

Can a Christian Be Miss America?

Marc W. Gibson

Over the years, Christians have been teaching their children how to live holy lives in an unholy world. Our young folks learn that there are many activities in this world that are not fit for Christians to participate in. The world finds great enjoyment in things that involve the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). One of those things is the ever-popular beauty pageant.

There is nothing wrong with beauty, or admiring beauty, whether in nature or in a person. The beauty pageant, though, takes it a step further. The physical form and beauty of a female girl or woman's body is put on display as an object to be judged. Clothing, or lack thereof, is worn to immodestly highlight the attractive features of the female body for all to observe. The swimsuit competition is a favorite part of these contests just for this reason. And it is just for this reason that faithful Christians have explained to their daughters that they cannot participate in such things and be righteous before their Creator.

But now it has happened. According to *The Christian Chronicle* (March 2006, 1, 27), a member of a church of Christ is now Miss America. Jennifer Berry, who was baptized in October 2005, at the Skiatook, Oklahoma church, won the 2006 Miss America pageant this past January 21. Perhaps someone will say, "Oh, she is a new Christian—she probably doesn't know any different yet." But hang on—there's more. Her traveling companion is Debbie Kendall,

who has served as the traveling companion for Miss Oklahoma winners for thirteen years. Mrs. Kendall is *the wife of a deacon at the Skiatook church*. What we have is a deacon's wife intimately involved in beauty pageants, encouraging and helping young women in this worldly pursuit! All this is reported with a front page picture and a flattering article in a journal that label's itself "an international newspaper for members of churches of Christ." In the past, brethren would have been ashamed to report such a thing.



Miss America 2005, Deidre Downs

It is reported that Mrs. Kendall had a hand in the conversion of Ms. Berry, which is wonderful, but I am more than disturbed about the obvious lack of concern for the worldliness that both of them are involved in! There is just no way to get around the fact that worldly activities and immodesty are at the core of these beauty pageants. Yet a deacon's wife continues to be a part of them and encourages others to do so with the apparent blessing of her husband and many of her spiritual brethren. Even the world understands that the purpose of the swimsuit competition is to seductively display the female *body*, not her brain, and certainly not her spirituality. In an article accompanying the PBS American Experience film, *Miss America*, we find this interesting comment:

The tension in the Miss America Pageant competition between judging women in swimsuits and offering them

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Special Privileges to Muslims

Mike Willis

In recent months, Muslims around the world have protested cartoons appearing in a Danish newspaper. There were street demonstrations and flag-burnings in the Middle East. Arab countries withdrew their ambassadors from Denmark. Danish citizens were warned about traveling to the Middle East. Some are moving to impose an international boycott of Denmark because of the cartoons (see Anthony Browne, "Denmark faces international boycott over Muslim cartoons," www.timesonline.co.uk).

Democratic societies are conflicted about how to react to the Muslim cartoons. On the one hand, they want to defend freedom of speech and freedom of the press. On the other hand, they do not want to inflame Muslims. Never mind that the Arab presses are inflaming their citizens to riot, burn, pillage, and kill because of the cartoons. The average Arab would not even have known about the Denmark cartoons were their leaders not inciting them.

Also, some European countries have laws prohibiting anti-Semitism. A professor was recently sentenced to prison for denying the Holocaust. The Muslims want similar protection for hate crimes against Muslims. But, do Islamic countries have any obligation to protect their minority Christian population and to stop the spread of hatred of Jews? Or do they want a privileged status with no responsibilities of equal treatment to others?

The cartoon incident has exposed a double standard in the press of democratic countries. The press does not hesitate to say anything it wishes to say about Christianity. The movie industry produces films that portray Jesus as involved in adultery with Mary Magdalene. The academic community censures "intelligent design" from participating in the discussion about man's origins, as if macro-evolution were a proven fact. The Christian view of homosexuality is attacked repeatedly on sit-coms and movies. On and on, one could go listing assaults against the value system of Christianity by mainstream media. But this same mainstream media is so sensitive to offending Muslims that they would not reproduce the offending cartoons in their news coverage of the international events. Suppose someone had published anti-Christian cartoons that offended the American Christian community. Do you think that the major news outlets would have shown

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Editorial Left-overs

Connie W. Adams

Speak Up, Brethren

It is a privilege to be called upon to lead public prayer. Careful thought should be exercised to express the petitions of the congregation. Such prayers do not need to be orations full of flowery language couched in well-worn expressions. Except on rare occasions, they do not need to be long. One thing that is often ignored is the fact that they need to be *heard*. If there is a microphone, please use it. Do not stand to the side but speak directly into it. If you are leading from your seat, then stand and speak as loudly and distinctly as the occasion requires. There are often a number of people in any congregation who do not hear well. Sometimes they do not know when the prayer begins or ends. They cannot make it their prayer when they simply cannot hear it. So, speak up, brethren. Some of us would like to be able to say “Amen.”

The Preacher’s Appearance

In this casual climate of “come as you are” the following item might be of some interest. I have a book entitled *Life In Utah* by J.H. Beadle. This is a well-documented expose of Mormonism in its early days in Utah, written by the editor of a Salt Lake City newspaper who was also a correspondent for the *Cincinnati Commercial*, a newspaper published in the middle of the last century. He wrote his impressions on hearing Joseph Young, the brother of Brigham Young.

... his brother, Joseph Young, preached the opening sermon, and I have no hesitation in pronouncing him the most inferior-looking man I ever saw in the pulpit, and I have seen some hard specimens. He is very old, very thin, very weak eyed, and rather sallow; his general appearance suggested that he had just slept a month, been awakened by a thunderstorm and come away without changing his clothes, washed in a mud puddle, and combed his hair by crawling through the sage brush. And yet, HE has four wives. Let the homely take courage. . .”

Later, he commented “I could not discover what was the special subject of Joseph Young’s remarks . . .” (256).

It is the duty of preachers to “preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2), and to seek to please God and not man (Gal. 1:10). Yet, every man bright enough to preach ought to know how to shine his shoes, comb his hair, tuck in his shirttail and straighten his tie. He should know enough to press the crease in his pants and

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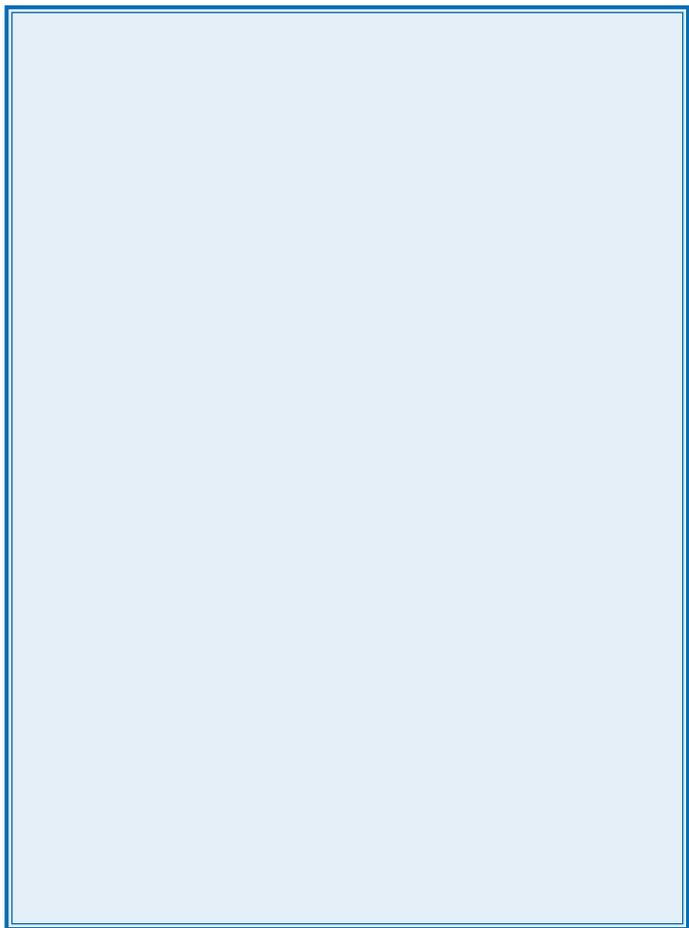
The “Old, Old Story” or the Story That Has Gotten Old?
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press the wrinkles out of his coat. If immodesty of apparel on a woman reflects a lack of shamefastness and sobriety, then slovenliness on man's part reflects a careless attitude which ill becomes a proclaimer of the gospel.

All cannot dress in finery, but all can be clean and tidy. Let us teach young men from the earliest of their public participation in worship, the importance of this principle. And by the way, how would you like for some reporter to hear you preach and then say he could not discover the topic of your discussion?

“You Left Out . . .”

As a preacher, I suppose one of my least favorite comments after a sermon is the astute observation “you left out” so and so. It would be the height of presumption for any preacher to even think he had said everything on a given subject or passage which could be said. A man needs to be as thoroughly saturated with the subject matter as possible, but in a sermon of reasonable length, he will not be able to cover everything he has learned on the subject. Even if he preaches a lengthy series on a subject, there will still be much that could be covered when he is done. In fact, every preacher much decide what to leave out in the interest of brevity.



I have never claimed that my sermons were exhaustive, though some have thought they were exhausting to the point of exasperation at times!

Sometimes such a comment reflects a desire to have the preacher grind an axe for someone, or elaborate upon some pet theory. I have never felt obligated to do this. On the other hand, no faithful servant of Christ should ever leave out some vital truth because he is afraid of how it will be received. The truth must be preached “in season and out of season” (2 Tim. 2:2-3). It requires very little courage to preach it “in season,” but that “out of season” part separates faithful men of God from mere hirelings. Paul said he “kept back nothing that was profitable” (Acts 20:20).

To a Hireling

Preach a sermon, preacher,
Make it short and sweet;
Our stomachs strike at 12 o'clock
A hungering for to eat.

Preach a sermon, preacher,
With words both smooth and fair,
For philosophy and theory we thirst;
For scripture we don't care.

