

Ern Baxter and the Article that Put Him at Odds with Other Healing Revivalists

A review of his blistering critique of the evangelists in the Post-World War II healing revival

By Roscoe Barnes III, PhD

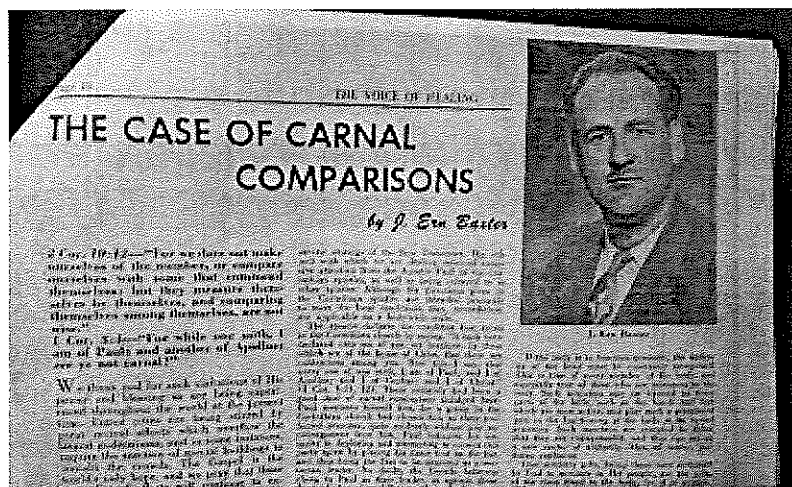
Author, *F.F. Bosworth: The Man Behind "Christ the Healer"*

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In a 1978 interview with *New Wine Magazine*, Ern Baxter spoke about an article he wrote that made him anathema among the healing revivalists of the 1950s. At the time, Baxter was an active member of the Voice of Healing organization. For several years, he had worked with William Branham, Gordon Lindsay, and F.F. Bosworth. After being intimately close to the preachers who boasted of having great healing ministries, Baxter apparently saw things that were inappropriate. He reportedly saw error, sin, and deception. He also believed the preachers were more concerned about “competition,” fame, and money, than they were about pleasing God. So he wrote an article to express his concerns. The article, which was titled, “**The Case of Carnal Comparisons**,” appeared in the June 1951 issue of *The Voice of Healing*. Baxter said in his *New Wine* interview that he wrote the piece out of his “conviction and concern.” He

said that in his article, he noted "there was a good deal of Corinthianism already in the healing movement." If things did not improve "by the healers to remedy it, this movement would self-destruct," he cautioned.

In the article, Baxter used Paul's writings to the Corinthians to support his argument. He acknowledged that God was doing a wonderful thing in the post-World War II healing revival. He suggested as much in his opening paragraph:

We thank god for such visitations of His power and blessing as are being experienced throughout the world at the present time. Entire cities are being stirred by great revival efforts which overflow the largest auditoriums, and in some instances, require the erection of special buildings to contain the crowds. The Gospel is the world's only hope, and we pray that these great Gospel efforts will continue to enlarge in power and influence until the whole world feels the influence of the Spirit of God.

Despite all the good that was being done, he explained, there were serious issues that put certain ministries (or the movement) in jeopardy. These issues were of such significance that he felt compelled to issue a warning. He wrote:

There is, however, a great danger in such mighty movements where individuals are catapulted into places of prominence as leaders. Instead of humbly recognizing the hand of God in the whole, and the grace of God in equipping men for leadership, and thus giving all the glory to God, there is a tendency to humanly evaluate leaders, and compare and pick and choose favorites. Such an attitude indicates a limited vision. This robs God of His glory, is unfair to the leader, and contributes to the party spirit among Christians, which God so evidently deplores, as indicated in His word.

The reaction to Baxter's article, for the most part, was not positive. "As a result of that article I was persona non grata from there on as far as the healers were concerned, so I confined myself to [William] Branham," he said. "Tragically, as these men violated the principles of plurality, each of them had his turn at the pinnacle of fame, but most of them were easily picked off by the enemy. Satan's aim is good."

Because his article appeared on the pages of *The Voice of Healing*, one must assume that Gordon Lindsay, the magazine's editor, agreed with Baxter's assessment. Other sources, such as Freda Lindsay and David E. Harrell Jr. have reported on Gordon's frustration and disgust with the men in the movement. Freda recalled how some of the evangelists actually "used" Gordon to their advantage. When they became big, they cast him aside. When they got into trouble, they came to him for help. Each time, she said, in loving humility, Gordon stepped in to help those in need. Still, he was disappointed.

In her memoir, *My Diary Secrets* (Christ For The Nations Inc., 1976), Freda recounted:

As Gordon and I reflected on the gradual change that became apparent, I recall his summing it up this way: "When ministers become successful and have large crowds, too often they forget to wait on the Lord daily and study His Word. They depend on their reputation. And instead of being men of God they become showmen."

A copy of Baxter's article is printed below.

