

"...having the eyes of your heart enlightened..." Ephesians 1:18

Welcome Visitors!

You are our honored guests and we are pleased that you have chosen to visit us today. Our goal is to do everything according to God's word, including respecting its silence. This is a church of Christ; we are not a denomination, not part of anything larger than this local church and we have no earthly "headquarters." The six elders oversee this work and, ultimately, we answer only to Christ. The comments you hear today are primarily aimed at our own members, as we examine Scripture and seek to be built up in our faith in Christ. If you don't understand something, please do not hesitate to ask one of the elders. We welcome and appreciate your comments and questions on any issue and especially if you see or hear anything that you feel does not correspond to God's word. We are here to serve; please help us do that.

Please fill out a visitor's card and put it in the collection plate. Thank You

Schedule

The Lord's Day

9:30 AM – Classes

Auditorium: Fellowship

Room 13/14: Jesus in the Gospel of John (cont'd)

Room 17 – Young Adults Class (18-29)

10:30 AM – Assembly

Speaking today: David Posey

2 PM Class at the Building

Hebrews (Room 13/14)

5 PM (building)

Proverbs

Weekly Young Adults Class

Class at Posey's: 5 PM

Tuesday Class: 10 AM at the Building

"Abounding Love"

The Love of God, our Motive for Loving Others

Wednesday, 7 PM

Auditorium: Fellowship

Room 13/14: Jesus in the Gospel of John (cont'd)

Men's Saturday Morning Meeting

7 AM, second Saturday of the month (see Tyler Wade)

Information

Website & Online Presence

Visit our website at www.folsomchurch.com for updates and material on current and past classes, and recorded sermons and classes. You will also find a directory of churches on page one. If you are a member of the church here at Folsom, see one of the deacons or elders to inquire about access to the password-protected members section. Find us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/folsomchurch>

Children's Classes

We have classes for children from 18 months and up. Please see the map in the hallway or ask any of the members which room is appropriate for you and/or your child. There are several Bible studies in progress on Sunday afternoon and evening. Check with David Posey if you have questions.

Restrooms

There are two sets of restrooms: one off the first hallway to the right of the lobby and another at the end of the first hallway to the left. Ask anyone and they'll be happy to point you in the right direction.

For Small Children

There is a special room for nursing mothers and a separate "cry room" at the rear of the auditorium. You enter them from the first hallway to the right, across from the restrooms.

View & Junior View

Be sure to pick up a copy of the View and Junior View; both are sent out weekly to our member list and hard copies are printed on Sundays and available in the foyer.

"Faith is not a leap in the dark; it's the exact opposite. It's a commitment based on evidence... It is irrational to reduce all faith to blind faith and then subject it to ridicule. That provides a very anti-intellectual and convenient way of avoiding intelligent discussion."

John Lennox, Professor of Mathematics at Oxford University (emeritus)

“I’VE GOT A QUESTION”

To: Parents – many of these questions have been asked by your children or their friends; you might want to go over these with them to see if they have the same questions.

Why doesn’t the church take a strong stance against gluttony?”

This is a good question. I can’t say I remember ever hearing a sermon on it and I admit I’ve never preached a whole sermon on gluttony (although I think I’ve mentioned it in lists of sins).

Unless I’ve missed something, the New Testament never uses the noun “gluttony.” It does use the word, “glutton”: Jesus was accused of being a “glutton and a drunkard” (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34); of course, that doesn’t mean he was either of those things. In describing the people on the island of Crete, Paul told Titus, “One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons’” (Titus 1:12). The word “glutton” also appears four times in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 21:20; Proverbs 23:20 & 21; 28:7).

Perhaps the reason the noun “gluttony” is not mentioned is because it is a subset of other works of the flesh such as covetousness, greed, sensuality (an obsessive desire to satisfy the senses), and “things like these” (Galatians 5:21).

I wrote an article on Gluttony in the January 12, 2014 issue of the *View*. If you would like to read it, let me know and I’ll send it to you.

