

# WHEN YOUR PREACHER LEAVES: Interim Services for Churches Between Ministers

May, 2008, #23



Jerrie Barber and John Parker



To subscribe to this newsletter: > [Subscribe page](#) .

---

In this newsletter:

The Identity of the Church

Are You a Lightning Rod or a Throw Rug? – Attitude toward Criticism

Shakespeare Quotations for Ministers

Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books

Smile of the Month

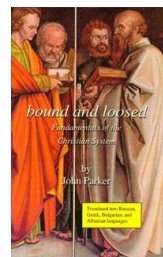
Jerrie and John this Month

---

## The Identity of the Church

by John Parker

Following is a selection from my book *Bound and Loosed: Fundamentals of the Christian System*, 2004. Please e-mail for information on purchasing this book: [johnparker22@aol.com](mailto:johnparker22@aol.com) .



People tend to be gregarious, and the world is full of groups and organizations of vastly differing purposes that put people together who have common interests. Some of these groups are of large national or international importance, such as political bodies like the United States Senate or the Parliament of England. Some groups are benevolent, such as the Red Cross. Others are for those who pursue the same hobby. The Baker Street Irregulars, for example, is a group devoted to the study of Sherlock Holmes. Members acquire a detailed knowledge of the Arthur Conan Doyle stories, pass tests, and receive special names from the stories, such as “Black Peter.” They may dress like Holmes and acquire such mementos as

Holmes alarm clocks or bricks from 221B Baker street, Holmes' fictional apartment house. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was once a member of this group (Strebeigh, 41-46).

Groups, then, are of many different origins and purposes, and of widely varying degrees of importance to the world. But there is one group of people that is infinitely more important than any other, and it is a group to which not just a few people or many people should belong, but one to which all men should belong, because the eternal destiny of every man or woman who lives on the earth depends on membership in it. That group is the church of Jesus Christ.

During his public ministry, while in the area of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his disciples whom they believed him to be:

MAT 16:16 NKJV And Simon Peter answered and said,

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

17 Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

18 “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

This was Jesus' great announcement concerning the church. What is the church? What is its nature and purpose?

To begin with, as stated above, the church is a group of people. Many ideas and concepts are associated with the church, and we will discuss some of these later, but here we should recognize first that the church itself is a group of people.

For example, in Acts 2:47 the church is identified as the people who were being saved. Acts 5:11 speaks of the church's being afraid; Acts 8:3 speaks of the church's being harassed and imprisoned. 1 Cor. 1:2 identifies the church as the saints, or people who had been sanctified. All of these references are to people, not to an object or a theoretical institution, neither of which can be saved, be afraid, be imprisoned, or be sanctified to serve God.

The Greek word translated “church”--*ekklesia*--originally meant a particular assembly of people. For example, *ekklesia* is used in this sense in Acts 19:32, where a man is described as attempting to address an assembly of people in the theater in Ephesus.

*Ekklesia* comes from a combination of two Greek words: *ek*, meaning out of (cf. “exit”), and *klesis*, meaning a calling. Hence it refers to a group of people called out for a special purpose. The Greeks used the term to refer to a body of people called together to discuss matters relating to the state (cf. Acts 19:39). Stephen referred to the people of Israel as an *ekklesia* in Acts 7:38. And finally the term *ekklesia* came to be used especially to refer to the New Testament church (Mt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1, et. al.) (Vine, “assembly,” 85-86).

It is important to keep this definition in mind so that we can have a clear concept of the activities and work of the church, and so that we can be accurate in our use of the term. One needs to be sure that he truly understands the word “church” when he uses it. To ask “what does the church believe” means to ask what do the people who make up the church believe. If one speaks of “attending church,” probably he really means attending the worship services conducted by the people who make up the church. If one asks “how is the church doing” he means how are the members who make up the church faring in their service to God. So the first point to be seen is that the church is a group of people.

In answer to the question of what the church is, then, we see first that it is a group of people.

