

The Berea Baptist Banner

"Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth" Ps. 60:1

Subduing the Flesh

By Paul Stepp
of Indore, West Virginia

"He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls" (Prov. 25:28). The text verse speaks of a man who has "no rule over his own spirit." For the purposes of this sermon, we will consider the phrase "his own spirit" in our text verse, to be a reference to the "spirit of man," or the "carnal nature of man." A



man that cannot control his own desires and his own expressions, is compared to a broken down city, that has no walls. The buildings and the city walls of a city, are mentioned as an allegory, comparable to the containment or the restraint that men ought to

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Dedication to Church Service

By Glenn Gilbreath
of Decatur, Alabama

John 6:26-51
I Thessalonians 5:16-23
As I began to study this subject, I first wondered who this message would be directed to. Would it be directed to those people who are not dedicated to church service? That is part of it, but first of all it is directed to all of God's chosen elect people. The lost of this world do not understand what true



church service is. God worked a miracle in us, His chosen, when He saved us. In Ephesians 1:1-14, the Word tells us that before the foundation of the world God chose a people to be holy and without blame before Him in love. God did this, not out of anything

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The Church at Smyrna

By Milburn R. Cockrell
(1941 - 2002)



"And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which

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"God with Us"

By Timothy J. Hille
of Ashland, Illinois

Read Matthew 1:18-25
text: vs. 23

We have here related to us some of the events concerning the birth of Jesus Christ, when He Who was the Son of God came from glory to take upon Himself the form of a man born under the law and dwelt in a tabernacle of clay. Many especially at this time of year are going to tell and hear many things concerning these events, but unfortunately much of

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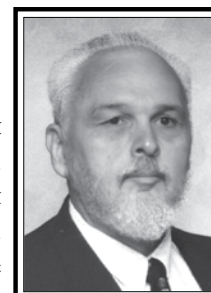


Two Kinds of Faith

By Curtis Pugh
of Poteau, Oklahoma

The Bible teaches that there are two kinds of faith. One is an intellectual faith. It is simply the belief of truth. It is the faith of demons. The Bible says, "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). While it is good to believe truth, mere mental assent is not saving faith. Demons are

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Let God's ways be in your heart, and your heart in God's ways.

"And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21).

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The purpose of the Berea Baptist Banner is as follows:

1. To honor God and to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. To preach the gospel to lost sinners.
3. To spread the whole counsel of God's Word.
4. To encourage God's preachers and to strength-en His churches in the most holy faith.
5. To motivate God's children to a closer fellow-ship around His Word.
6. To inform people of world events in light of Bible prophecy.
7. To condemn and expose error wherever it may rear its ugly head.
8. To stimulate Christian growth in grace.
9. To make the Devil and his demons as mad as possible.

Subduing the

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have in regards to their own flesh and their own desires. In other words, if we cannot control our own will, desires, actions, words, and expressions, then there is no barrier to what we might do, there is no restraint to prevent us from falling to unfathomable depths of wickedness. A lack of self-control is devastating to the character of any man.

If this is true in the case of an unsaved, worldly man, it is also true in the case of the saved and regenerate man. Not that the Lord would permit us to fall into Hell, because of our lack of self-control; and not that the Lord will allow us to very long taint His name, with a behavior and lifestyle that denies the need to subdue the flesh – chastisement will come to those children of God who reject the moralities and teachings of the Word of God; but, a lack of control in our lives will prevent us from properly serving the Lord, and may prevent us from gaining rewards in the cause of Christ. In regard to this sermon, I want to say that to subdue the flesh, means to control the anger, control the tongue, direct the thoughts to holy matters, engage in positive and reinforcing activities, and to defeat the laziness and the laxness that so often afflict us.

Let us read another verse in the book of Proverbs, which teaches us, in a positive fashion, the same concept as our text verse: "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" (Prov. 16:32). It is a worthy accomplishment, for one to rule his own spirit! Comparable, even, to the accomplishments of an army general who

has conquered a city! No doubt it is a challenge – and a difficult challenge, at that – for us to "rule our own spirit," or to control the fleshly nature, or to subdue the flesh. But, it is a challenge which is laid upon us all, and one from which we dare not run. The best and noblest servants of God have given us an example of godliness and subduing the flesh. Though none of them (and none of us) are perfect, we still must seek to exalt God – even at the expense of our own flesh, our own desires, and the will and purposes of mortal men. In doing so, we will find that we, too, will be known as faithful servants of God.

I want us to consider the path that we need to trod, through which we – the saved man that dwells within us – can gain the upper hand on the flesh and the carnal nature with which we are afflicted.

STUDY THE WORD OF GOD

First of all, I want us to know that it is imperative that the children of God would study the Word of God. The first part of Isaiah 34:16 says, "Seek ye out of the book of the LORD, and read..." Some effort is required on our part. Diligence is required in our habits. A certain godliness must be evident in our preferences. "Seek" the Word of God, and "read" it and study it.

The struggle that exists within us, as the mortal and spiritual seek to gain prominence in our lives, is compared to a race. "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I there-

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fore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that bea-teth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into sub-jection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (I Cor. 9:24-27). The Apostle Paul lets us know that a successful runner – a race winner – is typically that man who demonstrates tem-perature. That man who keeps his body under subjection at all times will find victory when the struggle (competition) is fiercest.

As we struggle against the devil and the flesh, we find that there is nourishment for the inner man to be found in the Bible. **"Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious"** (I Peter 2:1-3). The spiritual man thirsts for sustenance and knowledge from the Scriptures. The inner man will grow and become stronger as we feed the spirit with nourishment from the Word of God. Once the spirit has a "taste of God," the spirit will desire more and more. If a person is not truly saved, and has not once tasted of God, then it is not remarkable if that person will show no desire to feast on the Word of God.

The Word of God is essential in our initial salvation, and further necessary as we seek to do the things that the Word of God teaches us. **"Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your**

own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he be-holdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the per-fect law of liberty, and continu-eth therein, he being not a for-getful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (James 1:21-25). In order to subdue the flesh, the spirit of man must be immersed in the study of God's Word. There is strength for the spirit and soul in the Scriptures. David said, **"My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word"** (Ps. 119:28).

The boundaries and the con-trols that we set for ourselves are found in the Word of God. To know the Word of God – to un-derstand the will of God for us in our lives – is necessary so that we can properly restrain the evil and carnal nature that all men are afflicted with. **"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"** (II Tim. 2:15). To study the Scriptures, and to have a knowledge of right and wrong – as God sees right and wrong – is imperative, so that our un-derstanding of right and wrong is not skewed or tainted by the fleshly nature which we inhabit.

PRAY

Secondly, I want to remind you of the importance of prayer. In or-der to subdue the flesh, prayer is a vital, yet often missing element in the lives of God's people. Prayer is a spiritual affair, and moves our thoughts from mortal to heavenly. We read in the book of the Prov-erbs, **"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is**

his delight" (Prov. 15:8). It should be our desire to **"delight"** our God. The prayers of God's people are a delight unto Him. And, prayer is a means to strengthen the failing spirit of man.

When a person (or a people) is barren of prayer, that person (or people) is most likely barren of good works, and unable to sub-duce the flesh. **"But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life"** (Jude 1:20-21). Prayer is necessary, in "keeping to the way." Building up ourselves, and keeping ourselves in the love of God, are similar descriptions of the act which we are consider-ing today – "subduing the flesh." Prayer is a gift of God which is always at our disposal. We have the God-given right (and privi-lege) to call out to the Creator and the Savior! When we need help subduing the flesh, the child of God can take comfort in such a verse as this: **"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mer-cy, and find grace to help in time of need"** (Heb. 4:16). Through prayer we can **"obtain mercy."** Through prayer we can find the **"grace"** of God, ready **"to help in time of need."**

If a man would be profitable in serving the Lord, and if a man would desire to keep the works of the flesh at bay, then that person must indulge in prayer, and exhib-it a faith and reliance on God. **"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anoint-ing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they**

shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fer-vent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit" (James 5:14-18). Elijah was subject to the same car-nal and fleshly nature as you and I. And yet, he was faithful to serve the Lord, and through prayer he was able to accomplish miracles which are still spoken of today.

Subduing the flesh is not easy; if it were easy, then every Chris-tian would be able to live a per-fect life – or at least be subject to ridicule if he did not live a perfect life. We have already noticed that the Word of God is necessary and effective in the matter of subdu-ing the flesh. Since the Word of God is effective in the lives of the people of God; and, since the words of God have both spiritual and physical implications; it is ap-propriate and even necessary for a proper understanding of the Scriptures, that a man's study be accompanied with much prayer. The Apostles in the first Church said of themselves, **"But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word"** (Acts 6:4). The Word of God and prayer go together; we will find greater success in each endeavor, if we are careful to com-bine the two.

YIELD TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Finally, we need to be reminded to "yield to the Holy Spirit." I do not want to deny God's sover-eignty by imagining that you, or

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I, or any human being can thwart the will of God or the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit. And yet, it is right and proper for the child of God to “yield” to the Holy Spirit, because in so doing He is glorifying God as sovereign, he is acknowledging that God knows best, and he is actively and positively participating in the accomplishment of the will and purpose of God.

In reality, what hope do we have, in this spiritual warfare in which we are engaged, if we do not call upon, and yield to, the strength and leadership of the Spirit of God? Matthew Henry had this to say about our text passage: “The man who has no command over his anger, is easily robbed of peace. Let us give up ourselves to the Lord, and pray him to put his Spirit within us, and cause us to walk in his statutes.” This quote of Matthew Henry’s, reminds us that the Word of God, prayer, and the Holy Spirit all are necessary in the faithful service of the children of God. Not one is applicable in our lives, without the presence of the others as well.

The Lord Jesus Christ spoke of the necessity of the leadership of the Holy Spirit in the lives of His disciples: **“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you”** (John 16:13-15). Guidance comes to us through the Holy Spirit. Knowl-

edge is imparted to us through the Holy Spirit.

As men, we are not able to contend with spiritual beings and spiritual matters, without the support, strength, leadership, and guidance of the Holy Spirit of God. Sure, we are saved by the grace of God, and the new birth has brought to life the dead spirit within us, so that we are new creatures in Christ Jesus. But, the inner man – that spiritual man who has been made alive – is still confined to the house of clay (the flesh), and still prone to the failures of the flesh, and liable to be subjected to the wills and desires of the fleshly man. The will of the fleshly nature is pitted against the will of the new man within us. However, the Holy Spirit will lead us aright, and the Holy Spirit will be our succor and our strength – if only we will follow after Him!

I believe that the Lord Jesus Christ expects us to love and follow the Holy Spirit of God, and the Lord is, in fact, offended by our behavior when we set aside the teachings and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in favor of the baser instincts and the will of the flesh. Paul told the Ephesians, **“And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption”** (Eph. 4:30). Our service unto God is comprised of more than just a strict obedience to God! Our service unto God is made up of more than just a formality and the ritual of worship and religion! Our relationship with God ought to be more than just a desire to publicly proclaim praise unto God, and His Son Jesus Christ! What we need to do is to also subdue the flesh, and seek to “please” God. We have the blessed privilege of bringing pleasure to our God! More than anything else, I believe that Paul is referring to a lack of

“bringing pleasure” to God when he makes reference to “grieving” the Holy Spirit.

It seems to me that the flesh and our carnal nature will never have the upper hand unless we will yield ourselves wholly to the Spirit of God. The degree to which we are successful in serving the Lord, might be measured by this simple equation: the amount of ourselves that we yield to the Holy Spirit, as opposed to the amount of ourselves that we retain for the pleasures of the flesh. **“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God”** (Rom. 8:26-27). The Holy Spirit knows God intimately – the Holy Spirit is God. The Holy Spirit knows each of the children of God intimately – He dwells within us. As such a person with such knowledge and with such power, the Holy Spirit is eminently qualified to prosper the relationships of God’s children and the Father and Saviour in Heaven. As such a Spirit, the Holy Spirit is invaluable in our attempts to subdue the flesh.

The Holy Spirit is more than just a mere “help” to us in our time of need. The Holy Spirit of God can be both the inspiration and the strength to fulfill the Word of God and work out God’s will in our lives. The Holy Spirit can be both the alarm that sounds when evil is about, and the means by which the evil is conquered and the flesh itself is subdued.

God give us grace in our struggle against the flesh! God give us success in our desire to subdue the

flesh! I fervently desire that God would help you and me to study the Word of God, spend time in prayer and fellowship with our God, and yield ourselves wholeheartedly to the leadership of the Holy Spirit of God.



Dedication to

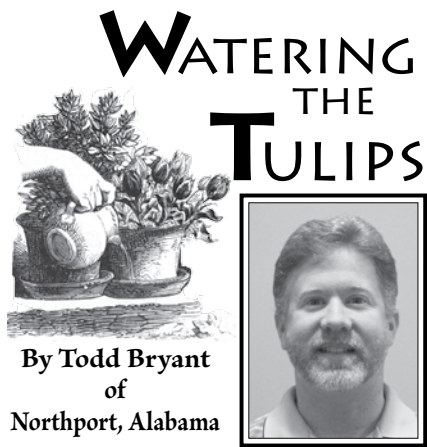
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He saw in us, but only out of the good pleasure of His will. You might say God did it just because He wanted to. We must see this as a miracle work done in our lives.

