

ISSUE

21.50

BULLETIN OF
THE OLSEN
PARK CHURCH
OF CHRIST

Faithful Sayings

December 15,
2019

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter
Brady McAlister
Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Steve Dixon
Ryan Ferguson
Ben Hight
Blake McAlister
Walker McAnear
Sam Nunn
Lance Purcell
Justin Smiley
Kevin Wise
Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope



Summary of the Burleson-Pope Discussion on Institutionalism and Expediency by David Halbrook

On November 15, 2019 in Dickson, Tennessee at Freed-Hardeman University's *Renaissance Center*, Kyle Pope and Doug Burleson met for a public conversation. This was not formatted in the style of a typical debate, but instead like a living room meeting, where both sides could ask a question, receive an immediate answer, ask follow-up questions, and offer/request clarifications.

This summary of that discussion will naturally not include many points and counter-points. Please view the entire discussion online at the website of the Olsen Park church of Christ (<http://olsenpark.com/Video/Burleson-Pope-Discussion.mp4>).

Introduction (9:49)

Both men began by expressing appreciation for every effort involved in the process that produced this meeting. They also expressed mutual respect and desire for unity. Among his introductory remarks, Kyle commented that while we cannot ignore differences, our conduct in working through them must be "as brothers," citing 2 Thessalonians 3:15. Doug stated that he received some negative feedback about this discussion, being urged in one email not to "tear down fences we built," but he explained his desire for brethren to understand whether we must live in "parallel universes," teaching and doing many of the same things but never together. Doug emphasized the importance of understanding whether this controversy and division are primarily due to modernization or the will of the Lord.

Individual Benevolence (23:00)

Doug began by asking what kind of individual benevolent work is being done by non-institutional brethren. Kyle described how the needs of strangers who visit the assembly and request help are met. After some assessment of the request and need, various individuals volunteer to help. Also, *Sacred Selections* helps to meet the needs of orphans. Regarding the church's work, Kyle contrasted Acts 11:28-30 and Philippians 4:14-16, showing churches relieving the benevolent needs of other churches by delivering funds to the hands of the elders while the needs of evangelists were met by sending funds to the evangelist, not to the elders. Doug then asked whether the practices of fasting, laying on of hands, confession of Christ in the water, and eating the Lord's Supper in the evening are also binding or whether the principle of cultural context proves them to be permitted but not binding (Acts 13:3; 14:23; 8:35-39; 20:6).

Treasury (31:25)

Doug then focused on the treasury, asking what passages govern its formation and use.

Kyle submitted 1 Corinthians 16:2 as identifying one purpose for the funds collected on the first day of the week. He added 2 Corinthians 8:4; 1 Corinthians 9:1; and Romans 15:26 to identify the link between "fellowship" and the funds collected or distributed. Regarding the use of the funds, he pointed to the principle that any command that is given to the church authorizes the church to use funds for that purpose.

Christians and Churches (35:48)

Discussion of the treasury led to a more general discussion of "What defines the [local] church's work?". Doug expressed that the difference between *Sacred Selections* (SS), Florida College (FC), and Freed-Hardeman University (FHU) is "cloudy" because he saw no significance in "who" money is given through, as long as each church remains autonomous in its giving. Then he asked Kyle for an example of a missionary society. Kyle identified any institution that solicits money from churches as a missionary society, which also identified the primary distinction between SS, FC, and FHU.

After a brief question and answer regarding the principles involved in other divisions (no Bible class, "one cup," etc.), Doug asked "Don't y'all have institutions too?," allowing Kyle to again clarify that they are all separated from the churches.

Principles of Benevolence (53:03)

Kyle asked Doug to define how authority is known in any matter. Doug pointed to Bible examples and declarative statements in the area of benevolence, starting with Galatians 6:10. He explained that the focus is on the saints but not to the exclusion of non-saints. He added that we must understand the historical context, theological context, literary context, genre, etc., as well as our "Post-Enlightenment" view of individualism, which was not shared in Galatia. While acknowledging that there are some things the corporate body can do that an individual cannot do, Doug said division on this topic not only involves authority but also is about 20th century Americanism, requiring us to consider Paul's intent in what he wrote. Without these considerations, he believes we view our church buildings, money, and social activities in a way that is far more restrictive than Paul did. Based on their agreement that the distinction between the corporate body and the individual is not merely cultural, Kyle identified the failure to let Scripture define that difference as one of the causes of division.

This led to a more detailed discussion of Galatians 6:10. Doug asked several questions related to the culture and problems in Galatia prompting Paul to write to the churches. Kyle noted that the problems described affected many churches but some problems were individual (not congregational) in nature, such as the practice of circumcision.