But recognizing that the church is a group of people is of course not sufficient for us to have a complete definition of the church. The church as it is used in the New Testament cannot be fully or properly defined or understood except in connection with the *nature* of the group of people referred to. Thus we must ask a second question: what is the nature of the church? What is this group of people like, and what distinguishes them as a special group of people?

The church is a group of people, but a special group, one unique in history. That special quality lies in the relationship of this group with God and his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus said of his purpose in coming to earth:

LUK 19:10 NKJV “for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

The church is that group of people whom Jesus has saved. It is that congregation which God has saved from their sins as a result of the sacrifice of Christ and their obedience to him. We see this illustrated in Acts 2, where three thousand people were saved on the day of Pentecost. Luke says that after they obeyed the gospel which was preached to them by Peter and the rest of the apostles,

ACT 2:47 NKJV the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

God had called this group of people through his word to obedience to the gospel and to his service (Mk. 16:15-16; Eph. 4:1). Hence they are referred to as the “church of God” (that is, the congregation or group of people belonging to God) in 1 Cor. 1:2; 11:16, 2 Cor. 1:1, and other places. And as Christ brought about this salvation, they are also referred to as his church (Mt. 16:18; Rom. 16:16), the group of people or congregation belonging to him because he saved them (cf. Eph. 5:23).

As the people saved by God and his Son, members of the congregation of the church sustain a special relationship to them and to one another. They are, indeed, those that are saved (Act 2:47; Eph. 5:23), as opposed to all other persons accountable to God, who therefore can only be identified as those who are not saved. That which the

members of the church have in common is their salvation by the Lord and all of the benefits and responsibilities that go with it.

It follows, then, that if one is saved, he is a member of the church (the congregation of saved persons belonging to God and Christ), and conversely if one is not a member of the church, he is not one of the saved people.

We should also recognize in this regard that the word “church” (*ekklesia*) is used in two senses in the New Testament. Often it means the saved people of God as a whole, or the universal church (cf. Mt. 16:18; Eph. 3:10, and others). Other times the term “church” refers to a specific congregation of the church in a given location, such as the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2) or the church in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:1). A person who obeys the gospel is added to the church (Acts 2:47), wears the name of Christian (Acts 11:26), and works for the Lord as a member of a local congregation of the church.

The church, then, is that group of people saved by God. But there is still more in this definition which requires our recognition. As stated above, God saves people by calling them through the gospel to obedience and service. In order for those saved by God to remain his people, they must continue to serve and obey him faithfully. Paul said to the church in Ephesus:

EPH 4:1 NKJV I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.

And John said:

2 JO 1:9 NKJV Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.

Further, Christ told the churches in Ephesus and Sardis that he would reject those who did not repent of wrongdoing (Rev. 2:4-5; 3:1-5).

These verses concerning the church demonstrate that God recognizes as his church only that group of people saved from their sins who continue to obey him and the doctrine of his Son Jesus. So long as they obey, they remain in his favor as his church. If they depart from his word and will not repent, they ultimately cease to be his church.

In summary, then, we see that the church is the group of people saved by God through his Son Jesus Christ who are serving him and remaining faithful to their calling through the word of his gospel. All of these people constitute the church of Christ as a whole, and they serve him and his Son in congregations of the church in various locations throughout the world.

(I am reading John’s book and have been thinking that this would be an excellent book for a *New Converts Class* or a book to teach those who are interested in learning how to become a Christian. Consider ordering a copy to consider and

then ordering one for each person in the class. – Jerrie Barber) Contact John directly for this book: [johnparker22@aol.com](mailto:johnparker22@aol.com) .

---

## Are You a Lightning Rod or a Throw Rug? – Attitude toward Criticism by Jerrie Barber



During the early years of my ministry, I didn't want criticism. I was scared of criticism. When someone told me what they didn't like, I felt rejected, mistreated. Twenty-one years after I started preaching, it was brought to my attention that criticism was a given. People thought it. I had the choice of knowing what others think and evaluating whether it is helpful or not helpful or of letting people know that I don't want it. If I choose that, my friend told me, "They won't tell you their criticisms until they are ready to fire (divorce, leave, reject) you."



