

The Night Paul and Silas Sang

Dick Blackford

What a night it was for singing!

For doing a good deed, Paul and Silas were arrested, brutally beaten, imprisoned and fastened in stocks (Acts 16:22-40).

DO YOU WANT TO FEEL MORE SPIRITUAL?

Sometimes Christians get discouraged and want to feel more spiritual. They try to find spirituality in all the wrong places—dimming the lights, lighting candles, humming and holding hands, having unstructured and “free” worship, meeting in a “cell group,” or a “house church,” counting beads, chanting masses, walking on hot coals, fasting to the point of near starvation, the sound of a pipe organ, the light of stained glass windows, listening to a dynamic speaker. It is difficult to think of anything that hasn’t been tried in an effort to achieve spirituality.

I have to tell you that I do not know a single thing you can do in the way of creating an external atmosphere that will make you a more spiritual person. It cannot be achieved that way. It comes by reading, studying, praying, and obeying the word (Ps. 1:1-3). It comes when you put away sinful attitudes of envy, strife, and division; when you are busy converting the lost and restoring the erring, bonding with other Christians, growing in grace and knowledge.

And it comes by *servicing others*. Jesus regarded those he depicted at the judgment scene who had served others as being spiritual people (Matt.25:31-46). There are no short cuts or gimmicks to achieving spirituality.

Growing spiritually will involve average, routine days. It is not proven by one’s ability to reach an emotional peak when talking about the Holy Spirit. No person can maintain that high emotional level at fever pitch for long. Those who have tried eventually suffer burnout and come crashing down. The lives of the great heroes of faith were not filled with numerous mountaintop experiences. Only a few. Most of their lives were filled with valleys. It was the valleys that helped make them the heroes they became. How do I know spirituality doesn’t come by these external circumstances? *Look at Paul and Silas!*



These are the remains of a jail in Philippi which may have been where Paul and Silas sang praises to God.

THE ATMOSPHERE AND SITUATION

When a Roman beating took place, clothes were stripped off. It was bare flesh. No cushion between your back and the whip. It is hard for us to imagine what just one lash with that whip would feel like. We don’t want to think about what thirty-nine lashes would feel like. This was not a Jewish beating, but a Roman beating to which there were no limitations. When punished by the Romans, they didn’t intend for you to enjoy it.

“Paul and Silas” continued on page 279

Editor: Mike Willis

Associate Editor: Connie W. Adams

Staff Writers

J. Wiley Adams	Olen Holderby
Donald P. Ames	Jarrod Jacobs
Randy Blackaby	Daniel H. King
Dick Blackford	Mark Mayberry
Edward Bragwell	Aude McKee
Bill Cavender	Harry Osborne
Stan Cox	Joe R. Price
Russell Dunaway	Chris Reeves
Johnie Edwards	Tom Roberts
Harold Fite	Weldon E. Warnock
Marc W. Gibson	Lewis Willis
Larry Hafley	Bobby Witherington
Ron Halbrook	Steve Wolfgang
Irvin Himmel	

**Guardian of Truth Foundation
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Connie W. Adams	Fred Pollock
Andy Alexander	David Shadburne
Dickie Cooper	Weldon E. Warnock
Ron Halbrook	Mike Willis
Daniel H. King	Steve Wolfgang

— Subscription Rates —

\$24.00 Per Year

Single Copies — \$2.00 each

Foreign Subscriptions — \$25.00

— Bulk Rates —

\$1.75 per subscription per month

Manuscripts should be sent to Mike Willis, 6567 Kings Ct., Avon, IN 46123, (317) 272-6520. E-mail: mikewillis@indy.rr.com.

Subscriptions, renewals and other correspondence should be sent to Truth Magazine, P.O. Box 9670, Bowling Green, KY 42102.

Book orders should be sent to Truth Bookstore, P.O. Box 9670, Bowling Green, KY 42102. Phone: 1-800-428-0121.

Web Address: www.truthmagazine.com

Postmaster: Send change of address to P.O. Box 9670, Bowling Green, KY 42102.

Truth Magazine (ISSN 1538-0793) is published twice a month by Guardian of Truth Foundation, P.O. Box 9670, Bowling Green, KY 42102. Postage paid at Bowling Green, KY and additional mailing offices.

The Abortion Debate

Mike Willis

With the appointment of two conservative judges, John Roberts, Jr. and Samuel Alito, Jr., to the Supreme Court in the last year, the debate over abortion is heating up again with Pro-life supporters thinking that this is the best opportunity they have for overturning *Roe v. Wade*.

