

The Berea Baptist Banner

"Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth" (Psalms 60:4)

The Faith of Hezekiah

By Paul Stepp

Indore, West Virginia

I want to talk today about one of the great kings of the nation of Judah. I want to look at the life of King Hezekiah. He is an example for us in many ways, and I want to examine some aspects of his life and use them for our own learning.



Paul Stepp

In the beginning, we read concerning Hezekiah: "Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign. Twenty and five years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Abi, the daughter of Zachariah. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did. He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan" (II Kings 18:1-4). This man was a good king, and good kings were the

exception rather than the rule among the kings of Israel and Judah.

Hezekiah's Trust

The first thing that I want to notice concerning King Hezekiah is the trust that he had in his God. In II Kings 18:5, we read, "He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like

Continued on page 382

The Wet Hands of God

By Jeff Short

Mantachie, Mississippi

"The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another



Jeff Short

vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it" (Jer. 18:1-4).

God often uses familiar things to speak to us and magnify His Word. This method makes the message personal. One example would be the use of parables by Christ to apply some spiritual truth by a familiar illustration. Another example is here with Jeremiah watching the potter at work.

In our text, God instructed the prophet Jeremiah to go down to the potter's house. Jeremiah went there and saw the potter at work. He saw the wheel the potter worked upon. He saw the potter's hands being applied to the vessel, shaping, and forming it. He saw the bowl of water where the potter dipped his hands. The water would keep the clay from becoming too dry as he worked with it. It also provided a lubricant to his hands so he could move them freely over the whole surface of his work, on the inside and the outside. He saw the clay upon the wheel being formed into a

Continued on page 385

Have We Misunderstood the Great Commission?

By Milburn Cockrell

Part 1

(1941-2002)

"Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:16-20).

Christ met here with His disciples on



Milburn Cockrell

a mountain in Galilee. It was a place He had told them to meet with Him. Scholars and theologians usually call this "the great commission" text. Were these words merely addressed to the eleven apostles? Was this commission limited to them? When they died did this commission cease to be binding? Is it not for us today? I wish to answer these questions by the Bible.

Continued on page 383

Sanctification

By John W. Porter

(1863-1937)

"Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 3:18).

Sanctification is a doctrine that is clearly taught in the Scriptures, and every believer is earnestly urged and clearly commanded to be sanctified. This being true, it is the more necessary to define the word "sanctification." The scriptural use of the word is "to set apart," "to make holy," "to consecrate" and "dedicate" to some religious work or service. We are told in the second chapter of Genesis that "God blessed the seventh day, and



John W. Porter

is sanctification, as applied to believers? It is not as sometimes supposed, a sinless perfection. The word neither demands nor implies entire freedom from sin. Quotations might be indefinitely multiplied, but the following will suffice:

Continued on page 393

sanctified it." God commanded Moses (Ex. 19:10) to "sanctify" the people.

Separation and Service

By A. J. Gordon

(1836-1895)

"Who gave himself for our sins that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father" (Gal. 1:4).

Here Christ's vicarious sacrifice touches its lowest depths of humiliation. Once we read that He "loved the church and gave himself for it" —wondrous grace, the Bridegroom for the Bride! Once we read, "Who loved me and gave himself for me" —wondrous love, the Son of God for a son of



A. J. Gordon

men! Here we read that He "gave himself for our sins" —the deepest condescension, wherein He "who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Consider now what was the end of this condescension.

I. THE DIVINE SEPARATION

That he might deliver us from this present evil world (Galatians 1:4).

Continued on page 389



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The Faith of Hezekiah

Continued from page 381

him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him." This is a wonderful recommendation of the trust that Hezekiah manifested in his Lord God. There were "none like him among all the kings of Judah." As we study his life we see that he had some perilous times that he and the nation of Judah had to endure, yet in the face of all these perils, his stay was the Lord his God. No matter the situation, his faith and trust was always in the Lord God of the heavens and the earth.

In II Kings 18-19, we read about the Assyrian's siege of the city of Jerusalem. Against seemingly insurmountable odds, Hezekiah retained his trust in the Lord God. After the emissaries of the King of Assyria came to speak to the besieged Jerusalem, we read this about Hezekiah: "And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of

the LORD" (II Kings 19:1). He then sends word to the prophet Isaiah, and beseeches the Lord for help against the Assyrian armies.

After this, King Hezekiah receives a letter from the Assyrians. In this letter, the king of Assyria essentially blasphemes the name of the Lord God of Judah. When he receives this letter, we read concerning the good King Hezekiah that he does the following: "And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD" (II Kings 19:14). In the following verses, we read of the prayer that Hezekiah offered up to the Lord. The Lord heard the prayer and supplication of King Hezekiah. The Lord heard Hezekiah's prayer, because we read in II Kings 19:20, "Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard."

The final deliverance of Jerusalem from this present threat is related to us in II Kings 19:35: "And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses." What a wonderful tribute to the trust and faith of Hezekiah! What a wonderful testimony to the greatness and power and faithfulness of our God! The God that destroyed 185,000 men that were threatening His people in the times of Hezekiah is the same God that we serve today. Surely, we can expect no less a manifestation of might, power, and faithfulness in our own situations that we encounter. Pray to God, and He will bless you and preserve you.

Hezekiah's Obedience

Next, we notice the Obedience of King Hezekiah. We read again concerning King Hezekiah in II Kings 18:6: "For he clave to the LORD, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses." As evidence of the obedience of Hezekiah, let's read the words of Rabshakeh, the emissary of the king of Assyria: "But if ye say unto me, We trust in the LORD our God: is not that he, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and hath said to Judah and Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?" II Kings 18:22). Evidently, King Hezekiah had removed the high places and the altars where the children of Judah had gone to worship. Many of these high places and altars were intended as places to worship false gods—and this was wrong. In Ex. 20:3, we read, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." We can also read the words of the Lord Jesus as He addressed Satan in Matt. 4:10:

"...Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

Many of these high places and altars may have also been used from time to time as places to worship God—but this also was wrong. In I Kings 11:36, we read, "And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light altar before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there" (See also Deut. 12:5). We read also in the NT the words of the Samaritan woman: "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." I think that it is a wonderful thing that Hezekiah would cause the people to come to Jerusalem to worship, just as they had under King David.

If we compare the account that we have been studying in II Kings to the parallel account in II Chron., we can learn some more interesting facts. In II Chron. 29:3, we read about King Hezekiah, "He in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the LORD, and repaired them." We need to remember that Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah, had been an exceedingly wicked king. Therefore, we can only imagine that Hezekiah must have been very distraught concerning the many evils that Ahaz committed. He was therefore very anxious to open the door of the house of the Lord as soon as he became king.

The man Hezekiah was apparently very obedient to serve the Lord in His house. We have already read that Hezekiah went to the house of the Lord when he was threatened by the Assyrians. But I believe that it was the habit of Hezekiah to frequent the house of the Lord. We read in II Chron. 29:20, "Then Hezekiah the king rose early, and gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of the LORD." It was important that the king of Judah, and the rulers of Jerusalem and Judah would be regular visitors to the house of the Lord. They mustn't be strangers to prayer and sacrifice.

We can see also that very early in his reign, King Hezekiah instructed the people in proper service to the Lord. He set up the priests and the Levites in II Chron. 29:4-19. Then in II Chron. 30, we see that King Hezekiah gathers the people to observe the Passover. In II Chron. 30:26, we read, "So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem." This man was obedient to serve the Lord as the children of Israel had been instructed. He did not attempt to do things as his father or his forefathers had done, but he sought to do the things that the Lord had instructed them to do.

Hezekiah's Prosperity

As a result of Hezekiah's trust and

obedience, we read next concerning his prosperity. "And the LORD was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth: and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not" (II Kings 18:7). King Hezekiah was faithful and obedient to the Lord his God. Therefore, the Lord God would not desert him. In Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, he prayed to God, "Yet have thou respect unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer, which thy servant prayeth before thee today: That thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there: that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place. ...Then hear thou in heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked, to bring his way upon his head; and justifying the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness" (I Kings 8:28-29, 32). No matter how wicked the nation of Judah was, and no matter what dire straits they may be in, still the righteousness of even one man could make a difference. In this case, Hezekiah was the righteous man, and the Lord granted him prosperity—the Lord gave him "according to his righteousness."

Concerning the prosperity of King Hezekiah, we read in II Chron. 32:27-30: "And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour: and he made himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels; Storehouses also for the increase of corn, and wine, and oil; and stalls for all manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks. Moreover he provided him cities, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance: for God had given him substance very much. This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper watercourse of Gihon, and brought it straight down to the west side of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all his works."

Hezekiah's Failure

I want to show you now, that King Hezekiah was not a perfect man. He, too, had failures. We read concerning his failure in II Kings 19:12-19. In this passage, we see the account of the emissaries from Babylon being sent to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem. These men came to congratulate King Hezekiah for his recent recovery from sickness, and perhaps to woo him to join them in the war that was now being waged against Assyria.

Though King Hezekiah was prideful and sinned when he showed the Babylonians all of his glory, yet he did not sin when Isaiah came to reprimand him.

Continued on page 383

The Faith of Hezekiah

Continued from page 382

He didn't hide his sins from Isaiah and from the Lord. In this he reminds me of King David when Gad came unto him after he had numbered Israel (II Sam. 24:1-15). We even find that Hezekiah is still willing to admit the goodness and mercy and verity of God when he says in II Kings 20:19, "...**Good is the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken. And he said, Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days?**"

Hezekiah's Legacy

Hezekiah's legacy is mentioned somewhat in the verse that we have just read in II Kings 20:19. In that verse, Hezekiah refers to the fact that there would be "**peace and truth**" in his days. Hezekiah came to reign as king over the nation of Judah in a very perilous time. In fact, during his reign the nation of Israel to the north was carried away captive by the same Assyrians that would later besiege Jerusalem. And yet he never faltered in his trust in God that God would preserve Judah from the Assyrians. In this attitude, he once again reminds me of King David. Remember that when all the children of Israel were afraid of Goliath, a man that defied and blasphemed God, the young man David was not afraid, but he trusted in God. Just as David had done, even so King Hezekiah did. When all of the nations around him were being destroyed and conquered by the Assyrians, Hezekiah trusted in the Lord. When the Assyrians defied and blasphemed God, King Hezekiah took the matter to the Lord and desired the Lord that He would defend His name and His people.

We read the words of David: "**The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain**" (II Sam. 23:2-4). Hezekiah became king of Judah at a time that was dark as night. His coming was as the coming of the "**light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds.**" The land of Judah was as a land that was enduring a famine. In fact, they were enduring a spiritual famine. King Hezekiah and his reign were "**as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.**" Oh that we could leave such a legacy!

Hezekiah took a nation that was teetering on the brink of extinction and he made that nation one that could rebel against what was possibly the most powerful nation on earth. He turned Judah back to God, and he made them a free nation once more.

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Conclusion

We have much to learn from King Hezekiah. We can learn from his *trust in God*; we can learn from his *obedience to God*; we can learn from his *prosperity in God*; we can even learn from his *failures in his service to God*. Let us pray to the Lord that He will grant us grace to trust implicitly in His Name, and that we would be obedient to serve Him. As we are obedient to serve Him, He will be faithful to prosper us. Let us admit our failures and our sins, and let us praise the Lord for His forgiveness and for His mercy.

Do you want to leave a legacy for those that will follow? If the Lord allows us to remain on this earth, do you want to have some to notice that you have been here? Lord willing, we can have some effect on the people that we come into contact with. Perhaps some in our family or some of our friends or some of our co-workers will be led to see their needs before God through the testimony that we present. I pray God that it will be so!

We can possibly do some good even yet in our country. It could be that we can turn some to God. It has been a long time since this nation has served God properly. Let us pray to God that He would use us to cause this nation to once again be a God-fearing country that would seek to honor the name of God.

Misunderstood

Continued from page 381

QUESTION ONE: HAVE WE MISUNDERSTOOD TO WHOM IT WAS GIVEN?

By looking at Matthew's account alone we might suppose that it was addressed to the eleven apostles only. But even Matthew's Gospel implies that there were more present than the eleven when examined closely. Note the words in verse 17: "**...but some doubted.**" This could not have been the eleven because earlier they had their faith in the resurrection confirmed. They saw Christ in Jerusalem before this time (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-23). Thomas was absent at this first meeting and he continued to doubt the Lord's resurrection (John 20:24-25). So Christ appeared a second time when Thomas was present. This second appearance removed the doubts of even Thomas (John 20:26-31). The

eleven apostles who met with Christ on the mountain in Galilee had no doubts about the resurrection. Hence the words "**some doubted**" cannot apply to them.

Then to whom do we apply them? To those disciples who were present and who had not before this time actually seen the risen Christ. I Corinthians 15:5-6 gives us some light on the great commission text: "**And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present time, but some are fallen asleep.**" Those who doubted were some of the five hundred brethren who were also present at the mountain meeting in Galilee.

On the expression "**but some doubted**" A. T. Robertson commented: "The reference is not to the eleven who were all now convinced after some doubt, but to the others present. Paul states that over five hundred were present, most of whom were still alive when he wrote (I Cor. 15:6). It is natural that some should hesitate to believe so great a thing at the first appearance of Jesus to them. Their very doubt makes it easier for us to believe. This was the mountain where Jesus had promised to meet them. This fact explains the large number present. Time and place were arranged beforehand" (*Word Pictures In The New Testament*, Vol. I, p. 244).

By a study of Matthew's Gospel we can see that this meeting was announced three times before it actually occurred. In Matthew 26:32 Christ said: "**But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.**" The angel at the empty tomb told the women: "**And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you**" (Matt. 28:7). As the women went to tell the disciples Christ Himself appeared to them and said: "**Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me**" (Matt. 28:10). Observe the words of Christ here: "**Go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee.**" Then compare them with Paul's words: "**...was seen of above five hundred brethren at once...**" (I Cor. 15:6). The Lord had appointed this special place for them to meet Him, for He had something special for them. That special thing was the worldwide and age-lasting commission of our text. Those

present on the mountain were the greater part of the Jerusalem church!

The meeting was held in Galilee because it contained a greater number of trustworthy disciples than Judea or Perea. It was held on an appointed mountain so it would not attract the attention of the rulers in Jerusalem. This accounts for the stress laid three times on going to Galilee and while there being able to see the risen Christ. So this great commission was not merely given to the eleven apostles as some teach. It was given to the greater part of the first church.

For the benefit of those who may think that the putting of Matthew 28:16-20 with I Corinthians 15:6 is a novelty, I would point out that this is the opinion of some of the greatest scholars who ever lived on earth. In *The Harmony of the Gospels* by John Broadus they are put together. The same is true of Robinson and Clark in their harmonies. C. H. Spurgeon takes this position, and so do Cobb, Ellicott, Godet, Weiss, Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, and a number of others.

Commenting on these words, C. H. Spurgeon remarked: "It was evidently a meeting for which He had made a special appointment, and His own words to the women, following these of the angel, seem to point this out as the one general assembly of His Church on earth before He ascended to His Father. Those who gathered were, therefore, a representative company; and the words addressed to them were spoken to the one Church of Jesus Christ throughout all time" (*The Gospel of the Kingdom*, p. 257).

I firmly believe that these words in the great commission were addressed to the church, which Christ Himself had organized during His personal ministry on earth. This church had been organized out of the materials prepared by John the Baptist (Luke 1:17). The Foundation Stone was laid when John baptized Jesus in Jordan. Others were added to this building when Jesus called John's disciples unto Himself (John 1). This company which followed Christ from the baptism of John (Acts 1:21-22) was called by the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:47 "**the church.**" This company of baptized disciples had already observed the two ordinances—baptism and the Lord's Supper (John 4:1-2; Matt. 26:26-28). They had already received the rules of church discipline (Matt. 18:15-17). The apostles, the first officers of the church (I Cor. 12:28), had already been set in the church (Mark 3:14).

Some are determined at all costs to deny that the commission was given to the church as a corporate, visible institution. They attempt to limit it to the apostles, or to individuals. They simply cannot bring themselves to believe that it was given to the church as a Divine institution. The fallacy of this reasoning

Continued on page 384

Misunderstood

Continued from page 383

is evident. If Christ gave the great commission to the eleven apostles only, then when they died the commission ceased, and we are in no sense under it today. The same is true if you make it merely individuals. This would leave us without a commission to evangelize the world for Christ, for all of the apostles and individuals to whom the Lord personally spoke the words of the great commission are now dead.

There are some very good reasons for believing that the commission was given to the New Testament church as an institution, and since that institution still exists, then we are under the great commission, and we are obligated to carry it out today as much as the first church. This must be true for two reasons. First, it would have been humanly impossible for these eleven men to go to all nations, to make disciples in all nations, to baptize these disciples in all nations, and to teach these baptized disciples all that Jesus Christ commanded to be taught to the end of the age. Second, Christ could not have been with these men in this work until the end of the age as He promised here, for in a few years all of these men were deceased. Christ could and would be with the church as an institution across the centuries who did go to all nations as He commanded them.

I conclude that the great commission was given to the Jerusalem church and those churches which came down from her by a succession. All the true churches on earth today are under this mandate from Heaven to evangelize the world. This commission will rest upon the churches of Jesus Christ until His second advent.