Preach a sermon, preacher,
Punctuate it with jokes;
Fill it with your yarns and tales,
And entertain us folks.

Preach a sermon, preacher,
But don't get too specific;
As long as you will generalize
We think you are terrific!

Preach a sermon, preacher,
Make it good and plain (?)
But don't you dare to get so close
As to call sin by its name.

Preach a sermon, preacher,
Preach it round or flat;
We love to play at hide and seek
And guessing where you're “at.”

Preach a sermon, preacher,
Make it what we love to hear;
We'll pat you on your spineless back,
While you scratch our itching ear.

Hugh Davis

And let everyone say “Amen.”

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The Storms of Life

Mark Mayberry

Introduction

The Bible frequently refers to the tempests that fall upon nature. God's word also describes the storms of life that fall upon the righteous, and the crashing waves that overwhelm the wicked.

Fall Upon Nature

The Song of Deborah and Barak, celebrating Israel's victory over the Canaanites, says, "The stars fought from heaven, from their courses they fought against Sisera. The torrent of Kishon swept them away, the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon. O my soul, march on with strength" (Judg. 4:15-16; cf. 5:19-21). Elihu, the friend of Job, affirmed that God stands behind the storm (Job 37:5-13). Demonstrating his supremacy over the forces of nature, Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves, saying, "Peace, be still!" Immediately, the wind died down and it became perfectly calm (Mark 4:35-41).

Fall Upon the Righteous

Job decried his present state of humiliation, saying, "You lift me up to the wind and cause me to ride; and You dissolve me in a storm" (Job 30:20-22). Near the end of the book, God answered Job out of the storm, rebuking the afflicted patriarch for his ignorant accusations (Job 40:6-9). Nevertheless, if not in time, then in eternity, he delivers men from manifold storms of life (Job 42:10-17; cf. Ps. 107:23-32).

Fall Upon the Wicked

God will deal with the wicked: they as straw before the wind, and like chaff which the storm carries away (Job 21:17-18). In his judgment upon his enemies, God is like a whirlwind, a fire and a tempestuous storm (Ps. 83:13-18).

The consequences of rebellion are likened to a dreadful storm and a calamitous whirlwind (Prov. 1:24-31). God's judgment upon proud sinners is like a storm of hail and a tempest of destruction (Isa. 28:1-2). Jehovah's greatness is seen in his creative acts and his catastrophic judgments (Isa. 40:21-24).

Conclusion

God offers defense for the helpless and needy, a refuge from the storm and a shade from the heat (Isa. 25:4-5). The Lord comforts the storm-tossed (Isa. 54:11-13).

Jesus Christ, the Lord's Branch, offers shelter, refuge, and protection (Isa. 4:2-6). In Israel's glorious future, her king would reign righteously and her princes rule justly, each serving as a refuge from the wind and a shelter from the storm (Isa. 32:1-2). Christ is the foreshadowed King (John 1:49). The princes prefigure those who faithfully oversee the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-2).

Jesus said, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). Heaven is a place of perfect tranquility. God's throne is surrounded by a sea of glass (Rev. 4:5-6; 15:2). No evil disturbance will enter that glorious realm (Rev. 21:25-27).

Will your anchor hold in the storms of life (Heb. 6:13-20)? Do you know the peace of God that passes understanding (Phil. 4:6-7)? Obey God so you can enjoy his protection as you

face the storms of life. Submit to his will so that you may escape the storm of eternal torment.

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Review of the Reeves/Cook Debate

Dennis Carrow

With the advent of the social gospel, relative truth, and situation ethics, many consider “debate” as unnecessary, or even counterproductive to the cause of Christ. . . . A result of this debate has been no less than six souls who confessed Jesus as the Christ and were buried in the waters of baptism for the remission of their sins.

Introductory Comments

Over the past couple of decades there has been a significant decrease in the number of public religious discussions. There was a time when men were willing to stand before an audience and preach their religious convictions, share their faith with others, and allow those who disagreed with them to challenge their beliefs. With the advent of the social gospel, relative truth, and situation ethics, many consider “debate” as unnecessary, or even counterproductive to the cause of Christ. The Bruce Reeves/Gene Cook debate, which was held at the Reynolds Auditorium, on the campus of the University of Central Arkansas, proved that way of thinking to be flawed. A result of this debate has been no less than six souls who confessed Jesus as the Christ and were buried in the waters of baptism for the remission of their sins.

While I have seen public discourses in which two reverted to personal insults to defend their belief rather than exposition of the Scriptures, this debate was not so ordered. While there were times near the end of the debate, which will be observed in this review, when Mr. Cook, the Baptist minister, failed to refute the evidence presented by his opponent and became frustrated by the conclusions of his doctrine, overall the debate was conducted in a respectful, congenial decorum. The discussion accomplished what any religious discussion should seek to accomplish: two differing views being

presented and the light of God’s truth exposing the darkness of error.

About the Proposition

More than 350 people assembled four evenings (June 20-24, 2005) to hear two disputants respond to the propositions: (1) “the Scriptures teach that the alien sinner is forgiven of his past sins by faith only, before and without water baptism;” and (2) “the Scriptures teach that water baptism is essential in order for the alien sinner to obtain the forgiveness of his past sins.”

Gene Cook, pastor of the Covenant Baptist Church, San Diego, California would deny that water baptism was essential in order for one to have his past sins forgiven. Bruce Reeves, evangelist at the Hwy 65 church of Christ, Conway, Arkansas would affirm that baptism was essential in order for one to have his past sins forgiven.

Though the proposition addressed the essentiality of water baptism for the forgiveness of the sins of the alien sinner, the issues proved to be much deeper than that. To deny the essentiality of water baptism requires one to embrace a theology that denies that one *must* obey a direct command of God. This discussion required that the disputants define God’s grace, and answer the question, “Does God’s grace remove the essentiality of one humbly obeying God’s divine will?” I invite the reader to study the material presented in this discussion,

consider the evidence in light of God's word—then, if you have yet to do so, as those six souls did following this debate—do what the Lord would have you to do.

Keith Sharp, Brother Reeves' moderator for the debate, introduced the speakers, the propositions, and the protocol for the debate. His presence, as was witnessed on Friday evening of the debate, proved to be a critical element in keeping the debate balanced and in accordance with Hedge's Rules of Debate. The disputants had agreed to respond to five questions given to them by their opponent just prior to that night's discussion. The questions prepared by brother Reeves for Mr. Cook defined the debate from the outset.

Monday Night

On Monday evening when Mr. Cook began to respond to brother Reeves' questions, it was obvious that it was not a road he wished to travel. In fact, his opening comments included a warning to the audience, "watch what happens." Though he professed to be a Calvinist, he stated he was not there to defend Calvinism. However, immediately, his opening discourse was built on the first tenet of Calvinism, *inherited depravity*. The assertion that men inherited Adam's sin was the platform on which Mr. Cook began to construct his argument of "faith only."

When responding to questions about the baptism of Romans 6:3-4, Colossians 2:11-12, and Galatians 3:26-27, he admitted that it was essential for the remission of sins, but claimed that the passages referred to Holy Spirit baptism and not water baptism. This proved to give him trouble when he commented on Acts 8:12-16, regarding the baptism of the Samaritans, for there he said that Holy Spirit baptism is not what puts one into Christ. He equivocated by saying they were "closely related," then went on to comment we could not go to the book of Acts for doctrine.

Anticipating brother Reeves' refutation of his doctrine, Mr. Cook espoused a line of reasoning that the *works* of James 2 spoke of justification before men. Brother Reeves thoroughly refuted this assertion from the context, reading from verse 14, "Can faith *save* him?"

Tuesday Night

Tuesday proved to be a pivotal point in the debate. Mr. Cook was to be affirming salvation by faith only, before and without water baptism. To defend his doctrine, it required that Mr. Cook redefine the meaning of salvation as it is used in Scripture. This proved to be a strategically fatal move on the part of Mr. Cook. As he attempted to affirm salvation by faith only, he affirmed "regeneration is unconditional." When brother Reeves addressed the audience in his first rebuttal, he quickly proved the error of this position. Mr. Cook had signed a proposition that salvation was by faith only, but had stated justification came by faith, but only after one was regenerated. Mr. Cook equated regeneration with salvation, thus denying his own proposition. The consequence of the doctrine was "one was brought to life without faith!" From this point forward, Mr. Cook's effort to be consistent with Scripture or logical was futile, and the discussion began to center around unconditional election.

One glaring contradiction was observed as Mr. Cook's proof text of Romans 4:2-12 was examined by brother Reeves. "Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness," was suggested by Mr. Cook to affirm the doctrine of faith only. Following his affirmation that Abraham was justified by faith only, Mr. Cook denied Abraham's obedience had anything to do with his condition before God, or his justification. Much time was spent by Mr. Cook explaining how works (obedience to God's commands) had nothing to do with salvation. However, when brother Reeves addressed this text,

he proved that Abraham was justified by a working faith by introducing James 2:22-23, "faith was working together with his works . . . you see a man is justified by works and not by faith only." Mr. Cook went so far as to deny that Abraham was "justified" in Genesis 12 when he first received the promise of God and obeyed his word. This was a clear contradiction to his own proposition, and violates Hebrews 11:8 when "by faith Abraham obeyed" God. Though Mr. Cook presented a fair speech, he could not explain this contradiction.

One primary point to look for when reading or listening to Tuesday evening's discussion (while cloaked in convoluted language), Mr. Cook denies salvation is by faith only and affirms salvation is by election alone.

A pointed statement near the end of Mr. Cook's second speech was very revealing. As he denied the essentiality of obedience to God's word for salvation, he stated, "In the Bible, the sign is so closely related to the thing signified, the apostles could use the sign and the things signified and could speak of them interchangeably." He then used an example of Jesus being spoken of as the "Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world." His analogy was that as Jesus was not a literal lamb, so baptism does not literally remove sin. As you will observe in brother Reeves' response on Friday night, this analogy was detrimental to Mr. Cook's position.

