

the Informer newsletter



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PARAGON CHRISTIAN ALLIANCE INT'L (PCAI) FELLOWSHIP
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Where There is NO VISION, the People Perish (Proverbs 29:18)



(Republish by popular request)

Every Christian has heard this verse quoted numerous times...but, usually out of context. A noun, the word “vision” (Heb. *mar’ eh*) in the Old Testament refers to *prophetic visions* or *a revelation*, and sometimes *an appearance of God* in some manner, not to be considered a manifestation. In the New Testament, “vision” as a noun (Gk. *horama*) more often refers to something manifest or actually *seen* such as the *Transfiguration of Christ* on the mount (Matthew 17:9) witnessed by Peter, James and John. It may also refer to *a night dream* or *a revelation* received while in a semi-sleep state, such as in a trance. A vision (revelation) may be given by God to a single person or to a group of people for direction. In a literal sense, Proverbs 29:18, an oft quoted verse, should be translated as, “Where there is no adherence to the *Law of God*, the people go astray—[that is, *go in the wrong direction and die spiritually*].” In this context, “vision” refers to the *Law of God* being that which directs people toward pleasing Him in much the same way as the Word of God guides those who serve Him today under the New Covenant.

Sadly, many churches in America today are dying—closing their doors because there is no vision. People go to church on Sunday and experience a *Greeting, Seating, Meeting, and [time of] Eating* – after which they go home and wait for the next service. When asked “What is the vision (mission) of your church?” most church members will respond “I don’t know.” Thus, it is of paramount importance that the vision (mission) of the local church be continually preached by the pastor and kept at the forefront of various other activities. All activities of the local church are important, but usually the vision suffers because it is *never mentioned by church leaders*. In fact, it often isn’t mentioned, because there really is NO VISION at all [in the church].

On numerous occasions, I have seen small churches begin to grow when the pastor and leadership placed a painting or architectural drawing of a future church facility on the platform where the congregation could observe it at all times. It became a visual reminder to God’s people that the church was not dead like the stagnant water of the Dead Sea. A vision that is kept before the people brings purity and new life—[that is, *a fresh vision, spiritual growth, and new church members*]. A vision gives the congregation purpose, strength, and vitality. In fact, it’s always a good idea to have special offerings for the *VISION* in order for the church to reach more people for the Kingdom of God.



**By Dr. Henry Harbuck,
PCAI General Overseer**

In the current economic downturn, some churches have given up and said “we perish.” Thus, it behooves pastors to preach victory, not defeat. More people are leaving the church now than ever in the history of our nation, and are looking to the government to supply their needs. But this is in sharp contrast to what Paul says in his letter to the Philippians: “But my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:20). While we must not be insensitive or foolish about earthly matters, we must also realize that the wisdom of men will fail, but the Wisdom—[that is, *Gk. the Logos—Christ, the Word, Wisdom, and Communication*] of God will not. There is no doubt Paul is saying in Philippians 4:20 that *...through Christ, God will supply what you need (not what you want) according to His abundant supply and His divine will*. When people who claim to be Christians have more of the world’s

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The Kingdom of God is NOT in Recession, Are you Fearful or Faithful

By Dr. Jan Harbuck, PCAI Vice President

Being on the front lines here at PCAI, I have seen many ministers, churches and ministries through the years struggle with being faithful — especially in the area of giving. Most of the time they get very discouraged because God is not blessing them, not just financially, but in the growth of their ministry. In talking with them I receive many excuses why they cannot be faithful with the giving commitment they made when they received their credentials. Such excuses range from, “I have too many bills to pay,” “I need the money to send my child to college,” “I can’t remember to send it,” or, “the people in my church or ministry won’t support me,” ... etc., etc., etc.” In hearing

these excuses my question is, **How can God bless you and cause people to support your vision if you are unwilling to keep your promises and commitments?** In my early years, I struggled with faithfulness too. Then God helped me to realize that faithfulness in every area, especially giving (which included giving beyond what is “required”), was a key principle to having a successful ministry, and in becoming a true leader and an overcomer.

Those of you who truly understand the heart of PCAI know we are not (and never have been) about “money,” but about “faithfulness.” And

if you know your Bible, it speaks of the same. Now with the US economy on the downward spiral, fear is trying to grip the hearts of Christians (both ministers and laymen), and many are withholding giving to the work of God. But is this pleasing to God? Are we only to be faithful in the good times? Do we only give when the economy is healthy?