When I was young, my parents taught me that going to church on Sunday is what we are to do. I did not understand why until later in life when the Lord saved my soul and revealed Himself to me. But I know that from that point on, I recognized the need to be dedicated to God in my church service first and foremost in order for me to learn and gain direction for my spiritual life. I pray this message will be a blessing to whoever reads it and will see a need in their lives for a better dedication to church service.

When we talk of “dedication,” what do we mean? The dictionary gives the meaning as a feeling of very strong support for or loyalty to someone or something; allegiance, commitment, devotion, faithfulness, loyalty. What are we to be dedicated to? We must dedicate all service to God. What consists of service to God? Prayer, meditation, study, singing praises, love, faith, works, thankfulness, worship service, etc. In Joshua 24:14-15, God tells Israel to **“serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve.”** I pray that all who read this can answer as Joshua,

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By Todd Bryant
of
Northport, Alabama

Watch Your Mouth

“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain” (James 1:26).

If this verse is true (and it is), social media is quite a condemnation of much of Christendom today. We, as believers, have ignored much that the Bible has to say about our tongues. Just a casual perusing of Facebook or Twitter will reveal rant after rant of believers against the government, the lost, and even other believers. Those who are called to be **“the light of the world”** (Matt. 5:14) seem to spend more time adding fuel to the fire than anything else. We need change.

The Word of God has much instruction for God’s children concerning how to talk. For instance, Proverbs 15:2 says, **“The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.”** Nobody is suggesting that believers be silent. Certainly, we must share the truth! However, there is a proper way to do that. Notice, Solomon here says that one who is wise will speak knowledge in the proper way. It is possible to speak the truth with hate. We have all seen churches (using this term loosely)

that have spewed forth hate in the media. How does such publicity affect the name of Christ?

Our text verse is quite convicting, really. If a person “seems” (thinks) they are religious but does not keep their mouth in check they are deceiving their own heart. Did we just read that – really? Does that mean all of the rants on social media that spout “truths” in a hateful, mean spirited, spiteful manner are done by people that are deceiving their own heart? This verse seems plain enough. But what does that mean? There are two possibilities, really. First, the person may not be saved. They may be bearing fruit that proves they are lost. This must be considered. The other possibility is that they are deceiving their heart into believing they are working for the Lord. Without a doubt, most of us need to get our priorities straight as believers. We are called for two reasons – to glorify God in all that we do and to serve others (this glorifies God, by the way).

Is our religion useless? I mean, have we so run our mouth that we have lost our witness? Have we been so hateful towards others that we have wrongly represented what the Gospel is all about? Have we given such a perception of Christianity that others have no desire to be a Christian? Just a few verses before our text verse, we read, **“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God”** (James 1:19-20). Notice closely, our wrath is here linked to our speaking. If you are speaking the “truth” in a wrathful manner, it will not produce the righteousness of God. It will not.

Child of God, we have been sent by the Lord into the world

to spread the Good News of Jesus dying in the place of sinners. Let us keep this Great Commission before our eyes constantly. But furthermore, let us keep it on our tongues always.



Dedication to

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“but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” I want to look primarily at our church service and how we can become distracted from time to time away from worshipping God in our local New Testament Baptist church that we are, or should be, members of (Heb. 12:28-29).

What is meant by “church service?” First of all, the church is not the building; it is the ekklesia (assembly or congregation) of called-out saints of God that make up the local New Testament Baptist church. The church sets aside times to meet together, such as Sunday (both Sunday school and preaching service), Wednesday, revivals, etc. If you are a member of the church, you should attend all services all the time. Does Christ ever miss one of His churches’ services? In Matthew 18:20, Christ says, **“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”** When we deliberately miss a church service we are deliberately missing out on the sweet fellowship of Christ. There is nothing on this earth more precious to Christ than His church; read Ephesians 5:25–27. We as members of His church should love His church just as Christ loved it. Exodus 20:8, the fourth commandment, says, **“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.”**

In Matthew 28: 16-20, we

have Jesus Christ commissioning His church. It consisted of the eleven disciples, and Christ told the church to go, teach, baptize, and to observe **“all things”** He had commanded. Is church attendance part of the **“all things?”** Deuteronomy 31:12 says, **“Gather the people together, men and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law.”** Hebrews 10:25 says, **“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”** Oh, that we might all say as Psalm 122:1 says, **“I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.”** I am sure we all know someone that says, “I can serve God just as good at home as I can going to a church building.” If that were true then why did Christ establish His church? If we can worship just as well at our home, why did Christ see a need to establish His church? Ephesians 4:11-12 tells of Christ giving of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Now, why did He give these gifts? **“For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying (strengthening) of the body of Christ.”** Paul wrote this letter to the “church,” where we are to gain our strengthening. There are also those who do not see a need to join a church. They come to services regularly but never join. I assume this to mean that they do not want to be responsible to anybody. They want to do their own thing with no responsibilities, or that God is not directing them to join (Acts 2:47).

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What kind of preparation for church service are we doing? Do we begin our preparation on Sunday morning? Our preparation for the next service should begin after the last amen is said at any service, whether Sunday or Wednesday, or whenever your services are set up. Are you praying for the Sunday school lesson, the gospel messages, the singing, and the fellowship with other members and (hopefully) visitors that may come into the service, the sick that may not be able to attend? In other words, are our hearts prepared to serve God before we get to the church building? We can only get as much out of the service as we put into it. So, if our preparation is limited, the results will be limited. In I Thessalonians 5:16-22, we are given commands from God. The subject of this chapter is the second coming of Jesus Christ. Paul is instructing the church on what to be doing until He comes, and he says in verse 11 to **“comfort yourselves together, and edify one another.”** Where should this be done? He is instructing the church. We are to comfort and edify each other all the time not just in the services, but what a blessing we receive when we gather as a church and partake of the blessings in the study and preaching of God's Word and the fellowship with one another as a complete body.

• Verse 16 – **“Rejoice evermore.”** Paul is speaking of spiritual joy. Where should our rejoicing be focused?? Philippians 3:1 says to **“rejoice in the Lord,”** because in Him our joy will be full. The whole church is to be rejoicing in the Lord for evermore (always). Can the church properly rejoice when all its members are not in

attendance??

• Verse 17 – **“Pray without ceasing.”** Is our prayer life what it should be? I believe if we are honest with ourselves, we can all say it is not where it should be. Do we continue to pray for our Lord's soon return, for the forgiveness of sin we commit each day, for the well-being of the sick of our church, for all our members to be faithful to the service of God? Do we pray for each other like we should, for God to instruct us daily in His Word?

• Verse 18 – **“In every thing give thanks.”** Do we thank God for supplying our needs – not just our wants – but our needs? Do we thank Him for adding us to one of His true churches? Do we thank Him when we are able to be in His house? The Lord added us to His church. Do we take every opportunity to gather with His people? In our prayers do we thank Him for giving us a place to meet, worship and fellowship together and then do not avail ourselves of each service set aside by the church? These are serious questions each one of us needs to ask ourselves.

• Verse 19 – **“Quench not the Spirit.”** To quench is to “put out” or “extinguish.” When every member is present in each service, what is the spiritual attitude within the church? There is much joy and spiritual gladness felt within the services. It means there is harmony within the church. The Lord will bless His church when all the members are faithful. Is the Spirit quenched when all the members are not faithful? There is an emptiness within the congregation when some are missing. Acts 1: 14 speaks of **“one accord,”** which means being of the same mind. Philippians 2:2 says to **“Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same**

love, being of one accord, of one mind.” Where is the **“same love,”** and **“one mind,”** if those that could be in the service are not?

• Verse 20 – **“Despise not prophesyings.”** We are to understand the preaching of the Word, and we must not despise what God is teaching. We are to increase in knowledge and in grace. It is needful for our minds to be stirred up from time to time. If the pastor preaches on the subject of service to God and regular attendance in the church every week for two months, then this ought to stir up our minds to think about what the Lord is telling the church.

• Verse 21 – **“Prove all things.”** We must search the Scriptures to know whether the preacher is telling the truth about God's Word or not. It is our duty to know. Every Christian ought to **“have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil”** (Hebrews 5:14).

• Verse 22 – **“Abstain from all appearance of evil.”** We are to prevent ourselves from being deceived with false doctrine. Christ said in John 7:17, **“If any man will do his will (God's will), he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”** God's people should abstain from evil, and all appearances of evil, from sin, and that which looks like sin. When we are not in church and are seen of someone that knows we are Christians and knows when our church services are, what kind of appearance do we present to that person? What examples are we setting before others – our children, our neighbors, our friends, our relatives? I have seen on a church billboard and heard other men tell the example that “you may be the only Bible others may read.”

• Verse 23 – What will be the result if we abide by what verses 16-22 instructs us? “God will wholly sanctify us.” Vine's dictionary gives the definition of sanctification as “the separation of the believer from evil things and ways, this sanctification is God's will for the believer and His purpose in calling him by the gospel.” That sanctification is also **“wholly,”** or completely, done in us.

Is the church not growing because of the unfaithfulness of some of the members? Will God add to the church if all members are not faithful? Sure He will, because we have seen that in many churches. But, how many would God add if all the members are faithful and attend every service? And what about the blessings we would all receive from the sweet fellowship of the whole church meeting together? Christ is in the midst where two or three are gathered. If two or three make up the whole church, and those two or three gather together for every service, what a blessing He will bestow upon that church! Hebrews chapter 11 shows many examples of faith by those of the Old Testament times. Verse 33 tells us that through their faith they **“subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions.”** Oh that all of God's people today had such faith as those! Revelation 2:10 says, **“be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”**

How are we to be faithful? We are to be faithful to the commandments of God. Those who have jobs are faithful to be on time each day; we are faithful to family, to spouse, even to eating on time each day, or to reading a book, or even to having

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our devotional times in reading God's Word or praying. But how faithful are we when it comes to serving Jesus Christ in His house each time the doors are open? In Matthew 25:21, the parable of the talents is taught by Jesus, and we see that the **"faithful servant"** will be made ruler over many things. Oh, that we would hear our Lord say unto us one day **"well done thou good and faithful servant"** for being faithful unto the services of the church.

Is missing church services a sin?? Hebrews 10:23 says, **"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering."** Our faith is to be steadfast, grounded, without wavering. We must persevere in our service to God and His commands that He puts forth in His Word. Verse 24 instructs us to **"provoke unto love and to good works."** Christians should have a concern for one another, and consider the wants, weaknesses and temptations of other Christians. We should call upon one another to love God and Christ more, to love duty and holiness more, to love our brethren in Christ more, and to do all the good works God instructs us to do. A good example given to others is the best and most effectual love we can bestow upon our fellow Christians. Do we set a good example when we miss a church service? Verse 25 tells us not to **"forsake the assembling of ourselves together."** Christ established His church. Should we not gather together at each appointed time?? Evidently, there were some at this time who did not assemble with the church, because we see **"as the manner of some is."** What happens when we are habitually absent from the

services? It gets easier each time. It begins to become less important to us, and consequently we begin to miss more and more. Verse 26 says, **"For if we sin wilfully."** The more services we miss the more we are sinning against the Lord and His church. Read Acts 2:41-47. The Lord's church was having great revival. People were being saved, baptized, and added to the church. Verse 44 says **"all that believed were together,"** and verse 46 says, **"And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple."** This tells me that the whole church was together at this time. Verse 47 says, **"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."** I gather from this that the church, when all were together, were blessed and the church grew. Should we not learn from this??

What if the pastor began to only come to the services once a week, once a month, or only a couple of holidays a year, as are many so-called Christians in this day and time are prone to do? I am pretty sure the church would dismiss him from being the pastor. The pastor is a member of the church just like any other member. Granted, he has been called by God to preach and has been called by the church to be the pastor, but we all expect the pastor to be at each service, each funeral, each wedding, and each graduation of any of the members of the church. Why is it that some members expect the pastor to abide by the command of God to assemble at each service, but they do not see the need to avail themselves of that same command. When was the last time every member of the church was present at each service for one month, one week or even for one service?

Will God withdraw from us for not being faithful to His services? Hosea 5:6 says that **"They shall**

go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the LORD; but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them." Those who were spoken of here had a lot of problems. Ephraim committed whoredom, and Israel was defiled. I realize we may not be as bad as they were in that day, but they were not abiding by the command of God and He withdrew Himself from them. Will He do the same to us if we are not faithful to Him? Revelation 2:4-5 tells of the church at Ephesus, how that, even though they had good works, labor, had patience, and could not bear those who were evil, they had left their first love. Not that they had left and forsaken their love, but they had lost the zeal they once had when they were first saved. Most of God's people, when they are first saved, have a longing desire to learn and be with Christ in His church as often as possible. But many grow cool to the things of God and if much care is not taken and much diligence used to preserve those things, then God may withdraw, or remove, His candlestick. Christ is displeased with His people when He sees them grow cold towards Him, and He will get their attention one way or another. Those who have lost their first love must remember how **"thou art fallen, and repent."** He tells them to compare how it is now and how it was before and see how much better it was before. If the presence of Christ's grace and Spirit be slighted, then we can expect His displeasure. That displeasure may come in the way of judgment and the removal of His candlestick from that church. Had all the members of the church of Ephesus left their first love? It does not say and it does not matter if one or all the members had left their first love. He is talking to the



**Quotes
from
Brother
Ritechus
N.
Dignation**
by Joseph Harris

Some folks wonder why their public worship at church is so dead and they get nothing out of it. It's usually because they didn't put anything in to it by worshiping God privately at home during the week through prayer and the Word. It's presumptuous to expect God to fill your cup in one hour on Sunday when you ignore Him the other six days. When people aren't prepared to worship, it won't usually happen.

whole church not just to those who were unfaithful.