Those who favor abortion couch their position in terms of women's rights and argue that abortion is a safe medical procedure, which it is. Pro-lifers argue that there are psychological effects to having abortion, but former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, whose personal position was opposed to abortion, wrote that "the data were insufficient. . . to support the premise that abortion does or does not produce a postabortion syndrome and that emotional problems resulting from abortion are minuscule from a public health perspective" (1989, quoted in *The Ethics of Sex and Genetics* 4). No doubt problems of conscience are related to one's value system, his ethical beliefs, and therefore those with non-Christian values probably have little trouble accepting abortion, just as those who defined Jews as non-persons during World War II had little moral conflict with the Holocaust.

The issue of abortion focuses on when life begins, with those favoring abortion arguing that life does not begin until birth whereas Pro-lifers favor the view that life begins at conception. Some who also oppose abortion have argued that life does not begin at the moment of the union of the sperm and egg but at implantation (when the fertilized egg attaches itself to the uterus about fourteen days later), in which case devices such as the IUD and the French abortion pill RU-486 which prevent implantation are no different than birth control pills which prevent ovulation. There is no moment between conception and birth where the medical community can say that life begins. One's view on the subject of abortion cannot be determined by medicine but largely stems from his world view, his religion.

Legally in America, the Supreme Court decided in the 1973 decision that "a fetus is not a person for the purposes of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution." This decision conflicted with other legal decisions which recognize the rights of the unborn: the unborn can inherit property and negligently killing or injuring a fetus can lead to civil liability for wrongful death, wrongful birth, battery, and other torts. In this respect American law is inconsistent. More significantly than the conflicts in American law for shaping public opinion have been the developments in medicine in which doctors are treating the unborn as patients based on their ability to diagnose medical problems before birth and perform surgical operations on the unborn infant. Also documentary studies which provide pictures of the infant in the

continued on p. 281



Calamity or Negative Blessing?

William V. Beasley

In the normal course of events the God of heaven sends an abundance of the necessities of life to his children (i.e., members of the spiritual body of Christ) and to those who are in the world (i.e., those individuals who are either ignorant of the gospel of Jesus Christ or have refused his offer of salvation). Please know, or if needed learn, that there is a world of difference between the *necessities of life* and our wants and desires. At other times, in order to get man’s attention, the loving Heavenly Father may send us a calamity or *negative blessing* (that which may not seem to be a blessing, but is designed for our ultimate good).

We have examples of *negative blessings* in God’s revelation. One of my favorites is from the prophet Amos: “And I also have given you cleanness of teeth (a lack of food, wvb) in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places; yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah” (Amos 4:6; cf. 4:8-11). The positive blessings (i.e., food, clothing, shelter, peace, etc.) had not brought Israel to repentance, so, in a last ditch effort, God sent negative blessings (calamities, in man’s view of life) to call for his children to return to him.

Amos wrote to and for Israel, but also for our learning (Rom. 15:4). Brethren, are we listening? Are we hearing God’s call?

Our Lord tells us to love our enemies (a strange concept to most people of the world) and he also tells us why we are to behave thusly: “Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust” (Matt. 5:43-45, ASV).

Has a loving Heavenly Father been trying to get our attention by sending us inflation, terrorist attacks, tsunamis, hurricanes, mud-slides, etc.?

Being an ignorant, finite creature of clay, I cannot say with certainty that any one or all of the calamities mentioned above were actually negative blessings from God. As a stranger and pilgrim on the earth (Heb. 11:13), I can use the events of modern history as motivation for me to prepare to meet God (Amos 4:12) and to be inspired to pray for my enemies. Many,

continued on next page

The Night Paul and Silas Sang
Dick Blackford front page

The Abortion Debate
Mike Willis 2

Calamity or Negative Blessing
William V. Beasley 3

A Good Disciple
Kyle Campbell 4

The Empty Coffee Pot
Donald Willis 5

Some Thoughts on Gospel Meetings
Heath Rogers 6

Punctuality and Your Spiritual Focus
Michael Gibson 10

Baptist Church Opens Subway Restaurant
David Dann 12

“Grounds For Success”
Larry Ray Hafley 13

What Is Required For Eternal Life?
John Isaac Edwards 14

The Original Church of Christ: Then and Now
Ron Halbrook 16

Wonderful and Shameful
Rufus R. Clifford III 19

What the Lord Requires
Marc W. Gibson 20

Rebaptism
Jay Horsley 22

A Good Disciple

Kyle Campbell

Elisha was a disciple of the great prophet Elijah. He was designated as Elijah's successor but first worked as Elijah's servant (1 Kings 19:15-21). When God was ready to take Elijah to heaven by a whirlwind in 2 Kings 2:1-14, Elisha showed the qualities of a good disciple. If we will live by these qualities, we will be good disciples for our Lord's cause. Let's notice these qualities.