"The Lord left the authority to execute His laws and to carry out His great commission to evangelize the world in the hands of the church. No man has the right to preach or to teach authoritatively, nor to baptize believers unless authorized by the church to do so. The authority to preach the gospel, to baptize, to observe the Lord's Supper, and to teach the observance of all things whatsoever the Lord commanded was given to the church—and to the church only" (J. E. Cobb in *Cobb's Baptist Church Manual*, pp. 24-25).

I must say that many have misunderstood as to whom the great commission was given by Jesus Christ. There were no missionary conventions, no missionary associations, no mission boards, nor missionary societies in the New Testament because all members of each church were engaged in the great work of evangelism. These extra-scriptural, man-made organizations came into being in very modern times after many of the churches lost the vision of world missions. Missionary societies were

formed to arouse interest in and prompt missionary activity. While those who originate them have the purest of intentions, all honest men must confess that they are utterly foreign to the New Testament.

The great commission was not given to the Southern Baptist Convention, the American Baptist Association, the Baptist Bible Fellowship, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, or the PTL Club. Such organizations are extra-scriptural and unscriptural. I say unscriptural because they take control of the mission work of the churches, and the churches have little, or no control, over these societies, save to pay the bills. Apart from the local church Christ instituted no general organization to do the work of evangelizing, baptizing, and teaching. I, for one, am profoundly persuaded that this responsibility should be retained by the local church. The Head of the church has fixed it there, and it cannot be transferred unless Christ revokes the great commission.

In the New Testament each individual church was a missionary society within itself. Every church member was a missionary. I believe today that we should have as many missionaries as we do church members. Christ ordained it to be so in the beginning, and so it must be until the end of the age. The burden of sending and supporting missionaries should rest upon the local church. The trials and discouragements of the foreign fields should be the immediate concern of the churches. Let the churches get in the saddle, and with reins in hand, let them manage the missionary work as the Holy Spirit directs (Acts 13:1-4).

The present situation in our world is enough to make the angels weep and the demons to shout. In most churches very few members are active in witnessing for Christ. To strengthen, they go outside of their church and unite with others of kindred spirits in associations, conventions, Bible fellowships, evangelistic associations, and religious clubs. By this practice the churches lose their individuality and try to transfer the great commission to secretaries, committee members, board members, or some prominent preachers. By such unwise actions on the part of local churches they have allowed themselves to be robbed of a blessing—the blessing of having the presence of Christ while carrying out the great commission! This abdication to missionary societies has caused the churches to cease to give to Christ the glory that belongs to Him (Eph. 3:21). It has also made worldly and wealthy organizations who control the churches and who preach very little of the true gospel to sinners! It seems that the churches have forgotten that the great commission was given to them and to no one else.

Many who say they are Landmark

Baptists and believe that the commission was given to the churches practice the opposite of what they preach. Even Landmark Baptists have their foreign mission boards, their missionary committees, and self-perpetuating boards of directors. Why preach that the commission was given to the church, and then in practice act as if it were given to some extra-scriptural organization? This is so inconsistent that if it were not the things of the Lord it would be a laughing matter. Indeed if we believe that the commission was given to the church, then let us not try to transfer it to some man-made organization. Let us practice what we preach, or be consistent enough to start to preach what we are going to practice!

SECOND QUESTION: HAVE WE MISUNDERSTOOD THE COMMAND TO GO?

In Matthew 28:18 Christ declared that He had complete and universal authority: **"All power (exousia—authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth."** He did not assume or usurp this authority. It was given Him by the Father in the eternal counsel, and it was reaffirmed during His earthly ministry (John 5:27; 12:49; 13:3; 17:2; Matt. 9:8; 20:23; 21:23). As equal with the Father, all power was originally, legally, and essentially His. But as the Mediator of the covenant, all authority was given Christ in recompense for His work of redemption. His authority comprehends the universe, for He is **"Lord of all"** (Acts 10:36) in the upper celestial realm of heaven and in the lower terrestrial region of earth.

Immediately after saying that authority had been given to Him, He told His church: **"Go ye therefore."** In effect He was saying that authority is given to Me by the Father, and now I am giving you the authority to make disciples, to baptize, and to teach My commandments. We must go into all the world because the One who told us to go as His witnesses possesses all-encompassing authority. The only legitimate authority for missionary work is the authority of Jesus Christ. If we want power in our evangelistic effort we must depend on Him who has all power and authority. And remember that Christ gave this power to the church He established and to no one else.

We do not evangelize by the authority of some convention, or association, or Bible fellowship, or some board. We go out as members of New Testament churches to preach the gospel to every creature by the authority of a resurrected Savior, endowed by God with universal authority. Let us go out with a deep and lasting conviction that we are sent into the Lord's service with authority, which surpasses any obtained through earthly organizations. All power is given to us as members of a New Testament Baptist church by our Divine Lord, and we march

out in His power with no help needed from any other organization.

"Go ye" is the marching orders of every true church in existence today. We must go in His power and in obedience to His command. We must go with the message of salvation because Christ has sent us forth. The first two letters of the word "gospel" is "g-o." In the light of the great commission it is not God's plan that some should pray, others should give, and a few should go. The commission says: **"Go ye."** In response to this command, the members of the early church **"went forth, and preached everywhere"** (Mark 16:20); they went **"every where preaching the word"** (Acts 8:3). Acts 5:42 says: **"And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."**

Every church member is to go out and declare the gospel of salvation by Jesus Christ. Some may go across the street while others go to the foreign fields. The distance one travels is not the significant thing. Both those who go across the street and those who go across the ocean are desperately needed. The Master's command is to go with the gospel, not to sit down and let God save the elect.

The great commission cannot be accomplished without going. The growing church is the going church. Jesus Christ did not say to sit or to send, He said: **"Go ye."** Psalms 126:6 says: **"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."** Matthew 13:3 says: **"Behold, a sower went forth to sow."** Jesus says to us: **"Son, go work to day in my vineyard"** (Matt. 21:28). He again says to us: **"Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled"** (Luke 14:23). In Mark 16:15 Christ told His church: **"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."** Paul said in Romans 10:15: **"How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace."**

As New Testament Baptist churches we must obey our Lord. We must carry out the great commission. We must obey the command: **"Go ye."** Deep oceans, barren deserts, wild beasts, snow-capped mountains, shipwrecks, savage tribes, and death itself are not excuses for disobedience to Christ's command.

We must not forget that there are many heathen at home to whom we should give our attention rather than those in some distant land. There are many in easy reach of us who know not Christ. No one is a missionary abroad who is not a missionary at home. An ocean voyage or an airplane ride never made a missionary. In the heart of every true missionary there must be a divinely implanted love for lost souls. One of the first evidences of genuine conversion to

Continued on page 385

Misunderstood

Continued from page 384

Christ is the desire to make Him known to others. There is little need to send a missionary abroad if we are not willing to go to our friends and family at home. Missionary work begins at home: **“And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”** (Luke 24:47). After this we are to go to the rest of the world (Acts 1:8).

It is to be feared that many Sovereign Grace, Landmark, Independent Baptists have become hardshell in practice. We give a little to missions abroad, but we do little at home. Today, very little personal witnessing is being done by our churches. The cults put us to shame. If any work is done it is done by the pastor and a few other members. In some so-called Missionary Baptist churches no one witnesses to the lost. Professed Christian parents do not even witness to their lost children. Very few people are being converted in our churches because most church members are in rebellion to the great commission. They have forgotten that Christ told us to preach the gospel in the world (Mark 16:15). They seem to think that the commission said to preach the gospel in the church on Sunday morning and Sunday night and let the world go to Hell. Unless we recover our evangelistic zeal we are soon to be the former Sovereign Grace, Landmark, Independent Baptist churches!

I can tolerate an honest hardshell. He is consistent. He does not believe in missionary work; therefore, he does none. But many Missionary Baptists claim to believe in missions and do no missionary work at home or abroad. They are inconsistent! They are hypocrites! They profess to be missionary but in practice they are hardshells!

Because we have lost our evangelistic zeal we have become cold, callous, and complacent. We fuss and fight each other. In our backslidden condition, we have become critical of everybody and everything. We go off on strange new doctrines. We manifest a great amount of spiritual immaturity. If we do not return to the work of the great commission, Ichabod is soon to be written over our door.

The lost world has Jesus Christ and His church on trial. We are His witnesses (John 15:27; Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32; Luke 24:48). A witness is responsible to tell what he knows (Acts 4:20). If we do not tell the lost world of the good news about salvation by Jesus Christ, we are false witnesses before God. If we do not tell a lost world that Jesus Christ saves, we are ashamed of His gospel and in rebellion to the great commission. A man who has no concern for lost souls had better be concerned for his own soul!

The Wet Hands

Continued from page 381

vessel. Jeremiah beheld, pondered this sight, and waited on the words from his Lord.

As I watched the potter working on the wheel, I began to see that the potter was God. I observed Him busy at work, doing something with a purpose. He had a design in mind. I took note that the potter’s design was the will of God.

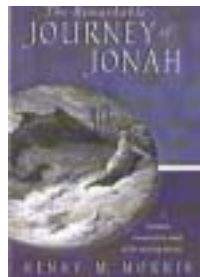
I was drawn to the wheel the potter worked upon. I began to see that the wheel was the providence of God. The round wheel signifies the continuity of God’s providence. Divine providence was once declared to Ezekiel through a vision of four wheels that were rolling, going straight in a line (Eze. 10:9-11). Those wheels continued to roll just as God’s providence is always moving forward with continuity of purpose.

The wheel is indispensable to the potter and his work. He forms the clay on that wheel, turning it at different speeds depending on what type of work He wants to do. Upon that wheel, the potter brings to fruition the vessel he has purposed in his mind. Just as the wheel is distinct from the potter’s design, so the providence of God is distinct from His will. These two are not contrary however; His providence can be thought of as the execution of His decrees. Then considering the providence of God to be the execution of His will, we see the likeness of providence to the potter’s wheel. Similarly, through permissive and positive directions, the providence of God moves, bringing to reality His plan and purpose.

I continued to watch and saw the potter’s hands molding the clay and saw that the hands were the Holy Spirit. The hands are mysteriously in union with the mind and agree with the design thereof. They move and work according to the fiat of the mind without audible direction. Jesus likened the Spirit to the wind that **“bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth”** (John 3:8). Also, those hands were dipped in the water in the basin, and that water was the Word of God. How plainly then I saw that God works through His Spirit and according to His Word!

Then, what had been in the background came to the foreground in my sight; I saw the clay. We, God’s people, are the clay—the raw material that is placed upon the wheel of God’s providence and to which the hands of the Holy Spirit are applied. The Divine Potter chooses us out from among the large mound of clay and casts us upon His wheel. That work, once begun, will continue to be performed (Phi. 1:6) until the vessel is finally glorified in His sight (Rom. 8:29-30).

I then looked upon **“the thing**



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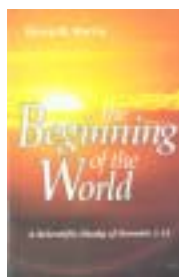


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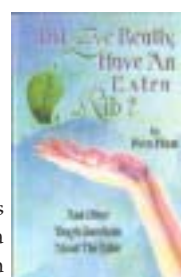
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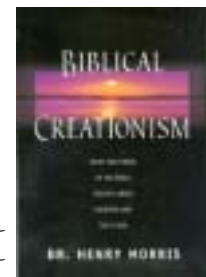
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formed,” the vessel that was the final product—the result of all the work the potter had done. The vessel was **“meet for the master’s use and prepared unto every good work”** (II Tim. 2:21). I had noted the Potter’s pleasure all the while He worked, but His greatest satisfaction

was expressed when the vessel was finally conformed into the perfect image.

From this picture, we first observe *the indisputable authority of the potter*. Evident secondly to our consideration, is *the irresistible ability of the potter* and, finally,

Continued on page 386

The Wet Hands

Continued from page 385

we shall consider *the work upon the wheel.*

I. In the first place, the potter has an indisputable authority over the clay.

In a sense, *the potter is sovereign over the clay.* Paul alluded to this fact when he asked rhetorically in Romans 9:21, **“Hath not the potter power over the clay?”** It is understood that the earthly potter takes the raw material, casts it upon the wheel, and forms the clay as he wants to. He has the authority; it is his work. He is responsible for the shape of the finished vessel. He is responsible for its fitness for its destined use. He is an independent artisan commissioned only by his own inspiration, regulated only by his own plans, and rewarded solely by the enjoyment of accomplishing his own purpose.

Likewise, *God has sovereign authority over His people.* Paul spoke to the Athenians about God saying, **“In him we live, and move, and have our being”** (Acts 17:28). Hence, we derive our material existence from God; also, our form and function comes from His hand. He takes the clay and casts it upon the wheel. He molds and shapes the vessel as it pleases Him. Solomon bids us to always remember that **“God is in heaven, and thou upon earth”** (Ecc. 5:2). We are **“the thing formed;”** He is the Potter, the Creator. The authority is His and it is indisputable.

In our text, the potter sat and **“wrought a work on the wheels.”** He sought the advice of none and was not obligated to answer any questions about his work. Likewise, God’s indisputable authority is seen in that *His work is unquestionable.* The Scriptures testify that God **“doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”** (Dan 4:35). Not one creature has the right to question the sovereign God about His work. He does what He wants to with the heavens above and the earth beneath. God does just as the potter who made his vessel **“as seemed good to the potter to make it.”** Elihu remarked of God’s unquestionable authority, **“Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters”** (Job 33:13).

Additionally, as far as the potter and his work are concerned, *his counsel is supreme.* The potter sat down and made the vessel **“as seemed good to the potter to make it.”** The design was his; the work was his. He did not consult with the prophet Jeremiah or anyone else before he began his work. He simply sat down and did the work that was in his mind to do.

This is exactly as God does with His work. His plans are born of His own thoughts, which are supreme and higher

than those of the created beings. God declares, **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”** (Isa. 55:8-9). His thoughts and ways are infinitely above the thoughts and ways of any other. The Psalmist explained, **“But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased”** (Psa. 115:3). Paul spoke similarly of God, saying He **“worketh all things after the counsel of his own will”** (Eph. 1:11). It is as the hymn writer taught us to sing:

*Life, death, and hell, and worlds unknown,
Hang on His firm decree;*

*He sits on no precarious throne,
Nor borrows leave to be.*

Holy men of old have taken up the thought of God’s supreme counsel and asked, **“With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding?”** (Isa. 40:14). **“For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor?”** (Rom. 11:34). Who consulted with God when He created the heavens and the earth? Who consulted with Him when He entered into that everlasting covenant with the Son and the Holy Spirit for the redemption of His people? With none has He taken counsel. His counsel is supreme and He does His work according to His pleasure and purpose.

II. Secondly, the potter has an irresistible ability with the clay.

The potter determined what he wanted to do, then sat down and formed the clay into his desired vessel. His ability to mold and shape the clay could not be hindered nor thwarted. His ability is irresistible and *he will execute his plan.* This is an even more fitting description of God and His work. Daniel wrote that **“none can stay his hand”** (Dan 4:35). God has a plan, a purpose, and He achieves that purpose and brings it about. He promised as much to Israel through the prophet Isaiah, **“I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it”** (Isa. 46:11). He cannot be successfully resisted.

Christ spoke of God’s irresistible sovereign ability to do what He has purposed saying, **“For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, til all be fulfilled”** (Matt. 5:18). He spoke certainly that all Scripture would be fulfilled. All of the will of God shall be done. His purpose shall not wither on the vine, going unfulfilled. He has a great power to will and decree, and that same almighty power will bring to pass His purpose.

God does not entertain mere notions or vain dreams. He has a definite purpose just as the potter had a definite purpose

and sat down to work. The potter was not talking about or dreaming about what he might like to do someday. Nor was his design foggy and abstract. He knew clearly his purpose and made a vessel **“as seemed good to the potter to make it.”**

Let us now consider further that *the potter’s hands are not stayed.* The potter made a vessel that was **“marred”** in his hands. So, he determined to make **“it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.”** He decided to remake the vessel into another vessel, a different vessel, and his hands were free to do so. He was not stopped from doing what he wanted to do. Likewise, God follows His own plan, makes and remakes as it pleases Him to do so. No one changed the potter’s mind and no one can change the mind of God. Job understood this and remarked, **“But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth”** (Job 23:13). God comforted the house of Jacob declaring, **“For I am the LORD, I change not”** (Mal. 3:6). What He sets out to do He does, because He is the sovereign God and He has an irresistible ability. His hand is neither slowed nor stopped by any of His creation. He will not be turned from performing His own will.

Furthermore, the potter has power over the clay and the clay cannot question him or reason with him about what he is doing. Frankly, there is nothing that the clay can do. *The clay cannot reply to the potter.* The clay is inanimate and is dependent upon the potter. We are then in the hands of God like the clay in the hands of the potter. It is preposterous for us to think of the clay replying against the potter. Paul asked, **“Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?”** (Rom. 9:20). Likewise, we have no right to murmur and complain against God. In reality, we have no power to do so as far as thinking it may affect some change in God’s will or way. The clay cannot change the potter’s mind and neither can we change the mind of God.

We notice also that *the potter does not seek the consent of the clay.* It is at best silly to think of the clay replying to the potter and giving directions to his work. It is equally unthinkable that the potter would speak to the clay and ask its opinion, preference, or advice. The potter’s ability then is not limited by the clay’s consent; he cares not for it. We noted that the potter was not satisfied with the first vessel and exercised his prerogative to make it again. Likewise, God does not need or desire the consent of His creation to do with it as He pleases. He needs no permission from the clay to squash the vessel and remake it to suit His mind.