Is attending church service a good work? Hebrews 10:24-25 tell us, **"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together."** It seems these verses are saying that going to church is a "good work." How can going to a place that Christ says that He is in the midst of, be anything but good? Colossians 1:10 says, **"That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God."** Where is the best place to increase in the knowledge of God? The church is the best place to learn about God, about Christ, about how we are to live our lives. We also know that God will bless and reward His people when they do good works. In Revelation 22:12, we are told,

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“And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.” Philippians 3:13-14 says, **“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize (reward) of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”** Do not misunderstand. I am not saying that being faithful to church service will keep you saved. There is no work of man that will keep you saved. Works of the flesh will not save or keep you saved. Works are a reflection of the love God bestowed upon His people. We owe God everything. He never asks anything from us that is unreasonable.

What does our conscience tell us when we miss a service? Our conscience knows right from wrong. A criminal, when he is about to commit a crime, knows it is wrong, but he does it anyway. When we miss a service for no “good” reason, we know it is the wrong thing to do, but sometimes we do it anyway. The desire is not there. If the desire is there, then we will be in His house. Our service to Christ should be first in our lives. Do we think ourselves better than Christ when we choose not to attend His services?

What kind of example are we setting before others? When you tell someone they ought to be in service each time, do they give the excuse that “well, there are others that are not there all the time”? We are not setting a good example when we miss for no apparent reason. Others see what we do, and so begins a domino effect. Romans 14:12-13 says,

“So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.” If we miss a service when we could have been there, is that not telling others of the church that it is ok? What kind of example is that to others? What if visitors come to the services on a regular basis and notice that all the members do not attend regularly? What if that visitor was someone YOU invited, and you are one that misses regularly? What will they think of you? They might think, “If it is not important to the members of the church it may not be where I want to attend.” When you start missing a service this week, then two or three services a month, it could eventually lead to not attending at all.

What are some “excuses” that we use to miss church service? Let me say up front that I know there are true and understandable reasons to miss. The ones I will list here are what I consider “excuses” for not attending. The first commandment God gave to the people of Israel was, **“Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”** Little “g” gods come in many forms, and people today have used them as “excuses” to miss church service. I want to look at ten different “gods” that many of God’s people use to miss church services from time to time. I will admit that I have done many of these in times past, and I am not proud of that fact. But by the grace of God, I have come to realize that these “excuses” do not have a hold on me as they once did.

- Working in the yard, playing golf, washing my car: “It is the only day I have time to get it done,”

some may say. There are 168 hours in a week, we work approximately 50 hours a week, and we sleep approximately 56 hours a week, which leaves 62 hours a week for other priorities. On an average, most churches have services that total about 4-6 hours per week. Where are our priorities?

- I have to work. I understand that in this day and time, it is hard to find jobs where we can schedule time for church services. So many places are open 7 days a week or even 24 hours a day. If you are a member of one of the Lord’s churches and have to work most, or all, Sundays or Wednesdays, then it is your duty to look for a job that allows you to attend all the services of the church. We must put God first in all things, which means before family, job, or whatever else may hinder our service to Him.

- Family or friends schedule parties, family gatherings, reunions on Sunday or Wednesday that would hinder you going to church. Tell them that if they want you to attend these functions, they will need to schedule a time that will not conflict with your service to the Lord. If they go forward with them during your service times, then be a witness to them and go to church instead of the function. Eventually they will change the times if they really want you to be there.

- Family comes to visit and they do not go to church. Do not let them hinder you from attending church just to stay home and visit with them. Do not let them “guilt trip” you into staying home and visiting with them. Invite them to go with you, and if they will not, then YOU GO. If we miss church and stay home with them, then where is our “first love” – Family or God?

- I live too far away from church

to go to every service. I only have one good answer for this “excuse.” **MOVE CLOSER TO YOUR CHURCH.** You might say, “But I have lived there for so many years and I do not want to give up the home or friends I have.” You are putting “things” before God. What is more important?

- I do not feel good. This can be a legitimate hindrance. If you have a sickness that is contagious or that has you bedridden for a while, the Lord does understand these things. I know many people who go when they are in much pain because of certain ongoing ailments. These have a great love for the things of God and desire to meet with the Lord Jesus Christ at each given time they can. But if you miss church because of a slight headache, or a few sniffles, or if your big toe happens to hurt, or whatever other “excuse” you may think of that would not otherwise hinder you from going to work or to the store or a family function, then it is not a good enough reason to miss a church service. Many times we will use these feeble excuses just because we are lazy and want to sleep in a little longer. When we use our minor aches and pains to stay out of church, we must remember what Christ suffered for His people. Remember what He endured for us. When we do that, our little aches and pains will seem as nothing.

- I overslept. Did you go to bed the night before early enough to get enough sleep so that you do not oversleep? Did you set an alarm to get up? We must prepare the day before to serve the Lord on HIS DAY.

- I can worship just as good at home as going to church, or some may say “God has not revealed to me the need to be in every

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service.” Did Christ establish His church so you could stay at home and worship? Most of us learn God’s truths in different stages of our lives and in different time frames, but this is not God’s fault. We cannot use the excuse that God has not “revealed” this or that to us. God reveals His truths to us by using His Word, the Bible, when we open it, read it, study it, and hear His truths taught to us in His church. I Peter 2:2 says, **“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.”** God teaches us through His Word, and then we grow in knowledge. We cannot grow if we do not desire to study His Word. Matthew 28:19-20 tells us of the Great Commission given by Christ to His ecclesia. They are to go, baptize, and teach, and He said that He will be with us unto the end of the world. Christ is in the midst when His church assembles. His people should be also. How can we be properly taught outside the church?

• I do not like the pastor or a particular member of the church. Is there something the pastor or member said to you that offended you? Did you go to that person and talk to them to let them know it offended you? If not then you must do what the Bible says to do in this situation. Matthew 18:15-17 tells us to go to the one who has offended us and tell him or her and get it taken care of before it progresses into a bigger problem. You are not helping yourself by refusing to attend church and missing out on growing in the knowledge of God and Christ, as well as missing the sweet fellowship of those that love you in the Lord. Make whatever it is right with that person, and do not

hurt your standing in the church.

• Deliberately not going when you are able. If you decide the day or night before, or even the same day of the scheduled services, not to go to church, then you are premeditatedly and deliberately forsaking the Lord’s house. You are deliberately saying, “I do not want to be with the Lord today.” Matthew 18:20 says, **“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”** You are missing out on fellowshiping with the Lord Jesus Christ. I John 2:19 tells of those who “went out.” **“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”** When you deliberately miss church service, does that show God or the church that you are “of us?” If your church has two services on Sunday, do you go to one and miss the other? If you are able to attend one, why not both? Could it be that there is not a strong enough desire in your heart to be there for both services? It is our duty to be in His house each time the doors are open. I Corinthians 12:13-27 speaks of the members of the **“one body,”** or the local church. Verse 18 says, **“But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.”** God put you in the church you are a member of. When one member is missing, is the body complete? Read Ephesians 4:1-3. Do we as church members **“walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called?”** We must examine our church life and walk worthy. II Timothy 3:14 says, **“But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured**

of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.” Have you learned in your church that faithful attendance is what the Scripture teaches? Have you continued in what you learned? The problem today is that many have changed excuses into hindrances. The Lord does not put hindrances upon His people to miss church services. Satan does that. Satan puts the idea in our mind, and we as sinful creatures act upon it. Satan puts doubt in our minds saying, “You do not really need to go today.” This is just as he put in the mind of Eve when he said, **“ye shall not surely die,”** when God had specifically said not to eat of the forbidden fruit. The true child of God knows the difference between being “hindered” and an “excuse” to miss a church service. If there is no hindrance, then the desire to be there is not within that person. If you have a TRUE desire and ability, you will be in each service of the church. James 1:12 says, **“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”** This is not speaking of salvation, but it is speaking of rewards from God. Do not be tempted to forsake God’s house. If you put God first in your life, then most, if not all, of these excuses will go away.

When we take time and go on vacation, do we take vacation from God also? Many of God’s people do not set aside a time to worship God when on vacation. Prepare your vacation in places where there is a true church to attend while there. Or be sure to set aside some time and listen to a CD or tape and have devotional time when you are away. Our time with God, even when on vacation, is important to our spiritual lives.

Is our heart in our service to God, Christ and the church? Deuteronomy 26: 16 says, **“This day the LORD thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments: thou shalt therefore keep and do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul.”** Can we make a covenant like the king of Judah in II Chronicles 34:31? **“And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with ALL HIS HEART, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book”** (emph. G. G.). Ephesians 6:5-7 speaks of servants being obedient to their masters, not with eye service, but as servants of Christ, **“doing the will of God from the heart.”** I Corinthians 7:22 says, **“For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord’s freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ’s servant.”** Are we really Christ’s servants if our heart is not truly dedicated to His service? Colossians 3:12-17 speaks of our being holy. Verse 15 says to **“let the peace of God rule in your hearts,”** and verse 16 says, **“let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.”** Being in church services each time the doors are open will go a long way in establishing peace with God and the Word of Christ dwelling in us. Acts 4:32 says, **“the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.”** They were in **“one accord.”** Is your church in **“one accord”** as pertaining to our service to the Lord?

Many speak of our responsibility to God. Do we not also have a responsibility to the Lord’s New Testament church that we are

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members of? Most of the Lord's churches are getting smaller in this day and time. The preaching and teaching of the Word of the Lord is not enough for many people today. People want activities that they can get involved in, such as sports and social programs to draw children and adults into coming to church. Many adults will ask what the church has to offer for their children, and when the answer is the teaching and preaching of the Word of God (and no activities), generally they will not come to visit. They want to bring the things of the world into the services, instead of dedicating the services to God and to the study of His Word. Why would the church want to bring in the "things of the world" when most of the world is doing everything to diminish God in our lives? Our schools from kindergarten all through college have taken God out of the classrooms. It is so important today that the whole family attends church at all times, to combat the world and its teachings. Parents, make sure you take your children to every church service, because it is the only place outside the home they will learn about God. Hebrews 12:1 says, "**let us lay aside every weight.**" We are obligated and responsible to keep ourselves from sin, we are responsible to abide by God's commands, and it is our responsibility to be dedicated to our church services.

What are the benefits of being in church? I have already touched on some of the benefits in this message. The biggest benefit is the fellowship with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. There is no greater need in our lives than to be in fellowship with Him.

The church is where we learn of Him, where we grow in a greater knowledge of His grace in our lives. It is where we learn what the Bible has for us to know about the things of God. Philippians 4:9 says, "**Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.**" The church is where we learn; and when we have learned, then we should "do." It is a place to go to fellowship with other Christians. Read I John 1:4-7. If we have fellowship with God, then we will have fellowship with one another. It is a place where we receive blessings when we are faithful to God.

Is the Lord satisfied with our service? Read Titus 1:15-16. I know this passage is talking of those who do not believe in Christ, but we can see the sentence that states, "**they profess that they know God; but in works they deny him.**" Do we, as God's people, profess that we believe, when He tells us we are to meet with Him on the first day of the week, or whenever the church has set aside to worship, and then make it a point to distance ourselves from the services whenever we feel like it? Are we denying Him in our work of service to Him? God will judge us in the last day. Our judgment will not be whether we go to Heaven or Hell, but we will be judged on our works that we have done in our Christian lives. Our church service is only one of the works that God expects from us, and that we will be judged for. I Peter 4:17 says, "**For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?**" John 3:16 says, "**For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten**

Son." Christ died on the cross of Calvary for our sins. His love for us is perfect. Does our service to him reflect our love for Him? (I John 4:7-10).

In conclusion to this message, I must ask the question as Christ asked His disciples when He told them that He is the bread of life to believers and they began to murmur among themselves (John 6:61). He asked, "**Doth this offend you?**" Does anything in this message offend you? If you are offended, then you are probably one of the ones who does not dedicate themselves to the church service as you ought. If you are not offended, then you are probably a faithful member of one of the Lord's churches, and you attend whenever the doors are open when you are not providentially hindered. I ask a question to all churches. Do you have members who are not dedicated to church service? I am sure most do. I also have a question for pastors. Do you preach and teach that members are commanded to be dedicated to church service? I am sure most do. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "**Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.**" Trust in Him to give you the ability and the desire to be dedicated to church service.

I want to close with a portion of Spurgeon's book "*Morning and Evening*" for February 3rd. Read carefully and glean from its teachings.