Brother Reeves' final negative speech summarized the truth of God's word. He preached that faith, grace, and works are all a part of God's sovereign plan through which God saves man, but "man is not passive—man must be receptive and responsive to God's word." One effective refutation by brother Reeves came as he responded to Mr. Cook's accusation that placing baptism within God's plan of salvation had the "cart before the horse," to which brother Reeves responded, "if faith only is the horse,

he's dead, . . . because James says faith without works is dead . . . he's not going to pull anything 'cause he's dead as a hammer."

The power of God's word reigned as brother Reeves made his final appeal on Tuesday night, referencing Colossians 2:12, which states we are buried with Christ in baptism *through faith in the working of God*. Brother Reeves pleaded, "I am not teaching you a works system, I am teaching you the working of God." Clearly, this was the definitive point of the discussion.

Thursday Night

Brother Reeves' first affirmative included a recording of a quote from Mr. Cook during a previous night of the discussion in which he had stated, "If I have a contradiction in my interpretation, then I'll agree it is time for me to abandon that interpretation." Brother Reeves then played quotes in which Mr. Cook had contradicted himself when commenting on Acts 8 and Acts 10 in relation to when a man received the Holy Spirit of God and salvation.

Though Mr. Cook had referenced Titus 3:3-5 in his previous speech, brother Reeves pointed out that the *washing of regeneration* was water baptism by showing the correlation between Titus 3:3-5 and John 3:5. Brother Reeves' exposition of Acts 8:4-17 proved to be a critical and unanswerable argument for Mr. Cook. In his closing statements of his first speech, brother Reeves read 1 Peter 3:21 and explained that baptism was "an appeal to God for a good conscience." Then he asked a penetrating question: "Why would a person be appealing for a good conscience

if his conscience had already been cleansed by the blood of Jesus?"

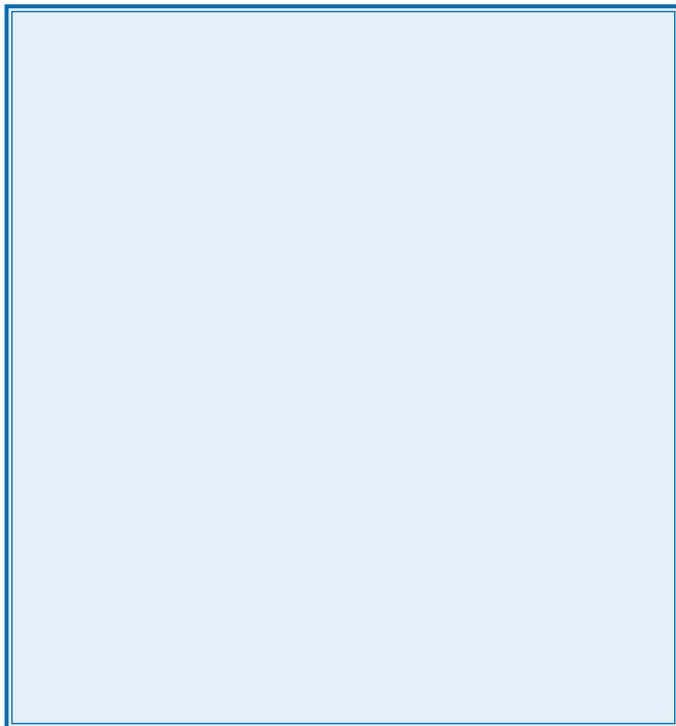
Unfortunately, when Mr. Cook was to answer the arguments presented by brother Reeves, he chose simply to repeat his previous affirmative speeches and never really responded to the Scriptures that teach water baptism is essential for the remission of sins. The extent of Mr. Cook's unwillingness to accept the word of God was revealed as he responded to the question, "What baptism put the Samaritans into Christ according to Acts 8:12-16?" To which he replied, "I would say regeneration was what put the Samaritans into Christ."

One incredible statement made by Mr. Cook was in response to the question, "Is it just for God to hold us accountable for something we are not able to do?" To which he said, "Yes it is."

Interestingly, although Mr. Cook had previously stated we could not go to Acts for doctrine, he spent most of his time quoting from the book of Acts in an attempt to establish his doctrine. Additionally, the primary foundation of Mr. Cook's denial of water baptism is based upon the theology that God "causes" one to obey, and that man is incapable of responding to God's word. Mr. Cook espoused that Ezekiel 36:25, John 3:3-5, and Titus 3:3-5 prove that when Scripture speaks of water, it is a metaphorical reference to the Holy Spirit and does not refer to water baptism. One peculiar argument made by Mr. Cook, as he concluded his final speech on this night, was his address of 1 Peter 3:21. He accused brother Reeves of quoting from the New American Standard translation because it fit his interpretation better, when this was the very translation Mr. Cook utilized. Brother Reeves quickly pointed out Friday night that his chart contained both the New King James and the New American Standard translation of the verse and this objection was quibbling on the part of Mr. Cook. Mr. Cook had discredited his position and left the audience with the inescapable conclusion that "baptism does now save us." His equivocation on this passage was that baptism and salvation were so closely related that they could be used interchangeably. This is tragic exegesis and led him to deny the power of the gospel.

Friday Night

Brother Reeves' first speech of the final night of the discussion provided an overwhelming number of responses to virtually every misapplication of Scripture made by Mr. Cook. "Romans is about obedient faith," brother Reeves stated, pointing the audience to Romans 10 and expounding on the text that plainly states one "*submits* to the righteousness of God." This passage, he stated, "refers to those who submit to the conditions set forth in the gospel of Christ." This was followed by references to the plain language of Mark 16:15-16.



One powerful rebuttal to Mr. Cook's equivocation on Tuesday night was taken from the words of Mr. Cook himself. Mr. Cook had referred to Jesus as the "Lamb" of God being the "sign," but not the literal lamb (correlating Christ the Lamb with baptism for the remission of sins). Brother Reeves then asked, "If the Lamb of God is the sign, does he literally take away the sins of the world? If that is the case, then baptism . . . literally is involved in taking away sin." (Brother Reeves then referenced Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, and 1 Peter 3:21.) A resounding exposition was set forth by brother Reeves on the meaning of the words, "baptism does now save us" (1 Pet. 3:21).

At the conclusion of brother Reeves' first speech, he played two dark and depraved statements Mr. Cook had made while attempting to defend his theology. These quotes proved to be the final blow of the debate. One quote, which had been played previously during the discussion, pointed to a theology espoused by Mr. Cook that places innocent babies in a devil's hell only because they are non-elect. The second quote of Mr. Cook stated, "The devil is God's devil, he does what God allows him to do, he does what God commands him to do, and no more and no less."

Mr. Cook pointedly replied in his first rebuttal that he was going to preach the gospel of grace, and if you rejected this gospel, you would be lost eternally. The peculiar aspect to such a statement is that he had previously stated regeneration, which was necessary for one to have the *ability* to believe, was an unconditional act of God. (This self-contradiction was ably pointed out by brother Reeves during his final speech.)

One disappointment during the final phase of the discussion was Mr. Cook's failure to reply to brother Reeves' first affirmative speech in his first negative speech. He simply preached a pre-determined script and saved new argumentation for his final speech. This is contrary to Hedge's Rules of Debate, and forced the moderator to call a point of order at the beginning of Mr. Cook's final speech. This was a defining moment in which the darkness of the doctrine of unconditional election was preached by Mr. Cook.

Brother Reeves had exposed the unconditional election aspect of Mr. Cook's theology in his final speech. He proved from Scripture that this was a dark, depraved doctrine with the illustration of a parent who spanked his child vehemently and there was nothing the child could do about it. Brother Reeves explained, "Mr. Cook's position is that we have a little baby, . . . if they are on the non-elect list . . . God is going to send them to hell because he foreordained before the world began that they be sent to hell." Mr. Reeves spent the remainder of his time revealing a loving God who desires all men to be saved, and concluded with an appeal to those of the audience who had never obeyed the gospel of Christ to submit to God through faith in the working of God.

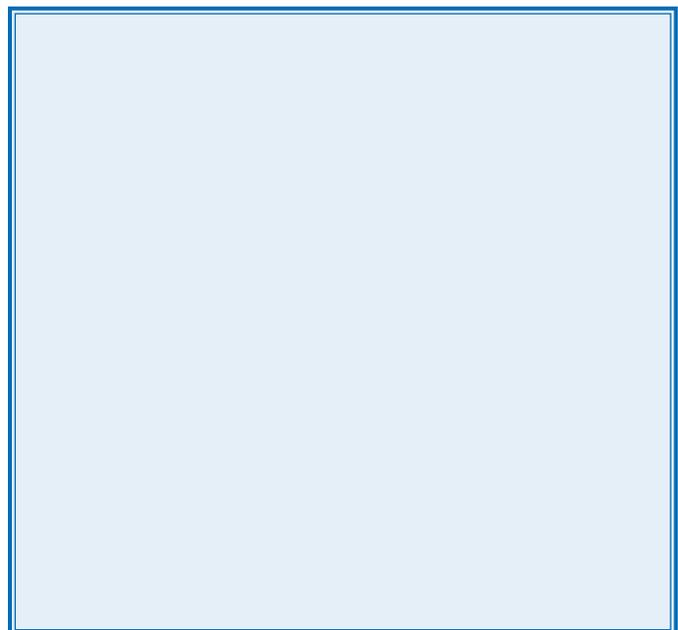
As I witnessed Mr. Cook's tragic depiction of God being exposed, I anticipated that when Mr. Cook took the podium with the final speech of the debate that he would deny that was an accurate picture of his God. However, the following quotes from Mr. Cook continue to stand as testimony to the depth of the darkness of the doctrine, "You just got up and heard Mr. Reeves make the argument that my version of God is a God who puts one baby on the baby list and another baby not on the baby list and I'm going to show you from Romans chapter 9 that that's what the Scripture says."