It may seem sometimes that men are resisting God and replying against God. Truly, this is a mystery, but the Scriptures testify, **“Surely the wrath of man shall**

praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain” (Psa. 76:10). It may suffice the fool today to say in his heart, **“There is no God,”** but all created beings will bow to God in His supreme sovereignty. **“Every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess”** (Rom 14:11). Yes, even the stiffest rebel and greatest fool shall confess, **“Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”** (Phi. 2:11).

III. Thirdly, let us look more closely at the work that was upon the wheel.

When Jeremiah saw the potter, He was busy at work. The clay was upon the wheel and the potter was forming it into a vessel. As we consider the Divine Potter, we note that His people are the work upon the wheel. *They are His workmanship.* Paul wrote of God’s people, **“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”** (Eph. 2:10). His **“workmanship”** is His manufactured product. God sits as the Potter of His people. His vessels do not collect dust on the shelf but He is working His will in their lives.

This is where we truly see the picture of God as the Potter. The hands of the Holy Spirit are upon the vessel shaping it. Those hands are wet with the water that is the Word of God. This is how God works. He works upon us through His Spirit and that by His Word. He is shaping, forming, and always conforming the vessel to the image that He desires. God is always busy and always at work on His people.

God is always at work on all His creation. He does not sit idle and watch as things go by. God is directing, conducting, and orchestrating all the affairs of men, this world, and His universe! We rightly sing of Him:

Who flung the stars out into space,

And holds them in their proper place?

Who, like a curtain, stretched the sky,

To make a place for birds to fly?

Who holds all things within His hands?

Who owns all houses, fields and lands?

Who keeps our souls each passing hour?

No man has this almighty power!

It is God who does this! It is God that created, sustains, and upholds all of the universe. God speaks of the earth and its inhabitants and proclaims, **“I bear up the pillars of it”** (Psa. 75:3). He spins the earth upon its axis and works with it as it pleases Him. From the larger world and outlying universe, it comes down very personal, **“we are his workmanship.”**

Those wet hands upon the vessel speak to us in dear terms. For it is here, *through His hands, we have personal contact with God.* We have been thinking on such things as God’s will, His decrees, His eternal purpose, but these are **“secret things,”** which **“belong unto the LORD our God”** (Deu. 29:29). It is not for angels or men to pry into such things. If we were

Continued on page 387

Outlines for Country Preachers by a Country Preacher

Sermon Outlines by Milburn Cockrell

Remember God in the Morning of Life

Ecclesiastes 12:1-7

This is a call to the young to think of God and their duty to Him in the bloom of life. This statement is from the wisest man who ever lived. The wisdom of all heaven is behind this statement. The wise of this world affirm its truth.

I. REMEMBER WHOM—"THY CREATOR."

1. This language implies man has a Creator. He is a dependent creature and could not create himself. He could not act before he existed (Job 10:8-12; Ps. 100:3).
2. Man is wonderfully and fearfully made (Ps. 139:13-14).
"What a wonderful piece of machinery man is as you look at his physical body. The eye with its window and lens; the ear with its paraphernalia and drum; the tongue with its countless operations and various functions; the lungs with their inhalations and exhalations; the heart throbbing with its ceaseless beats; the stomach with its gastric juice digesting the food; the lacteal nerves of the bowels with their assimilating power; the liver with its secreting power; the kidneys with their purifying power; the nerves, muscles, bones, sinews and the triple skin punctured by millions of pores; all present an appearance of mechanism that required a God to conceive as well as a God to make (create)."
3. Man originally knew God and though now fallen, he has some knowledge of God (Ps. 19:1-3; Rom. 1:19-20).
4. God deserves to be remembered above all else. "Creator" is "Creators" in Hebrew as in Job 35:10. It looks back to: **"Let us make man"** (Gen. 1:26).

II. REMEMBER HOW?

1. By remembering the record God gave of His Son, the gospel, the old, old story (Ps. 103:1-4). The wicked never do this (Ps. 10:4; 14:1).
2. By thinking about Him (Ps. 20:7).
3. By remembering His providence that rules the world (Ps. 105:3-5; 77:5-12; Ps. 103:18).
4. By meditating upon His Word (II Tim. 3:15). Scriptures make us wise unto salvation. David was converted, Christ sanctified, Paul begotten, and Peter born again by them.
5. We remember by attending His house (Heb. 10:25; I Cor. 11:25). We meet to have fellowship, study His Word, pray, sing His praise, and to remember His death and resurrection.

III. REMEMBER WHEN—"IN THE DAYS OF THY YOUTH."

1. God must be remembered early and never forgotten along the whole journey of life. No age is exempt and no sex excluded. The religion of Christ is a religion of hope for the young (Prov. 8:17; 22:6).
2. Scripture writers recommend early godliness (Ps. 34:11; Prov. 3:1-4; II Tim. 3:16; Luke 2:49, 52; Matt. 19:14).

IV. REMEMBER WHY—"THE EVIL DAYS COME."

1. If it should be done, it should be early done. Youth is a formative period, impressions are most readily made, and are most lasting. Youth is a formative period, impressions are most readily made, and are most lasting. Youth is a formative period, impressions are most readily made, and are most lasting. Youth is a formative period, impressions are most readily made, and are most lasting. Youth is a formative period, impressions are most readily made, and are most lasting. Youth is a formative period, impressions are most readily made, and are most lasting. Youth is a formative period, impressions are most readily made, and are most lasting. Youth is a formative period, impressions are most readily made, and are most lasting.
2. Christ encourages it (Mark 10:14-15). A child has little prejudices or theories to give up.
3. Don't give God the dregs of life. It is a noble sight to see an entire life, from youth to old age, given to Christ. If the Creator is remembered in youth, He will not be forgotten in later years.
4. The evil days come. . . .
 - (1) **"Stars, be not darkened"**—sight fails, colors eclipse, mind weakens and memory fails.
 - (2) **"Clouds. . . after the rain"**—like wet weather, as one pain goes another comes to take its place.
 - (3) **"keepers. . . tremble"**—the hands shake and the head, the watchtower.
 - (4) **"strong. . . bow"**—the back bent and the feet are soon tired.
 - (5) **"grinders cease"**—the teeth are rotten, broken, and few remain and these ache. It is hard to chew and the digestion is poor.
 - (6) **"look out of the windows be darkened"**—the eyes have grown dim with age.
 - (7) **"doors. . . shut in the streets"**—the mouth is closed because of the absence of teeth and have no desire to travel.
 - (8) **"sound of the grinding is low"**—no appetite for food and unable to chew meat well.
 - (9) **"rise up at the voice of the bird"**—little things disturb them, even the chirping

of a bird. Unable to sleep.

- (10) **"musick. . . brought low"**—tongue not able to sing and the ears unable to hear and appreciate music.
- (11) **"afraid of that which is high"**—afraid to go high on a ladder or hill for lack of breath.
- (12) **"fears. . . in the way"**—neither ride or walk with comfort; find bugbears in the way.
- (13) **"almond tree shall flourish"**—hair white like an almond tree in bloom.
- (14) **"grasshoppers. . . a burden"**—a little weight upon his mind sits heavily upon him, in body and mind.
- (15) **"desire shall fail"**—appetite almost gone.
- (16) **"goeth to his long home"**—his final destiny in eternity

The Wet Hands

Continued from page 386

to consider these things alone, we might conclude that God is quite aloof from His creation; God would seem perhaps involved with the whole of His creation, but we might infer that He is not intimate with the individual works of His hands. However, God has not left us here with things that we cannot know, understand, or even see. He does communicate with us in a personal way through His commandments, His Word, **"those things which are revealed."** These are the things that **"belong unto us and our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law"** (Deu. 29:29).

God becomes our God when He lays the hands of the Holy Spirit, having been drenched in the water of the Word, upon us as the vessel and begins to form us as it pleases Him. This is how God touches us. This is where we come in to contact with God. If it were not so, then our religion would be nothing more than a head knowledge. It would be some great intellectual pursuit that we could all respectably speak about to each other and then commend each other for how smart and how intelligent we all are, but that is not the case. God has His hands upon you, upon me, and all of His people He touches with His hands.

God is intimately involved with all of the works of His hands. Even the sparrow, which is so lightly esteemed by man that two are **"sold for a farthing,"** is highly esteemed of God and **"one of them shall not fall on the ground without"** Him (Matt. 10:29). He has the very hairs of our head numbered. He knows what things that we have need of. How closely acquainted is God with all our ways! Job took comfort in his distress that God **"knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold"** (Job 23:10). God knows more about the way that we take than we do. God is very involved with His creatures and His people.

In verse four of our text, we read that *the marred vessel was remade* by the hand of the potter. **"And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it."** That the vessel was marred

meant that it was imperfect. There was a problem with the vessel itself not with the potter's work. Perhaps it was too dry and stiff. Perhaps there was a stone or some other foreign object that was within the material and that made it unsuitable for the vessel that the potter had in mind, so he remade it.

Generally, whenever I set out to build something, I never get it right the first time. I always have to tear it apart and put it back together again. It may be due to a problem with the material, but it is most usually due to my own error. This does not seem to be the case with the potter. It does not say that the potter made a mistake or marred the vessel, or that the vessel had turned out to be something that the potter did not want or did not allow. The vessel itself was marred as the potter was working upon it, so he made it again.

Remaking vessels is a characteristic of the Divine work. God told Israel, **"I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal"** (Deu. 32:39). God breaks down and tears down that he might build up. Christ said the same when He said, **"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"** (John 2:19). God often squashes the marred vessel that He might remake it a better vessel.

We have many examples in the Scripture of God remaking His vessels. One that comes to mind vividly is Job. Job was a good vessel, an upright man. He eschewed evil. There was not anything, humanly speaking, that we could look upon Job and condemn him for. He was an upright man before God, nevertheless, the vessel **"was marred in the hand of the potter,"** and Job was remade. He was brought down, broken completely to pieces until he sat down in the ashes, took of the potsherds, and scraped his sores. He lost all of his wealth, health and family and he sat in the ashes mourning not knowing what to do. He may have thought that he had lost control, but he never had control. God was in control. Likewise, we do not control our lives. God is in control. He is the one that is determining and working all things out for our good according to the counsel of His own will. Job was remade. He was torn down and built up again better than he was to begin with. Every time that

Continued on page 388

The Wet Hands

Continued from page 387

God remakes a vessel, it comes out better on the other end. So when God remakes us we shall come out better than before.

Joseph was another one that was remade. He spent some time in the prison and under persecution, but we find that in the end, God blessed him and raised him up. Joseph said to his brothers, "**Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good**" (Gen. 50:20). He saw the providential hand of God shaping and fashioning his life.

Peter was another vessel that was remade. When the Lord was taken to be crucified, Peter followed afar off. The vessel "**was marred in the hands of the potter.**" When the maiden came and asked Peter if he was with Christ, he cursed and he said he did not know Him. He denied the Lord three times before the cock crew. Later, when he was in the judgment hall, the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. Peter in that instant was torn down. All of his self-righteousness was gone, but he was built again and what a vessel, what a work God made out of him when He remade that vessel!

We may even know some folks personally that have been remade by the hand of the Potter. Perhaps the reader has been remade or may be in the future. The wise preacher said that "**Faithful are the wounds of a friend**" (Pro. 27:6). When God tears us down it is for a purpose. It is to rebuild us again. He is not going to tear us down and leave us in the ashes and the pit. If He has torn us down, then it is because He has a design to rebuild us again and we shall come out on the other side "**as gold.**"

In the account of Job we read, "**And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends; also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before**" (Job 42:10). God blessed him two-fold. He gave him even more than all he ever had before. He was a greater vessel of honor and glory for God than he had ever been. So it is that the marred vessels many times are remade.

Remaking is a painful process. It hurts us in the flesh but God, rest assured, will tear us down that He might build us again. This is *the assurance that we have in God*. We have an assurance in this doctrine of God's sovereignty as the Divine Potter. We might have reason to fear and lose hope if our God was not sovereign. If God had to ask someone's permission before He could do something for us, then we might have whereof to fear, because they might not grant it. God seeks no consent but He does what He has in His will and His mind and His purpose as seems good in His sight.


We have a grand promise that "**all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the**

called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate" (Rom. 8:28-29). God is working in us to this end. He is working in us with a design in mind. He is forming us into a vessel with the form and function that He desires, and making us a vessel for His honor "**that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared**" (Rom. 9:23).

We have blessed assurance in the sovereignty of God. It would be a most miserable religion if God were not sovereign. If God was fickle as the human mind, feelings, emotions, and flesh, we would be most miserable creatures, but we have hope because God is sovereign and He does what He wants to, when He wants to, and with whom He wants to. "**None can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou**" (Dan. 4:35). God is a God of all power.

Conclusion – In light of this wonderful truth, as clay, we should seek to be malleable. We should seek to be soft and supple. We should be moist with the Word of God in God's hands. We should seek to be pliable to His Spirit. We should be responsive to the Holy Spirit working and moving upon us and across the surface of the vessel, inside and out. We should seek to yield to the Spirit. We should seek that God would work upon us. Let our cry never be, "Why have you made me thus?" Let our daily prayer be, "Search me, try me, purify me and remake me! O, dear Father, wet Thy hands and take hold of me, form me, and fashion me until I be conformed to the image of Thy blessed Son! Amen."

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Mini-Edition

By Joseph Harris
Chairman of Biblical Studies
Southeastern Baptist College, Laurel, Mississippi



The I's of Bill Clinton

Bill Clinton has written his life story called *My Life*. If his past means anything, then it will not be hard to predict what may be in the book. I have already heard and read some reviews on the book and the reviews are not positive. The New York Times review was scathing, and probably factual. If you have read Mini Edition for the past few years, then you know I am no Bill Clinton fan. The man was the worst disaster-of-a-President in the history of this country. He brought the office to an all time low. I respect his position as an ex-president but have never respected him as a man. Respect is something to be earned, not freely given.

Someone has suggested the title of his book should be *My Lie* and someone else suggested *My Lies*. Maybe, but considering his egomania and obsession with self and a legacy, I think his autobiography should be entitled *Me, Myself and I*, since it is all about him and what he did to further his agenda and gratify himself and not this country. I propose the following outline of I's for Bill Clinton's life story.

He was INCOMPETENT. As Commander-in-Chief, he demoralized our troops and cut the military. He did not make the nation safer from terrorism. When given the chance to snare Bin Laden, he was instead allowed to go from Sudan to Afghanistan for a safe haven. He furthered the cause of abortion and advanced the homosexual agenda. We are left searching for something he did of magnitude that furthered the cause of liberty and honored the great heritage of this nation. And don't give me the old "It's the economy, stupid" story either. Bill Clinton rode the crest of the Reagan economic boom until it played out in his last year in office. He then conveniently dumped the fault of a sagging economy on President George W. Bush in his first year in office. No President is superhuman enough to boost or destroy the economy of this country in one year (with the exception of Alan Greenspan).

He was IMMORAL. Several key women have come forward with stories ranging from their willing participation in affairs with Clinton, to unwanted sexual advances from Clinton. All these women still stick to their sordid stories, which happened years ago. Where there is smoke, there is usually fire and where there is billowing smoke; there is a raging forest fire. Concerning Monica Lewinsky (remember, "I did not have sex with that woman!"), he has now freely admitted he did have sex with her, but worst of all was his cavalier attitude about why he did it.

His reason: "Because I could," he said in his book. This leads to the next "I".

He was IRRESPONSIBLE. There are numerous stories which document his irresponsible use of the highest office of the land for personal, sexual, and political gain. It all began in Arkansas where he used state troopers as watchdogs for his nightly sexcapades. His irresponsibility escalated in the White House where he used the buildings and grounds as his playhouse. He repeatedly lied and created his own truth for the moment, based on expediency, in and out of the witness stand.

He was INCONSISTENT. He began his journey to the White House as a moderate centrist, while holding to liberal philosophies and ideas. He flipped and flopped on issues throughout his tenure, running a close second only to John Kerry. He was a new Democrat, which turned out to be nothing more than old liberalism in disguise. And does anyone remember his promise to deliver the most ethical administration in history, only to produce the worst administration, with numerous criminal investigations, imprisoned associates, and mysterious deaths of co-workers? He was anti-tobacco, yet who was responsible for the half-smoked cigar in the Monica episode? Monica didn't smoke it.

He was IRRELEVANT. For eight years, he was as relevant to America as the Koran is to a Baptist. His vision for America was off track. His philosophy for government was built on a foundation of sand. And he was morally bankrupt. He offered no solutions and fixed no real problems. His "quick fix" mentality of big brother government solutions was comparable to placing a band-aid on cancer. America lost her soul and morality during the eight years of Bill Clinton. And though I am not ecstatic over President Bush and his global world view, illegal alien amnesty program, etc., let's not make the unforgivable mistake of extending and magnifying the Clinton years by electing John Kerry. It would be a multiplied harvest of lies, corruption, sorrow, and loss of liberties that will never be reclaimed.

