren know that virtually all, if not all, of the instructors at MSOP spoke out against the elder r/r procedure. Some of them were among the 60 brethren who signed the letter of

support of Apologetics Press after the sad situation with Bert Thompson. At the time they did not know that Dave Miller would be appointed as the new director. If they had, some of them, maybe all of them, would not have signed the letter. But, instead of admitting to a mistake, they changed their tune, and began to support brother Miller. Why? Brethren, if the matter of money does not play some role in that, the skies are not blue, the grass is not green, and the wind does not blow in March!

Many brethren over the past five years since the unwarranted forcing out of Dub McClish and David B. Watson as editor and co-editor of the original *Gospel Journal* respectively, have up until the present time focused almost exclusively on the matter of fellowshipping the false teacher, Dave Miller. Now, though, they are beginning to realize that that issue only touches the hem of the garment respecting what is transpiring at Forest Hill Irene and MSOP.

The Forest Hill congregation and the school are seriously changing their position on the crucial matter of fellowship. The lectureship this very year featured speakers who have also appeared on programs of some of the most apostate schools, including Sunset Bible Institute in Lubbock, Texas. Some speakers are affiliated with schools and congregations who practice things which in and of themselves, would have excluded them from appearing on the lectureship when you and I were students. For instance, on January 10, 2010, Phil Sanders now the speaker on *In Search of the Lord's Way*, spoke on the Sunset Bible Institute Workshop. Faithful brethren withdrew from Sunset years ago. At the close of his remarks, brother Sanders very plainly extended the hand of fellowship to those at Sunset.

Have you brethren read what Phil Sanders said in a February, 2006, *Christian Chronicle*, interview? Here is his response to the question of how he perceives members of the Independent Christian Church denomination: *"I can only speak for myself here. I believe baptized believers in the Independent Christian Church are my brethren, since everyone who is scripturally born of water and the Spirit is a child of God. I love my brethren, but I grieve that they have clung to an unscriptural [instrumental music] practice. I wish we could find biblical and hermeneutical unity once again."* The same Phil Sanders will be speaking on the MSOP lectures on March 31, 2010.

Herb Alsup, who spoke on the MSOP lectures this year, also spoke on the lectures at Tennessee Bible college in 2007. TBC is a supporter of the direct operation of the Spirit error of Mac Deaver. Who spoke on the same TBC program with brother Alsup, in fact, immediately after him? None other than Mac Deaver himself!

In 2009, brother Bobby Liddell spoke on the Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver Lectureship. Among the other speakers was Robert Oglesby, of Richardson, Texas. Oglesby is involved with a Sunset Bible Institute Satellite school. Another speaker on that program was Rick Walker of Golden, Colorado. Brother Walker preaches for a congregation that utilizes the divided assembly; Children's Bible Story Time, they call it. It is unclear if this is done on both Sunday morning and evening, or one or the other of the two worship periods. The congregation also is involved in the small group Bible study practice. Brethren, you know as well as I do that these things would never have been condoned, practiced, or tolerated when we were students at MSOP. You also know that a few years ago, brother Liddell would not have appeared on a lectureship with those men.

If all of the above information were not disappointing enough, there is still more. On February 10, 2009, in the Forest Hill bulletin, brother Barry Grider included three disturbing articles. The first one was entitled, *"I got used to it."* In that article, brother Grider defended the song, *"Sweet Sweet Spirit."* He denied the song makes any reference to a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, but anyone who can read, and understand what he reads, immediately recognizes that it does. The second article was by brother Tyler Young, and entitled, *"Binding Where God Has Not."* Brother Grider informs us that the material in the article was prepared for the 2008 Lubbock, Texas Lectureship. What brother Grider neglects to mention, though, is that the material was so far to the left that brother Tommy Hicks, the preacher for the Southside congregation in Lubbock which hosted the lectureship, refused to include the material in the lectureship book. When brother Young delivered the material orally anyway, the Southside elders would not allow the lecture to be included on the DVD with the other lectures. The material suggested that it

may be legalism to bind that it would be wrong to change (even dismiss, one would have to conclude) the Sunday evening worship to accommodate brethren who do not want to miss any part of the Super Bowl. It questions whether it is wrong to forsake a worship assembly to participate in a sporting event, defended dismissing the Sunday evening service in lieu of small group gatherings instead, and expressed disdain for regulating which versions of the Bible can be used in preaching and teaching. Again, brethren, this does not sound like the Knight Arnold congregation, or the Memphis School of Preaching you and I attended. The third article was a rendition of an old poem, *"I Drew My Circle Again."* The poem sarcastically criticizes the limiting of fellowship only to those who are right on all points of doctrine and practice. This is the same kind of heretical thought expressed in the book, *Facing Our Failure: The Fellowship Dilemma In Conservative Churches of Christ*, by Todd Deaver. Whether it was viewed as a go ahead from the lofty Forest Hill Irene church we know not, but since Grider published the poem it has been showing up in quite a few church bulletins. According to Grider, the Forest Hill elders and his fellow faculty at MSOP have been in complete working harmony up until the present time. If this is true brethren, the MSOP brethren agree with the February 10, 2009, bulletin material; if that is true, your alma mater and mine has changed, and not for the better.