As if that were not sufficient, Mr. Cook went on to explain, "So when he (Bruce Reeves) stands over here and says, 'His (Gene Cook, Jr.) God is a monster, his God is not fair, his God sends little babies to hell, his God spansk babies indefinitely and there is nothing they can do about it,' he (Bruce Reeves) is really arguing against the God of the Bible."

As unbelievable as this statement may sound, this is the logical conclusion of a doctrine that denies the essentiality of obedience to the gospel. I invite you to read the book or listen to the CDs or DVDs of the debate; examine the Scriptures and realize, as brother Reeves stated in his closing remarks, "Jesus Christ shed His blood for each one of us, but we only receive the benefit of that blood when we render obedience to the gospel."

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For a free DVD or CD of the debate you may contact Bruce Reeves at 501-336-0052 or e-mail him at www.hwy65churchofchrist.org.



“The Church Across Town”

Jarrood Jacobs

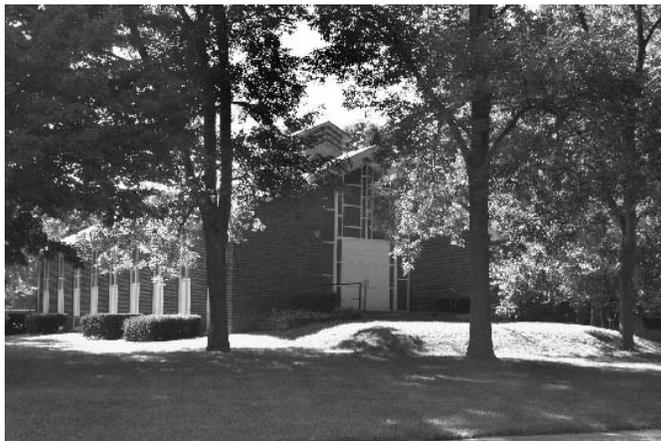
In days gone by in this country, transportation was limited to walking, riding a horse or mule, or sometimes riding a boat down the river. To travel to a neighboring town, or certain points within the county of one’s birth was to travel as much as a “day’s journey” at times. Folks stayed closer to home because traveling was just not practical. With the advancement of technology came advancement in transportation. Today, we have cars, as well as airplanes which can travel hundreds of miles in a day. Such transportation takes folks where they wish to go in a very short amount of time. With this being the case, points on the map which used to seem “far away,” “a day’s journey,” or even farther, are now reached in a matter of minutes. While this certainly has its advantages, I am afraid sometimes such conveniences serve to do harm to a local church.

Why do I say this? I say this because with such blessings as an automobile, it becomes rather easy for folks to go to “the church across town” or across the county when they get uncomfortable with a problem or conflict (real or imagined) which arises within the local congregation of which they are a member. Rather than staying with the group where they are and working it out, today it is much easier to get in the car and go “across town” or across the county. (I recognize that there are times when folks go to the “church across town” without malice or because of “hurt feelings” or a conflict. These folks are not under consideration in this article.)

When there were difficulties in Bible days, folks had to work things out where they were. While we read of regions where there were several congregations of God’s people (ex: Gal. 1:2), problems or conflicts arising within the

local body was not used by God’s people as an excuse to abandon their duties and commitments in favor of “greener pastures.” Nor is it the case that such actions were encouraged by Christ as a “first response” to trouble.

In the New Testament, Christians were encouraged to work out problems in order for true unity to exist (1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 1:27; etc.). Certainly, such instruction was needed for some of the churches in Asia (Rev. 1:11). The churches found in Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, and



Laodicea dealt with not merely a difference of opinion, or “personality conflicts,” but actual cases of sin in their midst (Rev. 2-3)! In these cases, Christ encouraged them to “repent,” to change, to “strengthen what remains”; but he did not encourage them to run away from the problem! When John wrote to Gaius about the problem with Diotrephes, Gaius was not encouraged to leave, or start another church with Demetrius. Both were encouraged to continue in their good

works. Specifically, Demetrius was encouraged to “follow . . . that which is good” despite the fact that Diotrephes was practicing evil at that moment (3 John 11)!

The church at Corinth had plenty of problems to conquer. In the first letter, almost every chapter deals with some doctrinal error that had to be combated and corrected. Evidently, Paul thought these problems could be overcome, for he gave them the instruction necessary to overcome the sins. These brethren put forth the effort, and fixed many problems by the time the second epistle was written, but they still had more to fix (2 Cor. 12:19-21). In two letters, he never encourages folks to “leave” or “start over afresh.” Rather, he declares that these brethren need to stay and work

this through so that all the brethren could be right before God.

Some might have suggested to Demetrius, or to some whose garments were still white in one of the churches of Asia Minor that they needed to leave. Some may have said, "Move on to the next church down the road!" Or, perhaps Gaius, Demetrius, and others would have been encouraged to start another congregation a few miles away. Perhaps well-meaning individuals would have encouraged some Corinthian Christians to just leave those folks and start a new work on the other side of town.

While such things can be an option, (we will discuss this later) should this be our *first* response to problems? What happened to talking to folks? What happened to trying to work things out? Christ said to let our lights shine so that folks can see our good works and glorify the Father (Matt. 5:16). How can my light shine or illuminate a room if I am not in it?

Therefore, before folks get excited about leaving a place, perhaps they ought to first ask whether or not they can influence others to do what is right? Is there hope or not for the people to return to the Lord? Evidently, Christ still held out hope that Sardis could "resurrect" from the "dead" (Rev. 3:1). If not, why did he encourage those faithful few to "strengthen" what remained (Rev. 3:2)? He still saw some "worthy" folks there, and wanted them to continue to do what they could (Rev. 3:4). What if these few had simply ran "across town" at the first signs of difficulty? How would that have helped matters in a spiritual sense?

Having said all of this, am I saying that a person could never leave the congregation of which he/she is a member regardless of how wicked they became? Of course, not! There are times when it gets so bad that one must leave for his own spiritual safety. Can I tell you "when" this point is in every case? No, I can't. However, here is a short list of suggestions that could be used as a type of barometer to help in our decision-making.

A Time to Stay . . .

- Just because something is not done exactly the way it used to be done is no reason to leave. Ask questions to find out "why." Is your concern a matter of faith or opinion?
- When elders and deacons are appointed. This occasion marks a time of great change in the congregation. This is a time when you are needed the most.
- When the church gets a new preacher. This time can be just as life-changing as getting elders and deacons. Don't leave.
- When folks do something you don't agree with, please stay. Talk to these brethren and try to get on the same page again (Ps. 133:1; Amos 3:3).
- When there are disagreements, but are still open lines of communication between you and the preacher, elders, and other brethren.
- When we have differing views, but can still study and reason together about the Bible (2 Tim. 2:15; Eph. 5:17).

A Time To Leave . . .

- When false doctrine is defended.
- When sinful practices are in evidence and defended.
- When folks will no longer talk and study with you about your concerns.
- When contentious attitudes (from the pulpit or the pew) are not corrected and repented of.

Conclusion

I hope these thoughts will be helpful to you. I am afraid sometimes, we are too quick to "cut and run" instead of considering matters, and systematically studying things out to prove what are matters of faith and what are matters of opinion. Think about this carefully. Don't become frustrated and leave a congregation when you could be of greater help by staying!

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Does the Bible Authorize Building a Meeting-House?

Kyle Pope

The congregation where I preach has recently embarked on a building project. As is common (and fitting) in such endeavors, questions arise regarding the authority for having a building at all. Does the Bible authorize the church to build a building?

New Testament Places of Assembly

The Bible tells us that the first Christians in Jerusalem assembled in the temple courts. Acts 2:46 describes them as “continuing daily with one accord in the temple” (NKJV). As the church grew outside of Jerusalem, some Christians are described as opening their homes to allow the church to assemble there. When Paul writes to the church in Rome, he tells them to greet Aquila and Priscilla adding later, “greet the church that is in their house.” When this same couple lived outside of Rome, they did the same elsewhere. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul says, “The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house” (1 Cor. 16:19). In Laodicea a brother named Nymphas opened his home for the church. To the Colossians Paul charges, “Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house” (Col. 4:15). Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus, a family in Colosse, hosted the church in their home (Phile. 2). Archippus may have preached for this congregation. Paul writes, “Say to Archippus, ‘Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it’” (Col. 4:17).

In addition to this, the Bible records for us that churches made other arrangements for places to meet. After Paul withdrew from the synagogue in the city of Ephesus, he met with the brethren in what was called “the school of Tyrannus” (Acts 19:9). It is unclear whether this was a building, a courtyard or some other type of place normally used for schooling. The text doesn’t tell us how the brethren secured this place to meet. Did they pay rent to use it? Was one of the members involved with the school? We do not know.

Finally there is one other text which adds to our understanding of this issue. In the epistle of James a word is used describing a Christian assembly which may tell us something about the place of the assembly. Teaching the brethren about the sin of partiality, James begins, “If there should come into your assembly a man” (Jas. 2:2). The word translated “assembly” is the Greek word *synagogue* translated elsewhere “synagogue.” By the time of the first century this term was used to refer to both the people and the place of a Jewish assembly. The text in James is talking about a Christian assembly. The use of this word may indicate that James is talking about a Christian meeting house. If so, again, the text does not tell us specifically how they secured the building, what it looked like or how it was built.

The Command to Assemble

These texts show us the approved examples of the church meeting in a public place, private homes, a school, and probably in a meeting house set up for that purpose. Are there any Scriptures which authorize setting up such a place of meeting? Hebrews 10:24, 25 teaches: “Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” The word translated “assembling” is a verb related to the word *synagogue*. This indicates that the Hebrew writer, through the direction of the Holy Spirit, is commanding religious assemblies. It only follows that if the Lord gives a command, he is authorizing what is necessary to carry out that command. The church could meet in a public park or marketplace, but what if none is available? The church could meet in the homes of members, but what if no member has a home large enough to accommodate a big congregation? Must the size of the congregation be restricted to a number that can fill the home of the wealthiest member? The church in Jerusalem grew to 5000 men alone (Acts 4:4).