"For the commandment is a lamp;



and the law is light" ~ Proverbs 6:23

Separation and Service

Continued from page 381

Attachment to Christ is the only secret of detachment from the world. Therefore, I do not say, "Break your fetters of evil habit that you may lay hold of the Saviour," but, "Lay hold of the Saviour in order that you may break your fetters of evil habit." I have never known a man to stop sinning until he had begun believing. I do not deny that unconverted men may carry on a tremendous warfare with their evil passions; but I do say that so long as it is only self against sin, it will be a drawn battle. In the seventh of Romans we have a picture of this warfare vividly portrayed, "**For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.**" Here is the battle. "**For I delight in the law of God after the inward man.**" Here is our better nature, one of the combatants. "**But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.**" Here is our evil nature, the other combatant. And these two keep up the struggle. It grows hotter and hotter. "**The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary, the one to the other.**" And this conflict will go on, sorrowful defeat following sorrowful defeat till Christ comes into the soul. Then and only then will the shout be heard, "Jesus is victor!" This has happened repeatedly. I have seen and bear record to the fact: the drunkard victorious over his appetite, the worldling victorious over his pleasures, the self-seeker victorious over his avarice, the sinner victorious over his sins.

But how has the victory come? The Apostle answers: "**The law of the Spirit of life in Jesus Christ hath made me free from the law of sin and death.**" "But," it is asked, "is the battle won once and for all at conversion?" No, it has to be fought again and again. I believe that with most Christians the temptation is to the misuse of good things, in other words, that Satan turns our very peace into war in order to get the victory over us. Therefore, look out for the flag of truce that proposes a compromise with the world. Beware lest you be beguiled through your harmless pleasures. A traveler in Barbary mentions seeing a beautiful clear spring of water over which was inscribed this motto "Drink and be gone." Robbers infested the region, and were constantly on the track of the traveler, ready to pounce upon and destroy him. Therefore, he must snatch the cooling draught and hasten on. Shall we refuse ourselves all pleasure in this world? Shall we write, "Touch not, taste not," on every innocent gratification? No, but as soon as we have tasted the pleasant draught we must hurry forward lest we be overtaken by the destroyer of our souls. Drink and be gone! Hasten on from pleasure to life's serious business, from

rest to life's serious toil, from peace to life's serious conflict. This is just what Peter meant when he wrote: "**Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.**" The citizen may tarry, build, plant, and reap; but the pilgrim must make haste lest he take root in this world, when his calling is to be rooted in heaven.

This deliverance from a present evil world means election, you see, not assimilation. As a sunbeam falls upon a muddy pool and draws up from it a clear crystal drop, leaving behind all the filth and sediment with which it was mixed, so Christ takes souls out of the world into His kingdom. Much of the religion of our day is an adulteration—a mixture of earth and heaven in the same compound. Those who want to popularize Christianity go in for this mixture. They think a religion of mingled secularity and spirituality will be more palatable and will win more disciples. But it is not so. Christ gets the soldiers who are really valuable to Him by proclaiming: "If any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me." Real strength for the church has always come, and always must come, through unworldly conditions and claims. By repentance, faith, and self-denial Christ separates men from the world in order to join them to Himself.

Here is the test of evangelical faith by which we ask to have it tried—it can take a sinner out of his sin. To keep a serious-minded man serious, to keep a moral man moral, to keep a respectable man respectable—this is not a very difficult matter, especially when your moral or respectable man has a good heredity behind him. But to change the immoral and the outcast into the sober and respectable is quite another matter. That is the work of the supernatural spirit operating through a supernatural Gospel. Nothing but an evangelical Christianity can do this. Go into the liberal churches where they boast so loudly of their ethical preaching, and their high morality, and their strict integrity, and ask them how many drunkards they picked from the gutter last year, changing them into sober men who can pray and sing praises to God. They cannot show you one, and they are condemned by this test. The tall cedars can be easily sawed and planed, and polished, and fitted into their places in the temple of God; but the great problem in my boyhood was how to pull the stumps whose strong, deep, gnarly roots have struck down into the earth and grasped it with giant fingers. Only by a tremendous convulsion can these be uprooted. The world is full of such stumps of humanity, all beauty and grace gone, and they only a mass of deep-rooted and inveterate evil habits. "To deliver men from this present evil world"—this is the problem of humanity which the Gospel solves.

II. THE DIVINE STANDARD

According to the will of God (Galatians 1:4).

That is to say, God has His own sovereign method by which He works, and to this we are to conform. Often have I heard it affirmed by earnest reformers that the great problem, which the church has to work out, is that of adapting Christianity to the age, but if, as the text affirms, the age is evil, why should we attempt to conform Christianity to it? On the contrary, the word of Scripture is very explicit: "**Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.**" There is nothing more needed than this demonstration. Exhibitions of the bad and selfish and imperfect will of man are common enough, but the divine will lived out in human lives, the perfect will exhibited amid imperfect surroundings—that is what our nonconformity should exhibit—proving "**what is that good, and acceptable and perfect will of God.**"

The will of God is the rule and measure by which all human conduct is to be rectified. If traders have fallen into the sin of measuring with a short yardstick, and weighing with a false balance, is he the best friend of society who succeeds in getting the standard of weight and measure changed so as to conform to this dishonest usage? Surely not. Well, sin has deranged our moral standards, and the Christian is set into the world not to adjust himself to the age, but to convince the age of its sin by exhibiting to it "**the good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.**"

It strikes me as a most significant name by which Christians are called in the Bible—"believers." That is, they are persons who accept what God says as final. They set their watches by the sun instead of by the town clock. One of our preachers lately declared that all thinkers now accept the doctrine of evolution as true. That may be or may not be—I will not discuss the question. But how is it about believers? Thinkers accept one another's opinions: believers accept the voice of God. Thinkers base their conclusions on a "Thus saith science"; believers rest their faith on a "**Thus saith the Lord.**" I know that there are multitudes of believers who accept the doctrine of creation as true. They read in Genesis the simple and sublime record that in the beginning "**God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him,**" and they credit the record without question. They believe implicitly that creation proceeds from above, not from beneath; that God spake and it was done, not that chaos fermented and it was begun. "**In the image of God created he him.**" It may seem like a very stupid and stubborn thing not to think with the great thinkers, but we prefer to

believe with the great believers. Let who will choose for himself the encomium: "He thought with the great thinkers and it was counted to him for originality." We prefer to take our place with faithful Abraham, if with him we may win this epitaph: "**He believed in the LORD; and it was counted unto him for righteousness.**"

This, my hearers, is the chief distinction of the Christian; he is delivered from the present evil world—from its way of thinking and reasoning; he is "separated unto the Gospel of God." When others walk by sight, he walks by faith; when others look at the things that are seen, he looks at the things that are not seen; while others say, "I have proved, therefore I affirm," he says, "I believe, therefore have I spoken."

How beautiful is the counterpart to this text, which the Apostle gives us in another Scripture. He speaks of Christians as those who: "**have tasted the . . . powers of the world to come.**" That is, they are delivered from the present age, and made partakers of the age to be. It is a strange paradox, but as true as strange: the pilgrim feeding from his father's table while yet in the wilderness, nourished by angels' food while yet in the earthly house of his tabernacle. "I have known more enjoyment in one hour of communion with God than in a whole lifetime of earthly pleasure," says an experienced Christian. If, then, you ever get weary and languid for a moment, "taste the powers of the world to come," and you will be refreshed and invigorated! Beautiful illustration of it we have in the story of the sick soldier. He was given up to die, and his father hastened from a long distance to his bedside in the hospital. He lay half-conscious, and nothing that father or attendants could say could rouse him till the father said: "Here is a loaf of your mother's bread which I have brought you." "Bread from home!" said the dying man. "Give me some," and from that hour he began to mend. Bread from Heaven! Don't fail to eat it every day, oh, Christian. You are in the world, but not of it, and you will die if you eat the native food. Feed upon the word of God; live upon the promise of God; satisfy your souls with the hope of God, which He has revealed to you in the Scriptures. "This is that bread which cometh down from heaven, of which if a man eat he shall never hunger."

III. SEPARATION TO WHAT?

1. *We are separated for our Lord's ownership.*

We speak of losing the soul. Who is the loser? We speak of saving the soul. For whom is it saved? "**All souls are mine,**" saith God. To lose the soul is to defraud Him of His redemption-right: to save a soul is to restore to Him that of which He has been defrauded. Gold cannot be used for currency so long as it is mixed

Continued on page 392

The Berea Baptist Banner Forum

Submit questions on any Bible topic

The Berea Baptist Banner, PO Box 39, Mantachie, Mississippi 38855

1. *Could you please explain spiritual adultery and/or spiritual fornication and does it include visiting the services of another denomination? — Kentucky*



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“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” (James 4:4). Spiritual adultery can be summed up in one word, “worldliness.” I John 2:15-17 reads, **“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”** Notice that the worldly things mentioned here have to do with self and will be destroyed, but the things of God will abide forever.

Spiritual adultery happens when those who profess faith in Jesus Christ become selfish and love the things of the world, or find pleasure in those things that are evil in order to gratify the flesh. Perhaps the best way to illustrate this is to consider some examples.

First, to have fellowship with unbelievers for any selfish reason is to commit spiritual adultery. Selfish reasoning could be seeking popularity, entertainment, or just companionship. It's not that we can't have any relationships with unbelievers at all, but we should understand that the purpose of those relationships is to reach them with the gospel for Christ's sake. This should be our only motivation to associate with sinners that we might give them the words of life as our Savior did when He lived here upon this earth. We should never just be carnally entertained by the company of unbelievers. We are on a mission to make disciples of them.

Second, watching TV is spiritual adultery in most circumstances. Everything that God hates is glorified on TV. This is the **“lust of the eyes.”** For a Christian to be entertained by those things that God hates is to mock the holiness of God. It's not that the TV set

is intrinsically wicked (although most films and programs are), but when we find fleshly gratification from watching TV we commit spiritual adultery.

Third, to listen to worldly music is to commit spiritual adultery. Any music that is sensual or that appeals to the flesh is worldly and is the **“lust of the flesh.”** It is impossible to listen to such things without turning from God. There are certainly many other lusts of the flesh which we won't mention.

Fourth, to live for our own ambitions is to commit spiritual adultery. We belong to God and should willingly surrender our ambitions and desires to Him. If we don't, we are full of the **“pride of life”** and seeking fulfillment in ourselves rather than seeking the glory of God.

These are just some examples of spiritual adultery. Visiting the services of another denomination may or may not be spiritual adultery depending on the circumstance. Some people are saved and searching for the truth, but have not yet been taught. They go from denomination to denomination looking and learning until they come to find a true church. They have not committed spiritual adultery. Sometimes people are traveling and visit other churches that are not exactly the same as us. This does not make them worldly, but they should be willing to leave the place if God's name is blasphemed. Every situation is different but I would hope that God's people would have the discernment to know what spiritual adultery is and flee from it.

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The words spiritual adultery and/or fornication are never found together in the Scriptures as far as I could tell. I have heard the terms used together many times in sermons over the years. The principle stems from the teaching of the Lord's church being likened to His espoused bride. As such the members are to be faithful to attend the worship services of a true New Testament Baptist Church. The Roman Catholic Church is

referred to as the great religious whore in Revelation 17 and her Protestant daughters are called harlots in the same context. I Corinthians 6:15-17 states: **“Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of a harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh.”** Amos 3:3 asks a penetrating question: **“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”**

Knowing what I know about the Scriptures, it is difficult for me to understand why a true Baptist would desire to visit the services of another denomination that does not believe the truth. We are instructed not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together in Hebrews 10:25. I would not recommend that a Baptist church member visit the services of another denomination. James 4:17 declares: **“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”**

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First, let me say that I am unfamiliar with the term spiritual fornication. I may be showing my ignorance in saying such but that is the simple truth. There may be places in the Bible that teach spiritual fornication but I cannot recall them at this moment. I shall deal with what I believe the Scriptures would call spiritual adultery. When dealing with adultery we must obviously be speaking to those who are one with Christ and not the lost.

James 4: 2-4 says: **“Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”**

I had recently written an article on

spiritual adultery and when I wrote it, I stated that I believed that we commit spiritual adultery a lot more than what we would like to confess. It is obvious from the above Scriptures that what we may call spiritual adultery can be committed even in our prayers. Sometimes the child of God may ask for things that he shouldn't and in so doing he is showing unfaithfulness to his Lord. Is that not what adultery is? It is unfaithfulness to one's spouse. I believe that any kind of unfaithfulness could be a form of spiritual adultery. Again, it can be seen from the above verses that spiritual adultery can be committed by having a friendship with the world. When a husband or wife lets their affections be toward someone other than their spouse then they are guilty of committing adultery in their heart even if no physical contact is made. Jesus said in Matthew 5:27-28: **“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”** When our heart and affections are towards the things of this world rather than God, I believe we are guilty of spiritual adultery and that can often be seen in the things that we pray for as can be seen in James.

Now, let me address the latter part of the question. “. . . does it include visiting the services of another denomination?” By “another denomination” is surely meant “other than Baptist,” I assume in the question. This is a question that I don't think you can throw a blanket statement over and say “yes” or “no.” I believe a person who may not have been taught much truth about what the faithful and true church is may in ignorance go to services in a false church and not be guilty of spiritual adultery. They may go and see while they are there the falsehood of that church and come to realize that they shouldn't have come and they may either get up and walk out or they may observe the service with disgust without participating in their spirit. However, for them to return knowing what it is like would make them guilty. It's like a man who may catch himself in an awkward position of being alone with a woman and he may not have even planned it that way. She then makes a move toward him. Is he guilty? Only if he gives in and lets her capture his affections. We must remember that we are talking about “spiritual adultery” and it is done and committed by our spirit. One may appear to have been guilty of “spiritual adultery” by going to a false church but they may not have engaged in the services with their hearts and participated.

Now, if one goes knowing what is ahead and knowing what kind of worship is going to take place and decides to worship with them then I believe they are

The Berea Baptist Banner Forum

Submit questions on any Bible topic

The Berea Baptist Banner, PO Box 39, Mantachie, Mississippi 38855

2. Could a church member be disciplined for spiritual adultery or spiritual fornication? Is there an example of such discipline in Scripture? — Kentucky



Billy Holbrook
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Yes, I think that they could. However I think that you would have to be very careful. As can be seen in my answer to the other question just because someone went to a false church doesn't automatically make them guilty. For the heart and motive must be considered in the matter. If a person continues to go to the services of a church that is teaching lies then I say yes. But a one time visit I don't think would be sufficient enough grounds. A pastor may have a church member who goes to a service that they should not have gone to and they come to the pastor and express their regrets or disgust with what went on. Should the pastor exploit that person and use them as an example and discipline them for spiritual adultery? I think not.

As I stated in the last question spiritual adultery can be committed in other ways than in going to a false service and giving your heart to its worship. Do we confess all the times that we have been unfaithful in our hearts to our Lord Jesus Christ? Has our heart always been engaged in the services and not wandered off to the world? Are we disciplined every time we are guilty? By the Lord we certainly are.

We actually do discipline church members for spiritual adultery all the time. That is, if we discipline for non-attendance. The person who misses church for the things of the world is guilty of spiritual adultery. The friendship of the world has stolen their heart's affections and they have failed to worship God. They are closer to the world than they are to the church that God has placed them in and the Lord their God.

We see a false balance in this in many of the Lord's churches today. We have people who miss regularly for Sunday School or Sunday night or Wednesday night or even on Sunday morning. You never know for sure if they are going to be there or not. They are sometimes committing spiritual adultery by missing church for the world 3 or more services a month. Let the Lord's churches deal more faithfully in disciplining these "spiritual

adulterers" and then may we be able to cast stones at the person who goes one time to a false church. Some of these same people who are unfaithful to services are the first ones to cast a stone at someone who may have committed spiritual adultery by going to a false church. A false balance indeed.

Lastly, is there an example in Scripture? I think so if you see spiritual adultery as I have tried to briefly state it in these answers. I believe nearly any sin we allow ourselves to be taken by can be labeled as spiritual adultery or unfaithfulness to our God.

In disciplining for spiritual adultery let us be very careful about these matters and make sure that we have a proper view of the issue at hand. I can't really think of any situation where one would only be disciplined for spiritual adultery. If spiritual adultery is found in any of us, it will, like heart adultery against our spouse, find its way out and then there will be no question as to whether a person is guilty or not. If a person is guilty of spiritual adultery constantly in their life, then it will manifest itself through acts of unfaithfulness to God and upon those acts we discipline members of the body. And that may include going to false churches, missing our own services, and falling into sin.

BILLY HOLBROOK



Todd Bryant
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Pastor
**Sovereign Grace
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Northport, AL 35473

I'm not sure whether this question assumed that I would answer the first question for this month differently. If the question is whether a person should be disciplined for visiting the services of another denomination, I would have to say no. However, if a person shows a pattern of missing the worship services of one of the Lord's true churches in order to attend the worship services of another denomination, discipline might be considered proper. Each local church should investigate the circumstances surrounding the discipline of a member.

If the question is whether a person who tries to "worship" with another faith

(other than Christianity) should be disciplined, the answer is absolutely yes. If a member takes part in idolatry, something is wrong and that member's salvation is in question. The church should discipline in order to either correct or purge. Discipline does two things—it weeds out the lost and corrects the backslidden.

