

3-19-1969

From/To: Charles Shelton (Chalk's reply filed first)

Charles Shelton

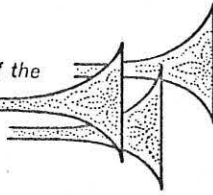
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March 19, 1969

Mr. Charles Shelton
3822 64th Drive
Lubbock, Texas

Dear Charles:

Your letter of March 11 has been received in the same Christ-like spirit in which it was written. The thoughts of Philippians 2:1-4 kept running through my mind as I read it and remembered the wonderful experiences on which to base a Christian relationship like ours. I treasure your friendship and I treasure our oneness in Christ. It is only on this kind of basis that such frank exchanges as your letter and mine can be made.

Specifically, let me speak to the facts of your letter. I am not being scared away by two or three men on the Union Avenue eldership. But the thinking of these men has not been repudiated by either your dad or the eldership as a whole. I must, therefore, take the remarks they made in my meeting with them, remarks that were never challenged, to be the consensus of the Union Avenue leadership.

I do not believe that I am sensitive in these areas because of the reactions to my July, 1968 sermons. Since our negative response amounted to only one and one-half per cent of our total response, and since I don't have a vested interest in Herald of Truth any longer, there must be other reasons for my concern over the race problem. I do believe that it comes out of my positive response to Jesus, to the Gospel, and to the Biblical nature of the church.

I do regret that I will be unable to associate with Clarence Dailey, your dad, and other "right-thinking men on the eldership." I, however, question whether men that have been there as long as these men, and have been involved as long as these men, could not have done something to move the negative attitudes of the congregation toward a more Christ-like position. When a man has occupied a pulpit as long as Clarence Dailey has the Union Avenue pulpit, there ought to be some evidences of the universal nature of the gospel and the inclusive nature of the church being expressed in that church's life and work. Therefore, I am sure that one short week with me would not only do no good, but would further escalate the tensions. This is why I asked to be released from my commitment.

I am writing Clarence Dailey today regarding Union Avenue's membership policy for Negroes. Brother McAuley did not pull me into a corner and make these statements. He made them in the meeting I had with the four elders and Clarence Dailey. His remarks were not challenged either during the meeting or after the meeting. I understood

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them to be congregational policy as brother McAuley so stated. We'll just have to get this unraveled by another person who was in the meeting.

I did not cancel the meeting because of personal unpleasantness which might have been my experience. There is going to be much unpleasantness in the days ahead regarding race relations in this country, and possibly bloodshed.

I can understand the way you feel about circulation of personal correspondence to a selected group of gospel preachers. I do not believe this is unethical. It is simply an attempt to further deepen personal relationships and confidences which have been immeasurably enriched by this practice. The racist establishment does the same thing through brotherhood newspapers and through college lectureships. I do not see how it could be unethical for relationships that foster constructive action in this area to be built through circulation of such correspondence. It is unfortunate that brother Lawton misinterpreted this particular correspondence. His letter was not in the best taste, but there will be other such acts as all of us more bravely move out into the world to be Christ's men. I do regret the letter and hope that it will not do permanent damage. But I believe that the whole practice of exchanging this kind of correspondences to be in the best interests of the future of the church as Christ's body.

The story of the black man eating out of a dog's bowl is not apocryphal. It does not belong to "folk tales" as you called them. I happened to have heard Franklin Florence, the man who was subjected to this humiliation, tell the story twice in the last five years. It happened to him while he was a student at Nashville Christian Institute and worked on Saturdays for a gospel preacher in Nashville, Tennessee. The story was told in Nashville to white gospel preachers and was not challenged. I believe Franklin Florence is a Christian who tells the truth.

Charles, I wonder how the church is going to "face up to the obvious racism which infects" it, according to your words. I see nobody facing up to this racism. I do not see the Union Avenue eldership facing up to it. I do not see Clarence Dailey and other gospel preachers like him facing up to it. I do not see people like yourself, or even like myself, facing up to this problem. Where is progress being made? Until you and I can answer questions like that one, letters like yours and the advice you give seems to me to be irrelevant and possibly even negligent.

Now to my subjective response to your letter (as if other reactions in this letter have not been subjective). Charles, your letter reflects a white mentality. I see in your letter no tears, no laments, no heartaches for the black man's plight in America. I see no realistic grappling with the established racist structures in the Church of Christ. Your attitude is the kind that will allow racists to continue to control all our Christian colleges, all our brotherhood papers, all leadership positions in local churches throughout the country. Has not the whole civil rights movement taught us that progress only comes when struggle and tension occur at the sources of power? When I learned the

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facts, as I did very carefully in this case, about the dismissals from Oklahoma Christian College, when I associate personally with the leadership of the college and others like it, when I see a Norvel Young, unwilling to this date to use the word "black" in public when referring to Negroes, when I see Reuel Lemmons state that there is almost no racial prejudice in churches of Christ, and when I see the white back-lash or, as Humphrey Foutz chooses to call it, "the continuation of white racism," continuing in everything being done by the officials of churches of Christ, I cannot help but think that your letter only aids and abets these evil situations. My reaction is, therefore, to the fact that you have counseled gradualism at a time when America is burning; that your letter has urged me to so understand the Union Avenue leadership that I could under no possible circumstances be able to provide any kind of tension and confrontation of their lives with the absolute claims of Jesus Christ.