As I have reflected on that conversation on a Monday afternoon in 1982, I have thought about the absurdity of my original attitude toward criticism. When a person accepts a position of leadership (elder, deacon, preacher, teacher, parent, Christian), he or she is accepting an opportunity of being in front and calling others to a higher plane. My picture is that of a lightning rod. The encyclopedia says that a lightning rod is a "metallic rod (usually copper) that protects a structure from lightning damage by intercepting flashes and guiding their currents into the ground. Because lightning tends to strike the highest object in the vicinity, rods are typically placed at the apex of a structure and along its ridges; they are connected to the ground by low-impedance cables" (<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9048229/lightning-rod>).

**Leaders are criticized.** The children of Israel wanted a recall on Moses and Aaron. When Joshua and Caleb concurred with their leadership, the congregation wanted to stone them (Numbers 14:1-10). Paul was criticized. "For *his* letters," they say, "*are* weighty and powerful, but *his* bodily presence *is* weak, and *his* speech contemptible" (2 Corinthians 10:10, NKJV). In our language: "He is ugly and he can't preach." Jesus was criticized. He was called a glutton and a wino (Matthew 11:19). "He has a demon, and is insane" (John 10:20, ESV). On one occasion, His own people said, "He is out of His mind" (Mark 3:21, NKJV). If Jesus and Paul were not good enough and effective enough to escape criticism – even from those close to them – Jerrie Barber will be criticized.

If that is true, I have some choices. I can play the game of "Ain't it awful" and wish that it would go away. I can get angry and defensive and blame the critics. I can feel rejected and depressed because everybody doesn't appreciate how hard I work and how dedicated I am.

Or I can accept reality: lightning rods attract lightning. Lightning rods process strong surges of electricity. A bolt of lightning can travel 37 miles per second and reach

a temperature of 54,000°F. The lightning rod accepts the power and transports it to the ground to keep the house over which it is watching safe.

**Criticism is and will be.** I can be defeated by criticism by:

1. Rejecting it all. This assumes that I am the smartest, wisest person on earth. There is no one who knows as much – and certainly not more than I do. No one could tell me a better way to think or act. Therefore, I do not need to hear a critic. And if anyone should have one small bit of information different from what I have already thought (and I doubt if they do), they must come with the best attitude (judged by me), with the right tone of voice, at the right time, and acknowledge that I am probably right. Moreover, if I am not right on this issue, I am right on everything else.
2. Accepting it all. Everyone knows more than I do. All people are wiser than I am. Any time any one tells me a better way to think or act, I must comply with his or her wishes. After all, I have few goals in life. My main one is to please everyone all the time. That's not asking much. Therefore, when anyone criticizes me, I will immediately take that person's advice. I will comply with his wishes.

There is at least one more choice. I can listen to what others say. I can thank them for their concern. Anyone who finds salmonella or e coli in my refrigerator and tells me is my friend – not my enemy. Anyone who criticizes has some concern, some connection to me.

After I have listened, I can think. I can evaluate. I can decide if the comments were helpful, hurtful, or neutral. I can choose to accept, reject, or ponder the comments. I am not obligated to accept, refuse, defend, or refute. I can think and act appropriately. When I have remembered to do this, I am less anxious and wiser.

Charles Reynolds Brown, dean of Yale Divinity School, commented, “The man who does not know, and does not know that he does not know and is not willing that anyone should tell him that he does not know, had better not enter the ministry – he had better raise sweet potatoes” *Education for Christian Service*, “The Training of a Minister,” page 11).

For a longer discussion of this subject, select the CD: [“How to Accept, Invite, and Enjoy Criticism.”](#)

---

## Shakespeare Quotations for Ministers, by John Parker

It is not enough to speak, but to speak true.  
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE 5.1

There was never yet philosopher  
That could endure the toothache patiently.  
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING 5.1

Runs not this speech like iron through your blood?  
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING 5.1  
[A reaction to hearing unpleasant news]

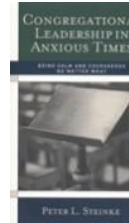


There is not one so young and so villainous this day living.  
AS YOU LIKE IT 1.2  
[A commentary on a young but treacherous person]

---

## Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books, Jerrie Barber

*Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, Peter L. Steinke, Copyright © 2006 by the Alban Institute.