First, a good disciple follows (2 Kings 2:1-2, 4, 6). Whenever Elijah went Elisha insisted on going too. We should follow our Lord Jesus this diligently (Luke 9:23; John 12:26). Truth deserves to be followed and preserved. We must "buy the truth and sell it not" (Prov. 23:23). But just as Elisha surely learned the difficult life of a prophet of God, so the Christian learns the difficulty of following the Lord. It is difficult to follow the Lord when your friends or family ridicule your position on doctrines such as instrumental music and church-supported institutions (although I certainly hope this is never the case). It will be difficult to follow the Lord when your brethren oppose you on doctrines such as divorce and remarriage, fellowship, or creation. Ridicule and opposition will not end, so we must endure and follow the Lord.

Second, a good disciple is faithful (2 Kings 2:3, 5, 8). Even though Elijah and the sons of the prophets both seemed to try to dissuade Elisha from following, he was faithful. He was not going to be dissuaded (Luke 14:26-27; 1 Cor. 4:2). A faithful Christian will not be pulled away from serving the Lord by a whim or by some unimportant, irrelevant, trivial reason. They will put God and his kingdom first.

perhaps most, of the Islamic people of the world hate me because I am an American and because (praise God) I am a Christian.

How are you using the news events of our time? Are they merely calamities of nature? Or, are they (to you) wondrous negative blessings from the Almighty? Are you praying for the Islamic peoples of the world? Are you ever preparing to meet God in judgment?

1572 Sandy Lane, Lincolnton, North Carolina 28092
beeshive@bellsouth.net

Far too many Christians now do not love the Lord more than they love their job or their recreation. Sadly, this fact is often demonstrated when Christians are not even willing to attend worship services regularly or gospel meeting services that are arranged by a local congregation. Is this a good disciple?

Third, a good disciple has foresight (2 Kings 2:9-12). When Elijah asked Elisha what he wanted, he asked for a double portion of his spirit. The enormity of the loss of Elijah so gripped the humble Elisha that he asked to be granted spiritual power far beyond his own capabilities to meet the responsibilities of the great task that lay before him. He wished that Elijah's mighty prowess might continue to live through him. In short, he asked for a spiritual blessing. If we could choose anything to be given us, would we waste that choice on a material possession or would we desire something greater and more heavenly? Solomon chose wisdom and an understanding heart above material riches (1 Kings 3:9-13). Are we willing to seek for knowledge and understanding of the Lord's word rather than financial advantage in this life? The assaults of the Devil in the forms of immorality and false doctrine never stop. Congregations need strong, wise servants of the Lord who can see the end of a matter and know the Bible and how to defeat ungodliness and error.

Fourth, a good disciple has faith (2 Kings 2:13-14). Elisha picked up Elijah's mantle and performed the same miracle that Elijah had done earlier. He had the faith to believe that God would give to him the power to work miracles like his great predecessor. It is our faith which gives us the ability to overcome the world (1 John 5:4). This victory does not take the form of miraculous actions, but of a victory over sin and Satan. When we cast off the dominion of sin, we must do so by faith. Christ's disciples live by faith (2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:6).

Are you a good disciple? If you were to take stock in how you have lived your life to this moment, would you hear the words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. 25:21, 23)? If not, then maybe some repentance needs to take place!

2326 Centertree Dr., Murfreesboro, Tennessee 37128

The Empty Coffee Pot

Donald Willis

Some have told me that I drink too much coffee . . . but, we normally make only one daily pot. I switched to decaffeinated coffee some time ago. But, coffee is not the subject of this article. When being hospitable, as one prepares to pour another cup of coffee, *be sure there is still coffee in the pot*. One would appear foolish to attempt to pour coffee from an empty pot.



Jesus (Matt. 12:34) said, “. . . out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” One has heard many speak about spiritual subjects of which they know nothing . . . and *possibly I have so done*. But, the *foolishness* of talking about a subject about which one has not studied or comprehended is easily seen. I am not a nuclear scientist and will leave that subject for experts to expostulate.