This in no way questions your own personal commitment to Jesus. In no way do I intend to suggest that you are not doing what you believe is the right thing in bringing an end to the sin of racism in today's Church. It does mean that I question whether you have looked carefully into the ultimate conclusions of the kind of attitudes your letter indicates. I am only raising questions. I am not stating categorically, as fact, what has happened in your case or what would happen with the attitudes expressed in your letter. I do realize, in some degree at least, the danger of becoming more radical than was our Lord, or rather more unbalanced than the Christian is supposed to be in this one area. Truth must prevail and I am doing, as sincerely as I know how, exactly what you are doing, as sincerely as you know how, all I can to make truth prevail in the hearts and lives of those with whom God brings me into contact.

As you have time and want to continue this conversation, I will be glad to pursue it. Thank you so much for loving me enough to write. I hope that my love has shown through the very plain things I have tried to say to you. I send you my genuine respect for the way you are allowing God to use your life.

Your brother,

John Allen Chalk
Radio Evangelist

JAC:hm

P.S. Neither your letter nor my answer has been circulated to the men mentioned in our correspondence.

P
March 11, 1969

CHARLES A. SHELTON
3822 64th Drive
Lubbock, Texas 79413

Mr. John Allen Chalk
Herald of Truth
P. O. Box 2439
Abilene, Texas 79604

Dear John Allen:

I had hoped to have an opportunity to talk with you while I was in Abilene, but my schedule and yours seemed to be extremely crowded during that week.

Specifically, I wanted to discuss with you a couple of things about the Union Avenue meeting. Frankly, I am afraid that you are letting two or three men on the Union Avenue eldership (scare you away) from an opportunity to do considerable good. I can appreciate your sensitivity in the matter as the result of the reactions of many to your excellent sermons on race and the subsequent attitudes of the Highland elders. I sincerely regret that Union Avenue will not have the benefit of your insights and dynamic ability. Clarence Dailey, Dad and other right-thinking men on the eldership need the encouragement and strength which you could give them to move forward more forcefully toward right attitudes and constructive action in the area of race relations. (1) ? (2) Handwritten

I discussed with Dad the alleged policy of handling Negroes who come for membership at Union Avenue and he denies that any such policy exists. Apparently, this is a figment of Brother McCauley's imagination. I want you to know, however, brother, that I appreciate your unwillingness to interject yourself into a situation that is so loaded and in which you would be subjected to the possibility of considerable unpleasantness. ?? (4) (5)

The second thing I wanted to suggest to you has to do with the matter of circulating correspondence to the select mailing list of Wells, Lawton, Foutz, Hairston, Davis, Meador, Orman and Bishop. These men cannot possibly know the personal conversations which you have had with the elders at Union Avenue. The content of the letters is certainly subject to interpretation. I just wonder about the ethics of sharing materials such as this. I suppose I am a little sensitive since Union Avenue's home and Dad's name is involved. I do know that the story of the nursery attendant and her grandchildren was misinterpreted and blown completely out of proportion. I also question where the story arose about the black person who had to eat out of the dog's bowl. Cookie William used this in a speech at Pepperdine College and I have heard it attributed to Andrew Hairston. Did it happen more than once? Is it a common experience? Or is it just one of those folktales that get circulated as the result of poor circulation? While I certainly agree that we need to face up to the obvious racism which infects the church, I just question whether we have the ethical right to publish evidence on any brother or congregation without giving him the opportunity to defend himself beforehand. Having recently experienced a similar situation, I am especially sensitive at this point. It just seems to (6) (7) (8) how? * not published

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me the correspondence such as this would best be put in our confidential files *no power*
~~and kept there.~~ If you needed to use such information, you could do so just
as effectively by taking off the names and the labels. I fail to see how
knowledge of this exchange is going to do any of the brethren who would
receive copies of it any good whatsoever, nor am I aware of any contribution *Confidence*
that they could make to remedy the situation. Brother, I hope that you will
receive this in the spirit of love and appreciation for you in which it is
given. It is entirely possible that I have the wrong slant on the whole affair.
I hope you won't hesitate in saying so if it is your opinion that I do.

We are counting on you for April 4 and 5 in Daytona. I hope that you will be
able to work around any conflict with the opportunity in Jackson, Tennessee.
We are proceeding on the assumption that you will be with us.

Give our regards to Sue.

Your brother,



Charles A. Shelton
Director of Evangelism

CAS:jw