Doug pointed to the way Paul addressed the Galatian saints in 6:1, 6, 9, and 11 as evidence of a congregational application of all that is said, including verse 10. Kyle said verse 10 could either be a statement identifying individual responsibility or was to be applied distributively, describing the general conduct of all Christians. I encourage you to view this section of the video.

Then Doug asked how restrictive 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 is-- may the funds thus collected only be used for disaster relief? Kyle identified this passage as identifying how and when churches collect funds, and that other passages show how churches use what they have. Doug said that position is difficult to sustain being based simply on two verses in 1 Corinthians 16. For example, should a church accept a widow's estate if it is officially turned over to the church on a Tuesday? Kyle acknowledged there are difficult circumstances but that does not change the original plan, adding that some people would say the practice of only singing (not playing) songs to God is based on two passages. Doug said "That's different." Kyle said "I don't think so."

The Treasury and Fellowship (1:13:04)

In Kyle's observation, Galatians 6:10 and James 1:27 have become "gridlock" passages, often ending this discussion. So he asked how Doug explained the consistent use of the term "saints" in connection with the purpose of the collection and how the treasury, being frequently associated with *koinonia* (fellowship), could be offered to non-saints since fellowship with non-saints is forbidden. Doug stated that 2 Corinthians 6:14ff, being very individualistic in nature, must be considered alongside 1 Corinthians 5:11 where we are told we must associate with the world. Thus he concluded that *koinōnia* is not always financial. Additionally, he noted that other passages include love, prayer, and service as fellowship. He then asked whether

love, prayers, and service must also be withheld from non-saints. Kyle stated that other passages expand on love, prayer, and service for non-saints, but none do so regarding the church's funds.

The Church, the Individual, and Our Identity in Christ (1:23:38)

Kyle returned to the difference between the church and individual, as illustrated in 1 Corinthians 11:18; 14:28, 34-35. Doug acknowledged that such differences exist but asked, due to our ongoing identity in Christ, how we can limit our benevolence since Jesus never did. Kyle stated that Jesus' unlimited benevolence was as an individual. Kyle added that the limits of Jesus as our pattern is illustrated in the fact that Jesus followed the old law, requiring discernment in our appeals to His example.

Doug expanded on the Christian's ongoing identity in Jesus, adding that Christ in us means the kingdom of God is always in us (Luke 17:21). Believing this, and that benevolence is tied to evangelism, he finds it hard to believe that the body of Christ cannot corporately serve the way Christ served. Kyle identified this as a false comparison because Jesus did this work individually and at times even turned people away (John 6), warning that shift-

ing the church's work beyond Scripture, shifts its purpose. Doug said this does not align with Jesus' ethics or practices, which included benevolence to children (Mark 9-10). As this discussion ended, Kyle stated that being acceptable to God means doing what we read in Scripture, following the examples given there. Doug replied that Jesus is our approved example.

Institutions (1:40:00)

Doug transitioned to the topic of institutions by asking whether there are any circumstances in which an unbaptized person could benefit from church funds, such as an unbelieving spouse married to a Christian or children. Kyle clarified this as a reference to benevolence, stating that the general New Testament teaching about the care of saints may incidentally involve unbelievers who are in the same household as believers. He then asked how this proves the church may fund another institution.

Doug pointed out the similarities between *FC* and *FHU* and asked Kyle to explain the differences, adding that

the claim there is no relationship between the college and church is difficult to maintain. Kyle returned to the distinction between acting as a church and actions which do not represent the church, noting that there are no "church-affiliated institutions" in Scripture. Doug agreed that there are no "church of Christ institutions," and added that the primary difference between he and Kyle is that he uses money from the treasury for these institutions and Kyle uses money that is not from the treasury. As a result, Doug concluded that, in the end, we are all supporting institutions. Their discussion is summarized by these questions: Kyle asked "Is everything we do as individuals, acting as a church?," and Doug asked "When am I not representing the church of our Lord?".

Kyle stated that if we are going to be united, we must figure these things out. I believe Doug would fully agree.

Closing Remarks (1:53:06)

Both brothers expressed mutual love and desire for unity. Doug urged us all to do better in that effort. Kyle optimistically noted that though we disagree about where there is a pattern, at least we agree that there is a pattern. The evening concluded with prayer by our brother Greg Tidwell.

Of course, there were many other Scriptures and points made that are not included in this summary. I have no doubt that I left out some things that both men would want you to hear. Whatever your convictions are on these topics, I hope this summary and their discussion will be occasions for us to exercise our senses to discern both good and evil (Heb.5:12-13).

EDITOR'S NOTE: David Halbrook preaches in Fairbanks, Alaska. Olsen Park has fellowship with David in helping with some of his support. David invited two institutional preachers to watch this discussion with him and recently sent us this summary. The elders asked me to print it in this week's bulletin.