"**Tell me....where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon.**" Song of Solomon 1:7. These words express the desire of the believer after Christ, and his longing for present communion with Him. Where dost Thou feed Thy flock? In Thy house? I will go,

if I may find Thee there. In private prayer? Then I will pray without ceasing. In the Word? Then I will read it diligently. In Thine ordinances? Then I will walk in them with all my heart. Tell me where Thou feedest, for wherever Thou standest as the Shepherd, there will I lie down as a sheep; for none but Thyself can supply my need. I cannot be satisfied to be apart from thee. My soul hungers and thirsts for the refreshment of Thy presence. "Where dost Thou make Thy flock to rest at noon?" For whether at dawn or noon, my only rest must be where Thou art and Thy beloved flock. My soul's rest must be a grace-given rest, and can only be found in Thee. Where is the shadow of that rock? Why should I not repose beneath it? "Why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?" Thou hast companions—why should I not be one? Satan tells me I am unworthy; but I always was unworthy, and yet Thou hast long loved me; and therefore my unworthiness cannot be a bar to my having fellowship with Thee now. It is true I am weak in faith, and prone to fall, but my very feebleness is the reason why I should always be where Thou feedest Thy flock, that I may be strengthened, and preserved in safety beside the still waters. Why should I turn aside? There is no reason why I should, but there are a thousand reasons why I should not, for Jesus beckons me to come. If He withdraw Himself a little, it is but to make me prize His presence more. Now that I am grieved and distressed at being away from Him, He will lead me yet again to that sheltered nook where the lambs of His fold are sheltered from the burning sun.



Two Kinds of Faith

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not saved by this kind of faith and neither are sinners. Some people think that if they will add to their mental belief certain actions they will be saved. They may take it upon themselves to be baptized. They think that baptism will save them. Or perhaps they perform other religious rituals. Perhaps they attend church, financially support their church, take the Lord's supper and do good works. But the Bible is clear: works have nothing to do with salvation. The Bible says, **"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast"** (Eph. 2:8-9).

The second kind of faith is **"the faith of God's elect"** (Titus 1:1). Romans 10:10 says, **"For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."** This second kind of faith – the kind that results in a sinner being righteous in God's eyes – is a matter of the heart and not of the head. This kind of faith follows repentance. Repentance is produced by godly sorrow – an emotional experience which God brings to pass in the heart of His elect people. II Corinthians 7:10 says, **"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death."** God breaks the hearts of His elect over their sins and they experience godly sorrow. This in turn works repentance – a turning from sin to God. Repentance is accompanied with faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable twins. Paul said that he preached precisely this: **"Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance**

toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). Whenever repentance and faith are mentioned in the Bible repentance always precedes faith. This faith is the casting of the sinner upon the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work. This kind of faith puts you in company with Abraham, for we read: **"For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness"** (Rom. 4:3). Further to this point the Bible says: **"Now it was not written for his [Abraham's] sake alone, that it was imputed [accounted] to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed [accounted], if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification"** (Rom. 4:23-25). [Brackets added].



Church at Smyrna

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thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death" (Rev. 2:8-11).

Of all the seven letters dictated by Christ and recorded by John, the briefest is the one to the Smyrna Church. Not one word of reproach is addressed to this witnessing and suffering church. The Lord Jesus spoke to them only words of commendation and encouragement. She represented the state of the church under the persecutions of the Roman

Emperors.

THE CHURCH (V. 8)

We know nothing as to the origin and founder of the church in the city of Smyrna. All we know for certain is that there existed a church there in A.D. 96 when this epistle was written. Since Acts 19:10 says all Asia Minor heard the gospel preached by the Apostle Paul during the two years he was at Ephesus, we may surmise Paul could have been its founder. At least it must have been in some way connected with the work of his missionary team.

As to who the pastor of the church was when this letter was penned is not certain, but it probably was Polycarp. Irenaeus, who knew him, said he was pastor of the church in A.D. 108. We do know that Polycarp suffered martyrdom under Marcus Aurelius in A.D. 169. He told the proconsul at his trial he had been a Christian 86 years. This would place his conversion in A.D. 82 and make him about 28 or 29 years old at the time this epistle was written. Both Tertullian and Eusebius affirm he was pastor of this church. Thus there is good reason to believe the angel of the Smyrna Church to whom John wrote was Polycarp, himself a disciple of the Apostle John.

THE CITY (V. 8)

The city of Smyrna dates from about 1500 B.C., having been founded by some piratical Greeks. It was located some 40 miles north of Ephesus at the mouth of a small river, Meles. It was one of the most beautiful Greek cities ever erected. Smyrna was at the head of the gulf of Smyrna, where the hills of Asia Minor ran down to the blue waters of the Aegean Sea. The gulf of Smyrna reached back into the inland of Asia Minor for about 35 miles. Ships could enter that harbor and dock to load and

unload cargo. This made Smyrna a celebrated commercial center in the days of John.

Smyrna received its name from her traffic in the balsam herb for which it was world famous. It was the port of the fragrant perfume Myrrh. The same Greek word translated Smyrna in Revelation 2:8 of our King James Version is also translated "myrrh" in Matthew 2:11 and John 19:39. This perfume had a sacred use in Old Testament times (Ex. 30:23) and was used as a love perfume in Solomon's day (S. of S. 1:13; Prov. 7:17).

In the city of Smyrna was what was called the Golden Street. It began at the seaside, at the harbor, and ran the length of the city up to the Acropolis on Mount Pagos, where stood the temple of Zeus. At the beginning of this street, near the sea, was the gorgeous Greek temple to the goddess Cybele. Farther up was the beautiful temple to Apollo. Still farther up, there was the temple to Aesculapius and the temple to the goddess Aphrodite. Along this same street was a monument to Homer, the Greek poet who was born in Smyrna.

Smyrna was known in John's day for its famous hill which had a crown of buildings encircling it, a most magnificent sight to behold from its harbor. There was a citadel situated on the hill called "The Golden Lined Palace." Heathen temples adjoined the palace. These buildings were said to have girdled the hill and glittered like a crown. Hence Smyrna was sometimes called "the crown city." The citadel itself was called "the crown of Smyrna." The city still exists today and is now called Izmir, the Turkish corruption for Smyrna. It has a present population of about

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The Berea Baptist Banner Forum

Submit your questions on any Bible topic.

1. Many Christians use the phrase "God bless." Is this scriptural?
Internet

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I believe it is very Scriptural. For one thing I do not believe in "Luck," so I never say, "have a good day" and "Good Luck." Or wow, you were or are very "Lucky." All good things come from God. **"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning"** (James 1:17).

Everything is ordained by the Lord. If it rains on my garden and I asked God for that rain, does it just rain on my garden alone? **"That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust"** (Matt. 5:45).

Some use these next verses as a repetitious saying in their ritualistic services, but that was not what it was intended for when the Lord spoke it to Moses, **"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and**

give thee peace" (Num. 6:22-26). Also, please read Psalms 67.

We are to be a "blessing" not a curse to everyone, and ask God to "bless" them. Do we not ask God to "bless America?" Do you know the lyrics to "God Bless America" by Irving Berlin? Or "America the Beautiful" by Katharine Lee Bates that are in most hymnals?

I do not wish harm on any and I have known some who do, I have heard some say that they pray that the Lord would deal with someone they have had words with, or bring upon them hurt "seven times" because of their sins against them. I take it they are referring to the Book of Leviticus, **"And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins"** (Lev. 26:21). To me that is vengeance; God has already condemned the unrighteous to the **"Lake of Fire"** He does not need my help to bring more hurt upon someone when they could be a child of the Living God. Oh, do not get me wrong, I have had my times of being so furious with someone that I could knock their block off or do them bodily harm, but I do not recall praying to God to rain fire and brimstone down upon them or deal with them "Seven Times" more harm. Many forget we are sinners, too, and when God brings me to that place, then I realize they need salvation, if it would please Him. See, I know not God's elect, but He does. Let us see, was it not David that refused to do harm to Saul, the reason being he was the Lord's anointed.

"And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD" (I Sam. 24:6). Read also chapter 26.

One last thought, because it is in the back of my mind. In II John it says, **"If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds"** (II John 1:10-11). This would be the exception. If I knowingly know that one is a Jehovah's Witness or some other cult, then I am very careful. I will say, "have a nice day," but never "May God Bless You," or "God Bless."

My prayer is that God's elect will come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ whoever they may be. **"Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities"** (Acts 3:26). Paul said he was the "chief of sinners" and the Lord saved him, so there is hope for all, because again, I do not know who all of God's elect are. Paul said it better than I can, **"Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not"** (Rom. 12:14). God Bless!

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If you examine the Pauline Epistles the apostle often ends the letters with a request for grace, love, and peace to be extended

to the people he was writing to. II Corinthians 13:11-14 states: **"Finally brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you. Greet one another with an holy kiss. All the saints salute you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen."** Other passages that are similar may be found in Romans 16:24; I Corinthians 16:23-24; Galatians 6:18; Ephesians 6:23-24; Philippians 4:23; Colossians 3:18; I Thessalonians 5:28; II Thessalonians 3:18; II Timothy 4:22; Titus 3:15; Philemon 25 and Hebrews 13:25. All of these passages may be construed as elongated versions of the simple phrase we often use "God bless."

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I would be one of those many Christians that use this marvelous phrase of "God Bless!" The meaning of this word "bless" is "to be, or to make happy." "God make you happy," would be the TMS definition here at Big Creek Baptist Church! Selah! Think about it!

At least 13 times we find this phrase (or adaptation) in the KJV Bible. Isaac speaking to Jacob is the first in Genesis 28:3, **"And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people."** Usually, I try to end my phone calls, or a

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The Berea Baptist Banner Forum

Submit your questions on any Bible topic.

2. Is it wrong for churches to be involved in politics as a church (assembled group) and/or should we openly take part in political movements? Internet

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The main business of the Lord's church is set forth in Matthew 28:19-20: **"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."** Our main focus should be pointing men, women, boys, and girls to Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation, baptizing those who believe the Gospel, and then teach them the commandments and principles of Christ.

I believe the doctrines, teachings, and principles of Christ along with the worldwide spread of the Gospel have had a profound effect upon political movements and governments over the last 2,000 years. This is especially true when examining the discovery and founding of America. Folks were leaving Europe to escape political oppression, governmental tyranny, and persecution because of their religious beliefs. There is no question that genuine Christianity has had a political component attached to it as evidenced by America's Declaration of Independence, the

Bill of Rights, the Constitution, and laws in general. We are the first country to really establish the principle of religious liberty to worship according to the dictates of one's own conscious, coupled with the right to have freedom of speech apart from governmental coercion.

A casual reading of John T. Christian's "History of the Baptists" reveals that the American Baptists were very much involved in the Revolutionary War and the framing of the Constitution of the United States. A few excerpts will suffice to prove that our Baptist forefathers had a great deal of political influence:

"Only patriots could be trusted; and true men with the American spirit and liberty were imperatively demanded. The Baptists were such men. They were accustomed to a hardy life; had long been trained in the rugged school of experience; were loyal and trusted citizens; and above all were endured with the spirit of wisdom and liberty. Not a man of them proved a traitor. They cast their united strength into the American cause. The Baptists were among the first of the religious bodies to recognize the authority of the Continental Congress" (Vol. 2, p. 229). "The first colony to take an official stand against Great Britain was Rhode Island....The Baptists have always been, says Morgan Edwards, more numerous than any other sect of Christians in Rhode Island; two-fifths of the inhabitants, at least, are reputed

Baptists. The governors, deputy-governors, judges, assembly men and officers, civil and military, are chiefly of that persuasion....The first work of the Rhode Islanders after their incorporation in 1644, was to make a law that Every man who submits peaceably to civil government in this Colony shall worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience without molestation" (Vol 2, pp. 232-233). "The Baptists of South Carolina likewise took a noble stand. Richard Furman, a young man was pastor in Charleston. He was an ardent advocate of rebellion. Everywhere, on stumps and in barns, as well as in pulpits, he preached resistance to Britain. Pursued by the Tories, young Furman fled to the American camp, and there by his prayers and eloquent appeals so reassured the patriots that Cornwallis is said to have remarked that he feared the prayers of that godly youth more than the armies of Sumter and Marion" (Vol. 2, p. 234).

From the excerpts above I think is apparent that the Baptists of early America definitely were involved in the quest for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In fact, without the efforts and influence of the Lord's churches we may not have the United States of America or the constitutional rights of religious liberty and freedom of speech.

With that said I have been a pastor of two different Baptist churches for nearly 29 years. I have never endorsed a candidate or a party from the pulpit. I urge our members to exercise their right to vote. I think it is vital for Baptists to be involved in the community. Our lives, ideals, and principles of Christianity should be diligently spread. One of the reasons we are losing our freedoms is because we are not

exposing the progressive religion of the state which is secular humanism. Every time I preach against homosexuality, abortion, evolution, etc. I am taking a stand against the evils of our government for promoting such wickedness. When I preach about the sin of lying I am taking a stand against nearly every politician! Whether you like it or not when you preach and practice the truths of the Scriptures you will be perceived by most in society as taking part in politics. It seems as though nearly everything in our society is becoming politicized. That is why the progressives have been trying to banish the Bible and Christianity from the public forum for years.

I long for the day when King Jesus will put down all the systems of men to rule and reign upon this earth for a thousand years! How I long for the millennium of spirituality, peace, and love that will permeate the earth when Jesus comes to reign!

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It is not wrong for church members to be involved in politics. The pastor and every member should be a vital and "involved" member in every institution God has put them in! I should be an involved and faithful father, husband and son in my family! I should be an involved and faithful pastor and member in the Big Creek Baptist Church! Not any less, I should be an involved and faithful citizen, voter, legislator,

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Forum #1

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conversation with a “God Bless.” Whether it is an old friend, or a customer for whom I have installed a garage door, especially as our conversation has turned toward the Lord and spiritual things. What a marvelous way to end a visit or acquaintance- with a “God Bless!”