Their Tongue, A Sharp Sword

Larry Ray Hafley

So said David of his enemies: “My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword” (Ps. 57:4). “Swords are in their lips” (Ps. 59:6). He further said, they sharpen “their tongue like a sword” (Ps. 64:3). You may see Psalm 35 to learn how they cut and slashed David with their lashing lips and tart tongues. Job, too, experienced the same (Job 30).

Part of the ploy and plot of the Pharisees against Jesus was performed with the slanderous swords of wounding words (Luke 20:20; 23:2). John said that Diotrefes unjustly and unfairly accused him “with malicious words” (3 John 9). Nothing has changed. Enemies of the Son of God continue to torment and torture with their tongues, just as the Just One said they would (Matt. 5:11, 12; John 15:18-21; 16:1-3).

When evil men arise in a congregation to defile, divide, and destroy, their first weapon is a burning tongue dipped in poison. It is a fiery dart from an inflamed heart. The “poison of a serpent” is “under their lips” (Ps. 58:4; Rom. 3:13). Friends of a lifetime, yea, of a generation, are alienated. Bitterness breeds and brethren bleed. Glaring eyes and cold, sharp, harsh features take over faces which once glowed with the warmth of love, the soft sweetness of kindness, and the gentleness of friendship. Alas, though, that countenance is fallen and in its place is the mask of Nabal and the cosmetics of Jezebel, doing their best to do their worst.

No one is immune from this demonizing, bodily takeover. Preachers, elders, their wives, any and all may fall prey and be victimized by pride, envy, jealousy, and arrogance. When they are, their tongues clang and clank as metal, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit of God’s people. It is a raging metamorphosis characterized by every evil work (Jas. 3:13-18).

Psalm 64 forecasts the doom and downfall of all such tongues and taunts. Unfortunately, the highway to heaven will be scarred with the scattered skeletons of those who fell by the wayside, having been cast aside by a “tongue like a sword.”

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The very command to assemble authorizes a congregation to secure a place to carry out that command. What if this requires spending money? How is the church authorized to secure money? Through the “collection for the saints” (1 Cor. 16:1). While this does not authorize the church to buy Corinthian leather pews, gold-plated communion trays, or marble bathroom fixtures, the church is authorized to do what is needed to carry-out this charge.

Conclusion

The Bible grants the church liberty to meet in a variety of different settings. The very command to assemble au-

thorizes the church to do what is necessary to fulfill that command. If a congregation through necessity or choice chooses to secure a permanent place to assemble it is authorized by approved example and the generic command to assemble. Given that the authority to secure a permanent place to assemble comes from the generic command to assemble, it is imperative that a congregation limit its use of such a building to only those things which the church is authorized to do.

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The Philippine Islands: Fertile Field For Gospel Preaching

Ron Halbrook

When God opened a door for my first trip to the Philippines with Jim McDonald in 1995, little could I realize how greatly it would change my life. This 21st trip January 23-February 18, 2006 was truly unique. Jerry Statler (St. Helen, MI) was a most congenial and helpful travel companion. Though not a preacher, this brother is greatly interested in the Philippine work. He felt comfortable speaking only a few times but gave the brethren great encouragement. Our faith was challenged and strengthened by the faith and the sacrifices of our Filipino brethren. In twenty-five days I spoke sixty-four times. There were eighty-nine baptisms counted, but actually about one hundred occurred. Saints and sinners on the island of Luzon heard the proclamation of the gospel of Christ.

Lessons on the Home in Manila

By request of the brethren, our first day of teaching focused on the family in **Manila** at Kapitbahayan Navotas where **Ben Cruz** preaches. My first lesson on “Cultivating the Garden of Marriage” was followed by two studies on “Man’s Leadership in the Home.” There are advantages to the patriarchal culture of family life in the Philippines, but also disad-



vantages. When young people marry, at times it is difficult to establish the independence of the new home. Also, the culture of poverty results in some mates taking employment in foreign nations, involving months and years of separation. These and other issues were discussed both in the lessons and in the open forum. One brother publicly stated he was convinced that he should join his wife in the foreign

nation where she works or else bring her home.

Laoag Bible Study and Preacher Training Classes

At **Laoag City, Ilocos Norte Province** we spent Friday and Saturday in the Laoag Bible Study, a series of lessons presented by nineteen Filipino speakers from throughout the islands. I first tried this format in December 2004 in Manila, then August 2005 in Davao City on Mindanao, and Laoag City in northwestern Luzon was the third venue. The brethren consider it to be very helpful. They speak on four themes: “From Past to Present,” “The Preacher’s Life and Work,” “The Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace,” and “Faith, Fellowship, and Finances.” A panel discussion followed the lessons on each theme. About forty observers joined us. Younger men are meeting more experienced and mature men (Ben Cruz, Ramon Carino, Juanito Balbin, Mat Sibayan, Sr., etc.), and the older men commended the sermons presented by the younger men (such as Egdon Sabio, Roger Borja, etc.). Old barriers and suspicions are falling away and a spirit of unity in the truth is growing as brethren participate in these studies. I spoke Friday night on “The Preacher’s Proper Priorities” and Saturday night on “The Heart of the Preacher.”

Mat Sibayan, Sr. and **Vic Domingo** have done steady, sound work in the Ilocos region for about thirty years and over 100 churches meet in the region today. I presented two textual lessons from Hebrews 10, "Why Saints Assemble" and "Be Stedfast," at Escoda, Marcos where Vic preaches. There were over 200 present. Vic and his son-in-law **Rex Bayaca** took me to a radio station to preach on "The Original Gospel." Jerry spoke to a good audience in Laoag City where Mat preaches.

In Laoag City Jerry Statler, **Jonathan Carino**, **Lordy Salunga**, and I conducted a preacher training class January 30-February 3. There were eight classes each day covering Robert Harkrider's four workbooks on "Basic Bible Doctrine" including a Bible survey, biblical Christianity, worship, how to study the Bible, Bible authority, the church, the Holy Spirit, baptism, and denominational errors. Also, each student was given a Strong's *Concordance*, *Zondervan's Pictorial Dictionary of the Bible*, and a reference Bible. Evening sessions focused on how to use these research tools. Mat and Vic worked together in selecting thirty-five brethren to be formally enrolled (there were books for thirty-five), and another twenty-five men attended as sit-in students.

With Danilo Tiongson in Pamplona, Cagayan

Next, we followed the northern coastline of Luzon to the area of **Allisitan, Pamplona, Cagayan Province**, where **Danilo Tiongson** has worked for years. Danny has trained other good men preaching in the area such as **Robinson Pulvaris**, **Juanito Aguday**, **Jose Tabulog**, **Alfredo Cammagay**, and many others. My lessons covered such subjects as "When Peter Confessed Christ," "How Sinners Receive Salvation," and "Complete in Christ."

Sunday morning in Pamplona I preached to over 200 people representing four tribal groups meeting

under a large A-frame roof made of dried grass and supported by bamboo poles without walls. The backless seats are boards nailed to poles driven into the ground. Many are Negritos, an aboriginal tribal group who are very short, very dark-skinned, and have kinky hair. They listen intently and have humble hearts. There was an afternoon service at Allisitan, with Jerry speaking on "The One Faith" and me on "Be Stedfast," followed by an evening session for about thirty preachers.

Penetrating Christian Church Strongholds

On February 6 **Rody Gumpad** picked us up at Modesto Domingo's house where we were staying, and took us further eastward along the northern shoreline. For the first time, we penetrated the Christian Church stronghold of **Aparri**, preaching first by the ocean under a nippa-covered



Near Aparri

arbor reached by crossing an inlet in a small boat and later under some trees on the beach. We worked with **Alvin and Alex Lagat**, young men trained in a Christian Church school but disgusted with the centralized control. My subject under the arbor at **San Jose, Sta. Ana** and under the trees at **Amuniten** was "Hold Fast to God's Pattern of Truth." In the later afternoon I preached on "The Original Gospel" at Ziminila with **Rodolfo Tabisaura** and **Ben Invierno**. We finally reached Rody Gumpad's home in Tuguegarao.

The next morning found us preaching at **San Isidro, Isabela Province** to about 100 people, mostly non-Christians. My topic was "The Gospel Makes Us Right with God" and the audience was most attentive, including the barangay official who welcomed us. Rody preached effectively about the true church from a bed-sheet chart. **William Remegio** and **Ruffy Tolentino** are preaching here. Eleven were baptized. In the afternoon, our travel brought us to a group coming out of the Christian Church under the preaching of **Patrick Bagayao** at **Arcon, Tumauni**. This audience of 50-60 listened very well in a small meeting house which was filled. A larger building is underway along a main highway nearby, but like so many places, the project is hindered by lack of funds.

Preaching to a Tribal Village in the Mountain Province

On Wednesday February 8 we traveled about two hours from Tuguegarao to Tabuk in the Kalinga Province, then southwest following the National Highway into the mountains to the **Mountain Province**. This travel continued in the rain for about four hours, climbing the mountains in Rody's vehicle followed by Ben Vistro's vehicle also loaded with preachers. The road is mostly one lane, rock and dirt, overlooking valleys and gorges hundreds of feet deep, often right to the very edge of the drop-off. We drove in rain, fog, and clouds, climbing above the clouds at times. This road is treacherous and miserable under such weather conditions. Men hired by the government are standing every two to three miles with shovels to monitor the road and to fill in fresh holes or remove rocks and mud resulting from landslides. At times we drove through the fresh rock and mud resulting from a slide by following the narrow trail dug by these men. Often we were sliding in the mud as on ice or struggling through mud holes. When the vehicles

got stuck, the men got out and pushed, and were splattered by flying mud, but they did it in the best of spirits. Once we slid into a bank, a welcome alternative to sliding off the mountain side.