As I said in the previous question, we must be careful in labeling other groups of believers (even if they are wrong on some issues) as idolaters, especially as we consider that many of our people were saved in these groups. I would say that is an extreme position. I'm not trying to say we should or even could fellowship with other denominations—we CANNOT and WILL NOT. However, it is, in my estimation, going too far to say that if one of our members walks through the doors of another "church," he should be disciplined or even excluded.

TODD BRYANT



Tom Ross
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Yes, a church could discipline a person if they were guilty of visiting the services of another denomination. A church could also discipline a person for missing a single service if the church chose to do so. However, I don't think either would be wise or prudent if it was done in ignorance. If a brother wanders into any kind of error it is the church's responsibility to confront him and warn him in love. If he continues pursuing the path of error then church discipline should be exercised. It is much better to restore a brother through love and instruction than to discipline him for a single action. I am in no way condoning attending the services of another denomination. However, some people do it through ignorance. In such cases they need instruction from the Scriptures.

Regarding the second question, I don't think that there is a specific instance where a church exercised discipline for spiritual adultery, however the principle is certainly set forth in I Corinthians 5:7, 11-13 which states: "**Purge out therefore**

the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened . . . But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." The same principle is set forth in Titus 3:10-11 which declares: "**A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.**"

TOM ROSS



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"**But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.**" (I Corinthians 5:11). The whole chapter of I Corinthians 5 has to do with church discipline, but this particular verse makes known to us the kind of sins that merit this discipline. If spiritual adultery is worldliness, then all the sins mentioned above would involve some degree of spiritual adultery. Those who are guilty of this type of open rebellion should be disciplined from the Lord's churches until the fruits of repentance are manifest in them.

We must be careful here with our terminology though. It is possible to be guilty of spiritual adultery in the heart and not in action, and only God can accurately judge the heart. The church judges those things that are apparent in practice. If someone is a spiritual adulterer in their heart, however, it will become obvious in their practice too if they do not repent.

Church discipline is always a serious matter. We should be very careful about making blanket statements about whether or not every spiritual adulterer should be disciplined. In every situation we must consult the Scripture and pray, seeking the leadership of the Holy Spirit for the right way to deal with each case.

MATT JAMES



Forum Question #1

Continued from page 390

guilty. However, it may be in certain rare occasions that one may be in a service that is not after the manner of Scriptures and they may not have given their heart's affections over to the false teaching. An example may be at some funerals. Sometimes we may go to funerals not knowing what is going to happen or what is going to be said. If we go and it becomes obvious that the speaker and the spirit there was not of the Lord, are we guilty? I don't think so.

In closing let me say this. It doesn't have to be another denomination. It could be a "Baptist" in name and it not be according to Scripture. Also, let me give you something else to think about. Could a man commit adultery in his heart while being physically intimate with his wife? I say yes, if he is thinking about another woman. So then you can commit spiritual adultery even in church services of a sound church if your heart and affections are on the things of the world and not on the Lord who you are supposed to be worshipping.

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"That they have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands, and with their idols have they committed adultery, and have also caused their sons, whom they bare unto me, to pass for them through the fire, to devour them" (Eze. 23:37).

"How shall I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods: when I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses" (Jer. 5:7).

"And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also" (Jer. 3:8).

All of these verses speak of spiritual adultery. In each of these instances, the adultery is speaking of the nation of Israel actually forsaking Jehovah God for other gods (which are yet no gods—Jer. 2:11).

The question before us is one that must be answered carefully. Many of our people (Sovereign Grace Landmark Independent Missionary Baptist), pastors and lay persons, were saved in other denominations. To say that these

"churches" are equal to idolatry is perhaps going too far. I realize that many of our people probably will go to that length, but, I'm not sure that position has been completely thought out. As I see it, idolaters are not saved—they are worshippers of a false god. However, it is my opinion that the Lord has many people saved outside of His true New Testament churches. These people will have no place in the Bride of Christ, but, they are blood bought and will have a place in Heaven. Idolaters believe Jesus was nothing but a mere man and that He had no power to fully save from the penalty of sin. Some denominations know some truth concerning salvation being **"by grace ... through faith"** (Eph. 2:8).

I do not believe that visiting other denominations would equate as spiritual adultery. I myself went to hear an Israeli journalist speak at an Independent Baptist Church (not Sovereign Grace) here in Alabama a few years back. He had a wonderful insight which helped to link prophecy with the daily happenings in Israel. I enjoyed hearing him speak and would probably go to hear him again. I was edified by his teachings. I have myself spoken at several churches which were not "true" churches as far as I know. They surely didn't bear the fruits. However, I was asked to speak and I feel that I should preach when given the opportunity. That having been said, I think it is unwise to make a habit of visiting other "churches." We are separated for a reason. We have drastic differences. We differ with some even on the most basic fundamentals of salvation by faith alone.

I am not prepared to say that every other denomination worships a different god than we do. I am confident in saying that many, if not most, have a warped view of God, His Son, His church and the Bible. Our people shouldn't make a habit of trying to fellowship with these. Convert them to the truth, yes. Fellowship? NO—impossible.

TODD BRYANT



Importance of Public Worship

By Francis Wayland

It is too obvious, to need illustration, that one of the great objects for which churches of Christ are established, is to maintain the public worship of God. Hence, also, one of the first duties devolving on those who profess Christianity, is to provide the means by which this object shall be accomplished. Under the former dispensation, those that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was kept. Our blessed Lord, as His custom was, was seen every Sabbath day in the synagogue, to read and explain to the people the Law and the Prophets. An apostle has cautioned us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Indeed, were there neither precept nor example to enforce this duty, the experience of every Christian soul must bear witness to its vital importance. It is thus that we publicly testify to the world that we are looking for the Sabbath, which remains for the people of God. It is thus that we strive the better to understand the Word of God. It is in the sanctuary that we offer up, with one heart and voice, our prayers to Him Who is the giver of every good and perfect gift. Here we render public thanks for public as well as for individual mercies. It is to the sanctuary that we invite the thoughtless and impenitent, to hear the words by which they may, by the blessing of God, be saved. And we do all this, encouraged by the blessed assurance of the Saviour, **"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."**

The importance of this subject can hardly be exaggerated. Every one knows that the Christian who has begun to think lightly of the ordinances of the sanctuary, is already treading in the path of the backslider. Who that, by sickness, or other providential hindrance, has been kept for a time from the meeting of the saints, has not uttered the plaint of the Psalmist, **"My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD."** In a village or settlement in our own country, where the Sabbath is not honored by the public worship of God, how soon do parents and children relapse into almost heathenism! Suppose that any denomination should adopt the view, that as religion was a personal matter, the assembling for public worship was needless, and should sell off its churches and close its meetings for prayer, who does not see that it would become extinct within a single generation? And, on the contrary, those denominations are most rapidly extending, which furnish the most abundantly, to all classes of the community, the means of hearing the preaching of the pure Word of God.

Hence it is not remarkable that the making provision for public worship has been

a leading object with all sects of Christians. Where religion is established by law, the State assumes this responsibility. The people are taxed to support religious worship, and they have an equitable claim on the State for the maintenance of teachers of religion. In the Episcopal form of church government, the oversight of a particular district, called a diocese, is devolved on a single individual. He has a power of admitting to the ministry—he has the whole field under his eye, and to him the people look for direction in their efforts to extend the kingdom of Christ. A Presbytery frequently exercises a similar influence within its limits. With us, however, there is no such organization. Every church with us is independent, and is not of necessity associated with any other. Every pastor is a Bishop, and holds the highest ecclesiastical rank, which we acknowledge. Hence it is manifest that the responsibility for sustaining the worship of God, in our case, rests upon every church, and every individual member of a church. We have neither State, nor Bishop, nor Presbytery, nor Synod to fall back upon. We have assumed this responsibility as churches and individuals, and we must abide by the choice, which—agreeably to the New Testament, as I conceive—we have made. Our progress—nay, our very existence—depends upon the vitality, which pervades *the whole mass*. If every individual disciple would devote himself to the work of extending the kingdom of Christ, relying on the promised aid of the Holy Spirit, we should need no more organization than existed in apostolic times, when they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word, and when, within a single lifetime, the civilized world was filled with the knowledge of Christ. If we rely on any thing else, it is evident that we must be covered with confusion. If, instead of putting forth our own power, in simple reliance on Christ, we are looking for aid in any other direction, we shall find that we have mistaken our principles, we have leaned on a broken reed, which can yield us no adequate support, but will pierce the hand, which presses upon it. So long as, universally vital, each disciple relies on himself, trusting only in God, we shall be irresistible. So soon as individual effort relaxes, and we trust to means of our own devising, we shall inevitably fail.

Separation and Service

Continued from page 389

with the quartz and rock in which it lies embedded. So your soul is useless to God till taken out from sin and earthliness and selfishness in which it lies buried. By the regenerating power of the Spirit you must be separated unto Christ, stamped with His image and superscription and made into a divine currency, which will bear His likeness among men. The Christian is, so to speak, the circulating medium of Christ, the coin of the realm by whom the great transactions of mercy and grace to

Continued on page 393

MARK OF THE BEAST

Look at your name on the front page of this month's paper. If you see the mark 8-04, so detestable to a Baptist, wash it out by renewal of greenbacks. If not your paper will stop next month. We are not able to credit. It is not a good plan.



Separation and Service

Continued from page 392

a lost world are carried on. As the currency stands for the gold, so does the Christian stand for Christ, representing His good and acceptable will.

2. *We are separated for our Lord's service.*

Christ takes us out of the world in order to send us into the world. His two great texts should never be forgotten. "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." "As the Father hath sent me into the world, so have I sent you into the world." I am not advocating any surly asceticism, any monkish or selfish seclusion from society. It is the men and women who rise highest into fellowship with Christ who plunge deepest into the sin and woe of the world to rescue the lost. A swimmer who would dive to the bottom of a pool selects the loftiest point he can find from which to leap. It is to me one of the standing confirmations of the truth of our religion that its highest saints have been its deepest divers into the woe of our suffering race. A worldly man is in the world, not to make his neighbors more unworldly, but to make himself more worldly. A heavenly man is in the world to lift men up to God. There is no peril to the true saints in going into the world: he can no more be hurt by it than a sunbeam can be defiled by falling into mud and slime. For the sunbeam has its origin and continuance in the sun, and the Christian has his source and being in God. **"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,"** is our Lord's command and in order to keep it, rise ye into living and constant communion with your risen Saviour; come out of the world by a true and separating faith, that you may be sent into the world bearing the blessing of the Gospel of Christ.

Sanctification

Continued from page 381

"For there is not a just man upon the earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Eccl. 7:20).

"As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10).

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8-10).

The doctrine of sinless perfection finds no warrant in the Scriptures, by precept or example. There is not a recorded example of a sinless life, from Genesis to Revelation, save that of the Son of God. Noah was referred to as "perfect," but after this reference he was found beastly drunk. The patriarch Job was declared to be perfect, yet in his own book he says: **"If I say I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse,"** Again: **"Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."** Abraham and Jacob were alike guilty of

gross deception. Moses lost his temper and smote the rock. He hit the rock, but missed the Promised Land. John the Baptist, who received from Christ the greatest compliment ever paid mortal man, even doubted the Son of God, whom he had baptized. Hear him! "Art thou the Christ, or shall we look for another?" Explanations are useless. He sinned as all other mortals have done. Poor Paul cried in agony of soul, **"Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"**

The apparent conflict comes from the fact that in every Christian there are two natures, the Adamic and the Christ-Nature. These two natures are irreconcilable, and their warfare will only end at the grave of the Christian warrior. Paul describes this conflict in his letter to the Galatians (Gal. 5:17).

As a matter of fact, the more we grow in grace the more clearly we see ourselves as sinners, though, thank God, sinners saved by grace. In speaking of his own unworthiness, Paul said: **"I am the least of the Apostles."** A few years later he declares himself **"less than the least of all saints,"** and still later he calls himself "the chief of sinners." It is absolutely impossible to reconcile these statements with a state of sinless perfection.

The sinless person could not truthfully pray the Lord's Prayer. If perfect, he does not commit **"trespasses,"** and therefore it would be superfluous to ask God to forgive them. Had the Disciples been sinless, the poor woman, taken in the nameless sin, would have probably been stoned to death. As our recollection serves us, the **"first stone"** was not cast, and for the best of reasons. None of them were **"without sin."** It was the poor publican, who said have mercy on me, a **"sinner,"** not the Pharisee, that went down to his house **"justified."**

Sanctification is not in the nature of a second blessing. Indeed, the poor man is to be pitied who has only had the second blessing. Most of us feel that if we would count them they would be as the stars of the sky and the sands of the sea. The man who has only the second blessing has never had the blessings of redemption, or is incapable of counting. The poet has well said:

*"Would you be joyful in the Lord
Then count your blessings o'er
Revealed by faith within His words
And note the boundless store."*

Sanctification comes with regeneration and is a progressive growth in grace, and is completed only when we "shuffle off this mortal coil." Its cradle is the conversion of the sinner; its final consummation the grave of the saint. It is not a growing into grace, but a growth in grace. We are born babes in Christ, but should grow into the full measure of manhood in Christ Jesus. Spiritual babies, to fulfill the law of their creation, should grow. A Tom Thumb is a physical

curiosity, but a spiritual Tom Thumb is a spiritual monstrosity. Our churches are filled with spiritual dwarfs, who seem to defy all laws of growth and development. Like the runty pig, in spite of the best of nourishing food they fail to add to their spiritual avoirdupois. The truly sanctified acorn one day becomes the mighty oak, in whose branches the fowls of the air make their nesting places. The little stream that has its source far up the mountain side, expanding and deepening as it makes its way to the sea, illustrates the sanctifying process in the life of the believer.

I have spent the night far up in the Rocky Mountains, and on going down the mountain on the following day I noted that there had been a hard rain. The place where I spent the night was above the clouds. The truly sanctified saint will live above many of the clouds, and at times will walk among the stars. We are all conscious of the fact that we could live a higher life than we are living. We must all confess with shame and humiliation that had we allowed the Holy Spirit, with all His blessed sanctifying influences, to have had complete control of our hearts and lives, the result would have been far different.

*"Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove,
With all Thy quickening powers,
And kindle a flame of holy love
In these cold hearts of ours."*

The little child, grasping for breath, uplifted in mother's arms, whispers "higher, mother, higher." Day by day we should strive more to live like Him Who died for us.

Many years ago I attended the golden wedding of one of the deacons of my church. Both husband and wife had passed the mark of man's allotted time. The dinner over, the bonnie but wrinkled bride, took her seat by the piano. With deft fingers, that still defied the touch of time, she began playing and singing: "I wandered to-day to the Hill, Maggie," etc. They had grown old gracefully on account of God's abounding grace.

It is a pity to see one's hair whiter than his heart, or his linen more spotless than his life. Growing old has its compensation, if grace multiplies with the passing years. The eyes may be growing dim, but they see visions that youthful eyes never catch. The ears may be deafened, but they can hear the chorus of the skies that the unseasoned heart and untutored ear hath never heard. The form may be bent with weakness and age, but it stands upright in strength before the God of all the earth. The step may be slow and feeble, but be hastening to the land of perpetual youth. The scenes of his childhood are far away, but eternal youth and everlasting joy are near at hand. The sun of time will soon set, but after the sunset there will be complete consecration in the land of the Unsetting Sun. For our sanctification will yet be complete. We cannot see our

growth, yet it may be continuing on to completion. The blooming of the flower is invisible, and yet we behold it in fragrant and blooming beauty. We cannot see the wheat grow, but we can see the ripened grain, ready for the sickle. Sanctification is a mysterious process, though its results are apparent to others, and above all with Him who created and redeemed us.