People vary considerably in how they address emotionally challenging events. On the lower (immature) side, people are *reactive*. They blame more often; they criticize harshly; they take offense easily; they focus on others; they want instant solutions; they cannot see the part they play in problems. On the higher (mature) side, people are most thoughtful and reflective; they act on principle, not instinct; they can stand back and observe. They are *responsive*. Intent and choice characterize their behavior (page 1).

Human behavior is largely governed by automatic forces. Most of the time, people act without thinking. Differentiation is a process in which a person moves toward a more intentional and thoughtful way of life (and a less automatic way of functioning). Differentiation is the relative ability of people to guide their own functioning by

- thinking clearly
- acting on principle
- defining self by taking a position
- coming to know more about their own instinctive reactions to others
- learning to regulate those reactions
- staying in contact with others
- choosing a responsible course of action (page 19).

Congregations are uniquely vulnerable to fusion. Being idealistic groups, congregations work to maintain high spirits. When premium value is placed on harmony, acceptance, and belonging, people resist information that might disturb their peace. No one wants to speak the truth. If people are emotionally linked, they may not have sufficient space to challenge one another (page 26).

It is important to not the difference between giving up self in fusion and giving up self for cooperation or for the community's welfare. Fusion results from *automatic* reactions. Cooperation is *chosen* (page 29).

To be a nonanxious presence, you focus on your own behavior and its modification rather than be preoccupied with how others function. In a hospital, a rule for caretakers reads: "In case of cardiac arrest, take your own pulse first" (page 31).

In the biblical story of the golden calf (Exod. 32), anxiety became contagious. By relenting to the peevish demands of the Israelites, Aaron gave them the Prozac of the day. He thought that if he helped them to feel good, they would be contented and their lot improved. Essentially, Aaron succumbed to the pressure of the moment. Aaron joined the excited mob with such haste that he did not in any way calm the emotional uprising. He simply could not tolerate their pain. In contrast, when Moses returned and saw the glittering idol they had constructed, he took a stand. He had the gold melted and pulverized (page 34).

People have the dual capacity to act without thinking (reactivity) and to take time for thought before they act (response). They cannot, however, control their original impulses, even their first perceptions and impressions. They can control their expression in word or action (page 35).

The influencing potential of the nonanxious presence is not to be confused with being “cool” or being “nice.” Nor is it to be construed as denying anxiety in ourselves, as if unaffected by events. The nonanxious presence involves engagement, being there and taking the heat if need be, witnessing the pain, and yet not fighting fire with fire. The nonanxious presence means we are aware of our own anxiety and the anxiety of others, but we will not let either determine our actions. Obviously this means that we have some capacity to tolerate pain both in ourselves and in others (page 37).

The nonanxious leader can broadly affect the entire emotional field. It’s as if the leader’s calm, reflective demeanor becomes an antibiotic warding off the toxicity of reactive behavior (page 38).

Because of the leader’s position in an emotional field, the leader affects the whole most significantly. With the leader make choices based on principle or will the leader choose on the basis of expediency? Will the leader take a clear position or will the leader change sides according to the audience? Will the leader, through a differentiating, nonanxious presence, promote creativity or will the leader’s high anxiety encourage reactivity (pages 67, 68).

One of the nagging questions facing leaders is how long can the mess be endured before it becomes a major infection. Love, after all, is long-suffering. Indeed it is. But love is not long-suffering and foolish. Love is not overindulgent. Love is not a failure of nerve. Love suffers long so that something new can be erected out of the old. Yet love does not suffer long because it is anxious about naming and confronting the violation. Love doesn’t put up with harmful boundary intrusion, because it would agitate the community’s peace. Long-suffering love is about doing away with suffering that issues from the harm of others, not being an accomplice to the harmful invasion (page 94).