Finally, we arrived at a point directly across a deep gorge from the village of **Bugnay, Tinglayan**. The vehicles were abandoned as we hiked down small, narrow steps which snaked their way deep into the gorge to a hanging bridge overlooking a white-water river raging past below. After crossing this bridge of about 100 yards, we resumed our trek on the winding steps. Our path led upward through terraced mountain sides turned into rice paddies resting in the clouds. At the last step, it was necessary to cross a barrier wall protecting the village. The tribal people at Bugnay created this long, narrow, winding path as protection from enemies in times of tribal warfare, which still may occur at times.



National Hwy. Mountain Province

Bugnay is a village of about 1,000 people with a Catholic Church and a Pentecostal style church. After attending the preacher training classes at Tugugarao, **Marcos Allib** and **Rodolfo Dumgiis** began preaching here and twenty-nine had been baptized before we came. We stayed in Marcos' and Rodolfo's rented house, which was one average-sized room. No furniture of any kind rested on the wooden floor. Everyone sat on the floor and 15-20 of us slept in the room, literally wall to wall people.

We arrived at the house about 3:00 P.M. Coffee was served. After we heard a boom echo, the women were chattering loudly, excited and happy! It turned out the men had dropped a stick of dynamite in the river to get a big catch of fish and within 15-20 minutes they showed up with the fish. Fish, rice, and pork were prepared and served to everyone sitting on the floor.

Our service was held at 8:00 P.M. after the villagers returned from their work. We met in a one-room building used as a day-care center and the room was filled with 40-50 people. I spoke on "The One True God (Acts 17:22-31)" and Rody spoke on the one true church. The Pentecostal preacher attended and publicly expressed his approval of what we taught. Three were baptized the next morning.

For the parts of Wednesday and Thursday we spent at Bugnay, Jerry and I ate none of the food prepared by the natives. We ate our snacks such as peanut butter and crackers. The people live there as ancient people lived in many ways. An old woman was using a wooden mallet to pound rice to separate the shell and the rice.

Visiting New Works in the Kalinga Province

Thursday morning we followed our trail back to the vehicles and drove in the rain on the treacherous roads back to the Tabuk area to visit **New Balbalan, Kalinga** where **Sammy Haban** and **Philip Lilagan** are beginning a new congregation. The late afternoon breeze was chilly and the Filipinos were wrapped in coats as we preached in the open air to 50-60 very attentive people. Typical in such situations, dogs and chickens invited themselves, wandering amidst the people and preachers. Several people decided to obey the gospel of Christ.

Friday found us backtracking a short distance on the National Highway and turning into the rolling hills at the foot of the mountains. Rain left the dirt and rock road so soft and muddy that our vehicles got stuck several times



Trail to Bugnay

People were working in the terraced rice fields descending from Bugnay even in the rainy weather. They were gathering seedlings for replanting. On the other side of the mountain, hidden from view, are the fields where much marijuana is raised.

In past generations, these tribal people ambushed buses and jeeps traveling the highway, even creating breaks in the road which caused the vehicles to crash and roll down the mountain side. The passengers were killed and plundered as a gift from the gods. Some of Rody's relatives died this way in the 1960s and he concluded after talking with the villagers that this tragedy occurred at the hands of the very tribe we were visiting (their fathers and grandfathers), along the road within sight across the gorge.

(Geronimo Ganela's vehicle had joined us). I finally got out and walked about thirty minutes to reach the venue at **Casabang, Tabuk, Kalinga** where **Rodolfo Gunaban** is preaching. Almost two hours were lost because of the muddy road, but Filipinos are patient in waiting. Finally, we met outdoors at the side of a house and several of Rody's relatives were present, including a Wesleyan layman. My lesson on "Jesus Came to Save the Lost" was followed by Rody's bed-sheet sermon on the church, and twelve were baptized including the Wesleyan layman.

Jason Dollente and **Danny Cabrerros** are starting a new work at **Pinagan, Kalinga**. We preached here in the afternoon at the side of a house under a plastic-covered arbor to about fifty souls. There were several baptized. Our last, late appointment was at **Tanyok** with **David Malupeng**, where again we preached at the side of a house under a plastic cover while it rained. The ever-present dogs and chickens were there, and a couple of chickens roosted above us and flew over us to make their presence known. A dog in the house directly at my back barked incessantly and loudly for a while to make his presence equally known. Eight souls decided to follow Jesus.

Filipino Heroes of Faith Establish a Beachhead in the Rainforest of Isabela Province

February 11-13 was set aside for the trip to **Maconacon, Isabela Province**. An eight-seater plane took us from Tuguegarao across the Sierra Madre Mountains to the little air strip at Maconacon on the eastern coast of Luzon. Unlike most areas, these mountains have not been strip-logged and the region is like a rain forest. The unseasonable rains caused flooding, so we found ourselves riding a kuliglig, a farm implement powered by a 16-hp Briggs & Stratton engine. We followed a gravel road in the edge of the forest, passing waterfalls, yet in sight of the ocean. At washed-out bridges, the passengers got off and crossed what was left of the bridge on planks or bamboo poles, while the kuliglig left the road and negotiated the stream as best it could. Our team included **Rody, Ricky Ramirez, Florendo Respicio,**

Virgilio Bocarile, Dennis Yuson, and myself (**Rolando Agpoon** went ahead of us and met us there). Several young men who attended the preacher training classes at Tuguegarao are pioneering the work of Christ in this area, including **Randy Lamarca, Rowel Andam, Frederick Bumagat,** and **Rondie and Lawrence Corpuz.**

At 3:30 P.M. we reached the house of a barangay captain named Teddy Anwa where we were to sleep. His wife was already a Christian. When we preached that night from 8:00-11:00 P.M., about 50-60 people attended at the barangay hall, and several decided to be baptized including the captain. This is the place of the **Canadam, Flores** church.

Sunday morning found us at a river at flood stage, 100-150 yards wide with a strong current flowing to the ocean about 250 yards away. Women had swum it the night before to hear us preach, and now women and women with babies were swimming it to reach the place where 80-100 were gathered at **Mercedes Blues** waiting for the service to begin. Having a background as a swimmer, I knew I could cross it and dove into the cold water at about 8:30 A.M., was carried toward the ocean by the strong current, and got to the other shore exhausted. While getting my breath on the rocks, I heard Rody shout, "Help!" A blood pressure attack had immobilized his arms and the current was taking him like a Ping-Pong ball. He disappeared under the water, came up, and disappeared again. As he prayed for the Lord to receive his spirit, his hip hit a large rock, and his feet touched bottom; immediately he pushed with his legs with sufficient strength to thrust him to the surface for a breath of air. A whirlpool current took him down again and only God can explain how he was thrust toward the shoreline! A couple of brethren ran down the riverbank and pulled him out of the water and we forced him to spit up some water. There was no medicine to get his blood pressure down and he was prostrate all morning with severe pain, cramps, and weakness.



Kuliglig



Transporting Rody Gumpad after drowning incident

Rody was carried to the village at Mercedes Blues, where brethren tried their best to minister to him. Rather than immediately move him again, we decided to let him rest while we preached, hoping he might begin to recover.

I was amazed to see Negritos in this audience, so far removed from the Pamplona region. Both Virgilio Bocarile and I preached. There were several baptisms.

Rody was not improving. The brethren wrapped him in a net and tied it to a long pole, and men at each end lifted the pole and started to the river. I could not imagine how we could get him across in his helpless condition. They found small pieces of Styrofoam, placed them under his body in the water, then surrounded him and started swimming their makeshift stretcher across the treacherous water! I watched in disbelief. Then, I found a place to swim across, which was much more difficult because I was so tired by this time (about 2:30 P.M.); when I felt rocks under my feet on the other side, I was so weak I could hardly stand, but a brother helped me out of the water. For the rest of this day, I thought often of the brethren praying for us back home, who could not know how important and effective their prayers were!

I will always remember the faith, courage, and heroism of our Filipino brethren who serve God in these conditions. Like Paul, they press on in spreading the gospel though “in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren” (2 Cor. 11:26). I have been a Christian for almost 50 years, but I have plenty to learn from such brethren who press on in serving our Lord, hardly aware of the sacrifices they are making. Though young in the faith, many of them have great faith. My faith has much room to grow!



After getting Rody across the river, the brethren carried him near Teddy Anwa’s house, where he was loaded onto the kuliglig, and we started our long journey back to Maconacon. The ride back further beat and buffeted Rody’s body. We arrived about 5:30 P.M. and found a doctor to provide blood pressure medicine. While he rested that night, we preached to about forty people in the open-air gym in the middle of the Maconacon village from 9:00-11:00. I spoke on “The Beauties of Heaven.” The church here is the **Maasin** church. The next day the light plane met us and took us back to Tuguegarao, where Rody spent a couple of days in the hospital. His blood pressure problem will likely require medication for the rest of his life.

More New Works in Tuguegarao Area

Meanwhile, Monday afternoon found us at the new work at **Dagupan, Tuao, Cagayan Province** with **Florendo Respicio**, where we preached to about fifty very attentive people. At **General Balao, Edgar Corpuz** and others are beginning to preach the gospel, and I spoke under a mango tree to an audience of 50-60 people scattered under the tree and on both sides of the street by the tree. Many Catholics and Jehovah’s Witnesses were present and the open forum time was most productive.

Jerry Soliva preaches at Sta. Felicitas several miles from Tuguegarao. When I visited Jerry’s home at Maguirig to comfort him in the loss of his mother, I was asked to preach because it is the custom to have several funeral sermons over a period of days. I spoke to 50-60 people in the night air on “What Is the Meaning of Death?” Many Jehovah’s Witnesses were present.