The Voice of Healing
(June 1951, pages 10-11)

The Case of Carnal Comparisons

By J. Ern Baxter

2 Cor. 10:12 – “For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measure themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.”

1 Cor. 3:4 – “For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another of Apollos; are ye not carnal?”

We thank God for such visitations of His power and blessing as are being experienced throughout the world at the present time. Entire cities are being stirred by great revival efforts which overflow the largest auditoriums, and in some instances, require the erection of special buildings to contain the crowds. The Gospel is the world's only hope, and we pray that these great Gospel efforts will continue to enlarge in power and influence until the whole world feels the influence of the Spirit of God.

Such moves as we refer to are, in most cases, spearheaded by certain men, obviously God-blessed and God-ordained for the task. It is our duty to pray for such men that they will be sustained in spirit, soul, and body, that they might be at their best constantly in this greatest of all battles.

There is, however, a great danger in such mighty movements where individuals are catapulted into places of prominence as leaders. Instead of humbly recognizing the hand of God in the whole, and the grace of God in equipping men for leadership, and thus giving all the glory to God, there is a tendency to humanly evaluate leaders, and compare and pick and choose favorites. Such an attitude indicates a limited vision. This robs God of His glory, is unfair to the leader, and contributes to the party spirit among Christians, which God so evidently deplores, as indicated in His word.

Each of these leaders, indeed every minister in the Church of God, has some distinctive features which makes him to differ from every other minister, and unless the great principle of ministerial oneness is recognized, there exists the constant danger of dividing God's people into as many groups as there are ministers to give them leadership.

“There is no new thing under the sun,” and this seems especially true when considered in terms of error and defection among Christians. We can think of no modern system of error or trend of defection in the realm of professed Christian religion that had not appeared at least in germ form in the days of the apostles, and which was not given apostolic treatment in the sacred writings of the New Testament. The subject with which we are dealing received extensive attention from the Apostle Paul in the Corinthian epistles, as well as being referred to in other epistles. Although the directions given in the Corinthian

epistle are intended primarily to meet the local conditions, they, nevertheless, are applicable on a body-wide scale.

The apostle declares the condition that exists in the Corinthian church by saying, **"It hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cophas; and I of Christ."** (I Cor. 1:11, 12). There certainly had been a good deal of carnal comparison indulged here. Paul mentions himself first, for a group in the Corinthian church had chosen him as their preferred preacher, quite evidently without any encouragement from him. Paul indicates his sincerity in deploring and attempting to correct this party spirit by placing his name first on the list, and thus being the first to be demoted as a sectarian leader. No doubt, the Gentile believers clung to Paul as their leader, as against those Jews which preferred Peter with his background.

Then there were those who were followers of Apollos, described in the Scripture as **"an eloquent man, and might in the Scriptures"** (Acts 18:24). Apollos was an Alexandrian Jew, distinguished for literary culture and eloquence, and it is probable that the more highly educated among the Corinthian Christians were his peculiar followers.

Then there were the Cephasites, the followers of Cephas, or Peter, He, of course, had an apparent priority over the others, being one of the first followers of Jesus. His apostleship was well established, there being no argument as in the case of Paul. He was a "senior minister," and there were those who felt that he deserved a superior place, and so were quite prepared to battle for his leadership.

Finally, Paul mentions the Christ party. This may at first seem strange, for we should all be "of Christ." It has been suggested, however, that "this sect of Christ probably rejected the apostles, and professed to be admirers and followers of the traditional sayings of Jesus. They approved His ethics, but rejected the doctrines outlined in the Gospel, and more fully expounded in the epistles. Possibly, the apostle had this group in mind when he wrote, **"Henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more."** (II Cor. 5:16)

The apostle counters this condition with three pertinent questions, the first one being, "Is Christ divided?" Of course, the answer to this is an emphatic "No!" The body of Christ is one, and knows but one head, the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ. The one head governs the body, instructing the various members concerning their duty, and appointing the various tasks for the individual parts of the body. Thus, instead of individual members of the body setting up an independent centre of government and control, they must at all times adhere to the authority of the head. The structure of the human body contains the equipment for controlling and directing the various functions of the body. It has the advantage as the highest part of the body of seeing the farthest, and thus from its high place being able to intelligently instruct and direct the action of those members which live on a lower plane, and are depending upon the head for direction.

If the body is to function normally, the authority of the head must be constantly recognized. This is true of every member of the body, and especially true of those who are ministers in the body. Such ministers may be likened to those parts of the body, such as the hands and feet which are most active, and play such a prominent part in the functioning of the body in its varied activities. Such members are tempted to think that they are indispensable, and thus can set up a new center of authority. This, of course, produces confusion.

True ministry gifts, being those men ordained by God to minister to His people, are the gifts of the risen Head to the body, for it is written, **"When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men ... He gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some,**

evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers,” (Eph. 4:8, 11). Such men are God-gifted and appointed. They are not placed in the body to further some certain division or sect, and use their God given abilities to enlarge a segment of the whole, but they are placed in the body **“for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,” (Eph. 4:12).** Their interest is body-wide, they are affectionately disposed toward all God’s people, and are obliged by reason of the nature of their calling to seek to build up the whole body of Christ.