If there would be a concern about saying “God Bless,” it would be more along the line of the sanctifying aspect of the word “bless.” **“And Joseph said unto his father, They are my sons, whom God hath given me in this place. And he said, Bring them, I pray thee, unto me, and I will bless them”** (Gen 48:9). In this passage, we see that the “make happy” aspect of “bless” can be part of our worship and service to the God of ALL blessings! Jacob has no real ability to “bless” the sons of Joseph, other than that this blessing signifies that his prayers will be that God would make them happy and blessed in their lives. God, in some Biblical passages, has given some prophetic ability to His people concerning the future, but that ability is no longer with us, upon the completion of God’s Holy Bible. **“..whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away”** (I Cor. 13:8-10).

Another example of this “sanctifying blessing” is in Exodus 23:25, **“And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee.”** Every

time we partake of God’s bounty upon our table, we should offer up a Prayer of Thanksgiving and “bless” the bread we eat, that we might glorify and serve our Master with the benefits of the “blessed meal”...! Selah! Think about it! **“When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee”** (Deut. 8:10). Only with a thankful and obedient heart can we “bless” God” or “make Him happy!” **“Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee...”** (Isa. 62:3-4).

We do need to be more specific with our “God bless” at times. We cannot say open-handedly “God bless America” anymore! When we were a Christian nation that as a whole attempted to glorify God and keep His commandments, it was quite appropriate to say “God bless America.” But now that she has turned her back on the Lord (as a whole- legislatively, judicially and executively), we have to specify HOW we would “bless America.” Usually I end my prayers and conversations about my beloved country with the extended phrase, “God bless America with repentance and faith!” Repentance from our sins and renewed faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Daniel 9:3-19 is a great example prayer for God’s people in this day and age.

One last distinction, I would like to make is the difference between God bless and God speed. To say “God speed” is to say “God give wings of success to

your endeavors.” **“If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds”** (II John 1:10-11). Even to our enemies we can pray that God would “bless” them with salvation and deliverance from their sins and wickedness. But not God speed! Not further sped along their path of destruction! But, our continual desire should be to see EVERY soul on this Earth to be God blessed! Made Happy! Because true happiness can ONLY be found in the eternal, electing love of our wondrous Saviour! Selah! Think about it!

MATTHEW STEPP



Forum #2

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political leader and soldier for my beloved United States of America! Selah! Think about it!

We should be educated and “involved” in politics enough to inform our neighbors and friends and even debate our “political foes” about the necessity of aligning our “politics” with God’s Word! **“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues.”** (Matt. 10:16-17). Christians are not to be stupid! Along with being **“harmless as doves”** we are to be **“wise as serpents!”** We are to know who to vote for, know which propositions to stand for and to wisely choose the future path of our families, churches and governments! Selah! Think about it!

And, “yes,” the church, as an

assembled group is to be “involved” in politics! It is not left up to us, as individuals, to “guess” or have an opinion about what is right or wrong, or to extend the premise, WHOM is the right or wrong candidate! God’s Word sends out a MANDATE on righteousness! This would involve the pastors and teachers of our American churches entering the pulpit and lectern with sermons and lessons dealing with political issues, current moral issues, the eternal righteousness of God, relevant judgments of God, the reality of God’s blessings and cursings upon people (and countries) that walk in the paths of iniquity or uprightness! **“And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not”** (Ezra 7:25).

For the sanctity of our country and people, we should not hesitate to name names from the pulpit! Elected officials that are destroying the moral fabric of our nation should be held accountable in our pulpits! There should be sermons in Houston, Texas and Ashland, Kentucky denouncing the election of a lesbian mayor! It should rightly be called an abomination from the pulpit! How else will the sheep in our flocks be warned? Young Christians need teaching and preaching in all aspects of their lives, that they will not get anywhere else! Do you think our public schools will teach them to vote godly and to stand up against the “Obamanations” of this country’s current leaders? Do you think they will get godly information from our current liberal media and social outlets? Our churches have a HUGE

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Forum #2

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responsibility to be politically involved! American Revolution pulpits in the 18th century rang with sermons of “both” kinds of election- and so should ours! God will hold us accountable if we do not inform our members on how to vote and specific candidates to vote for or against!

As to the second half of the question: “No.” Political movements can never receive sanctioning approval from the Body of Christ in their local communities. A New Testament church has no authority over any, but its own members. A church holds no sway over the multitudes, to command or direct- only to evangelize and educate.

But, that does not limit our membership from political movements! If duty calls, we should put our lives on the line to stand up for our churches and the guiding principles of our God! **“Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king’s house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish”** (Esther 4:13-16). Do not just pray for God to stop abortion,

if we are not doing anything substantial in our communities to inform the people and advance the cause in every possible way! Do not hold our peace! Go to the kings! Endanger our lives if necessary and **“if I perish, I perish!”** Selah! Think about it!

“And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.” (*Declaration of Independence*, July 4, 1776).

MATTHEW STEPP



Yes, I believe it is wrong for churches to be involved in politics as a church (assembled group) and/or should we openly take part in political movements.

I will tell you what a wise man of God, a mentor to me, and the founder/editor of the BBB now home with the Lord told me one time about this very thing. This is paraphrased because I can not remember what he said verbatim, but he said it is a waste of time, and a Christian has more important things to do with their time like prayer, reading, and study!

We are not called to stand and picket or assemble in an open group or such like for any reason. But we are called to prayer, (ever hear of door knocking?) You know, one person can go door knocking, I would recommend at least two. But who wants to do that old boring stuff when they could be at a big political convention, right? Question; what can you accomplish at a

political movement, when God is in full control of the outcome? What we need to see is souls saved...So what part of **“Go ye therefore”** do we not understand?

“But as for me, my prayer is unto thee, O LORD, in an acceptable time: O God, in the multitude of thy mercy hear me, in the truth of thy salvation” (Ps. 69:13).

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6).

“Pray without ceasing” (I Thess. 5:17).

“I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (I Tim. 2:8).

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:25).

I am afraid that many would rather go to a political movement than to assemble themselves in the church house.

Let us be clear on one thing, I am not opposed to getting together with others down on the square to hear organizations like the “Tea Party,” but time may be well spent keeping the “Great Commission” (Matt. 28:19-20), and preaching the **“Word”** (II Timothy 4:2), **“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”**

May we be more diligent in our service to a Holy Sovereign God, and Saviour Who gave **“His life a ransom for many”** (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). God Bless!

ROGER REED



Church at Smyrna

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275,000 people.

THE CHRIST (v. 8)

The description of Christ is twofold and very suggestive. The two natures of Christ can be seen in these titles or attributes: **“These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.”** Jesus Christ is the first cause and the last end of all things---the eternal Jehovah (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12). Christ is the origin of all things. He is before and prior to all things. He is the chief in importance, in order and in dignity. He was before all things and by Him all things consist.

Consider the title **“the first.”** Jesus Christ did not begin when He was born in Bethlehem some 1900 years ago. He existed in the beginning as the self-existent One: **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”** (John 1:1). The eternal Son of God was active **“from the days of eternity”** (Micah 5:2 margin). Jesus Christ, the Second Person in the holy Trinity, always existed. He never came into being; there was never a time when He did not exist. He is an eternal Being.

Christ is not only **“the first”** but also **“the last.”** As **“the first”** He is before all time and above all as supreme. As **“the last”** He is after all, closing all up, for He is the consummation of all things. He, in the end of time, will complete what He purposed to do in eternity.

How practical these attributes of Christ must have been to the suffering Smyrna Church. These Christians were undergoing the most frightful persecutions. When Christ said, “I am the first,” He declared that all things had their

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Church at Smyrna

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origin in Him. Nothing happened to them by chance. The terrible trials through which this church was passing were not unknown or unforeseen to Christ. He planned the experiences of their lives and nothing could happen to them but what His grace permitted.

How cheering the saying: "I am the last." When all other human comforters were gone, Christ would remain at the side of this little church until their last extremity (Isa. 43:2). Christ would never leave them nor forsake them. He would be with them until the end of life, the end of time, and in eternity to come. The last sight they would see would not be sorrow, sickness, suffering, sin or Satan. It would be Jesus Christ their Savior. He would keep them till the river rolled its waters at their feet, and then He would bear them safely over, where the loved ones they would meet.

The speaker said He became dead and was alive to die no more. How consoling these words! It was as if Christ said: "I have been through what you are suffering on account of your faith and fidelity. Death did its worse to me. Nevertheless, I live---I conquered it---I have the keys of death and Hades---I died to abolish death. I am a living Savior. Do not fear what man may do unto you. He can only kill the body. Do not be afraid. I will land you safe on Heaven's shore.

THE COMMENDATION (vv. 9-10)

"**I know thy works.**" This is Christ's uniform method of introducing these epistles. In each case it implies the intimate acquaintance of the Head of the church with all that pertained to

the activities of His body. this was a working church. Their good works proceeded from the influence of the gospel, flowed from love to Christ, and were produced by a sense of redeeming grace. The church at Smyrna performed these good works under very unfavorable circumstances, which greatly enhanced their value.

"**I know. . .thy tribulation. . .**" The word "**tribulation**" suggests the threshing-rollers of the Romans, those heavy stones which ground wheat and forced blood out of grapes. This word indicates confinement within narrow limits. It points to the pressure their enemies exerted upon them by persecution, affliction and oppression. These Christians suffered because they insisted on the worship of one God in a city where they worshipped many gods.

"**I know. . .thy. . .poverty.**" Their tribulation had probably produced their poverty. These dedicated Christians had experienced real poverty. It cost them something to be a Christian. Their material goods had been confiscated. They had been reduced to an inferior position because of their loyalty to Christ. What has your loyalty to Christ cost you?

Jesus Christ was not unacquainted with poverty. He was born to poor parents in a stable. He owned no house and had no place to lay His head. He was buried in a borrowed tomb. Our Saviour became poor for the sake of His people (II Cor. 8:9). Hence Christ was eminently qualified to sympathize with the church at Smyrna.

Smyrna was a poor but rich church: "**I know. . .thy. . .poverty (but thou art rich).**" Their wealth was spiritual. So far as treasures in Heaven were concerned this was a millionaire church. Only spiritual

wealth will abide. "The Christian owns all Heaven. He walks its streets, not as a foreigner but as owner. The mansions, the angels, the tree of life, the streets of gold, the gates of pearl, Christ, God---are his. The mansion is his home; the angels are his companions; the tree of life is his shade and nourishment; God is his Father, and Christ is his Brother. The Christian is 'rich toward God'" (CHRIST'S LAST MESSAGE TO HIS CHURCH, p. 104).

"**I know the blasphemy of them that say they are Jews.**" The church at Smyrna suffered the reproach of the Jews. They were sneered at by those who claimed the exclusive privileges of being followers of God. Such wickedness brought contempt upon the very name they bore. This body of religious pretenders, who railed against the church, were in the sight of Christ "**the synagogue of Satan.**" The same crowd would a few years later demand the violent death of Polycarp, the aged pastor of the Smyrna Church. It is said that the Jews gathered the fuel to burn Polycarp.

Satan is a counterfeiter. Just as sure as there is the true church of Christ there is also the church of Satan. The Prince of Darkness has his own churches, ministers, members, creeds, doctrines and versions of the Bible. This Evil Strategist is spreading "isms" throughout the world. All heresy is a part of Satan's plan to steal souls.

The Evil One is the accuser of the brethren. He is a vilifier, a traducer, a false accuser of the saints. Those who engage in gossip, blasphemy, vilification are members of the synagogue of Satan. Gossip had broken the hearts of the members of the suffering church in the city of

Smyrna.

Christ did not promise exemption from suffering to this church. Rather, He said: "**Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer.**" They had already suffered, and they were about to suffer more. Christ exhorts this church to be brave, to be manly and to endure the suffering set before them. Christ does not deliver from suffering, but He has promised to be with His churches in suffering.

"**Behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried.**" No doubt men did this casting into prison, but Satan was the real instigator of it. The Prince of Darkness is the real source of the spirit of persecution. Behind the passions and prejudices of men and their persecution lies the malignity and malice of the Devil. Kings, magistrates and popes, when they become persecutors, become the instruments of him who is the accuser of the brethren and the murderer from the beginning.

"**Ye shall have tribulation ten days.**" Both the tribulation and the days are literal here. "**Ten days**" is a definite number and must be taken in its literal sense, so far as the primary meaning is concerned. The suffering was certain but it was of a limited duration. All Christian suffering is brief when compared to eternal glory which will never end. Thank God! all grief of God's sending has an ending.

"**Be thou faithful unto death.**" It does not read "until death," but "**unto death.**" The meaning is that death must not cause them to waver in their faithfulness to Christ. Loyalty to Christ is everything. Christ must be magnified in our body, whether by life or by death (Phil. 1:20).