Jesus said, “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matt. 12:35-37). Jesus is saying, store up the word of God within your heart, and then speak as an oracle of God, not speaking the words of men, but speak truth. Obedience to this command is impossible without first spending hour upon hour of study and meditation upon the teachings of the Scripture. But, one is accountable for every word we say—truth or error!

Often, a novice in the study of the Bible will begin to proclaim mighty biblical knowledge upon a subject(s), and then proclaim, “I do not care what the Bible says, that’s what I believe!” “A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards” (Prov. 29:11). A wise individual will be careful to study to give a scriptural answer to questions asked. Jesus said to fill your heart with biblical truth, and then speak as an oracle of God (Matt. 12:34; 1 Pet. 4:11), not an oracle of human philosophy or human opinion. Truth is determined by what the Bible says upon any subject regardless of personal belief!

Many are quick to proclaim that God will save outside of obedience to the revelation of truth! One proclaims, “I know that God will save me, I have this feeling within my heart.” Possibly, the feeling is from an overdose of coffee.

In religion, to speak *from a full pot*: “study (give diligence) to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Again, read Matthew 12:35-37.

Idle words must be accounted for. Teach error and one will be held accountable before God!

What does the Bible say about the deity of God, Jesus Christ being the Son of God, inspiration of the Scriptures, the plan of salvation, the required obedience in one’s private life? What does Jesus say about sin, about the love of sin and unrighteousness? Does Jesus say these things make no difference to him? Did Jesus say, “Just have that good feeling in your heart and I will save you anyway”?

What does Jesus say? “Ye shall know the *truth*, and the truth shall make you *free*” (John 8:32). Did Jesus say, “Ye shall know the creed book, and the creed book will make you free”? Each needs to be careful about proclamations regarding personal belief. When one proclaims “that sprinkling is acceptable as baptism,” does that make it so? When an uneducated speaker says “one church is as good as another church,” does that make it so? When followers of Christ do not live as a disciple of Christ, does that make it right? Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 talk of some being of the synagogue of Satan! What makes something to be “of Satan”? If following the words of Christ makes one a *disciple of Christ*; would following the teachings of Satan (i.e., something that is not found in the word of God) make one a *disciple of Satan*? Why did Paul say there is one body and that the body is the church (Eph. 4:4; Col. 1:24; cf. 1 Tim. 3:15)? When we disagree on these passages, are we (pouring) speaking from an empty coffee pot? Truth makes free!

Our duty is to be filling our coffee pot (spiritual mind) with the teachings of divine revelation, and not to go beyond or fall short of that which God speaks!

441 Cypress Dr., Conroe, Texas 77304

Some Thoughts On Gospel Meetings

Heath Rogers

As far as I know, “Gospel Meeting” is a term used exclusively by churches of Christ. Most people not associated with a church of Christ don’t have the slightest idea what a gospel meeting is. It is not uncommon for us to invite people to attend our gospel meetings and hear them respond, “What is a gospel meeting?” That’s a good question. The term “Gospel Meeting” is missing from both the dictionary and the Bible. The best definition that I can come up with is that a “Gospel Meeting” is a special effort put forth by a local church in which the preaching of the gospel is the primary focus.

I have heard stories about gospel meetings that would last from two weeks to an entire month. In the days before automobiles and air conditioning, people would come from miles around, pack themselves into a church building, open the windows, dispense hand fans from the local funeral home and listen to gospel preaching. I have heard stories about setting out folding chairs, standing room only, and men standing outside listening to the sermon through the open windows. Such efforts were almost always accompanied by numerous responses to the invitation.

I say that I have heard stories about these things because I have never seen them for myself. Today, these two-week meetings have been condensed into one-week meetings, which are being further condensed into weekend meetings. I have never seen standing room only at a gospel meeting, but I have seen where the empty pews outnumber the ones that are occupied. Although there are still public responses during gospel meeting, they are becoming the exception to the rule.

This trend has caused some brethren to question whether or not to

continue having gospel meetings. Some argue that these efforts have outlived their effectiveness and are a thing of the past. After all, why go through the effort and expense of having a gospel meeting if recent statistics indicate that it will be a failure? Good question. However, before we label the “gospel meeting” an outdated “tradition” and toss it on the trash heap, let’s take another look at these efforts. What purpose do gospel meetings serve? Why should we continue to have them? What makes a gospel meeting a success? What can we do to make the most of our gospel meetings?