No, Christ is not divided! His body is one. There is but one head of the body, and that is the risen Christ. Thus, every attempt to promote a group of God’s people as a segregated section as opposed to all the rest of the people of God is to work at cross purposes with the diving programme.

“Was Paul crucified for you?” is the second question. Who deserves our first loyalty? All our fellow humans, much as we esteem and love them, must never come between our undivided loyalty to Christ and His word. Many of those who would divide and rend the body of Christ are certainly not prepared to die for anybody, and before we take a hand in promoting some injurious division, let us remember that those whom we are influencing are the purchase of Jesus blood.

The final question of the trio is, “Were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” If these party leaders were so important as to create a division among God’s people, then why did they take in public confession at their baptism a place of identification with the Lord Jesus? The argument is overwhelming. There is no place for the exaltation of human leaders, and much harm is done all around when such exaltation is promoted.

The divine ideal is beautiful, and we dare not despise it by saying, **“It will not work.”** Let us listen to it humbly as God’s pronounced desire for His people – **“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” (I Cor. 1:10)**

That this condition of division is serious is clearly stated by the apostle as he continues his instruction, writing, **“I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ ... For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?” (I Cor. 3:1,3,4)** It is evident therefore, that party-spirited people are incapable of receiving mature instruction, and will always be found singing the praises of human leadership, making pretty comments on pulpit mannerisms, and the personal appearance and personality niceties of preachers. They have little or no time for an industrious study of God’s Word, or a diligent seeking after the Lord. They are God’s undeveloped children, for while they are not babes in the matter of years of professed salvation, they are “as babes” in the matter of understanding and conduct. They have not developed normally with the years, and are a heartache to the Father. We can imagine the constant pain in a mother’s heart as she watches her growing child, noticing physical development, and yet aware that the mind is not developing with the body. How our Heavenly Father, too, must look with sorrow upon us as we go from year to year developing in religious activity and church attendance, and yet undeveloped in our knowledge of His will through the Word.

Paul, having dealt with the sin of schism and having scored it as being wrong, now proceeds to deal with the true evaluation of the minister and his ministry. **“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos,” he says, “but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?”** These men who lead you to Christ and serve you in the ministry of the Word are “but ministers” which means “servants,” and if they are able to help you, it is because **“the Lord gave to every man (each one).”** Each one of these ministers received their ability and particular ministry from God, and so Paul goes on to say, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.” As in gardening, one plants the seed, another

waters it, and the unseen forces of growth give the increase; so in the field of Christian service, one minister plants, another waters, and God, like the unseen forces of growth, gives the increase.

“So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither is he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.” Compared to God, ministers are nothing. When the true power in Christian service is readily understood, then the ministry fades into insignificance. It is a human trait to always look at the things seen. God is everything. He is the One who imparts eternal life to believing sinners. He alone is to be recognized and worshipped as leader.

Furthermore, rather than ministers being competitors and leaders of individual groups, the apostle says, **“He that planteth and he that watereth are one.”** They are not rival leaders, each boasting of his particular sect. True ministry usually becomes divided when God ceases to be the supreme motive for service. When a denomination or a creed takes the place of God, then the ministry ceases to be experimentally one. It is decidedly wrong therefore, to speak of ministers as rivals, and is a sign of carnality.

“Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor.” One minister is not better than another, and each shall be rewarded according to his labor. The humblest ministry will be as abundantly rewarded as the more popular type. Let this serve as a warning to all who seek for fame and applause. God will reward ministers according to their labor, not according to what is generally considered success.

“It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.” The minister need not fret and worry about his popularity with the crowd as compared to the popularity of his fellow-ministers. If he is faithful to Christ and His Word, he can enjoy the incomparable inner rest that comes from knowing that he is being a true servant, faithful to his Master, and faithful to his task.

Rather than treating the people's opinion of himself as something important, Paul says **“that to me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you.”** He was doing the best he knew, and as he observed his labors, was able to say, **“I know nothing against myself ... However, I am not hereby justified.”** The people's opinion of him, and his opinion of himself was not the final opinion. The final word was the Lord's. **“For,”** says Paul, **“he that judgeth me is the Lord.”** And the day is coming when the Lord will indeed judge our service, not on the basis of apparent success, but on the basis of our motives, for in that day He “will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.” This is a very solemnizing fact, and ought to bring preacher and people alike to their knees in humble heart-searching to ascertain our motives and make sure that we are working on sound principles.

No minister has a right to boast, **“For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?”** Let us not indulge in carnal comparisons, but receive with thanksgiving every gift of God, thanking Him for His appointed evangelists, and pastors and teachers, and as they seek to feed us the Word of God, and thrill our hearts with their exhortation and comfort, let all the glory be His, Who is the head of the body, and the Lord of His church, and the King of His Kingdom.

Related articles:

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