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Church at Smyrna

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The pastor of the Smyrna Church was Polycarp. He took seriously His Master's words. When brought before the proconsul in Smyrna and asked to blaspheme Christ, he answered, "Fourscore and six years have I served Christ, neither hath He ever wronged me at any time; how then can I now deny my Savior and King?" The proconsul then urged him to swear by the fortune of Caesar: to which he replied, "That the Christian religion taught obedience to the civil government, but to swear by Caesar's fortune out of vain glory he must decline." He was then threatened with wild beasts, fire, and torments; he, however, stood unmoved, saying, "You threaten me with fire, which shall last but an hour and is quickly quenched; but you are ignorant of the everlasting fire of the day of judgment, and of those endless torments which are reserved for the wicked! But why do you delay? Appoint me what death you please."

Such confidence confounded the proconsul, who was amazed at such a display of courage in an old man. They sentenced him to the flames. In the midst of the fire, he thus addressed his prayer to Heaven, O, God! the Father of thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, and through Whom we have received the knowledge of thee! O God, the Creator of all things, upon thee I call, thee I confess to be the true God; thee I glorify. Oh! Lord, receive me and make me a partaker of the resurrection of thy saints, through the merits of our great High Priest thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and Holy Spirit be honor and glory for ever, Amen." Polycarp was faithful "unto

death." Praise God!

How such courage and faith shame us today! It is wrong to parade our religion, but it is criminal to hide it, too. Christ does not need soft and flabby Christians. He needs people with firmness and backbone. Seeing there are so many who speak against Christ, surely those who believe on Him should not be afraid to speak up and for Him.

"I will give thee a crown of life." Suffering here is followed by glory hereafter. He who gives up his life for Christ shall be given a crown of life by Christ---a triumphant immortality! This crown, like other rewards of encouragements, is given personally by Christ: **"I will give."** This will be a literal crown upon the head of the martyr, who won in the battle of life. Such a person shall have a crown which will by far outstrip the crowned city of Smyrna!

COMFORT (v. 11)

The letter closes with a promise to the overcomer: **"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."** The promise is to those who should gain the victory in the persecutions which would come upon them. The overcomer would not give up his Christian profession although opposed and persecuted. O Lord, please give such Christians today!

Jesus said the overcomer **"shall not be hurt of the second death."** The second death must be that which follows the death of the body, which is the first death. The second death is the death of the spirit---absolute exclusion of the spirit from God and the enjoyment of His presence (Rev. 20:6, 14; 21:8). Physical death cuts off from this life; the second death cuts off from eternal life. Death

puts an end to all hopes here; the second death ends all hopes for ever. The death of the spirit is to never see Heaven, never enjoy eternal life, and never share the glories of the saints' rewards.

The overcomer who dies for Christ is sure to be delivered from a more fearful death---the death of the spirit. Beyond the grave there is no power that can harm the overcomer. Happy martyrs! The first death shall not hurt you; and the second shall have no power over you!



"God with Us"

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what is told and heard will not be true and will not call men's attention to the One Who is Immanuel, **"God with us"**. Let us part with some misconceptions, misunderstandings, and utter falsehoods before we go into the main portion of the message. There is not one shred of anything called "Christmas" in the Scriptures; there is no commandment from our Lord, Who stated, **"If ye love me, keep my commandments"** (John 14:15), and, **"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you"** (John 15:14) to observe any such day or season, or to celebrate His birth (although we are instructed on numerous occasions to remember His death and watch for His coming again); and no one knows on what day Jesus' birth did occur. What is unfortunate is that people will become offended if these truths are told and yet they know not that He Who was born King of the Jews is He Who created the world and all things therein, and that only He can save them from their sins. Most all of the things which people do in connection with this so-called "Christian

holiday" began hundreds of years before Christ was born, and are connected with pagan idolatry (Jer. 10:1-7). Jesus is not the reason for the season.

That which Matthew records in our text by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God reveals the truth concerning the birth of the Saviour. Matthew here quotes from the Old Testament to show the fulfillment of God's Word in relation to God being manifest in the flesh to save His people from their sins (Isa. 7:14). In our text, Matthew records the Hebrew name Immanuel. Matthew's gospel, along with the rest of the New Testament, was written in Greek, and was first read by Greek-reading and Greek-speaking people. Therefore, Matthew gives us the interpretation of the Hebrew name which refers to Christ: **"and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."** This name teaches us something about Jesus Christ. A name has the significance of identifying the thing that is named uniquely from everything else. When a person calls you by name, you know that person is speaking to you as an individual. The name Pleasant Plains Baptist Church tells us something about this body: it tells us what this body is, specifically a local, visible assembly in a particular place, or a church; it tells us what kind of church that it is, specifically Baptist; it tells us where that body is to be found, specifically in Pleasant Plains. The name of the church tells us something about the church, and the name in our text tells us something about Jesus Christ: He is **"God with us."**

Consider at the outset of this message, beloved, that this name which applies to our wonderful

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“God with Us”

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Lord and Saviour Who humbled Himself to be born as a man and take on the form of a servant shows us the very means by which salvation is provided by God for fallen men, women, boys, and girls. Note that we are not told that the name means “us with God,” or “God for us,” or even “us and God for each other,” which is the type of false gospel being proclaimed by many today. I once heard a man state, “God has cast one vote for you, the devil has cast one vote against you, and you cast the deciding vote.” Such cute sounding rubbish has landed and will continue to land many a soul in a fiery Hell where the fire is not quenched and the worm dieth not. The only way you, or I or anyone else ever did and ever would “cast their vote,” if you will, is away from God. **“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God”** (Rom. 8:7-8). The only hope for lost man is the grace of Almighty God. Man does not move toward or with God, he moves away from God. **“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way”** (Isa. 53:6). We were not for God, and we certainly would never have been with God, except that God was with us. The only way people ever willingly come to Christ is in that Christ conquers their will and brings them to Himself. To this end He came, to exercise His saving power to rescue us from our own sinful, lost, and fallen estate, and to rule over our hearts in righteousness. He is **“GOD with us.”**

Men, women, boys, and girls

can be and are saved because of **“God with us”**. If it was “us with God” that saved, none would be saved; but thanks be unto God that it is **“God with us”**. **“God with us”** shows that it is His power that saves, for we alone are doomed forever under the just condemnation of our sins. **“God with us”** shows that God is the initiator and we are the recipient beneficiaries in salvation. **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16).

HIS INCARNATION

(Read I Tim. 3:16 and I John 4:1-3) He took upon himself flesh and blood and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh to die for sinful men, women, boys, and girls. Explain the term incarnation. He took upon Himself human nature, but not sinful nature; flesh, but not fleshliness; He was born of a woman, but was not of the seed of fallen Adam.

- He hungered: Matt. 4:1-4
- He alone feeds hungry souls: John 6:31-33, 47-51
- He was tempted, and He alone is a helper to them who are tempted: Heb. 2:14-18
- He groaned and wept: John 11:32-28, Luke 19:41
- He overcame death
- He thirsted: **“There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink”** (John 4:7), John 19:28.
- He gave that woman the water of life: **“But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life”** (John 4:14).
- He is God and He is man, the

fullness of the Godhead bodily dwelling in Him. He is **“God with us.”**

This Jesus, Who shall be called **“Emmanuel”**, is the only One Who can save your soul. He did not come to simply show men a way to be saved - He is the way!

OUR PRESENT HELP

“God with us” is what enables us to serve God and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. To the unsaved, this means nothing - to the saved, this means everything. This is our spiritual story, **“God with us”**. Here is that One of whom the wise man wrote, **“there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother”** (Prov. 18:24). As **“Enoch walked with God”** (Gen. 5:24), so may we also experience walking with Him on a daily basis because of **“God with us.”** He shares our experiences and bears our burdens: **“casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you”** (I Pet. 5:7). We cannot be separated from His power, presence, and love, because He is **“God with us.”** He is more than for us, He is with us. He does more than be on our side, He takes up our part.

We experience **“God with us”** in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the intercession of Christ on our behalf. These two things are spiritually intertwined (Rom. 8:9-11). Peter preached on the day of Pentecost concerning Christ, **“Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear”** (Acts 2:33). Christ obtained the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, and Christ has given the Spirit to all them that are His, being saved by grace through faith (John 14:16-17; 16:13-14). We who are

saved have the Spirit dwelling in us, whom Christ has sent. The Spirit witnesses to our spirits that we are the children of God, leads us into all truth, and convicts of sin and righteousness. The Holy Spirit works in us to perform the will of God in our lives through our willing obedience to God’s Word.

(Rom. 8:26-27), Christ Who is in Heaven seated at the right hand of the Father and the Holy Spirit dwelling in us work together to help us in the present. The Spirit makes intercession for us when we pray; and Christ knows perfectly the mind of the Spirit and makes intercession for us unto the Father, from Whom all blessings flow. The Spirit and Christ know our needs and infirmities perfectly, even more so than we know them ourselves (Heb. 4:14-16). This is **“God with us,”** our present help. Jesus knows how to supply your every need, and He knows more about your needs than you do. Have you wept? Have you been poor? Have you been alone? Have you been slandered, reproached, reviled, mocked, laughed at, scorned, or persecuted? So has Christ, and He is with us!

OUR FUTURE HOPE

“God with us” is also our future hope and expectation (John 14:1-4, Rev. 21:1-3). Jesus did not come and take upon Himself the seed of Abraham and endure the cross, despising the shame, simply so that I might not taste of Hell’s flames, but rather so that He might be with me and I with Him. Jesus prayed thus, **“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world”** (John

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“God with Us”

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17:24). Our hope as saints of God is “**God with us,**” our expectation for the future, for which we watch and pray no matter what state we are in, “**Even so, come, Lord Jesus**” (Rev. 22:20).

OUR BANNER

This is our banner, “**God with us.**” (Ps. 20:1-5), God’s name is our banner. This is that which we raise up identifying our cause, under which we fight the good fight of faith, and which we hold to as our protection from the enemy, the name of the Lord. We have no creed, we have Christ – “**God with us.**” To Him we have, as it were, sworn our allegiance. All that we do is to be done in His name to the honor of His name (Ex. 17:8-16). Moses called this place of victory over the enemies of God after the name of the Lord, “**Jehovah-nissi**” - “The LORD my banner.” We are not a weak and feeble church because of “**God with us.**” All that we do should be because of “**God with us.**”



**Quotes
from
Brother
Ritechus
N.
Dignation**
by Joseph Harris

I keep hearing conform, conform, conform, stoop to the world’s level, speak their language and then we will reach them. Well Jesus didn’t call us to conform to this world, but to be transformed above it. He expects His people to be different. If we are no different from the world, then what do we have to offer them?

THE

BIBLE AND THE NEWSPAPER

Readers of the BBB are urged to submit religious news items which they may read in their local paper or some other publication. In sending these please give the name of the publication as well as the date it was printed. We will not be able to print all which are submitted, but we welcome any item you may feel we should read.

Send them to The Berea Baptist Banner, PO Box 39, Mantachie, MS 38855-0039.

NEW HHS CONTRACEPTIVE RULES FOR NONPROFITS FAIL COURT TEST

(WNS)--A federal judge in Florida ruled the Obama administration’s latest exemption policy for nonprofit organizations that object to the contraceptive mandate does not do enough to protect their religious freedom. Judge James S. Moody Jr., appointed by President Bill Clinton, issued a temporary injunction that protects Ave Maria University, a Catholic college in southwest Florida, from penalties if it does not comply with the contraceptive mandate rules. Those rules require employers to provide a variety of contraceptives, some of which can act as abortifacients, to employees free-of-charge as part of their health insurance plans. Ave Maria objects to all contraception and sterilization as immoral and considers abortion and the use of abortifacient drugs a grave sin, according to court documents.

WILL PUERTO RICO TAKE MARRIAGE TO THE SUPREME COURT?

(WNS)--A federal judge in Puerto Rico affirmed in late October an existing marriage law after dozens of others have gone the opposite way in the past year. Puerto Rico is part of the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, seated in Boston. U.S. District Judge Juan M. Pérez-Giménez, an appointee of President Jimmy Carter, wrote a 21-page opinion that relied on basic principles and legal precedent,

points other courts have rejected. He looked to a 1972 U.S. Supreme Court ruling called *Baker v. Nelson*. The *Baker* case involved a gay couple’s attempt to get a marriage license from the state of Minnesota. The state Supreme Court upheld marriage as between a man and a woman. The couple appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, but the court dismissed the case, saying it did not raise a substantial federal question. That case is precedent and still stands. It was not reversed by the Supreme Court’s *U.S. v. Windsor* decision last summer, and the 1st Circuit upheld it as controlling precedent just two years ago.

FEDERAL JUDGE OVERTURNS MARRIAGE LAW IN SOUTH CAROLINA

(WNS)--A federal judge has declared South Carolina’s marriage laws unconstitutional, overturning a constitutional amendment adopted by voters in 2006. U.S. District Judge Richard Gergel stayed his ruling until Nov. 20, giving state Attorney General Alan Wilson time to appeal the ruling. But any appeal likely will fail. South Carolina is part of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which has upheld similar rulings in other states. South Carolina was the last state within the circuit to recognize marriage as only between one man and one woman. Last month, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal from Virginia of the 4th Circuit opinion that overturned its marriage laws, paving the way for

gay marriage to become legal in all states within the circuit.