“Will we know each other in heaven?”

This question comes up often from younger and older Christians alike. The answer is, *we don’t know*. My *guess* is that, yes, we will know each other. I say that because (a) while we *recognize* each other here by physical features, we *know* each other more deeply, as persons. That personhood is a product of our souls, not just our bodies and it is our soul that goes to heaven. (b) In Jesus’ story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), the rich man identifies Abraham. In other words, there is not only consciousness of what is happening to him — “I am in anguish in this flame” (16:25) — but also of the person of Abraham.

Another question that comes up, assuming we will know each other in heaven, is whether we will know that some of our loved ones did not make it to heaven. Again, I have no solid answer to that although since heaven is a place of constant joy and fulfilled hope, I must assume that our memories will be adjusted accordingly. Perhaps the Holy Spirit has a function in heaven in these matters.

Why are churches of Christ dying?

This important question is based on an irrefutable fact: most churches in the United States are declining in membership) and, in the last 25 years, many have shut their doors and ceased to exist. Remarkably, a church in the Bay Area that was the model of growth and “success” as late as the 1980’s, with attendance in excess of 400, recently shut its doors and sold the building. Why?

Any answer to that is, necessarily, anecdotal. There is no solid research that we can point to about churches of Christ in America because every church is autonomous and there is no central organization. But it is also true that denominations have lost members and many have closed their doors as well. In other words, Christianity — as that word is used in its broadest (not biblical) sense — has suffered loss in America for a couple of decades now. Research by the Barna Group tells us that the second largest “religious” group are the “nones” — those who are not religious at all (i.e., don’t attend a church of any kind and are indifferent to religion) and that is independent of their belief in God (many “nones” still believe in God).

It’s important to notice that this loss of interest is an American issue. In many places around the globe, Christianity (even if a watered-down version of it) is thriving. Many preachers I know love to travel to Africa or other parts of the world because the harvest is plentiful and they’ve found receptive hearts. I believe they would agree that while they’ve had great success in other parts of the world, they have much less success here.

Some blame the church for all this — and there’s plenty of blame that is justified (we’ll get to that in a bit). But in those places where churches are thriving, the churches function in their assemblies in much the same way that we do. There is something else that must explain the historic decline than that church assemblies are less than exciting — or whatever reason some may assert.

American churches that have tried to make their services more “exciting” and “user-friendly” have suffered losses, too. Even where attendance has remained the same, many leaders in these churches are realizing that the entertainment approach is failing miserably to form true disciples of Christ. This has given rise to the “spiritual formation” movement that many churches have adopted recently.

Spiritual formation is the process of forming or growing the spiritual self. You might be surprised to learn that this is a “movement” of recent origin — hasn’t this always been the goal in teaching and preaching. I can say that, although we haven’t used this term, that our aim at Folsom has always been to help form or grow the “spiritual self” (see Galatians 4:19; II Peter 3:18, and many more).

The point is, many of the churches that are signing on to this “movement” were previously engaged in something that appealed more to the physical life. The object was to give them what they *want* (entertaining music and sermons) then we will give them what they *need* (the gospel). Of course, that “seeker church” mentality brings a large crowd into a Sunday assembly, but it does nothing to help people to walk in the steps of Jesus.

But what about churches of Christ that, presumably, have always focused on the pure word of God and taught the gospel? Why have those churches failed?

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Again, the answer to why many if not most churches of Christ are declining or dying is speculation or, at best, an educated guess. We don't want to discount the cultural effects that affect every church, primarily declining interest in anything that has to do with God, Christ and the Bible.