The church has been far too fearful of conflict. Congregational leaders need to come to a new position, one that regards conflict as inevitable, possibly essential. Conflict is a part of living. Too often, however, we react in a primitive way that merely

results in a “we versus they” scenario. How we regard conflict is a test and an act of leadership. How can we turn trouble into opportunity? Most critically, when conflict arises, how can it be seen as a learning point for change and an experience that can strengthen the congregation’s functioning? Not all conflicts are equal. Some are harsh and bitter. Yet many conflicts can contribute to the growth of a congregation and make a positive contribution. The quality of leadership applied to the situation determines the outcome (page 99).

Moses represents the leader who is willing to challenge. Aaron portrays the leader who does what is necessary to survive, lets whatever the polls say determine his behavior, and maintains stability even if it means losing self. Moses doesn’t accept the fact that, although the people had seen firsthand God at work in their lives, they had not learned anything. Aaron? He’s smiling, ready to yield to any passion to preserve harmony. Learning is too messy, too slow. He chooses to be a leader who follows (145, 146).

---

## Smile of the Month

During a homicide trial in Nassau County, N.Y., the witness had just stated that he saw the victim lying on the ground, obviously dead. The defense lawyer rose to his feet and conducted the following cross-examination:

“Sir, are you a doctor?”

“No,” replied the witness.

“Well, are you a paramedic?”

“No, I’m not,” the witness stated.

“Have you ever gone to medical school?”

“Never,” was the answer.

“Then tell me, sir, how do you know that the victim was indeed dead?”

“Well,” responded the witness, “I went to his funeral.”

*Reader’s Digest*, July 1996, page 58



---

## Barber Clippings

We had fifteen men participate in the *God’s Great Servants* leadership class. You can see the picture near the bottom of the page: [Interim at Eddyville](#) . Outlines of the class with supplemental material are on my web site. The lessons are in PDF files. The book cover and spine and the certificate are in Word documents: [Resources](#) . Feel free to browse, edit and use as you see fit. If you have questions that I can answer, feel free to contact me.

Jerrie Barber

[jerrie@barberclippings.com](mailto:jerrie@barberclippings.com)  
[www.barberclippings.com](http://www.barberclippings.com)  
<http://barberclippings.blogspot.com/>  
(615) 356-8371  
P. O. Box 630  
Eddyville, Kentucky 42038  
Church phone: 270-388-7948  
Cell phone: 615-584-0512

---

## John Parker

New Leaf Press of Green Forest, Arkansas, will publish next spring a book on the classic British hymns by Paul Seawright and John Parker. Paul, head of the department of photography at the University of Ulster in Ireland, is one of Britain's outstanding photographers and has produced photographic books and exhibits in Europe and America. In the summers of 2006 and 2007 he and I traveled to many places in England and Wales where the hymns were composed. Paul photographed these sites for the forthcoming book, and I have formed images and collected material for the text. The hymns include *Amazing Grace; Just As I Am; When I Survey the Wondrous Cross, Abide With Me; Hark! The Herald Angels Sing; Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah*; and about twenty other of the great British hymns which have been at the heart of our worship in song for two centuries and more. While hundreds of books about the hymns have been published during the last century, none approaches the pictorial presentation that this book will contain. We look forward to completing it this year and to its publication next spring.

I have prepared and presented PowerPoint lessons on these hymns and their great scriptural and poetic teachings, lessons featuring my own photographs of the sites. If your church would be interested in my presenting some of these lessons, please contact me at [johnparker22@comcast.net](mailto:johnparker22@comcast.net). Please also see my website at [www.interimcofc.com](http://www.interimcofc.com).

John H. Parker  
[Johnparker22@aol.com](mailto:Johnparker22@aol.com)  
[www.interimcofc.com](http://www.interimcofc.com)  
(615) 373-4462

---

To subscribe to this newsletter: > [Subscribe page](#) .