6TH CIRCUIT UPHOLDS MARRIAGE LAWS IN FOUR STATES

(WNS)--A federal appeals court ruled in favor of laws protecting marriage between one man and one woman in four states, the first in the country to do so. The 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reversed lower court rulings that overturned marriage laws in Michigan and Kentucky and required Ohio and Tennessee to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states. The ruling in Tennessee applied only to a few cases. The cases before the 6th Circuit also included questions about whether gay couples should be allowed to adopt children and whether same-sex partners should be included on death certificates. A three-judge panel concluded states have a right to set their own rules on marriage. Judge Jeffrey Sutton, who wrote the opinion, appeared to be the swing vote during oral arguments in August. He seemed skeptical of trying to force the issue through the courts. “I would have thought the best way to get respect and dignity is through the democratic process,” Sutton said then. “Nothing happens as quickly as we would like it.”

OKLAHOMA PRO-LIFE LAWS ON HOLD PENDING COURT CHALLENGES

(WNS)--Oklahoma’s Supreme Court blocked two pro-life laws Nov. 4 while lawsuits challenging their constitutionality make their way through lower courts. Both laws took effect Nov. 1. One required adherence to Food and Drug Administration guidelines when administering the abortifacient RU-486. A district court in Oklahoma had recently decided to allow

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the law to take effect. The other law required that abortionists obtain admitting privileges at a local hospital. The Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR) filed suit in October against both laws. CRR's president, Nancy Northrup, called the decision a "crucial victory" for protecting constitutional rights and safe abortions. But the court's decision is out of step with the state's voters, said Tony Lauinger, president of Oklahomans for Life. "We are disappointed in yet another example of arbitrariness by the Oklahoma Supreme Court," he said. "The Supreme Court is the last bastion of pro-abortion liberalism in Oklahoma. And our state Supreme Court does not reflect the values of the people of Oklahoma."

SUPREME COURT ALLOWS SAME-SEX MARRIAGES IN KANSAS

(WNS)--The Supreme Court has ruled same-sex marriages can begin in Kansas while a lower court considers a case against existing state law. In early November, federal district Judge Daniel Crabtree issued a preliminary injunction against the Kansas constitutional amendment that defines marriage as between one man and one woman. A full suit on the case is pending, but Crabtree's ruling means same-sex couples can receive marriage licenses in the meantime. Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt appealed the ruling and requested an emergency stay from the Supreme Court. Justice Sonia Sotomayor put Crabtree's ruling on hold while the high court reviewed the case. It issued only a brief order announcing its decision, with Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas dissenting.

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFS

CHINA ANNOUNCES NEW TWO-CHILD POLICY

(WNS)--A researcher for the Chinese government announced in October that all couples in China will be allowed to have a second child in two years, the latest easing of the 1979 one-child policy, according to Bloomberg. "People wish to choose the number of children they want to have, and they should be given the choice, at least for two children," said Cai Fang, a vice director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Last year, President Xi Jinping allowed couples to have two children if one of the parents is an only child. Ethnic minorities, rural villagers, or parents whose first child is disabled, are also allowed more than one child. Reggie Littlejohn, president of Women's Rights Without Frontiers, said in a statement "the problem with the one-child policy is not the number of children "allowed." Rather, it is the fact that the CCP is telling women how many children they can have and then enforcing that limit through forced abortion, forced sterilization, and infanticide." The government has deemed forced abortions illegal, but the practice still continues in the countryside. At the same time, cultural preference for boys has led to a gender imbalance as parents abort their baby girls.

"And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply..." (Gen. 1:28).

CHINESE WOMAN DENIED U.S. ASYLUM FOR ROLE ENFORCING ONE-CHILD POLICY

(WNS)--A federal appeals court in New York rejected a Chinese woman's request for asylum because of her more than two-decade involvement in enforcing the country's one-child policy. Suzhen Meng, 61, worked for

22 years as the regional public security officer in Wuhan, Hubei, overseeing about 1,100 households. Women in the region are only allowed one child each, and she testified to reporting women with unauthorized pregnancies to China's family planning office. Meng also admitted she was aware that the women she reported would be punished "typically by being forced to undergo an abortion or sterilization," according to court documents. Meng said she saw the women being "dragged away forcibly by the police."

CANADIAN LAW SOCIETY REVERSES DECISION, WILL NOT ACCEPT CHRISTIAN LAW GRADS

(WNS)--The governing board of the Law Society of British Columbia decided last week not to admit graduates of Trinity Western University's proposed law school, reversing an earlier decision to accept the alumni. The about-face came after the society's member attorneys voted overwhelmingly to shut out the Christian school's graduates. Trinity Western spokesman Guy Saffold said the university is "disappointed" in the decision but it does not end plans for the law school. The 50-year-old school enrolls more than 4,000 students annually and requires all students and staff to sign a covenant outlining expected conduct. In 2012, TWU announced it planned to open a law school. The Canadian Bar Association and The Council of Canadian Law Deans opposed the program's accreditation, claiming the school's belief in traditional marriage made it incapable of training students to uphold Canadian law, particularly since same-sex marriage has been legal in Canada since 2005.



Stirred But Not Changed

By Curtis Pugh
of Poteau, Oklahoma

Every sound Baptist preacher with whom I have spoken on the matter deplores the sad spiritual state of the majority of Christians today. On the one hand there is the sad spiritual state of those poor professing Christians – perhaps genuine children of God among them – who have been fed a diet of "milk" polluted with the poison of Arminianism. Then there are those Baptists who profess to believe in sovereign grace, but who have never been really taught the Bible. They have heard topical sermons, doctrinal sermons, allegorical preaching, textual preaching and the like: all of which is "milk." But they have not heard consistent expository or exegetical preaching. Remember: "milk is what you get from the cow, but the meat is the cow herself." Apply that to preaching. If preaching is just "from the Bible" it is milk. If the Word itself is "served up" – that is, taught expositoryly, it is spiritual meat. Expository or exegetical Bible teaching is explaining the Word itself: what they did in Ezra's day: **"So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading"** (Neh. 8:8). Reading, explaining the meaning, and enabling people to understand the Word: what is wrong with doing that today? Those who are fed only "milk" will remain babies, spiritually. But on the other hand, Baptists are supposed to be people of the

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Book. They ought to be healthy “spiritual carnivores” excitedly feeding on the meat of the Word.

Paul observed babyhood (carnality) in the saints in Corinth. He wrote: **“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?”** (I Cor. 3:1-4). Few will disagree that prolonged infancy among God’s people is a problem today just as it was in Corinth. We have looked for a cure for this ailment, but settled for “snake oil.”

Not too far back in Baptist history - in the 1800’s - a new movement swept into American Baptist ranks. It was supposed to be the cure-all for carnality, deadness and apathy. Its foremost promoter was a man named Charles Finney. This fellow Finney was a Presbyterian who had rejected the concept of God’s absolute sovereignty and ran to the extreme free-will position. He is possibly the one Protestant that has influenced American Baptists more than any other. Finney was an advocate of the notion that man’s will had not been affected by Adam’s fall. He believed that all men could come in a saving way to Christ apart from any work of grace.

Today’s popular views of those that object to God’s

sovereignty are properly called neo-Arminianism (new Arminianism) and semi-pelagianism - a somewhat modified form of the doctrines of Pelagius. We generally lump all these “free-willers” together and just call them Arminians. However, neither Arminius nor historic Arminians would have tolerated the practices of those who follow their teaching. Today’s Arminians have run to seed on easy-believe-ism. Whether they call upon the lost to come to the front, pray a prayer, lift their hands, blink at the preacher or make a decision for Christ - or perhaps one of a half-dozen other things - they practice such things because of their belief. And their belief is that man’s will was not ruined or even affected by Adam’s fall. Man is a sinner: this they will admit. But they believe that man is a sinner because he sins. He can, they say, of his own free will choose Christ and good. The Bible, however, teaches that man sins because he is a sinner: that he was ruined by the fall of Adam and therefore will not and cannot do what is required of him in order to please God. Romans 8:8 proves that a natural man cannot please God: **“So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.”** Furthermore, sinners cannot come to Christ apart from God’s drawing them. The Lord Jesus said, **“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day”** (John 6:44). Whatever you believe about the natural (unregenerate) man’s will, by his will he cannot please God and cannot come to Christ in a saving way. None of his choices, decisions, or acts please God! “Revival meetings” are based

upon Finney-ism: the idea that men can please God if stirred up. Uh-oh! These two ideas are incompatible! Either Finney-ism (revivalism) is right or the Bible is right! Which will you choose?

So we have this fellow Charles Finney come upon the American scene. Prior to his “ministry” Baptists believed that true revival was a move of the sovereign God among His people. They believed the prayers of God’s people were a scriptural means. Consequently, they believed the saints of God needed to be occupied with prayer for revival. The old Baptists believed that a real revival had to be “prayed down.” It came from heaven and was sent by God in answer to the prayers of His people. Mr. Finney did not believe that a revival had to be “prayed down,” but rather that it could be “worked up.” Organization, publicity, musical specials of the right type, loud enthusiastic preaching, scare tactics, prolonged “altar calls,” emotional appeals to come forward - these and other psychologically manipulative tricks have been adopted and used by the followers of Finney. The fact that such “invitation system” tactics were never employed by the apostles did not matter to Finney. Nor does that fact matter to those who follow after the traditions inherited from Finney and his followers.

“Old timers” told of going to “camp meetings” and “revivals” just to watch the emotional displays of those affected by revivalist tactics. Later they would watch the “conversions” and “re-dedications” fizzle away into nothingness as “converts” and “rededicated” folk most often went back to their old lifestyles. Such “revival meetings” provided entertainment prior

to the days of radio, movies, and TV. Today confusion reigns in the minds of people as to the purpose of “revival meetings.” Often what is called a “revival meeting” is actually an effort to “get folks saved” as the Arminians say. In other words, it is a series of evangelistic meetings. Occasionally folk understand that “revival meetings” are held to stir up the church to more zeal and activity - and perhaps living a more holy life. Thus “altar calls” for “salvation” and “re-dedication” are commonplace in spite of the total absence of such things in the New Testament. “Get ‘em emotionally wound up, make ‘em feel guilty, get ‘em down the aisle to weep and “dedicate” or “rededicate” and send ‘em home.” that’s how it goes. If they stick, they stick. If they do not, too bad. Maybe next time they go through the cycle they will stick. And on the “revival circuit” many are recycled repeatedly year after year!

Not all revivalists are of the sort I am about to describe, but one Pentecostal preacher of a bygone day told a younger preacher how to tell when the revival was over in a place. He said, “When you can turn all the people upside down and cannot shake any more money out of them, the revival is over.” How is it that in “revival meetings” and “evangelistic services” most Baptist churches take offerings? No doubt **“wisdom is justified of her children”** (Matt. 11:19) and someone will come up with a soothing answer for my criticism. But passing the hat among unsaved folk asking them to pay for their own evangelization seems contrary to apostolic principles as stated in III John 1:7.

Stirred But Not

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Now back in the good old days revival meetings were different than today. Many times only the beginning date was announced. Meetings would be held both during the daytime and the evening. The idea of no ending date was that the series of meetings would last as long as “God was working.” Later, in order to allow the “evangelist” to schedule more meetings (and perhaps because of the decreased interest on the part of the people) “revivals” were shortened to two weeks. Then, beginning sometime later in the mid to late 1900s they were shortened to only a week: later, to only Monday through Friday evenings. And in some places now there are “weekend revivals” held on Friday and Saturday evenings and perhaps Sunday mornings. The entertainment value of “revivals” has been surpassed by sports, movies, restaurant meals and weekend trips. “Revival preachers” just cannot even begin to compete unless they are themselves really unusual and unusually good at something or another: music, karate, slight of hand, being ethnically different, preaching while standing on their heads, or perhaps being the world’s fastest guitar picker or the world’s strongest man or an “ex” secret agent, “ex” pugilist or “ex” something or other.

A good number of years ago a pastor said to me: “I am tired of being stirred and not being changed.” His words have remained with me. Perhaps it is your experience too! Is that not what the “revivalist” does? His aim is to stir people up. If he is a “good preacher,” he is able to excite the flesh and that is what

he does. His means is to affect at least some of people’s five senses. We have yet to hear of a revivalist who is a great chef and delights Baptist congregations with his cooking skills and thus tickles their taste buds. But the other four senses: feeling, hearing, seeing and, yes, smelling, have all been targeted by “revivalist” type preachers. I was in a Baptist meeting where the preacher had prearranged with certain men to spray air freshener into the air conditioning system at the proper moment so that it was smelled throughout the building. His topic: “The Secret Ingredient In The Anointing Oil.” The climax of his message was: “Can you smell it?” And for a moment, a thrill of wonderment went through the crowd as the fragrance spread – I repeat, for a moment. The people were stirred, but not changed: entertained, but not blessed! In speech classes we used to be required to prepare and make speeches with different aims. One kind of speech had the aim to entertain. How many “revival” sermons only entertain? The more of the five senses the “evangelist” can entertain and consequently the more he can stir people determines how good an “evangelist” he is. (Nobody goes away from a “revival meeting” saying, “I really heard some deep teaching from the Word of God tonight.”) Let no one think that most “revivalists” do not use all sorts of psychological manipulative methods/tricks. The “invitation system” itself is psychological manipulation! Is it any wonder that the pastor just quoted – and we think a large number of other Baptists – are “tired of being stirred and not being changed.” Is that the case with many if not most of God’s children who have experienced

spiritual nausea by the repeated “stirring” without real spiritual change? God’s children hunger and thirst after righteousness: personal growth in holiness. If you are not concerned about being more like the Lord Jesus whom you profess to follow, there is something wrong with your experience. You do not need a “revival” or a “re-dedication” (whatever that is). You need to be born again!