Having said that, there are plenty of things that churches have done that have been self-defeating. I can speak to some of those things since I've spent my whole life attending and preaching in churches in California (minus the 18 months I attended the church on Oahu). Here are some *personal* observations — and that's all they are, but they speak to what I try to teach and emphasize as the preacher here at Folsom:

1. **Focus.** I think many churches lost their way when they moved the focus from Christ to the church and put emphasis on the social aspects of the church instead of aiming for spiritual growth. I know churches that seemed more concerned about maintaining the building than about true edification. Any man who has ever attended a business meeting can probably attest to this.
2. **The Bible.** Of course, some churches have virtually abandoned the Bible. I've heard sermons in which the Bible wasn't mentioned for the first 20 minutes or at all. (In one case, a preacher read almost the entire "I have a dream" speech of Martin Luther King to start his sermon). Then there is the opposite problem: sitting in a Bible class where the teacher is spending 10 minutes on each verse and the comments almost completely ignore the purpose or the context of the book. Then when application is attempted, it is frustratingly shallow and rarely challenges the *status quo*. If the Bible is ignored or misused, churches are doomed to die and they probably should.
3. **Leadership.** One obvious reason for the death of churches is the dearth of qualified men to step up as leaders. The culture has seeped into the church so divorces are more common and fewer children have remained faithful. Qualified men are hard to find so churches settle for men who are not qualified in other respects (e.g., apt to teach). Lack of quality leadership kills churches, just like it kills businesses, organizations and families.
4. **Transparency.** In the past, I also observed a lack of transparency in the leadership, especially when it came to financial matters. There was little effort to keep the church informed about the budget, leaving the impression that these matters were none of the congregation's business and, worse, that the elders were making "backroom" decisions. This led, naturally, to a distrust of the leadership and disillusionment which led to members to leave those churches.
5. **Divisions.** Churches of Christ in the 50s were growing rapidly. It was reported that churches of Christ were the fastest growing churches in the United States. My dad was preaching in Huntington Beach in the

mid-50s and baptizing people right and left. That was true in all of Orange County and southern LA County — there were churches in most of the cities and two or three in some cities (besides Huntington Beach, there were three in Long Beach; two in Anaheim; four or five in Garden Grove and a couple in Santa Ana). But then it happened: churches began to divide over what preachers commonly called "the issues." These were serious issues that I won't get into here and I'm not going to comment on the wisdom of how debates and discussions were carried out — I was quite young. But my dad was in the middle of it and told me, later in life, that he felt they could have done better, that there wasn't much "gentleness" among the brethren in their actions toward one another. In any case, it goes without saying that if Christians are arguing with each other, that is not a recipe for church growth. Unfortunately, we see that today on Facebook. That's why I talk so much about unity here at Folsom. I've seen the terrible effects of *disunity*.

6. **Teaching the Youth.** I can speak to this with some authority: parents loved their kids but very little attention was given to kids in the churches I attended. That was not a priority. Parents were not teaching their kids like they used to either. Why? If you had to point to just one cause, television would have to be at or near the top of the list. Instead of reading to kids from the Bible and other literature, the family sat around watching *Father Knows Best*, *I Love Lucy* and *Gunsmoke* instead. We can grouse about the way kids are married to their phones today, but the technological miracle of TV caused just as much of a cultural shift in its day as the iPhone did several years ago. But many churches were not doing their part, either — they were too caught up in dealing with the "issues" and adult verse-to-verse Bible studies. I literally cannot remember Bible classes I attended when I was a kid. And there certainly was nothing like our VBS or Boot Camp in those days. I know that people criticized that kind of thing on the sole basis that "the denominations are doing that." The combination of a basic change in the way families spent their time and the lack of a church's emphasis on the teaching of the young was devastating and we've seen the results over the last 40 years.
7. **Questions.** One additional cause for the decline was a failure to listen to questions and address them honestly and openly. There was an epidemic of pat answers and an irrational fear of saying, "I don't know." That led to the use of proof-texts that many of us learned, years later, proved nothing at all and worse, suggested that men were not being honest with us.

And I haven't even mentioned the amazing lack of **friendliness** you find in some churches — even small ones. That may be the most inexcusable failure of all. A simple greeting and extending of kindness should be a given in a body of Christians.

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