AUTHORITY FOR GOSPEL MEETINGS

Whether or not gospel meetings accomplish any good is irrelevant unless we can determine that they are authorized. The church must have authority for everything it does. “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 3:17). What authority does a church have to engage in a special effort in which the preaching of the gospel is the primary focus?

Gospel meetings are authorized in that they are a scriptural means of accomplishing the work of evangelism. The church is to sound forth, support and defend the truth of God’s word (1 Tim. 3:15). This is done during a gospel meeting. Such efforts also give preachers an opportunity to fulfill their charge to “preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2).

Is it right to have gospel meetings? It isn’t wrong. They are an authorized means of carrying out the work of evangelism.

WHO ARE GOSPEL MEETINGS FOR?

Why have a gospel meeting? What are they for? Who should be the primary focus of such efforts? The answer to these questions is simple: anyone who needs to hear the gospel!

The Lost. Gospel meetings are for those who are lost in their sins. God has chosen to save the world through preaching (1 Cor. 1:21). The apostle Paul taught that the preaching of the

gospel was vital to man's salvation. "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:13-14). During gospel meetings, the lost have an opportunity to "hear the preacher" (hear the gospel).

The Saved. The lost are not the only ones who benefit from the preaching of the gospel. Christians need to be built up and strengthened in the faith. This is also accomplished through the preaching of the gospel. "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). Mature, established Christians need to be stirred up by way of reminder (2 Pet. 1:12-13).

Gospel meetings are for everyone. A gospel meeting shouldn't be written off as a failure if there weren't any visitors from the community. This may be a discouragement, and may even indicate a lack of effort put forth by the members, but it does not mean the meeting was not a success. Remember, they are not called "visitors meetings," they are called "gospel meetings." As long as the gospel is preached, a gospel meeting is a success. For some churches, the emphasis of gospel meetings has shifted from the pulpit to the pew. They want lessons that visitors will enjoy hearing. I once preached a sermon in a gospel

meeting on the Evils of Denominationalism. After the sermon, one of the members stood up and all but apologized to the visitors. What kind of sermons do you hear when you visit gospel meetings? The distinct, straightforward preaching that used to characterize gospel meetings is getting harder and harder to find. More and more, we hear sermons that are heavy on stories, statistics, and salutations, and short on Scripture. Brethren, in order for gospel meetings to be successful, they must contain the gospel.

The man preaching a gospel meeting has a unique challenge. I remember showing someone a sermon outline book titled "Gospel Meeting Sermons." He replied, "Isn't every sermon a gospel meeting sermon?" to which I answered, "No." In my local work I will sometimes preach sermons for specific individuals and specific needs that I would probably never preach in a gospel meeting. There are times that I preach a sermon and my wife (truly my "helpmeet" in this area) will tell me, "That is a gospel meeting sermon." Unless a meeting has been planned to meet specific needs, the sermons will need to be beneficial to everyone present. In short, they need to be simple enough to be understood by those hearing for the first time, yet meaty enough to stimulate and edify the mature believer.

GOOD GOSPEL MEETINGS

Good, successful gospel meetings don't just happen. They are the result of a lot of hard work put forth in different areas.

The Elders. Gospel meetings should start with the elders. They must exercise wisdom deciding when to have a gospel meeting and who to invite to hold it. Sadly, I have sat in business meetings where gospel meetings were planned like this:

"Well, its time to have another gospel meeting. (1) Who should we ask to come and hold the meeting?

(Often it was someone who has been there numerous times before.) (2) When should we have the meeting? (It was decided to have the meeting when the preacher said he could come.) (3) What should we pay him? (It was decided to pay him the same amount that they have paid meeting preachers for the past ten years, with no thought given to inflation or travel expenses.)"

Gospel meetings need more planning that this. Many factors need to be considered when choosing a man to hold a meeting. None is more important than his faithfulness to the word of God. Your gospel meeting is *your* gospel meeting—not the visiting preacher's. Choose the week that works best for you. Things like school events and community events need to be taken into consideration. I heard of elders having a gospel meeting during the week of Christmas for the purpose of "testing" the members to see if they would forsake the assemblies to be with their family. Talk about lording it over the flock! Choose the time that works best for you.

The local church has a lot of work to do before a meeting. They must prepare for the meeting. Money will be spent advertising the meeting. Plans will be made to house the preacher and take care of his needs for the week. The building needs to be cleaned up, song leaders need to be lined up, the tract rack needs to be filled up, etc.

