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From/To: Verlon Harp (Chalk's reply filed first)

Verlon Harp

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Mr. Verlon Harp
408 Beuna Vista
Salisbury, Maryland 21801

Dear Brother Harp:

My personal views regarding the institutional "Church of Christ" are extremely pessimistic. I see very little preaching of "the gospel" going on in our pulpits, much less any honest wrestling with the text in a serious way by adults who are already church members, consequently the "body of Christ" is not alive and responding to human need in the way that it's Head did while He was on the earth. As to what all of this means for the future, I have no way of knowing.

My own response has never been either evangelism or "change the church." It is my conviction that out of my personal relationship with God through Christ comes my daily opportunities to serve. A pagan is a pagan to me, whether he happens to be in the institutional church or out of it. Any man, in or out of the church, who does not know God is a mission field, and an opportunity for my witness. I might, at one time, have espoused denominational and parochial views that were aimed at "changing the church." I have, to the best of my knowledge, rejected such narrow sectarian approaches so that I am allowed, in my relationship with Christ, to minister to any needy human being God brings me into contact with, whether that man happens to be an elder in an organized "Church of Christ" or that man happens to be a secular hippie on a university campus. Both men have the same need of God and both men need the same message of Jesus. Both men will be approached differently, out of where they are, but my testimony ultimately of the salvation I am experiencing in Jesus will be the same.

I stay in the organized institutional church one day at a time. I stay in solely because of my relationship with Jesus Christ. In my serious intentional decision of surrender to His Lordly rule daily, I do what I believe is His will for me that day. To date, I
believe His will has been for me to work within the institutional church, though I believe it to be dead, sterile and impotent. He may, at some future date, not so desire, or at least I may come to the believing conclusion that He does not so desire that of me. At this point I have no other choice, in the midst of all of the pain it causes.

Your brother,

John Allen Chalk

JAC:lc
December 28, 1970

Mr. John Allen Chalk
Highland Church of Christ
P.O. Box 2439
Abilene, Texas 79604

Dear Bro. Chalk:

It has never been my privilege to meet you. Several friends of mine have much confidence in what you stand for and are striving to accomplish. Lynn Anderson talks very highly of you as God's man. You probably are very anxious for Landon Saunders to come to that part of the country. He is a great man. He mentions you often.

Perhaps you'll have time to answer a couple of questions which you might be in a position to answer. Many of us are going through a metamorphosis, as you well know. The beautiful Gospel pictures of Jesus coming to save and to serve is what I want to do as a servant to Him. Jesus made it clear in his commission to his disciples to go and teach, but what about today. It is very frustrating to teach some of our denominational friends and brethren when there aren't too many differences between us. Evangelism would be much more challenging in a place where few people knew about Jesus. At least it seems that way.

As I search the scriptures motives always come to my mind because I used to do things for the wrong ones as many of my brethren are doing today. And of course I'm still guilty many times. I want to do the Lord's will for the right motives and find fulfillment.

In Paul's letters he seems to be putting forth an effort to change the Church as it was then. Even that could be a worthy work as a servant. I guess I'm trying to find out where the Lord wants me to put my emphasis. You could not answer that of course. But you have been involved with both evangelism and trying to change the Church. Perhaps you could help me by letting me know how you feel at this point. Do you think you are fighting a losing battle at Abilene or is their hope and are things looking better in the "church of Christ".

"If You Are Living as Though Christ Never Lived, You Will Die as Though Christ Never Died"
Some of my closest preaching brethren are thinking about leaving the Church. I do not think that is the answer and I believe our historical roots are beautiful. We have just forgotten the kind of unity that brought men together instead of excluding them.

Thanks for the time. I hope this is clear enough for you to understand and if you have time, your emphasis and your thoughts along these lines would be of some help to me I'm sure.

God bless you.

Brotherly,

Verlon Harp
408 Buena Vista
Salisbury, Maryland 21801