BEREA BAPTIST BROADCAST Financial Report 6-1-2004 to 6-30-2004

Beginning Balance	\$861.86
RECEIPTS:	
Berea B. C., Mantachie, MS	200.00
Berea B. C., West Point, TN	50.00
Briar Creek B. C., Williamsburg, KY	100.00
Grace B. C., Corbin, KY	100.00
.....	450.00
TOTAL	1,311.86
EXPENDITURES:	
Radio Time	837.00
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	837.00
.....	474.86
Bank Charge	-10.00
ENDING BALANCE	\$464.86

CORBIN, KENTUCKY REPORT

Beginning Balance	\$1,051.52
RECEIPTS:	
Total	1,051.52
EXPENDITURES:	
WCTT	160.00
ENDING BALANCE	\$891.52

BEREA BAPTIST BANNER Financial Report 6-1-2004 to 6-30-2004

Beginning Balance	\$4,212.41
RECEIPTS:	
Arthur D. Richardson, Cedarville, WV	100.00
B. C. of Brimfield, Brimfield, IL	32.40
Berea B. C., Mantachie, MS	1,100.00
Berea B. C., Stonington, IL	60.00
Berea M. B. C., Mansfield, OH	50.00
Berea M. B. C., Westpoint, TN	150.00
Bethel M. B. C., Pasadena, TX	100.00
Big Creek B. C., Wayne WV	300.00
Briar Creek B. C., Williamsburg, KY	100.00
Cedar Grove B. C., Millport, AL	50.00
Central Ave. B. C., Tampa, FL	25.00
Citrus M. B. C., Inverness, FL	20.00
Faith M. B. C., Clarksville, TN	100.00
Faith B. C., Lynn, AR	25.00
Faith B. C., Seffner, FL	200.00
Gail Knowles, Scarborough, ME	20.00
Grace B. C., Corbin, KY	100.00
Grace M. B. M., Marion, IL	25.00
Grace M. B. C., Tulsa, OK	55.00
Hillcrest B. C., Winston-Salem, NC	50.00
Indore B. C., Indore, WV	100.00
Joseph Jurzec, Lake-in-the-Hills, IL	25.00
L. H. Farrell, Kenner, LA	150.00
Landmark M. B. C., Moncks Corner, SC	50.00
Leroy Bullard, Albuquerque, NM	100.00
Morris St. B. C., Hobbs, NM	300.00
Mt. Pleasant B. C., Chesapeake, OH	100.00
New Testament B. C., Bristol, TN	10.00
New Testament B. C., Goshen, IN	50.00
Ocoonita M. B. C., Keokee, VA	40.00
Philadelphia B. C., Decatur, AL	75.00
Sovereign Grace B. C., Columbus, MS	50.00
Sovereign Grace B. C., Galena, OH	150.00
Sovereign Grace B. C., Northport, AL	100.00
Sovereign Grace B. C., Raleigh, NC	100.00
Sovereign Grace B. C., Silsbee, TX	30.00
Vicki Mills, Richmond, KY	15.25
Victory B. C., Courtland, VA	200.00
West Milton B. C., West Milton, OH	50.00
Subscriptions	143.00
Dividing checks	1,050.00
Anon.	180.00
Sub Total	\$5,730.65
TOTAL	\$9,943.06
EXPENDITURES:	
Wages	3,920.00
Printing	517.86
Postage	851.31
FICA taxes	281.53
Dividing checks	1,050.00
Supplies	39.95
Total Expenditures	6,660.65
.....	3,282.41
Bank charge	-19.47
ENDING BALANCE	\$3,262.94



Studies in Esther 5:1-14

By Jeff Short

Mantachie, Mississippi

In the fourth chapter, Esther was a little hesitant to comply with Mordecai's directions. She knew that to appear before the king could prove to be a dangerous business. So, she wanted to find some other way of helping her people.

In all of this, Mordecai's faith remained strong. He believed that God was going to deliver the Jewish people despite their grim condition. He did not know exactly what the means would be, though he believed it was very likely that Esther had come to the kingdom for that time. He continued to urge her to move to the service and responsibility that she had from God.

Esther determined to take Mordecai's advice and the Jews responded to her request by fasting and praying. Though Esther was the one on the frontline in this situation, the Jews had a vested interest in her success. So, they prayed earnestly for her. Their present joy and future happiness were wrapped up in this one woman's service. This is humanly speaking, of course, but it is a good lesson for us to be more in earnest in praying for those in various leadership positions, seeing that their work is a source of blessing to us. Let us now turn to our present text and consider what unfolds.

Verses 1-2 – “Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house; and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house” (Est. 5:1). Esther had determined to fast and pray for three days and nights before she undertook such a serious task. We note in verse one that she did not linger but hastened at the appointed time to do her duty. **“On the third day”** her preparation time was finished. The time for action had come.

Her soberness and deliberation testify to the fact that she received Mordecai's words as a message from God. She believed what he was telling her was true. She believed it was the wisdom of the Spirit that was speaking and guiding her, though she did have a human teacher. Mordecai could have rejoiced over her as Paul rejoiced over the Thessalonians, to whom he testified, **“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God”** (I Thess. 2:13).

Esther's resolve here had been sharpened and fixed. The three days set aside for fasting and praying had served

to strengthen her own faith that she was doing the right thing. For this cause, when the third day was ended and the time to go to action had come, she was ready, willing, and able. It was not that she had some gushy feeling that everything would turn out all right so she was ready to go ahead in vanity. She had testified, **“So will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish”** (Est. 4:16). She had come to the place of surrender to God's will. Believing this to be His path for her, she was prepared to walk in it. Whether it meant her death or her life, she was satisfied with His will.

We note in this first verse that she **“put on her royal apparel.”** Perhaps she had donned the garments of mourning, but when she was ready to go in before the king, she put those garments off and put on her royal apparel. One obvious thing that we glean here is that she took clothing for herself that was appropriate for the situation. Esther put on clothes that would be most useful to state her case. She wanted to appear before the king, her husband, in a pleasing manner. She wanted him to look upon her favorably. She wanted to be beautiful and gracious in his sight. Interestingly, it was her natural beauty that won her the position she was in.

She acknowledged her beauty was a gift from God and she bore that gift with discretion and humility, an exceedingly rare combination. She had found favor with many, not only because of her beauty, rather because of her humility and graciousness. Had she been beautiful and proud, she would have repelled many from her. Otherwise, had she been beautiful with feigned humility, she would have been equally unattractive.

It is not wrong to acknowledge the gift or gifts that we have from God. It is wrong to glory in them as if they are something of our own doing (I Cor. 4:7). It is also wrong to misappropriate them to ourselves only to fulfill our selfish ends. The Scriptures instruct us to be sober in judging our gifts before God and men. Every man is instructed **“not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith”** (Rom. 12:3). David considered his own gifts and gloried in the Lord, praising Him, **“Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight”** (Psa. 144:1).

However, it is wrong to refuse to acknowledge our gifts or employ them in God's service. It is also wrong to have a

false humility about them. We do not find Esther always commenting on how ugly she was, how bad she looked in the royal colors, how everybody hated her, etc. In fact, when she first appeared before the king, she refused the extravagant ornaments and painted up beauty of the worldly women, choosing rather to appear in her natural, God-given beauty (Est. 2:15).

False humility is no humility at all and is in fact only pride in a different suit of clothes. It is kind of like a preacher that is always going on about how dumb he is, how ignorant he is, etc. To hear him tell it, he is as dumb as a stump. When, if he really believed what he was saying about himself, he would resign the pastorate at once, knowing that he was not qualified to be a leader and feeder of sheep. For by his own admission, he needs someone to bottle-feed him with milk. Nevertheless, let us return to right thinking and soberness and readily use everything we have received of God to serve Him and others.

Having prepared herself, Esther came to the inner court of the king's house and **“stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house, and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house.”** The house of the women was in a separate place from the king's house and his throne and they were separated by a court. She came into the court and stood in his presence. This must have been a tense moment for her. She had come into the place where she was not invited and had not been called to for thirty days. However, she stood there and wondered whether she would find favor to be received by Ahasuerus or not.

She probably had some inner turbulence while waiting. Maybe she had doubts and fears that rose up in her heart. Maybe she thought about turning and running. When we are tried and tempted and in places of pressure, we are tempted to act like a liquid when it is put under pressure, and find the easiest way out. We are tempted to make a compromise or take a shortcut to relieve the pressure. There are many things that could have tempted her at this point but she remained strong.

The next verse tells us that the king extended the scepter to her. **“And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre”** (Est. 5:2). The scepter was a symbol of authority and, if the king held it out to someone, that was a token that they had found favor in his sight. Esther drew near and touched the top of that scepter, signifying her gracious reception of the king's favor. She was before the king in humility and revered him. This had

to be a small relief at least.

God has here opened the first door that seemed closed fast. A few days earlier, Esther debated with Mordecai that this way was not opened because the king had not called her for thirty days. Humanly speaking, this door was closed, but God is **“he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth”** (Rev. 3:7).

Verses 3-5 – “Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom” (Est. 5:3). In the earlier part of this book, we learn that this was a very rich, powerful kingdom. During the tenure of Ahasuerus, it had expanded to 127 provinces. It was at the greatest height of power that they had known to that time. It would grow further after this king, but, to this point in their history, the kingdom was the most extensive.

So, the king had many things under his hand. He showed Esther the favor that he had for her. It is uncertain whether the phrase **“to the half of the kingdom”** was literal or merely an expression meaning that she was highly favored. Either way, it showed the king's affection for his queen.

Not only did she find favor, but also she found an expression of rich generosity and affection from the king. His response likely answered some questions that had been in her mind. Why had the king not called her for thirty days? Was he busy? Had she fallen out of favor? Had some other one won his affection? This event would have at least answered the questions in her mind as to whether the king still had any affection for her.

Esther was blessed by God to have her confidence strengthened. Having the golden scepter stretched out to her and having the expression of the king's willingness to give her any thing to the half of the kingdom would have made her feel emboldened to continue on in her difficult work.

Then Esther responded to the king's request. **“And Esther answered, If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him. Then the king said, Cause Haman to make haste, that he may do as Esther hath said. So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared”** (Est. 5:4-5). Many commentators attribute this request to fear or doubt on the part of Esther. They believe she digressed to take an alternate route instead of making her petition known to the king. Asking the king to come to a banquet would put off the real business that she had to conduct.

We cannot know for certain if this banquet was part of her original plan or if it was some sort of last minute desperate thought. It seems that it was

Continued on page 395

Studies in Esther

Continued from page 394

likely a part of her plan. We do not know what her reasons may have been for it, but it did have a good practical effect—it endeared her to the king.

From the king's point of view, he had just made a very gracious gesture and most folks would try to capitalize on the opportunity and ask for as much as they could get. Esther's request though, was very humble. She wanted the king and Haman to come to a banquet that she would prepare. The king was probably very impressed by this humble request. He commanded Haman to make haste and come to the banquet with him.

Verses 6-8 – “And the king said unto Esther at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed” (Est. 5:6). Traditionally, the king sat and ate his meals alone. Usually, his guests would eat in another room. However, they would sit together when they drank wine after that their meal was already eaten; this was the “**banquet of wine.**”

The king here probably reclined on some sort of couch and Haman and Esther were seated on the floor. To be in the king's presence at a time like this was a special privilege. His guard was probably down and a person could be freer with him. Haman certainly felt honored to be in this position. He was at this very private dinner between the king and the queen.

The king showed his pleasure in Esther and asked her again what her petition was and promised it would be granted to her. Contrast Esther with Haman who had come before the king and asked a petition. He made a very large request and the king was in a mood to give it to him. However, Esther had everything opened and promised to her, yet she remained humble and requested another banquet.

“Then answered Esther, and said, My petition and my request is; If I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition, and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do to morrow as the king hath said” (Est. 5:7-8). Her request remained humble and simple. She also had another day before her real matter would be made known. The king greatly appreciated the manner in which she conducted herself. He took delight in her at this time and in this particular incident. Many commentators have suggested that she was timid here with the king and Haman, that she tried to delay things. Whatever the reason, she was more endeared to the king through her gracious acts.

Verses 9-10 – “Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad

heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai” (Est. 5:9). Haman was absolutely elated because he was brought into the private banquet with the king and queen. He rejoiced in the power and honor bestowed upon him. The king had handed Haman his ring to seal the decree that he had written. The king had positively answered his request. He was very joyful.

However, it all came to an end when he saw Mordecai in the king's gate and Mordecai continued to refuse to bow to him. Mordecai refused to reverence Haman according to his wishes and he was “**full of indignation.**” Mordecai's integrity remained strong. He could have been tempted to let it go and go along with everyone else, but he kept with his principles and would not be moved by the fear of man.

Haman probably thought that Mordecai would bow to him once he saw how great a position of power and authority Haman had ascended to. He may have thought that some of the Jews might be interested in trying to make a deal to get out of their trouble. He thought surely Mordecai would be moved now, but he found out otherwise. This all upset Haman greatly.

Haman's joy was superficial and it disappeared very quickly in the presence of Mordecai. A few minutes prior to their meeting, Haman was on the top of the world. He got one look at Mordecai, his joy was gone, and he was full of indignation. His joy was very temporal and superficial.

One reason that we should not set our joy on the things of the earth is because those things are very temporary and fleeting. Conditions on earth change all the time. Men's opinions and words change also. We cannot derive our joy and have our hope fixed in these things because they will sorely disappoint.

Haman derived joy from his own success in life. Mordecai represented a failure to Haman because he was not able to oppress him. When our happiness is focused on the things of the earth, we are never satisfied by them. Solomon wrote, “**He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver”** (Ecc. 5:10). A man that loves money and is greedy will never have enough money. There is always more money that could be made. There is always someone else richer. This is true of money, possessions, technology, etc. Sometimes we put our happiness in these things and are disappointed because there is no lasting satisfaction in them. The Christian is only going to find satisfaction in God. God told Jeremiah, “**I have satiated the weary soul”** (Jer. 31:25). Satisfaction comes from Him and is in Him.

“Nevertheless Haman refrained

Continued on page 399



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THE BIBLE AND THE NEWSPAPER

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The Top 10 Reasons to Protect Students from GLSEN's Deceptive 'Marriage' Curriculum

(Mission America) On February 11, 2004, Kevin Jennings, the president of GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, appeared on the Fox News program "The O'Reilly Factor" to discuss what he called GLSEN's 'new' marriage curriculum for schools. He claimed it was developed in response to recent events for schools to utilize in lessons exploring the issue of same sex marriage. When asked by Bill O'Reilly if it presented both sides of the issue, Jennings answered, "Absolutely."

The reality is that Jennings is 'absolutely' full of baloney.

Once more, Jennings and GLSEN are not being honest. The curriculum is not at all objective but radically biased toward a pro-homosexual viewpoint. It distorts the information, and slickly manipulates student sympathies. The curriculum is also not new. We first reviewed the curriculum in 2001. It has been updated but is largely the same material.

The limitations of the GLSEN curriculum are numerous, and this material is not at all appropriate to fashion into a teaching unit for students. Titled "At Issue: Marriage," the curriculum is problematic for these reasons:

1. Throughout this curriculum, a spurious "civil rights" approach toward homosexuality is taken. The implication that homosexuals just "are" invariably a certain minority of people is assumed, and the realities and hazards of homosexual behavior . . . never revealed.

Consider this sentence from page 5: "There is no evidence to support the notion that marriage of same sex couples would pose a threat to the institution of marriage or to the fabric of society in general."

Or this statement from Lesson 2: "There are literally hundreds of rights, benefits, and protections that accompany civil marriage in the United States. Because they are so automatic, many people take these rights for granted. **For same sex couples, however – who are prohibited from civil marriage – the absence of these rights often creates devastating problems.**" (Emphasis Added)

Similar biased statements appear throughout the material. For instance, one chapter is entitled, "Winning the Right to Marry." In one exercise, teachers are told to ask students ". . . whether or not they think couples who cannot marry are victims of discrimination." Nowhere are students

reminded of the obvious: that people of the same sex already have the right to marry – someone of the opposite sex. And nowhere is there an honest debate challenging the false underlying assumption that homosexuals are somehow born with desires that are innate and unchangeable. Overwhelming evidence shows that those who want to change are able to do so.

2. Laws that once banned interracial marriage (miscegenation laws) are erroneously called a "parallel" to the prohibition of same sex marriage. Again, the argument is built on a false assumption – that homosexuality is an intrinsic and neutral characteristic like race. Students are asked to devote considerable time comparing what are really two unrelated issues. The class may in addition discuss another topic, the former ban on prisoners being able to marry, also irrelevant to the same sex marriage debate.

3. Traditional religious beliefs in marriage are said to violate the so-called "separation of church and state." Meanwhile, students are led to believe that if marriage laws followed the dictates of liberal religious viewpoints, this would not present a similar violation. The obvious bias here is never disclosed.

And, of course, the "violation" assertion itself is invalid. There is not a church/state separation problem with such laws. Laws arise out of ideas; if the prevailing viewpoint on a given issue arises from religious faith, so what? No constitutional question comes into play here, since no religion is being established. Some atheists as well as people from a variety of faiths share the view that same sex marriage is wrong.

To try to build this phony case however, students are provided a CBSnews.com story titled, "Vatican Targets Gay Marriage Laws." The Pope had urged political leaders in the U. S. who are Catholic to reject same sex marriage in faithfulness to Catholicism. Students are then asked to read a statement from a coalition of religious leaders who support homosexual marriage, take a strong stand on what they call "justice," and yet are incensed about the Vatican's guidelines as a supposed "church/state" violation. The curriculum implies strong support for this latter view. Such a message would train students to accept just one more left-wing "thought police" tactic, which paints traditional religious views as unacceptable but liberal beliefs as supposedly neutral.

4. A definition of marriage is used which doesn't mention conception or child-

rearing. Recalling a Supreme Court case from 1987 which lifted a ban on marriage by inmates, the curriculum quotes the attributes of marriage developed for that case, which don't mention children at all.

A skewed historical perspective of marriage is provided for students to consider, including the implication that no-fault divorce is an improvement and that removing the ban on contraception and abortion in marriage were milestones of progress and evolution. Marriage today is much improved over times past, students learn, having been rescued from many practices that oppressed women. Absent are the positive aspects of large families and in general, children and child-rearing receive scant attention in this curriculum.

5. Wildly manipulative educational tools, like a video of September 11 homosexuals who lost "partners," are used to garner student sympathy. Other emotionally loaded exercises ask students to play the judge in several fictionalized scenarios where homosexual pairs face situations like possible deportation, loss of child custody, and separation through illness.