God doesn’t need a healthy, normal womb for a woman to conceive and bear a child. In Judges 13:2-3 (conception and birth of Samson) the scripture says, *“And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her,*



Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son.” Not convinced?

In Psalm 113.9 the scripture says *“He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. Praise ye the LORD.”* And in Luke 1:5-37 the scripture tells us that *Elizabeth was barren and well advanced in years, but God brought forth a child out of a barren womb. So what is my point? God doesn’t need a healthy economy to supply our needs!* At this time in history our country seems to be slipping away from us, and the future is very uncertain. But we must

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God Says a Great Turnaround is Coming From the Grip of the Enemy

Recently the Lord spoke to me concerning the next 9 months. It’s unusual for me to get 9 months at a time. The Lord will often show me what is coming and how to pray but the time period or seasons are much shorter. Most times the things He shows or tells me are at a very high level. I always want more details. The details do come but it is always over time and many times you need to look back and see how things played out.

This 9-month period is from August to April. It’s basically Fall, Winter and the start of Spring. We still have some Summer to go so it starts now. It’s 9 months but covers four seasons. The main things He showed me and told me to pray about are the political, weather events and war. Some of this will be obvious. You do not need to be a prophet to see these things coming about. The political will

dominate worldwide. The political is a spirit. I will talk about this at the close of the article.

There will be major weather events worldwide. Nothing new here except I sense the magnitude of these events will dominate the news over this 9-month period. The third event is war. There will continue to be wars and rumors of wars, but I am focused on a war with America and China. I had a vision some time ago of a battle between us and China in the South China Sea. I pray this does not take place, yet all signs seem to be pointing to a war with China sometime in the future.

The good news is God told me a great turnaround is coming. A turnaround from all the evil plans of the

enemy. He said we would be earnestly in this turnaround by the Spring of 2023. The Lord asked me to partner with Him to bind the political spirit over America and the whole world. The jezebel spirit seeks to control the world population. There are many evil leaders worldwide. God is in the process of removing these evil leaders and replacing them with people who really care for the people.

The Lord is in the process of dealing with the enemy. The handwriting is on the wall. In Psalm 64 David says to God “Preserve my life from fear of the enemy. Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked.” Starting in verse five of Psalm 64 the bible says “They encouraged themselves in an evil matter. They talk of laying snares secretly.” They say, “who will see them?” They devise iniquities, we have



By Rev. Mike Taylor,
Raphah Ministry
President

perfected a shrewd scheme.” Verse 7 says “But God shall shoot at them with an arrow, suddenly they shall be wounded.” We are about to witness many suddenlies. God is going to expose and bring down evil leaders.

We must remember as the bible says, “Vengeance belongs to God.” God is about to render punishment to the proud. Lets continue to pray and do our part. These are intense times, and we are just getting started. I pray for God’s mercy and grace and that people’s eyes will be opened. Look for and believe for this great turnaround. The best is yet to come. In the end we win. ♥

Court Could Resolve Malpractice Suit Against Deacon

The First Amendment does not necessarily bar all claims that may touch upon religious conduct.

By Richard R. Hammar, Attorney, CPA

Most courts have rejected clergy malpractice as a basis for liability in all cases. A few courts have found clergy members guilty of malpractice for engaging in sexual misconduct with an adult or minor, or if they engage in “nonreligious” counseling. A Texas appeals court ruled that it was not barred by the First Amendment or “ecclesiastical abstention doctrine” from resolving a clergy malpractice lawsuit against a religious organization.

Background

A married couple were active members of a Catholic church for 15 years. The wife sought out a church deacon for marriage and family counseling. In time, the husband (the “plaintiff”) noticed an unusual closeness between the deacon and his wife, and he discovered that the two were having an affair. The couple later divorced.

Appeals court: not all religious conduct claims are necessarily barred

The plaintiff sued the deacon and archdiocese on several grounds, including malpractice (negligent counseling). A trial court dismissed all claims, and the plaintiff appealed. On appeal, the plaintiff argued that the trial court should have allowed the claims of professional malpractice to proceed to trial because some courts have recognized causes of action for such claims.