Progress in Isabela and Quirino Provinces

On February 14 while Rody was still in the hospital, Junior Gumpad and Jerome Forelo drove us to **Cordon, Isabela** to work with **Domie Jacob**. The remainder of the day was spent at **Maddela** in the **Quirino Province** with **Paquito Lopez**, a brother emerging from the one-cup background. After an afternoon lesson at his house with the Dumabato church on “How the Lord’s Supper Unites Us,” he took us to visit Alfredo Manuel of the Lusod church. Then we went to the **Villa Maddela** church where **Richard Blanco** preaches for an evening lesson on “Jesus Came to Save the Lost.” This meetinghouse was filled with about fifty people.

Wednesday was busy with visits in Quirino at **Saguday**, where **Sammy Gamit** preaches, and the audience spilled into the street; to **Burgos**, where **Otey Pastor** labors, and the church has a small new meetinghouse; and to **Sto. Domingo, Cabaruguis**, where **Armando Pastor** works. The father of these brothers was murdered some years ago, and their mother continues to set an example of steadfastness in the faith. We had good, attentive au-

diences at all of these places, and about fourteen were baptized that day.

On Thursday an all-day lectureship for preachers and their wives was held with Domie Jacob at **Sagat, Cordon, Isabela Province**. Well over 200 attended as I preached along with Lordy Salunga and Rody Gumpad, who was better but not recovered. My lessons were “Cultivate Your Garden of Marriage,” “The Heart of the Preacher,” and “A Preacher’s Proper Priorities.” Lordy’s lesson focused on unity and Rody’s on problems faced by preachers. Rody took us back to Tuguegarao that night.

The next morning **Jimmy Domingo** from the Lanao church brought three people to be baptized in the baptistry at the Metro Tuguegarao church, and I preached to an audience of about 30 people on “The Great Commission.” That afternoon, Jerry and I flew back to Manila, where we had a Bible study with the family of Ben Cruz at his house from 8:00-10:00 P.M.

Our Lives Changed Forever

We returned home on Saturday to our families, brethren, and loved ones. We do not return as the same people we were when we left. Faith building experiences with our Filipino brethren have changed us forever, and precious memories of our Filipino brethren will continue to leaven our lives for the Lord as long as we live.

Americans Can Help

Americans can help in this great harvest of souls. First, our coming opens doors for preaching the gospel because Filipinos in general respect Americans. Our nations have had a close relationship since 1898 when we broke the yoke of Spain, which had controlled the Philippines since the 1500s. English is taught as a second language in Filipino schools, so most of the people speak or at least understand English.

Second, there is a great need for studies and classes to train their preachers. I am spending more and more of my time concentrating on this need.

Third, grinding poverty makes it difficult for the average Filipino to own a Bible. We must provide Bibles and Bible study materials to our brethren! I carry as many Bibles and books as the airline allows. After returning to the U.S., I send boxes of Bibles and study materials. This creates a tremendous financial burden, but I am convinced this is one of the most important things we can do in spreading the gospel there. How can we deny this material to people so hungry to learn? These Bibles and related materials will continue doing good after we are dead!

Fourth, I have stayed involved in the Philippine work to provide an additional means of communication between U.S. and Filipino brethren. Culture gaps and communication gaps on both sides of the ocean cause confusion, and I do everything possible to bridge these gaps. Information can be shared about financial needs such as support for preachers, the costs of church buildings, benevolence, and other matters. Knowing brethren personally makes it easier to expose cases of dishonesty or corruption. The needs are vast for everything from Bibles to benevolence to church buildings. Rather than our simply throwing money in the direction of the Philippines, our limited resources need to be used carefully to help Filipinos help themselves and not to create perpetual dependence. Mature Filipinos recognize this, and healthy communication between brethren in the two nations is essential to true success in our efforts.

May God help us to serve, bless, and do good to our Filipino brethren, and never to harm their efforts to serve God in any way. May God bless every brother and sister who has given a dollar, a prayer, or an encouraging word to make these trips possible. The words of Jesus echo down to our time, “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few,” and the few must labor mightily while we can (Matt. 9:37). None of us can do it all, but all of us can do something. When we do what we can, souls will be saved for time and for eternity.

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Knowing When To Shut Up

Craig Meyer



“What do you have to know to play the cymbals?” a music student is supposed to have once asked Sir Malcolm Sargent, the British conductor. “Nothing,” he replied, “except when.”

A good cymbals player not only knows when to play, but also when not to play. He learns to observe the “rests” (musical notation for periods of silence).¹ This principle is valid for everyone else in the orchestra. If an orchestra is going to play a Mozart symphony, for example, the players are not free to play whatever notes they want; they are restricted to playing only the notes written down by the composer. Also, they are not at liberty to play during the rests; they are restricted to observe those periods of silence, however long or short the rests may be. Failure (or refusal) to play all the notes—and observe all the rests—displays a cavalier, disrespectful attitude toward the composer and his music.

Similarly, God has “given us the notes to play.” He has revealed his will. It directs us how to live (Ps. 101:2-3; 1 Cor. 2:10-13; 1 Tim. 3:15; 6:11-12). We are restricted to remain within that will (2 John 9). We are not at liberty to think or say or do whatever we want in life (Jer. 10:23). Failure or refusal to do all that he has commanded—and nothing that he has not commanded—displays a cavalier, disrespectful attitude toward God and his word.

In a contemplation of God’s infinite grandeur, we are moved to praise and extol the King of all (Pss. 66, 92, 93, 95; John 3:31). At times we will want to share these thoughts and feelings with others in an atmosphere of mutual teaching and admonition (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Yet it must be admitted that as we meditate upon eternal truth—either collectively or privately—there will be times

when our words are too feeble, too inadequate. On such occasions the only fitting and wise response is to simply hold our tongues in awestruck silence (Exod. 14:13; Ps. 46:10; Hab. 2:20; cf. Phil. 4:7).

The people of God walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). This walk comes by hearing and following God’s word (Rom. 10:17; Jas. 1:22-25). If God is silent in a given area (i.e., he has neither specifically nor generically addressed a certain matter), then there is *no revealed word for us to hear and follow on that point*. Therefore, it is *impossible* to do that thing by faith. Without further revelation from heaven, no one could ever know whether such a thing was pleasing or displeasing to the Lord.

Knowing when to shut up is essential if we are to successfully establish and apply Bible authority. “We speak where the Bible speaks; we are silent where it is silent” is true not because it was a slogan of the American “Restoration Movement,”² but because it is a principle of truth based on Scripture. On this point, carefully read 1 Peter 4:11 and Colossians 3:17.

God has given the human race everything it needs to survive, yea excel spiritually (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3-11). If God has not authored it, then we must leave it alone! If he has not given us “the green light” for a thing, we commit *presumptuous sin* if go ahead and do it anyway (Ps. 19:13).³

A good cymbals player knows when to play—and when to keep quiet. A faithful Christian knows enough to remain within the confines of the faith once for all delivered (Jude 3) and refuses to cross that circumscribed boundary. Those who ask the question, “But where does the Bible say I can’t do it?” tacitly have admitted a profound failure to understand divine warnings concerning rebellion and presumption.

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven . . . a time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (Eccl. 3:1, 7b).

The “Old, Old Story” or the Story That Has Gotten Old?

Adam Litmer

We often sing a song entitled, *I Love To Tell The Story*, written and composed by Catherine Hankey and Wm. G. Fischer. This song is one of my favorites. The story of God’s plan to save mankind is timeless. We are first introduced to God’s plan for saving mankind immediately following man’s earliest sins, first of Eve and then of Adam. In Genesis 3:15, when God is addressing the serpent in the Garden of Eden, we find the first Messianic prophecy. The passage says, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

Indeed, the entire Old Testament is dedicated to the message that Jesus is coming and God’s plan for redeeming man will be established and accomplished. Perhaps the most famous of all the Messianic prophecies is found in Isaiah 53 which has come to be known as the prophecy of the suffering Messiah. God’s plan for man’s redemption through the sacrifice of Christ is found all throughout that chapter, particularly verses 10-12, which say,

“Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”

Once we come to the days of the Lord himself the excitement of those who believed in him was tremendous. He was the One the Old Testament pointed to and now he was here! Imagine the excitement of Peter as he and the other apostles gathered around Jesus in the district of Caesarea Philippi and Jesus asked them who they thought that he was. Peter could say with absolute

“Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the doctrine, hath both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9).

Endnotes

¹ “No one wants to hear a cymbals recital” (Wayne S. Walker) Such cacophony painfully illustrates those who try to live without love (see 1 Cor. 13:1). While it is true that percussion instruments add rhythm, brilliance, color, and variety to the orchestra, very few people desire to hear *juar* the percussion. (I relish red cayenne pepper, jalapeños, and Chinese mustard, but I would never make a meal out them.) Percussion is “musical pepper,” best used discreetly and in modest amounts, therefore, all the more reason that these special players be silent during the rests.

² It seems to me that that some brethren try to “restore the Restoration Movement” in our time. Any allegiance to—or authoritative

appeal from—a man or group of men is thinking of men “above that which is written”(1 Cor. 4:6). Our first and only obligation is to serve God and to be true to his book. See Matthew 6:33 and 1 Timothy 4:6-10.

³ I would also strongly urge the reader to carefully study Numbers 9:15-23. When the fiery, cloudy pillar moved, Israel moved! When it stopped, they stopped! “At the commandment of the LORD they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the LORD they journeyed” (Num. 9:23). Later in the wilderness wanderings, the people presumed to travel on when the pillar did not move. The result? Defeat and disaster! Read Numbers 14:40-45. The taproot of much division in religion can be attributed to a failure (or refusal) to keep aloof from sins of presumption (cf. Num. 15:30-31).