Shall we continue with the vain traditions received from Charles Finney and some of our Baptist fathers or shall we turn again to the Lord? The Psalmist prayed thus: **“Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?”** (Ps. 85:6). He knew that revival – true revival – had to come from God. He prayed to God for it. Revival is to be desired because it brings joy (not mere happiness or fleshly delight) to God’s people. This verse says so! Have we forgotten that joy – real inner joy – is important, yea, necessary to God’s people? Nehemiah 8:10 says, **“..the joy of the LORD is your strength.”** Little joy equals little strength. Do you desire the spiritual strength necessary to change? Will you seek a revival – a real move of God – in your life and in your church? Or will you reason this way: to be on the safe side: churches should hold prayer meetings – special prayer meetings – begging God for revival – and just to be sure, bring in the best, high-powered “stirrer” (“evangelist”) around. In this way we can trust God and trust Finney at the same time! How sad that we might even consider such a thing!

Do not the words, “I am tired of being stirred and not being changed,” reflect that jaded condition that exists among

many Baptists because of the failed methods of Charles Finney and his followers? The word jaded is defined as, “feeling or showing a lack of interest and excitement caused by having done or experienced too much of something.” Jaded by having experienced too much stirring without any real change! What should we have expected? Can our Baptist churches really think to experience true revival by humanistic means? Should we not have seen this “burn out” – this jaded condition – coming? Is not the apathy and casual attitude toward the things of God not due at least in large part to “stirring” people, but without change? This jaded condition is not the fault of the church members. It is not even the fault of the pastors. It is the fault of Arminian thinking. It is the fault of Charles Finney. It is the fault of Baptist tradition! (Many a pastor will be criticized and opposed by some members and fellow pastors in his clique if he dares suggest not having the “annual revival.” After all, it is a tradition! You cannot be spiritual or succeed without Finney in your church.) Anybody remember what the Lord Jesus and Paul said about tradition? (See Mark 7:9, 13; Colossians 2:8).

What is the solution? Bigger, more impressive and more entertaining “revivalists?” Having seen that bringing in the clowns has not only not worked, but has done harm, shall we continue with the same entertainment-based tradition? Being already in this rut shall we continue down it? Someone said “a rut is just a grave with both ends knocked out.” Are we too dead, dense and spiritually blind to see that the “revival rut” is not bringing

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Stirred But Not

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growth and spiritual change to God's people? Seeing that the "revival meeting" path leads nowhere spiritually profitable, shall we Baptists blindly follow traditions of our own making? Or shall we get back to the Bible? Shall we go back to the methods of the apostles? What an innovative thought! Go back to Bible methods: apostolic methods? Just patiently preaching and teaching expository messages through the Bible? But that is so slow, unglamorous, and unattractive to the world and the flesh! Yes it is! But who are we fooling? Are we trying to be attractive to the world and the flesh? Or are we sincerely desiring to experience true revival: true change? Is it not both reasonable and biblical to think that feeding babes in Christ healthy "meat" - God's Word - will result in healthy, real and lasting growth? And is not spiritual growth the "change" that God's people need and want? After all, spiritual growth is positive change. And spiritual growth does not come from hearing "top-water" preaching. Shallow topical, textual, running-commentary-type preaching is not the meat of the Word! It takes time and effort to prepare a meal: it takes time and work to prepare a hearty spiritual meal. The apostles said, **"But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word"** (Acts 6:4): and this in their own local, Jerusalem church!

Churches do not need a gymnasium or a "dynamic young wavy haired evangelist" or any kind of religious entertainment. Churches do not need a gun club, or a concealed carry class.

Churches do not need Awana, a ladies aid society, a ball team or even new uniforms. In short, churches do not need any more fleshly tripe. (Tripe is literally the stomach of an animal eaten as food: by implication it means, "something that is worthless, unimportant, or of poor quality.") A church needs healthy meals - spiritual meals - served however often she meets. She is to be served for the most part by her pastor and other gifted men whom God may have placed within. Preachers are servants to the congregations, you know. That is what Paul wrote: **"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake"** (II Cor. 4:5). Barnes says this means the pastor's time, talents and best efforts and plans belong to the congregation of which the preacher is the bond-slave. Feeding a congregation "spiritual meat" will require intensive study on the part of those men and prayer on the part of the whole church - prayer for them - and prayer for revival. The recognition of a need is the first step is resolving that need. Will you be done with tripe and seek a true revival at the throne of grace? Will you seek the meat of the Word? May God so move upon His churches that they cease desiring mere "stirring" by psychological tricks and methods and seek real spiritual growth by feeding upon the consistent expository teaching of the Word of God. God has given us His "manual" and we have substituted Finney's methods for it. Our doing is our undoing. Oh that the members of Christ's congregations may be changed and not merely stirred!



Gleanings

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trusted for one solitary moment. He only chastens us in love, when He might justly punish us in wrath. He restores us from all our wanderings, and freely forgives our follies. He carries on His work within us, and generously supplies all our needs. He rejoices to save us, though mean as worms, and viler than the earth. He does all for us, and does all gladly, notwithstanding our ingratitude, perverseness, and rebellion; and why? He tells us, **"I have loved you."**

His love is displayed in what He intends to do for us. He will come in glory and majesty as our Bridegroom, to fetch us home, and openly marry us, and make us the partners of His throne, triumphs, and glory for ever. He will separate us from all sin and sinners, and every thing that can pain, trouble, or grieve us. He will clothe us with glory bright as the sun, and lasting as eternity. He will bring us to reign where we served, to triumph where we suffered, and clothe and crown us with glory where we were put to shame. He will fill us with joy unspeakable and full of glory, and give us to possess more than eye has seen, or ear heard, or the heart of man has conceived; and why? He tells us, **"I have loved you."** What will not love do? What has not the love of Jesus done, or promised to do? It is, it will be, it must be matter of wonder throughout eternity, that Jesus should love us so; so freely, so constantly, with love so pure, unbounded, and Godlike. Behold, how He loved us! Behold, and wonder! Behold, and praise! Behold, and love Him in return!



BEREA BAPTIST BROADCAST

Financial Report

10-1-2014 to 10-31-2014

Beginning Balance	\$7,266.74
RECEIPTS:	
Berea B. C., Mantachie, MS	225.00
Briar Creek B. C., Williamsburg, KY	100.00
Calvary Ind. B. C., Everson, WA	100.00
Grace B. C., Corbin, KY	100.00
.....	525.00
TOTAL	7,791.74
EXPENDITURES:	
Radio Time	563.98
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	563.98
.....	7,227.76
(Lost chk #826 added back in)	+200.00
.....	7,427.76
Interest06
ENDING BALANCE	\$7,427.82



BEREA BAPTIST BANNER

Financial Report

10-1-2014 to 10-31-2014

Beginning Balance	\$1,517.63
RECEIPTS:	
B.C. of Brimfield, Brimfield, IL	75.00
Berea B. C., Mantachie, MS	300.00
Berea B. C., Stonington, IL	60.00
Briar Creek B. C., Williamsburg, KY	150.00
Big Creek B. C., Wayne, WV	313.45
Carol Willitt, Edgewater, FL	50.00
Citrus M. B. C., Inverness, FL	25.00
Faith B. C., Lynn, AR	12.50
Gail Knowles, Scarborough, ME	220.00
Grace B. C., Corbin, KY	100.00
Grace B. C., Winston-Salem, NC	50.00
Grace M. B. C., Marion, IL	50.00
Grace M. B. C., Tulsa, OK	35.00
Grinter Heights B. C., Kansas City, KS	501.15
Indore B. C., Indore, WV	100.00
John Hammons, Grafton, WV	9.00
The Lord's Church, Goose Creek, SC	50.00
Mt. Pleasant B. C., Chesapeake, OH	100.00
New Testament B. C., Goshen, IN	50.00
Parkway Landmark B. C., Springfield, OR	100.00
Philadelphia B. C., Decatur, AL	100.00
Portland B. C., Plumerville, AR	50.00
Southside B. C., Fulton, MS	25.00
Sovereign Grace B. C., Burghill, OH	75.00
Sovereign Grace B. C., Northport, AL	100.00
Sovereign Grace B. C., Silsbee, TX	60.00
Victory B. C., Courtland, VA	25.00
Subscriptions	51.00
Anonymous	1,210.00
Dividing checks	150.00
Sub Total	\$4,197.10
TOTAL	\$5,714.73
EXPENDITURES:	
Printing	490.00
Postage	1,051.97
Wages	2,300.00
FICA	175.90
Dividing checks	150.00
Supplies	54.57
Total Expenditures	\$4,222.44
ENDING BALANCE	\$1,492.29

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Windsor Baptist Church of Windsor, IL is seeking a qualified candidate for pastor. They are small in number but rich in truth. Candidate should meet the qualification in I Timothy 3. For more information please contact Brother John Gregory at (217)728-8311 or Email windsorbaptist.grace@gmail.com.

The Community Missionary Baptist Church of Mansfield, LA is in need of a pastor. The church believes and preaches the Doctrines of Grace and church truth. Any interested Elder should contact Bro. Ray Darden at (318) 567-3961 or (318) 364-6302 or former pastor Elder Garthel L. Burr at (318) 872-3742.

The Sovereign Grace Baptist Church of Galena, OH is in need of a pastor. Any interested candidates possessing the qualifications and traits concerning the office as found in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 are asked to contact either of the following: Bro. Randy Coffey at (614) 871-2406 or email recoffeypot@aol.com, or Bro. Joe Vass at (614) 846-8699 or email jamijoe@wowway.com.

The Glade Creek Baptist Church, Summersville, WV is in need of a pastor. This church believes and preaches the doctrines of grace and church truth. Any interested Elder should call Bro. Rodney Perkins at (304) 742-3050 or Bro. Allen Frame at (304) 742-5775.

The Faith Missionary Baptist Church of Cobbitty, South Wales, Australia is in need of a

pastor. For more information please contact David Jackson at 4 Station Street, Thirlmere, NSW 2572, Australia or Email: shellie45@bigpond.com.au.

The Victory Baptist Church of Chehalis, Washington is in need of a pastor. Any interested brother may call Gerry Greisen at (360) 985-7975, or Mark Fenison at (360) 751-2929.

The Grace Missionary Baptist Church of Marion, IL is in need of a replacement pastor. Elder Raymond T. Ellis is the current pastor, but due to his age, is needing to resign. The church believes and preaches the doctrines of grace and the local church. Any interested Elder may contact Elder Ellis at (618) 983-8697 or Bro. Gary Ratley at (618) 841-0228.

The Twinbrook Hills Baptist Church of Hamilton, OH is prayerfully seeking a pastor. Organized in 1938, the church holds to historic Baptist truths, including the Doctrines of Grace. Please visit the church's website at <http://twinbrook.net> to view the Church Constitution and other items that describe our beliefs and show what the church is doing today. Please contact Bro. Chris Willis at Elohimfirst@gmail.com for more information.

GLEANINGS



The Love of Jesus

By James Smith
(1802 - 1862)

“I have loved you” (John 15:12).

Whom does Jesus love? Every believer whatever his outward circumstances may be. Every one that loves Him, or loves His saints because they are His, or are like Him, or for His sake. How wonderful that Jesus should love us, who are so mean, so debased, so ungrateful! It is; but it is a fact, and He has proved it in a variety of ways.

He displayed His love before we knew Him, or were even capable of doing so, in preferring our nature to the angels: they fell as we did, but their nature was more noble, their fall was from a greater eminence, yet He did not assume their nature to save them, but He became man to save us: and why? He tells us, “I have loved you.” In making a full atonement for our sins, He satisfied justice to the full. He removed the curse entirely. He produced for us a righteousness, sparkling with glory, beyond the

rays of the morning sun; and why? He tells us, “I have loved you.” In conquering all our spiritual adversaries, that had overcome our nature, and had taken captive our entire race. No human arm was strong enough to overcome them, no mere creature could escape from them: but He came, He fought, He conquered, He triumphed in our nature, in our name, for our sake; and why? He tells us, “I have loved you.” In going to Heaven as our forerunner. He has carried our nature into the presence of the Father, He has shown that the path to glory is practicable, and He is now actively employed in Heaven providing places for us; and why? He tells us, “I have loved you.” In sending the Holy Comforter, who comes in His name, to quicken, call, cleanse, and sanctify. By Him we are converted to God, prepared for glory, rendered useful in the present world, and comforted in all our tribulations. He was sent by Jesus into the church when first enthroned at the right hand of the Father, He was sent by Jesus into our hearts; and why? He tells us, “I have loved you.” In acting as our Intercessor and Advocate before the Father. “He made intercession for the transgressors.” He has pleaded for us, He does plead for us, He will continue to plead for us; and why? He tells us, “I have loved you.”

He has displayed His love in His dealings with us. He found us cruel, determined, unfeeling enemies; but He reconciled us, made us friends, and filled us with wonder at His love. He bare with us, while under conviction of sin, when we thought hardly of Him, doubted Him, and tried by all possible means to do without Him. He keeps us by His power and Holy Spirit, for we cannot be

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