The appeals court made the following observation:

Pursuant to the First Amendment, government action is not permitted to burden the free exercise of religion by interfering with an individual’s observance or practice of a particular faith or by encroaching on a church’s ability to manage its internal affairs. Accordingly, the First Amendment “severely circumscribes” the role that civil courts may play in resolving church related ecclesiastical disputes. For example, civil courts cannot inquire into matters concerning “theological controversy, church discipline, ecclesiastical government, or the conformity of the members of the church to the standard of morals required of them.” (*Serbian E. Orthodox Diocese for U.S. of Am. & Can. v. Milivojevic*, 426 U.S. 696, 713-14 (1976)). This constitutional limitation is implemented in Texas through the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine.

However, the First Amendment does not necessarily bar all claims that may touch upon religious conduct.. Churches, their congregations, and their hierarchies function within the civil community and, where appropriate, are subject to rules governing property rights, torts, contracts, and criminal conduct... Texas courts decide non-ecclesiastical issues based on the same neutral principles of law applicable to other entities while deferring to religious entities’ determinations on ecclesiastical and church policy questions. As the Texas Supreme Court noted, the “differences between ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical issues will not always be distinct” because many disputes “require courts to analyze church documents and organizational structures to some degree.” *Masterson v. Diocese*, 422 S.W.3d at 606 [2013]. Therefore, the court must determine whether a particular dispute is ecclesiastical or simply a civil law controversy in which a church or church official happens to be involved—a determination made by examining the substance and effect of the plaintiff’s petition. (“the key inquiry is whether a judicial resolution will encroach on the institution’s governance and affairs”).

The court noted that “courts have addressed a wide variety of disputes involving religious organizations; here, we focus on those analyzing the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine in the counseling context.” The deacon and archdiocese argued “that claims based on marital counseling services provided by a member of the clergy impinge on a church’s ability to manage its affairs” and therefore are barred by the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine. The court disagreed:

The allegations at issue here do not clearly intrude upon a religious matter or interfere with the Archdiocese’s ability to manage its internal affairs. The plaintiff does not allege that the conduct forming the basis of his claims (*i.e.*, the family and marriage counseling..) was grounded in religious doctrine or otherwise undertaken pursuant to guidance from the Archdiocese. Instead, the plaintiff alleges that

the deacon was having an affair with his wife and had a history of “inappropriate relationships with others.” These general allegations do not implicate any religious standards or indicate that judicial resolution of this dispute will encroach upon the Archdiocese’s internal affairs or religious doctrine. Therefore, they do not affirmatively demonstrate that the underlying dispute is inherently ecclesiastical as necessary to warrant First Amendment protection.

What this means for churches

Ministers who engage in counseling as a part of their ministry should be aware of the following conclusions regarding “clergy malpractice”:

- No court has found a minister liable on the basis of malpractice for the content of his or her counseling.
- Most courts have refused to find ministers liable on the basis of malpractice for sexual misconduct with counselees, on the basis of either or both of the following two grounds:

First, by exempting clergy from the licensing requirements that apply to other counselors, most state legislatures recognize that “the secular

state is not equipped to ascertain the competence of pastoral counseling.”

Second, “it would certainly be impractical, and quite possibly unconstitutional, to impose a duty of care on pastoral counselors” since such a duty “would necessarily be intertwined with the religious philosophy of the particular denomination or ecclesiastical teachings of the religious entity” (the court quoting from a 1981 law review article).

- A few courts have recognized malpractice claims against clergy in either or both of the following two situations: sexual misconduct with an adult or minor, or “nonreligious” counseling.
- It is advisable for churches to obtain counseling liability or malpractice insurance. While the likelihood of a church being successfully sued for clergy malpractice is very remote, the likelihood of being sued for clergy malpractice is conceivable. With malpractice insurance, the insurer will be responsible to retain and pay for the church’s legal defense. □

Mosby v. Kleinguetl, 2021 WL 824779 (Tex. App. 2021). *Richard R. Hammar is an attorney, CPA and author specializing in legal and tax issues for churches and clergy.*

Q&A: Should Noncash Contributions Be Included in Donor Statements?

Qualifying receipts should be issued for noncash donations separately from regular (cash) donor statements. By Elaine L. Sommerville, CPA

Before the beginning of each school year, our church has a back-to-school backpack drive in which members purchase new packs for needy children. Let’s say a member drops by a local retail store and buys \$100-worth of packs for the drive. Should churches include this noncash backpack donation on the donor statement?

My rule is to *never* add noncash donations to the regular donor statements. Qualifying receipts should be issued for noncash donations separately from regular (cash) donor statements. While noncash donation receipts should never include an amount, they must include a complete description of the item(s) given. The courts have ruled that where the description was insufficient, the donation was not allowed.