6. The influence on youth of legalizing same sex marriage is minimized, and opposition depicted as needlessly fearful and backward. Lesson 4 is called "The Notion of Influence" (emphasis in the original). Students are presented the text of the children's book *Daddy's Roommate* along with new accounts of a pro-family group's attempt to remove it from a library. The news account is predictably slanted against the traditional view. Students also read a letter to a newspaper advice column in which a woman asks whether to allow her nine-year-old daughter to be the flower girl at her uncle's same sex "wedding." Among the questions for discussion, is the following loaded query: "Encourage students to think carefully about the consequences of sheltering children from different people and experiences. No matter what our moral stance is on any particular issue, we all have to cohabitate in a world with others who look, think and behave differently. *Are we really doing young people a service when we shield them from this inevitable diversity?*" (Emphasis added)

7. The United Nations "Declaration of Human Rights" is presented to students and falsely depicted as justifying same sex marriage because it calls for 'dignity,' marriage and family rights and decries 'discrimination.' In a brazen twisting of the intent of this 1948 document, GLSEN again tries to construct a civil right for sodomy and same sex marriage when the document never intended for such interpretations. In fact, homosexual activists have tried (so far unsuccessfully) to amend the U. N. Declaration to re-cast the definition of key words to cover acceptance of homosexuality.

Students are told to evaluate the actions of the Vermont legislature in light of this document in an attempt to bring U. S. to "justice" by international standards outside our country. Yet, as indicated above, this

document has not been revised to support homosexual unions. Again, students are given a meaningless exercise based on false information and even asked to violate U. S. sovereignty, yet they are shielded from very important truth about how far [sodomy] is from "dignity."

8. The legalization of same sex marriage by other nations is presented as further justification and to depict the U. S. as less progressive. In this same exercise evaluating the court actions in Vermont and Massachusetts, students learn how many other countries have legalized some type of homosexual "marriage" or commitment. Students are to apply the questionable standard of "everyone's doing it" to validate high-risk behavior and its supporters in Vermont and Massachusetts. At the same time, they will see the hesitancy of other states and the nation, which has so far protected its citizens, as backward and suspect.

9. "Separate but equal" racial laws are examined as a comparison of "marriage" to "civil unions," to show why nothing but marriage is "fair" for same sex couples. Students examine the Plessy v. Ferguson and Brown v. Board of Education cases, in light of the actions of the state of Vermont, and even make comparable lists, African-Americans and homosexuals, of possible separate but equal "discrimination" in everyday life. This propaganda tool guides students through a useless exercise as if these cases had any applicability in policies about homosexual conduct.

10. The curriculum resource list is dominated by homosexual activist group web sites and contains no sources which support traditional values. Among the resources provided are National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Lambda Legal Defense Fund, and Gay & Lesbian Advocates and Defenders. — Linda Harvey

Just Barely Under God By Terence P. Jeffrey

This week a five-member majority of the Supreme Court, presumably sensitive to the public outrage that would greet such a controversial decision in a presidential election year, refused to rule on the question of whether the Constitution allows public school students to voluntarily utter the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The justices reversed the anti-Pledge ruling of a lower court on technical grounds, leaving for another day the underlying issue.

It will return—and soon—because the liberal judges who control our courts have long been laying the precedents to expel God from our public life and our law. If constitutionalists are not confirmed to the courts in sufficient numbers to stop them, this era will see the formal and final divorce in the 2000-year marriage of law and morality.

This is the marriage that begat American freedom.

"And there will not be different laws at

Continued on page 397

Bible & The Newspaper

Continued from page 396

Rome and at Athens, or different laws now and in the future, but one eternal and unchangeable law will be valid for all nations and for all times, and there will be one master and one rule, that is, God, over us all, for He is the author of this law, its promulgator, and its enforcing judge."

So wrote the Roman Senator Cicero a generation before Christ.

Almost two millennia after the fall of the Roman Republic, Thomas Jefferson, citing Cicero as an inspiration, wrote the words that gave birth to the American Republic. "We hold these truths to be self-evident," said Jefferson, "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights."

The same Congress that approved the 1st Amendment, guaranteeing the free exercise of religion, asked President George Washington to declare a "day of public thanksgiving and prayer." Washington complied, urging Americans to acknowledge the "many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness."

Two centuries later, Martin Luther King invoked the Founding Fathers' commitment to a republic founded on God's law in demanding an end to segregation.

"We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands," said King.

"A just law" — insisted this 20th Century Baptist civil rights leader, citing St. Thomas Aquinas, a 13th Century Catholic friar—"is a man made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God."

From Cicero to King, the Western tradition held that the pursuit of justice and the pursuit of God's law were the same thing.

But look how far we have fallen in the last 40 years.

With Justice Antonin Scalia having rescued himself from the Pledge case because he had publicly expressed his views about it, a minority of only three (Chief Justice William Rehnquist, and Justices Clarence Thomas and Sandra Day O'Connor) addressed the merits of the question before the Court and ruled that the Constitution does allow public school students to say "under God."

Justice Thomas directly challenged the court's recent reasoning on religious issues, flatly declaring the Pledge constitutional for public schools. But Rehnquist and O'Connor built their opinions on the dismal premise that the words "under God" in the Pledge mean little or nothing.

The Pledge, Rehnquist argued, "is a patriotic exercise, not a religious one; participants promise fidelity to our flag and our nation, not to any particular God, faith, or church."

The pre-Christian Cicero believed in one God whose laws were eternal and

unchanging. Rehnquist's Pledge declines to subordinate America to "any particular God." Why not Zeus or Apollo?

O'Connor dismissed the words "under God," along with the Supreme Court's own invocation ("God save the United States and this honorable Court"), as examples of what she calls "ceremonial deism." "Such references," she says, "can serve to solemnize an occasion instead of to invoke divine provenance."

It is constitutional, in other words, to take the Lord's name in our public institutions as long as we take it in vain. Students reciting the Pledge who don't want to violate the 1st Amendment must violate the 2nd Commandment.

Why has God's name been driven to the brink of expulsion from American public life and law?

For decades, liberal judges have advanced their agenda by arbitrarily declaring "rights" that defy the Western legal tradition, articulated so well by Cicero, Aquinas and Martin Luther King, that just laws comport with God's laws. They have declared that peddling pornography, killing unborn babies, and even same-sex marriages are "rights."

These are not rights, they are wrongs. For judges to enshrine them permanently in our law, they must first unthrone God—and put themselves in His place. (*Human Events*, June 21, 2004, p. 4)

Kerry Strengthens Pro-Abortion Stance in Choice of Running Mate

(EP) — If anyone still had a question about where Democratic presidential hopeful John Kerry stands on the issue of abortion, his choice for a running mate should remove all doubt.

"With John Edwards, Kerry has selected a running mate whose position is as extreme as his own, even opposing the ban on partial-birth abortions," said Carol Tobias, political director of the National Right to Life Committee.

Both Kerry and Edwards have a 100 percent rating from NARAL Pro-Choice America and a zero percent rating from the Family Research Council.

Edwards not only voted against the ban of partial birth abortion in 1999, but he also opposed "Laci and Connor's Law" — the Unborn Victims of Violence Act — that recognizes unborn children as murder victims when killed in violent federal crimes.

"Congressional voting records show that John Kerry may be the most liberal member of the U.S. Senate, but in his short time in public office John Edwards has amassed a record almost as liberal — ranking fourth only to Kerry, and Senators Ted Kennedy and Hillary Clinton," said Senator George Allen, chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee.

Edwards has also voted for tax subsidies for abortion on demand for federal employees.

"During his nearly six years in the U.S. Senate, John Edwards — like John Kerry — has consistently voted according to the

dictates of hard-line pro-abortion advocacy groups, and contrary to the policies favored by most Americans," said Douglas Johnson, NRLC legislative director.

Kerry's pro-abortion stance was difficult to explain to residents of heavily Catholic Dubuque, Iowa, where he made a Fourth of July visit and attended mass.

An Associated Press article quoted Kerry, the first Catholic major presidential candidate since John F. Kennedy, as telling one parishioner, "It's a difficult line to walk," and another "I'm against partial birth abortion," despite the fact that he voted against banning the procedure six times in the Senate.

In an interview with the "Telegraph Herald" newspaper, Kerry said: "I don't like abortion. I believe life does begin at conception. But I can't take my Catholic belief, article of faith, and legislate it on a Protestant or a Jew or an atheist ... We have separation of church and state in the United States of America."

While Kerry seems to believe he can serve in U.S. government without letting his personal beliefs influence policy decisions, he apparently doesn't believe others can do the same.

"Sen. Kerry stated that his personal belief that life begins at conception should not keep him from serving as president because it does not influence his public policy record," said Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council.

"However, both he and Sen. Edwards have repeatedly refused to extend that same courtesy — the presumption that one's religious beliefs shouldn't disqualify him from public service — to countless judicial nominees who happen to be pro-life."

African-American Leaders in Minnesota Step up to Defend Marriage and Family

St. Paul, Minn. (EP) — The Rev. Bob Battle has been deeply involved in the civil rights movement for most of his life. Battle, an African-American minister who pastors the Berean Church of God in Christ (COGIC) in St. Paul, Minn., said that he was born in Mississippi, "and if you're black and were born in Mississippi, you were born into the civil rights movement, because you had to fight to live."

Battle became an active participant in the movement in 1955, at the age of 14, and brought that passion with him when he arrived in the Twin Cities in the 1960s. Over the past four decades he has been a respected leader in the black community, including serving a stint as the chairman of St. Paul's human rights commission.

He said his more recent leadership in the campaign to defend traditional marriage came about for two reasons: As a pastor and bishop in the COGIC, Battle is dedicated to the biblical definition of marriage and family. As a veteran of the civil rights struggle, he, like other African-American pastors and civil rights leaders, vehemently rejects the comparison of that noble campaign with the efforts by homosexual activists to legalize

same-sex marriage.

Conservative black leaders across the nation have been blunt in their criticism of the civil rights comparison. A group of black pastors in Detroit issued a statement declaring, "We find the gay community's attempt to tie their pursuit of special rights based on their behavior to the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s abhorrent. Being black is not a lifestyle choice."

And in March a group of black pastors in Atlanta, considered by many to be the "cradle" of the civil rights movement, issued a declaration stating that same-sex marriage is not a civil right and that marriage between a man and a woman is vital for raising children. "People are free in our nation to pursue relationships as they choose," said the pastors. "To redefine marriage, however, to suit the preference of those choosing alternative lifestyles is wrong."

Battle and a team of other black leaders in the Twin Cities have joined their voices to this national chorus of black pastors and conservative leaders, and have been solid in their support of a state constitutional amendment that would define marriage as only between one man and one woman.

At a recent press conference at the state capitol in Saint Paul, Battle, the unofficial spokesman for the group, assured the public that "efforts to redefine the God-ordained institution of marriage have nothing to do with civil rights." Battle recalled that growing up in Mississippi, he had first-hand experience with the pain and humiliation of racial segregation. "Our marriage laws do not deny anyone's rights," he said, "unlike during the days of segregation when African-Americans were systematically excluded from full participation in society."

Battle emphasized that there is "absolutely no equivalence whatsoever" between homosexual rights and civil rights. "We fought the civil rights movement over our race," he said. "If you were born black in Mississippi, you automatically had a stigma against you — simply because you were black. You weren't allowed to vote, you weren't allowed in certain restaurants, you weren't allowed to use the white restroom, the white water fountain — simply because you were black." These are not issues with homosexuals, he pointed out. "I believe from the bottom of my heart that homosexuality is a choice one makes," he said. "It's a moral issue. It's not a civil rights issue."

He said the COGIC denomination is in agreement, and that "100 percent" of its congregants in Minnesota would oppose same-sex marriage. "We as a church have always felt that marriage is only between one man and one woman," he said. "This is not some new concept to us. Same-sex marriage is against God's law. It's an abomination to God. It's against everything He planned."

Court Upholds Equal Access Rights for After-School Bible Club

(EP) — An evangelical group's plan to hand out fliers to Maryland elementary school

Continued on page 398

Bible & The Newspaper

Continued from page 397

students is not an unconstitutional endorsement of religion, so says a federal appeals court that overturned an earlier ruling against Child Evangelism Fellowship.

A respected national organization that offers Bible stories, songs, games and other activities for children via its "Good News Clubs," CEF had earlier been blocked from the Montgomery County Schools' take-home flier program, despite the fact that other community groups were allowed to distribute their literature freely.

The school district, which routinely passes out informational material for sports groups, Scouts, and various performing arts, child care and environmental groups, refused CEF's request for the same service, saying the flier program was not available to "proselytization or evangelical groups." But CEF's program does not allow any child to participate without parental permission. Prior to the CEF request, the school district had allowed fliers from the local Jewish community center and the Holy Redeemer Summer Play School without incident.

Greg Baylor, director of the Christian Legal Society Center for Law and Religious Freedom, which filed suit on CEF's behalf, said school district officials apparently thought that the First Amendment's Establishment Clause required them to discriminate against the club.

On the contrary, in its June 30 ruling the three-member judicial panel pointed to the free speech clause and other parts of the First Amendment that force the school district to give the Christian club the same treatment that other community groups received. The case will return to Maryland's federal district court for further proceedings.

Baylor said the CEF v. Montgomery County Public Schools ruling sends a message to other public school systems around the nation that may not be affording equal access for religious speech.

"Discrimination is going to be challenged and it's going to be challenged successfully," he said, adding that the CEF case "affirms the public schools' important responsibility to respect the diverse religious viewpoints of the community they serve."

U.S. House Tries Again to Fund International Pro-Abort Group

(EP) – Two years after President Bush announced the United States would no longer support the United Nations Population Fund — withholding \$34 million from the organization that has been linked to forced abortions and other coercive population control methods in China, Mexico, Vietnam and Peru — the House International Relations Committee is pushing to again hand over taxpayer funds.

Sarah Craven, a spokeswoman for the UNFPA, said she is hopeful the United States will restore funding, a move that Population Research Institute president Steven Mosher would like to see stopped in its tracks.

"They've been involved in China's 'one child' policy from the beginning," Mosher said of UNFPA. "This is a policy that involves forced abortion, forced sterilization and forced contraception. It's one that the American people would not want us to be funding and that the Bush administration has made a very wise decision not to fund."

Secretary of State Colin Powell told Congress in 2002 that the UNFPA had provided computers and vehicles to the Chinese government to enforce China's family-planning policy. Other reports showed that UNFPA violated a 1985 law banning the United States from giving money to agencies involved in forced abortion or sterilization.

The committee vote to restore funding via an amendment, sponsored by Rep. Nita Lowey, D-N.Y., is expected to be close.

"If Lowey has her way, we'll be faced with another crisis," said Michael Schwartz, vice president of governmental relations at Concerned Women for America. "It will be a showdown between Congress and the president on whether the United States should begin to export abortion. We've never done that."

Supreme Court Term Bleak for Conservatives

Even one of the justices says the High Court is out of control

(EP) – Conservatives can't find much to smile about now that the Supreme Court has concluded its 2003-2004 session. Some are calling it "bleak." Justice Antonin Scalia had harsh words for his colleagues on the court, saying they were incapable of admitting that some matters are none of the court's business. Colby May, an attorney with the pro-family American Center for Law and Justice, said conservatives have a right to be concerned about the court's increasing power over what's intended to be "government by the people."

"This court seems willing to put itself in the business of the other branches and also seems willing to have a very strange view when it comes to religious liberties and religious rights," May said.

Pro-family advocates cite the recent decisions regarding online child pornography, the denial of state funding for a divinity student's education, and the dodging of the Pledge of Allegiance case as examples. Richard Thompson, president of the Thomas More Law Center, said this term is just another example of activist judges making laws "changing the culture of our society."

"These judges have replaced the rule of law with the rule of their ideological will," Thompson said.

Thompson calls it a tyranny of the courts, but reminds us there are two other branches of government: the executive and the legislative.

"Those branches of government must become courageous enough to stand and stop allowing the Supreme Court and other federal and state courts to take over what are their responsibilities," Thompson said.

He said another possible solution is very simple — appoint judges who will follow the law, not make it. Thompson said he longs for the days of judicial restraint, where judges leave certain issues to the legislative branch, where, he said, the Founding Fathers intended them to be.

Once again this term, many of the issues were decided by the swing votes of Sandra Day O'Connor and Anthony Kennedy. Even a normally pro-family conservative, Justice Clarence Thomas, proved to be a swing vote against the Child Online Porn Act.

YMCA Won't Back Down on Same-Sex Memberships

(EP) – A YMCA affiliate in North Carolina is refusing to bow to pressure from homosexual activists. YMCA of the Triangle Area in Durham will stand firm in its commitment to refuse family discount memberships to same-sex couples, despite pressure from homosexual activists and Duke University. Duke had promoted the YMCA in employee literature and on the Web in exchange for Duke employees receiving price breaks on memberships. That agreement ends next month, and Duke says they will no longer promote YMCA memberships to its employees.

Battling Homosexuality Top Priority for African American Church

(EP) – A 3,000-member predominately African-American church has planted itself at the forefront of the battle over homosexuality, denouncing the practice at government meetings and challenging lawmakers to take a stand. "If we're labeled as being fanatical Christians, we embrace it," said the Rev. Patrick Wooden of the Upper Room Church of God in Christ, one of the largest congregations in the Church of God in Christ denomination. "We will speak the truth in love." Recently, about 75 church members marched into the office of state senate leader Marc Basnight to show their support for a state constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, though Basnight wasn't at the office. Members passed out the senator's phone number and began a phone campaign.