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confidence and conviction, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

When Jesus was crucified, the spirit of the apostles was at an all time low. Their faith was tested during those days between his death and resurrection like it had never been up to that point. This despondency can be seen in the words of Thomas found in John 20:25. “So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.’” Thomas, who had not been there when the Lord appeared to the other apostles after his resurrection, showed himself to have sunk into dejection and hopelessness. His faith had been overcome and I think it is probably safe to say that he was not the only apostle seriously struggling at that time. But Jesus arose! The apostles were energized and convicted like they had never been before and they would preach his message, though it cost them their lives, in a single-minded effort to convert as many as they could. The attitude of all the apostles is reflected in Paul’s words found in Acts 20:24, “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” That the Lord came from glory and honor, took on flesh, suffered and died for all mankind, and then rose again, was the message that the earliest disciples took to the world with a zeal and determination probably not seen since those first century years. The plan that God developed for mankind’s redemption was complete; justification was now available to man. They believed and thus they spoke (2 Cor. 4:13).

Fast forward nearly two thousand years and here we are. As man looks at things this is an old, old story now. It is hard for us to comprehend what life would have been like just two hundred years ago, much less two thousand. Thus the words of the song are very appropriate now. Yet sometimes I wonder if with some, instead of being that wonderful old, old story, it has instead become the story that has gotten old. Let’s be honest, brethren, by far the largest portion of the religious world is not satisfied with the plain message of the Scripture; with its “antiquated” message, strict demands for obedience, and unpopular doctrine that man is no authority in religious matters. The plain gospel message was left behind by the denominational world long ago; the very existence of the denominations is proof of that.

Yet what about among Christians? The apostle Paul said something very familiar to Bible students in 1 Corinthians 2:1-2. “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech and wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” Part of teaching

“Jesus Christ and him crucified” is teaching obedience to the commands of Jesus. Another familiar passage that emphasizes this is 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8. “Since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”

I realize that it has become rather popular to claim that “the apostle Paul would not be welcome in our pulpits.” I also believe that we have a tendency to emphasize all of the negatives taking place in the church today to such an extent that we make it appear as though the church is just about to enter wholesale into apostasy or vanish altogether. Neither is imminent. With that being said, it has been my personal experience, particularly with the younger generation of Christians, that the plain gospel message taught by Paul is not exactly what some want to hear anymore. Since the earliest days of the restoration the desire to be considered “relevant” amongst the denominations seems to become a desire irresistible to some. Today Christians are speaking to their denominational friends and hearing about all the wonderful programs they are involved in; all of the fancy new buildings complete with state of the art gymnasiums, kitchens, bookstores, and more and more barbers, beauty salons, day cares, and any other modern convenience. More and more today the younger, and some older Christians feel that since the Lord’s church lacks these modern conveniences we have fallen behind the rest of the religious world and have been relegated to a position of irrelevance. It is sad that many Christians feel it more important to be relevant in the sight of men than of God. When the desire to please man becomes greater than the desire to please God it can only end in straying from the truth. Paul’s words in Galatians 1:10 mean today exactly what they did when he first penned them. “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

Look inward, brethren: has the plain gospel message become old to you? Has it become something outdated, requiring supplemental activities and perhaps even some rearranging to make it interesting, to make it “relevant”? Or can you still look with joy and speak excitedly about that magnificent old, old story that never really grows old at all?

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“Miss America” continued from front page

college scholarships is one that continues to plague the pageant. It is difficult to reconcile asking young women to speak intelligently on a social issue while in another part of the competition asking them to silently display their bodies. Cultural scholar Sarah Banet-Weiser describes one local competition where the contestants were asked to give their autobiographical speeches while in swimsuits. It was a disaster; most women struggled to maintain their poise. In the national pageant, women do not speak; they walk out and *show their achievement in attaining the contemporary ideal of the svelte body*. Their other attributes—personality, intelligence, and individuality—are judged in other segments of the competition, especially the interview (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/missamerica/peoplevents/e_body.html, italics mine, mwg).

The saddest part of all this is that many Christians among supposedly conservative congregations today would have *no problem* with involvement in such worldliness, and fewer and fewer pulpits are warning against such things as immodesty! Satan has done such a good job in getting worldliness into some Christians that, to hear and observe them, you would not know that they are Christians. They see nothing wrong with stripping down and displaying their bodies before leering judges and lusting audiences, smiling and waving for a worldly crown and earthly acclaim (or even just “innocently” encouraging someone to do this). Why do so many seem so unconcerned about the will of God that commands women to “adorn themselves in modest apparel” (1 Tim. 2:9)?

Has a love for this present world turned our ears deaf to the divine standards of morality and godliness (Tit. 2:11-12; 2 Cor. 7:1)? We need a revival of true holiness—not just talking about it, but actually living it. “But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

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“Muslims” continued from page 2

the offensive cartoons? What makes the Muslim religion off-limits to criticism in a democratic society?

And, what should we expect of the Islamic public? Did you ever see on national newscasts any marches in the streets of predominantly Muslim countries protesting what the terrorists did in killing 3000 Americans at the WTC? Did you see anyone marching in the streets when a terrorist bombed a market place in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Baghdad, or any other place? But a newspaper in Denmark publishes a few cartoons against Islam and look at the reaction!

The Bible teaches that civil justice is to be even handed.

When a man causes a disfigurement in his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has disfigured a man, he shall be disfigured. He who kills a beast shall make it good; and he who kills a man shall be put to death. *You shall have one law for the sojourner and for the native*; for I am the LORD your God (Lev. 24:19-22).

You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes; and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not pervert justice; *you shall not show partiality*; and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. (Deut. 16:18-19).

I suppose that the ideal to which we aspire has never been completely achieved, but the Islamic culture does not appear to be making any effort to treat all mankind the same. Else, why would they applaud the suicide bombers and protest the cartoons?

What is happening in Islamic culture reminds me of the fairy tale about the emperor without any clothes on. You remember the story. Some con artists deceived the emperor into thinking that they had knitted for him the most beautiful, but invisible clothes ever made. After the swindlers had “dressed” the emperor in his invisible clothes, they paraded him through the village. Different subjects to the emperor praised how beautiful he was. However, a child said, “But he doesn’t have anything on.” Her innocent words caused the crowd and finally the emperor to realize the situation. He had been conned and was walking about naked. Does anyone in the media have the honesty and courage to tell our Islamic friends the truth which they need to hear?

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Obituary

Passing of brother Dale Walden

Shortly after midnight this morning (12-22-05) Illinois time, brother Dale Walden of Hidalgo, Illinois departed this life. For more than a year, he had been a resident of Lake Lord Rehab and Care Center in Effingham, Illinois due his suffering the dread illness of Alzheimer's. His loving wife, Lucille, departed this life last spring. Dale' mental abilities never permitted his knowledge of her passing. Dale had grown progressively worse in recent weeks and his death is indeed a blessing regarding his condition.

Dale had served as an elder in the Lord' church for many years. Hidalgo, Walnut Chapel, and Casey (Eastside) each were guided by his diligent stand for the truth. His death seemingly brings to close an "era" of men with his caliber. He would be numbered in the generation of strong Christians who preached and taught in east-central Illinois: men such as J.C. Roady, J.W. Gallagher, Everett Stivers, Bill Read, Lyle Berry, Loyal Hall, Dan and Willie Mathis, Galen Wells, etc. Many of us "grew up" under the tutelage of these solders of the cross. They being dead yet speak (Heb. 11:4) and their works do follow them (Rev. 14:13).

Our sympathy is surely extended to Dale's only daughter, Velina Dooley, and her family of Hidalgo, Illinois. **Michael Davis, 825 W. Second St., Bloomington, Indiana 47403.**

Quips and Quotes

Kansas High Court Blocks Access to Abortion Records

"Topeka, Kan. — The state's highest court on Friday temporarily stopped the state attorney general from looking at records from two abortion clinics, saying such a review could violate patient privacy.

"The Kansas Supreme Court ordered a lower court judge to first make sure that Attorney General Phill Kline has the right to see the documents in his investigation of potential violations of state restrictions on abortion and suspected rapes of children" (*The Indianapolis Star* [February 4, 2006], A5).

Megachurches Keep Growing

"A new survey shows Protestant megachurches continue to grow quickly and draw younger Americans and families through contemporary programming and conservative values.

"The study said the number of megachurches, defined as having weekly attendance of 2,000 or more, doubled during the past five years to 1,210. The churches have an estimated cumulative weekly attendance of nearly 4.4 million and income of \$7.2 billion. The average megachurch posted attendance of 3,585, a 57 percent increase since 2000" (*The Indianapolis Star* [February 11, 2006], B4).

Openly Gay Bishop Enters Alcoholism Rehab Center

"Concord, N.H. — The Episcopal Church's first openly gay bishop, V. Gene Robinson, is being treated for alcoholism, a step that surprised friends and colleagues.

"A key administrative panel said it stood by Robinson, whose 2003 election as bishop of New Hampshire caused a furor in worldwide Anglicanism, because he lives with a same-sex partner.

". . . Robinson said he has been dealing with alcoholism for years and had considered it 'a failure of will or discipline on my part'" (*The Indianapolis Star* [February 15, 2006], A5).

Church of England to Consider Letting Women Be Bishops

"The Church of England's national assembly voted overwhelmingly to pursue the possibility of allowing women to serve as bishops and to develop a plan aimed at overcoming objections from traditionalists.

"Delegates voted 348-1 for a motion from Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams requesting 'further exploration' of plans to legalize female bishops as early as 2012, but also asking to find a way to provide alternative male bishops for dissenting parishes.

"A church report last month recommended allowing female bishops and looked at ways to avoid repeating the 1992 split over female priests, now about one-sixth of the clergy" (*The Indianapolis Star* [February 18, 2006], B4).

Presbyterian Units Push For Action Against Sex Law

"San Francisco — At least 21 of 173 regional bodies in the Presbyterian Church (USA) have petitioned a June legislative assembly to repeal a church law that bars clergy and lay officeholders from living in relationships outside heterosexual marriage.

"The tally was reported by the San Francisco-based Covenant Network of Presbyterians, which has long advocated repealing the law. Wednesday was the deadline for such legislation.

"The bills ignore a special task force's plea against making changes this year to help keep the church unified in the face of divisions over the role of gays in the denomination" (*The Indianapolis Star* [February 18, 2006], B3).