This additional description requirement does not normally work within the context of the regular cash donation receipts created by typical donor systems. Receipts for noncash donations should include the normal “no goods or services” statement and a full description of the noncash donation, but, again, not include a value. I stick to this rule even if the member submits a receipt for the backpacks to prove what he or she paid for them. □

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wisdom than the wisdom of God (I Corinthians 1:20-21), there is no faith resident in their lives and they have no peace. The Lord has promised to give every believer a degree of [inner] rest—*peace* (Gk. *anapauso*), regardless of what may be weighing them down.

Keeping a local church on track and in a growth mode is much like keeping the body in check. There must always be discipline and the desire to do better than the status quo. To merely attend church, experience some “goose bumps” [and thrills], and then go home is not enough to sustain a Christian. When there is no vision, no strategic planning, no sermons that meet needs, there will be death in the church. There will be no spiritual growth in the church because there is no spiritual growth in the people of the congregation. A congregation is much like a baby. If a baby is not growing, it is sick. Good parents immediately take the child to a doctor to determine what the problem is.

It is to our shame, as Christians, that Buddhists exhibit more discipline than we do. Buddhists fast and discipline themselves beyond what we could even imagine. But most Christians whine and complain about every small matter the church requires, giving one excuse after another why they cannot get involved. And even when they do become involved, it is usually only “lip-service” and nothing more.

Every church must have purpose -- a revelation, a direction, a plan to establish, a goal to reach. Sometimes the “word in due season” comes during a sermon, or in the form of a one-on-one statement. However, if the people have NO VISION, they will die spiritually. Based upon my experience, I am convinced pastors become involved in too many matters and neglect to speak of vision. When a vision is kept before the congregation, progress is made. Excitement and joy prevail, not hopelessness. And when everyone in a church is given a role to fulfill in a body of believers, the attention is diverted from the pastor. As people learn to minister to each other, they cease to believe the pastor is the only one who can “give a word.” When people are studying the Word of God for themselves, praying and showing concern for others in the Body of Christ, a flame is ignited. Life flows into the church. The church becomes “People Centered and Purpose Driven.”

If you are a pastor, or planning to become one, remember that “*Where there is no VISION, the people perish.*” Lastly, remember to focus not only on preaching, but on what is necessary for a congregation to grow spiritually and numerically. Today, anyone in America can stay home on Sunday and listen to a sermon delivered by a TV preacher. The local church must provide more. It must be a place of refuge, healing, comfort and learning – a haven where someone feels he/she belongs because the people who attend care about each other. ♥

(Scripture quotes are from the King James Version of the Bible and the New Millennia In-Depth Bible—General Editor, Henry Harbuck, Ph.D.)

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remember that most of the time God provides “just enough” at “just the right time”. **So what must we do?** We must not fear but remain faithful in all areas of our Christian life. And yes, that most assuredly includes our giving, as well as keeping our commitments to whomever! *This is called integrity, and it reflects Christian character.*

God can make the bitter water sweet. He can bring water out of the rock. **God wants daily trust in Him, not trust in our economy. Remember the Lord’s Prayer.** “Give us this day our daily bread” (not weekly, monthly or yearly). **I’m not saying we should not plan for the future, but we must trust God with the future!** In fact, it is unwise not to invest for the future. However, when times get tough is not the time to withhold our faithful giving to the work of God.

God can supply our needs even in a bad economy, just as easily as He can in a prosperous one. Since the “great depression” we Americans have lived a relatively prosperous and comfortable lifestyle unlike many countries in which my husband and I have traveled. The U.S. (regardless of our many faults) has enjoyed the blessings of God — many of which are due to our Godly principles and unselfish giving to those in need. That’s why all foreign people desire to come to this great land of the FREE. Many say that in the future Social Security may not exist, **but God’s security is inexhaustible and limitless! So don’t fear, but BE FAITHFUL. God still specializes in miracles which are not dependent on our economy.** ♥

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TWO WAYS TO RENEW:

- (1) Complete the credential renewal form was mailed to you and send it back to us.
- (2) ONLINE—fill out the renewal form on our website under RESOURCES: www.https://paragonchristianalliance.org

NOTE:

- *If received after OCTOBER 1st, must pay \$100 late fee.*
- *Renewal Fees: \$50.00 for Licensed and \$75.00 for Ordained Minister*
- *Monthly giving must be up-to-date.*

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