Although strange, uncertain, and completely heretical sounds have been raised in many places, a few years ago, many would have been surprised that now those places include Forest Hill and MSOP. Please read the following excerpt from page 2 of the February 14, 2006 Forest Hill bulletin, and then answer this question: Is this an indication of things still to come?

70th Annual Freed-Hardeman Lectures

This past week several thousand Christians gathered in Henderson, Tennessee for the 70th Annual Freed-Hardeman Lectures. As they have done for many years, our students in the Memphis School of Preaching, attended the lectures on Tuesday, as did I. Throughout the day I heard some wonderful preaching from the Book of Hebrews by outstanding evangelists such as James Watkins, James Meadows, Dan Winkler, and Winford Claiborne. It was good to see many friends and acquaintances, along with a number of graduates of the school of preaching who are now doing local work in various locations. The highlight of the day, perhaps of the week, was the William Woodson Appreciation dinner. Brother Woodson is a man who is highly regarded for his soundness and scholarship. I have benefited greatly from his lectures and writings. Brother Billy Smith served as master of ceremonies for the dinner. Those who spoke commending the life and work of brother Woodson were Tom Holland, Alan Highers, Dan Winkler, and Hardeman Nichols. **It was my pleasure to be asked to sit close to the front at a reserved table, along with Jim and Sherry Brown, Everett and Doris Day, and Buster and Matilene McGuire. I owe this honor to our dear sister McGuire. Sister McGuire is a multi-talented lady. She is a superb organist and provided the entertainment for the event. After an enjoyable, yet exhausting day, I could not help but realize that our own lectureship is not far away (March 26-30). We look forward with great anticipation to a marvelous week together with friends and loved ones far and near.** [emph. Mine].

Barry

I know this was not a worship service, but it was a religious activity, and the implication that entertainment on this occasion was an organist is very troubling. I believe it adds more fuel to a liberal fire that is already beginning to flame at Forest Hill Irene and MSOP. I would ask my former classmates and all graduates of MSOP, to consider these things very carefully. Be honest with yourselves. Ask yourselves this question, and answer yourself truthfully. Is this the MSOP I attended? I think not!

In the December 10, 2009, Forest Hill bulletin, a scathing notice of withdrawal of fellowship was announced against brethren David Brown and Dub McClish. All these two faithful Gospel preachers have been guilty of calling upon Forest Hill, MOSP, and many others, to repent of their support of a false teacher who is not even willing to admit that he did something wrong in the eyes of God, much less

repent of it. I am totally confident that in the years of 1993-1995 all of those who are involved in the Memphis work would have been shoulder to shoulder with these two brethren in calling for brother Miller to repent of his preaching in favor of elder r/r and his participation in the process. The only thing different that I can see now is that if they speak out, and brother Miller does not repent, and Apologetics Press retains him, and GBN continues in fellowship with AP, Memphis would stand to lose the support, including financial support, of many brethren. Put it all together with the pressure while attending as students and as graduates to raise money for the school, and brethren, I fear that MSOP has lost its way and for nothing more than the pursuit of the huge amounts of money they need. No wonder the apostle Paul warned Timothy that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:10). But it isn't just the love of money that springs forth in evil. Putting one's self or an entity in the position of needing more money than is responsible does the same thing. This, in my view, is what has happened to Memphis School of Preaching. And unless and until repentance is forthcoming from them, they do not have the fellowship or support of this graduate.

In the early 1990's, I received a form letter from the now totally apostate, Rubel Shelly. In that letter, Shelly claimed that he had not changed in doctrine, only in attitude. Everyone knows now that his claim was a pure fabrication. I am not sure if the Forest Hill elders, Barry Grider, and the MSOP, would even admit to undergoing a change in attitude, but the truth is, they have not only changed in attitude, they have changed in actions, too. The words and deeds of Forest Hill Irene, and the presence of false teachers on the MSOP lectureship (and 2010 is not the first time it has happened), conclusively proves this to be the case. Some of you may blindly follow the lead of the school, others may be deceived, and still others may understand and agree with the fellowship compromises. If you are in either of the first two categories, I plead with you to do some open-eye and mind investigation. If you are in the third class of individuals, you, along with the brethren at the school need to repent. Apostasy begins in different ways, including compromise in fellowship. Compromise in fellowship cannot help but lead one to the conclusion that one really cannot determine what issues are matters of fellowship and which are not. Ultimately, the only conclusion to which it can lead an individual is that the New Testament does not constitute a pattern at all. Perhaps they would deny it, and maybe you would, too, but, my brethren, that is the direction Memphis School of Preaching has been heading for a considerable number of years. I implore you to join with your fellow classmate and graduate, and plead with the school to face how they have changed and turn them back from it, before it is too late to salvage.

Yours in Christ,



Charles Pogue