Episcopal Church Votes to Bless Same-Sex Unions

(EP) – The 12-member governing board, or vestry, at St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Durham, N.C., voted unanimously June 21 to allow the blessing of same-sex unions among members of its congregation. After encouraging conversation among members of the congregation, the board set aside time at meetings to discuss the issue and presented a summary of the talks early last month. The move came about a year after national church leaders decided to allow each local diocese to make its own decision about same-sex relationships. The head of the Diocese of North Carolina, Bishop Michael Curry, said he would recognize same-sex union ceremonies performed by St. Phillip's.

Swedish Pastor Sentenced to One Month's Jail for Offending Homosexuals

(EP) – A Swedish court has sentenced Ake Green, a pastor belonging to the Pentecostal movement in Sweden, to a month in prison, after he was found guilty of having offended homosexuals during a sermon he preached. Soren Andersson, the president of the Swedish federation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights (RFSL), said on hearing the sentence that religious freedom could never be used as a reason to offend people. "Therefore," he told journalists, "I cannot regard the sentence as an act of interference with freedom of religion." During a sermon in 2003, Green described homosexuality as "abnormal, a horrible cancerous tumor in the body of society."

Study Shows One-Third of Americans Unaware of Proposed Homosexual Marriage Amendment

(EP) – A study released by the Barna Research group on June 21 said that one-third of adults in America are not aware of the proposed constitutional amendment banning homosexual marriage.

The survey of 1,618 adults revealed that 37 percent of voting-age citizens had never heard of the amendment that the Senate will vote on in July.

Groups most unfamiliar with the legislation included women (40 percent), adults under the age of 40 (41 percent), and individuals aligned with a non-Christian faith (45 percent).

But several groups proved acutely aware of the amendment, according to Barna: homosexual adults (94 percent), evangelicals (89 percent), Republicans (77 percent), and people likely to vote in the November election (76 percent).

The survey also asked participants for their opinion on the amendment. The responses were nearly evenly divided. Forty-six percent favored the amendment, 44 percent opposed it, and 10 percent said they had no opinion.

The strongest support for the amendment came from evangelicals (83 percent) and conservatives (58 percent).

Woman Can Sue Pastor For Revealing Her Infidelity

Fort Worth, Texas – A Texas court says a woman can sue her pastor for allegedly telling their congregation that she had an extramarital affair and was planning to divorce her husband.

Peggy Penley was a member of the Rev. C.L. Westbrook's Crossland Community Bible Church when he involved her and her then-husband in counseling to help their troubled marriage.

After Penley shared her plans with the pastor, she says, he wrote a letter to the congregation saying she was involved with another man and planned to get divorced, so church members must break "fellowship with

Continued on page 399

Bible & The Newspaper

Continued from page 398

her until the time of repentance and restoration.”

Church bylaws allow the congregation to discipline members for inappropriate behavior.

But an appeals court in Fort Worth said Penley can proceed with a lawsuit challenging her pastor's actions as a counselor under the Texas Licensed Professional Counselor Act.

Pro & Con: Should Congress Ban Gay Marriages and Civil Unions?

(Duluth News Tribune) – The Federal Marriage Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which is scheduled for a vote this month in the Senate, is a grand gesture in the most important battle of the “culture war” — the battle to save marriage from being blurred to include homosexuals. The amendment says important things, but it leaves much undone.

The well-intended proponents of this legislation have made a political calculation that restrictions on civil unions must be compromised in order to win the necessary votes in the Congress. The current version of the amendment allows states to enact civil unions.

Even with this compromise, the amendment is nowhere near the two-thirds vote requirement for its passage in the Senate and, according to media reports, House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas, has already conceded that the votes for the amendment are lacking in the House and he, therefore, will not schedule it for a vote there.

Yet Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., continues the march toward the pending vote. Some attribute this to election-year politics, votes against the amendment could be used to embarrass and unseat liberal politicians.

The fact is the original calculation about permitting civil unions in order to win passage underestimated the power of the publicly expressed will of the American people.

The amendment's proponents relied on rhetorical pabulum about “every child deserves a mother and a father” and other poll-tested mantras, while ignoring the more-to-the-point arguments about civil unions and the homosexual agenda toward marriage. In their efforts not to arouse the homosexuals they neglected to inform our own people that this amendment ducks on civil unions and leaves that large battle to every state to fight.

This has caused a “fog of war” to descend on this debate with few of the rank and file grass-roots activists across America understanding that this marriage amendment is not a final battle but an incremental one. It symbolically reasserts the traditional definition of marriage but substantially leaves it open to distortion by civil union and domestic partnerships.

The Federal Marriage Amendment offers lip-service to traditional marriage at a time when anti-family activists are dismantling

this vital institution. We need to pray and then fight a whole battle to save marriage, not just a symbolic partial skirmish that proponents have already declared lost.

Poll: Christians Buy Lottery Tickets at Higher Rate Than Non-Christians

Ventura, California (RNS) — Christians are more likely than non-Christians to invest in lottery tickets while non-Christians are twice as likely as Christians to fast, a newly released survey shows.

The Barna Group, a research and analysis company, looked at the relation between faith and lifestyles in a survey of 1, 002 adults in May 2003. It announced its results in May 2004.

Researchers found that 15 percent of born-again Christians and 23 percent of notional Christians—people who say they are Christian but haven't made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ—bought lottery tickets in a typical week. That compared to 10 percent of adherents of non-Christian faiths and 12 percent of atheists and agnostics.

Although the Bible and churches encourage fasting for religious reasons, adherents of non-Christian faiths—some of which advocate fasting during particular seasons—were most likely to participate in religious fasts.

Researchers found that evangelical Christians and nonevangelical, born-again Christians were least likely to recycle. More than six of 10 non-Christians, notional Christians, atheists and agnostics engaged in recycling. Only half of evangelicals and 47 percent of nonevangelical, born-again Christians recycled.

The survey had a margin of error of plus or minus 3.2 percentage points.

Studies in Esther

Continued from page 395

himself: and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife” (Est. 5:10). Recall that Haman was full of indignation. He had already exercised a little control over himself not to strike out at Mordecai. He had thought up an elaborate plan to destroy Mordecai and all of his people, too. Generally, people are able to restrain themselves in order to achieve some earthly goals. Paul talked about the runners in the Olympic Games. They would be moderate in all things. They would deny themselves certain indulgences in order to be able to run races and win prizes. To a surprising degree, men are able to deny themselves in order to get the things they want. Here Haman refrained himself because he was going to be satisfied with a much greater form of punishment or method of elevating himself. Haman is of a type that cannot be content to have someone opposed to him. So, he is able to restrain his passions to wait for the greater pay off.

Verses 11-14 – “And Haman told

them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to morrow am I invited unto her also with the king” (Est. 5:11-12). He began to spread his case before his friends and family. Notice, he makes an enumeration of where his joy is. He told of the “**glory of his riches”** and the “**multitude of his children.”** He had a large family and in that day, the number of a man's children was a symbol of his strength and power. He was proud of these things. Additionally, he was second only to the king in power and authority over the entire Persian kingdom. The queen had expressed favor for Haman. She had invited Haman, alone, to a banquet that was private and attended only by the king and herself. All these things have been the joy of Haman and happiness of his life.

This is great folly, because where is Haman's happiness going to be when all of those things are gone? We should never set our heart on uncertain riches, for “**they make themselves wings; they fly away”** (Pro. 23:5). Riches are here today and gone tomorrow. We must not wrap all of our joy in our families, because tragedy can strike and we can be deprived of our family and loved ones that are dear and close to us. We cannot derive our happiness from our job or position of authority and influence, for that can come to an end quickly. The world is very fickle and the current of opinion that is with you one day can be against you the next. These temporal things were the reason for all of Haman's joy.

For all of his apparent success, he was yet discontented. “**Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate”** (Est. 5:13). His pride would not be contented. He had all the money, family, power, and authority that he wanted and he wanted everyone to acknowledge that and reverence him. Haman also abused his authority by trying to use it to wipe out everyone that he did not like and that disagreed with him. Therefore, as long as Mordecai was permitted to sit in the king's gate and hold a high position, Haman could not be happy.

“**Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and to morrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made”** (Est. 5:14). We have seen that Haman had a cold and calculating anger. Even though he was infuriated with Mordecai, he was able to restrain himself

so he could plan in order to have a much sweeter revenge. Mordecai had further frustrated him and heightened the stakes. Haman's decree was already published and Mordecai was a marked man, living on borrowed time along with all his people. What further can Haman do to gain advantage over Mordecai, since he is already sentenced to die? His friends and family proved wicked counselors and told him to single out Mordecai and put him to a very public, painful, and humiliating death. They told him to make a large gallows and hang Mordecai thereon.

Haman was delighted with their depraved minds and ordered the gallows to be made. Haman is really in this digging a pit for himself. It is according to the words of Solomon, “**He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him. Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby”** (Ecc. 10:8-9). Truly, the wicked are taken by their own mischief. They are the ones that are snared. Haman's own gallows shall be his ruin.

Conclusion – The main teaching of this book is about the providence of God. It is a notable providential event that the queen was received so graciously and found favor with the king. The odds seemed to be against her, seeing that she had not been called in before the king for thirty days. The king is a man with many things on his mind and pressures, so who is to say what kind of mood she would find him in? He may have been dealing with some upsetting business and been in a foul mood and would not have received Esther graciously at all. However, Esther came at the time she had planned to come, after the Jews prayed and fasted, and she found favor.

This may not seem to be all that remarkable, but this one fact, humanly speaking, could have made all the difference in the outcome of her request. If she found him in an ill humor he could have had her put to death according to the law, but she did not find him in a ill humor but a good humor. This is a notable event of God's providence because, again, we see God working out His plan. He did not use some miraculous event in order to convince the king but He worked in the normal course of events. The king's heart here was in God's hand and He turned it just like the rivers of water. Certainly, God could turn his heart to favor. In Exodus, Pharaoh hardened his heart but the Bible also says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart against the people so that he would not let them go. Why? So that He might show His power in Pharaoh and manifest His great majesty in judging that wicked king.

Also, Esther comes to the king to begin the process of seeking deliverance. Notice

Continued on page 400

Studies in Esther

Continued from page 399

the way it happens. The Jews and Esther fast and pray first and then they go to the means of deliverance. Many times, in our experience, that prayer is our last resort. After we have tried everything else we know how to do. After we have used every means possible to deliver us from the trial then we go and pray to God that He will raise up some deliverance. Here we see that Esther and the Jews started by going to God. They were strengthened, comforted, and emboldened by this and then they went about to use the means.

We see another notable providential event in that Esther delayed her request. She asked, in the first place, for the king and Haman to come to a banquet instead of making her real request known at the first. They come to the banquet and the king is in a very good humor. He reiterates to her that he will do anything to the half of the kingdom for her. Again, she made another simple, humble request to have another banquet the next day. Whatever Esther's reasons were for doing that we definitely see the hand of God's providence in this, because He is allowing time for Haman to manifest his utter depravity and his wickedness before God. God has not yet let Haman go as low in sin as he can go. His pride is going to come to an even higher level when he sets about to make this gallows. Haman is going to be high and lifted up in his own mind and then brought very low and judged of God. Space is made for Haman to manifest his wickedness even more against the Jews. Space is granted for the Jews to exercise their faith and remain steadfast and unmovable in the duty along with Esther.

GLEANINGS



Marriage is What God Says It Is By Bill James

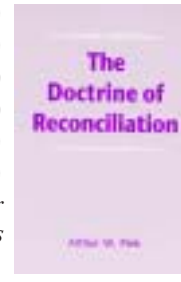
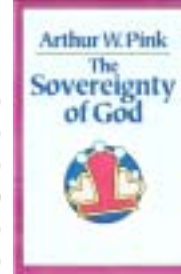
"Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?" (Matt. 19:4-5). Christ confidently quotes these words from Genesis written by Moses. He quotes them as reliable facts to be reckoned with and not an allegory. To believe Moses is to believe Christ for Moses wrote of Him (John 5:45-47). They are mutually believable and having authority. God told Moses that if men did not heed the



Select Works by A. W. Pink

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Doctrines of Election and Justification	\$14.00
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The Attributes of God	\$8.99
Comfort for Christians	\$14.00
The Divine Inspiration of the Bible	\$14.00
The Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer ..	\$11.99
Seven Sayings of the Saviour on the Cross ..	\$9.99

(Please note that many of Pink's works are out of print or are going out of print. Most of the large publishing houses no longer carry his books.)



words Christ would speak that He would require it of them (Deut. 18:19). We cannot escape the responsibility to obey. The words of our text are unmistakably clear about what God constituted marriage to be.

According to these words, God created Adam the man and Eve the woman. Note the words in the text: *male, female, father, mother, man and wife*. Most any child can understand their meaning without hesitation. God Himself united the man and the woman. He commanded them to multiply and replenish the earth (Gen. 1:28). Being male and female they could obey this divine mandate. They could be parents. They could have children who in due time would leave their home to make one for themselves. A man capable of supporting a wife would leave his father and mother and cleave to her. These words may not be construed or twisted to mean other than male and female. Marriage may not be distorted to mean other than the uniting of male and female. Marriage is what God defines it to be. Same sex unions are not marriage and will never be by Divine and Biblical definition. Neither can they obey the Divine mandate to multiply or bear children. Their union is against nature and a clear departure from the will of God (Rom. 1:26-27).

What is God's purpose in marriage? Man needed the love and companionship which his wife provides as they share life together. She was a help meet for his needs (Gen. 2:18, 21-23). Together they were to have children and train them up in the way they should go. In this way God would populate His earth. God is seeking a holy seed in holy matrimony

(Mal 2:15). Out of humanity God desires a multitude of people to be like His Son. Good marriages and solid homes are most conducive to this grand purpose. This is good reason for us all to diligently uphold the Biblical concept and sanctity of marriage. We cannot improve on what God hath ordained. Neither can we depart from it with impunity for we reap what we sow. The words of our text show that our Holy Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, will never sanction other than what the Bible defines to be marriage. Marriage is what God says it is.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Salem Missionary Baptist Church of Willow Hill, IL will be hosting their 6th Annual "Focus on the Singles" conference August 5th through August 7th. The speakers for this year's conference will be Bro's Garner Smith and Philip Potter. If you wish to attend, you should contact Pastor Billy Holbrook at 618-592-3806 or via email at holfam5@shawneelink.net for more information.

The Northside Baptist Church of Elkton, KY will be hosting a Bible conference August 5th through the 7th. Services will begin Thursday evening at 7:00 p.m. with Elders Don Titus and Wayne Bowling preaching. Services will Begin Friday morning at 9:30 a.m. with Elders Bob Asbury and Lonnie Badger preaching. A noon meal will be served and the afternoon service will begin

at 2:00 p.m. with Elders Roger Jones and Dan Gordon preaching. An evening meal will be served at 5:00 p.m. with the evening service beginning at 7:00 p.m. Elders Lee Hammel and Randy Titus will be preaching in the evening service. Services will begin again on Saturday morning at 10:00 a.m. with Elders Garner Smith and L. G. Richardson preaching. The conference will conclude with a noon meal on Saturday. The church building is located at 532 North Main Street, Elkton, KY. For more information, contact Pastor Irving Cummins at 270-265-9665 or via email at icummins@commandnet.net.

The Dessie Baptist Church of Clem, WV will be hosting the annual "Voice in the Wilderness Bible Conference" August 13th through the 15th. There are several preachers on the program. For more information, contact Pastor Mark Minney at 304-462-5591 or via email at dessiebaptist@rtol.net.

The Landmark Missionary Baptist Church of Granite Bay, CA will be hosting their annual Bible conference September 17th through the 19th. Services will begin on Friday the 17th at 7:00 p.m. The morning services will begin on Saturday and Sunday at 9:30 a.m. The theme of the conference will be "Missions" and some missionaries and their pastors will be present to preach and speak about their work. For more information, contact Pastor Rick Perdue at 916-791-7046 or via email at rperdue@jps.net.

The Covenant Baptist Church of Troy, MI will be hosting a Bible conference beginning Tuesday September 21st and continuing through Thursday the 23rd. The services will begin on Tuesday evening at 7:00 p.m. Services will continue all day Wednesday and Thursday. A meal will be served on Tuesday evening at 5:00 p.m. for those attending from out of town and lunch and dinner will be served on Wednesday and Thursday for all in attendance. For more information, contact Pastor Bill Senich at home at (586) 977-8809, at the church building at (248) 689-6722, or via email at wrsenich@sbcglobal.net.

The Landmark Baptist Church of Tulsa, OK is currently in need of a pastor. Any interested preacher that is not currently pastoring may contact Sis. Katie Wilson at 918-437-3904 for more information.

The Unity Missionary Baptist Church of Paron, AR is currently in need of a pastor. Any interested preacher that is strong in the doctrines of God's sovereign grace and not currently pastoring may contact Anthony Johnson at 501-594-5218 for more information.

INDEX

Bible and the Newspaper	p. 396
Forum	pp. 390 - 391
<i>Have We Misunderstood the Great Commission?</i> Part 1 by Milburn Cockrell	p. 381
Gleanings	p. 392, 400
Mini-Edition	p. 388
<i>Remember God in the Morning of Life</i> by Milburn Cockrell (Sermon Outline)	p. 387
<i>Sanctification</i> by John W. Porter	p. 381
<i>Separation and Service</i> by A. J. Gordon	p. 381
<i>Studies in Esther 5:1-14</i> by Jeff Short	p. 394
<i>The Faith of Hezekiah</i> by Paul Stepp	p. 381
<i>The Wet Hands of God</i> by Jeff Short	p. 381