The Members. Gospel meeting time is a hectic time for most families. Some members spend the week rushing home from work, eating, cleaning up, and getting to the church building. Parents of younger children have a challenge during meetings. Their night time routine is broken during the entire week. This makes for a rough week, but most Christians are willing to make the sacrifice.

The Visiting Preacher. I once had an older Christian try to convince me that, when I hold a gospel meeting, I

Good, successful gospel meetings don't just happen. They are the result of a lot of hard work put forth in different areas.

am basically on vacation. I laughed. He didn't. He was serious. I enjoy holding gospel meetings, but they are not my idea of a vacation. If a preacher holds a gospel meeting like he is on vacation, he ought to be ashamed. Preachers work during gospel meetings. The running joke about preachers is that they only work one day a week. During gospel meetings they work six days. Most preachers spend meeting weeks separated from their wife and children, their normal routine and their own bed to sleep in. A preacher holding a gospel meeting spends the week doing a balancing act between visitation and preparation. He must make himself available to the congregation while still finding time to prepare for the evening service. One more thing to consider, the preacher probably had to work double-time the week before he came to hold your meeting. He had to get his local work done ahead of time for his absence, and also have lessons ready to present when he gets back after one day's "rest" (which is spent traveling). You will not hear preachers complain about this. There is nothing to complain about. This is a gospel meeting from a visiting preacher's perspective, and it is work. I don't know anyone who takes vacations like this.

The Preacher's Home Congregation. The church holding the meeting is not the only congregation putting forth an effort during that week. The church that the preacher labors with is without his services for a week. Other men will have to fill in to preach and teach during his absence. This isn't a bad thing, but it is an effort that is required for a preacher to be away to hold a meeting.

WHAT CAN I DO?

With all of this effort being put into a gospel meeting, what can I do to make the most of a meeting? The following are some suggestions.

1. Look Upon It As An Event. Gospel meetings need to be more than

just a bump in the road. They need to be special events that are planned for and looked forward to. When I first began preaching, gospel meetings were the highlights of the year. As soon as one of our gospel meetings finished, I looked forward to the next one. In my mind, my local work progressed from meeting to meeting.

Perhaps if the entire congregation took this approach to their meetings they would put more work into them and thus get more out of them. Make it a practice to announce upcoming gospel meetings from time to time. As they draw closer, begin counting down the weeks to the meeting, emphasizing increased excitement and involvement.

2. Pray. If nothing else, I can pray for the meeting. I need to pray for the preacher, for his health, safe travel, boldness in preaching, etc. I need to pray for his family that he is away from. I need to pray that visitors will be present to hear and respond to the Gospel.

3. Attend Every Service. A gospel meeting" is just that: it is a *meeting!* We meet together to worship God and study his word. My presence in these assemblies will be an encouragement. My absence will be a discouragement. As a member, I must make a commitment to support the meeting with my presence in every assembly. We have previously pointed out the fact that gospel meeting weeks present hardships for everyone involved. However, these hardships must not be reflected in our attitude towards the meeting. Like David, we must be glad when they said let us go into the house of the Lord (Ps. 122:1).

What Can I Do?

- Look upon it as an event.
- Pray.
- Attend every service.
- Invite people.
- Welcome visitors.
- Engage in the worship.
- Encourage the pracher.
- Reap the harvest.

4. Invite People. When Cornelius knew that he was going to hear words by which he could be saved, he prepared for the meeting by inviting his relatives and close friends to be with him (Acts 10:24). We need to be inviting people throughout the year, but a gospel meeting is a special time to invite people to come and worship with us. Denominations have their special events (Christmas programs, Easter Egg Hunts, pancake breakfasts, carnivals, etc.). A gospel meeting is our event. Invite everyone that you can. Make a list. Make a goal. Get excited about the meeting, then get the word out!

5. Welcome Visitors. What do we do when visitors show up? We welcome them. They need to be treated as honored guests. When you see a new face in the assembly, go to them, introduce yourself to them, tell them that you are glad they are here, and invite them to come back. You may not think this is important, but it is *very* important. Most people, when they visit a place for the first time, make up their mind about whether or not they are going to return within the first five minutes. For visitors

to gospel meetings, this time frame usually expires before the actual worship begins. The time before and after worship is a time for you to be busy greeting visitors.

6. Engage in the Worship. Come to the assembly prepared for worship. A gospel meeting is not a time to be-

come casual in our appearance or our attitude. Get there early enough to get settled in before worship begins. Sit up and sing out. Good singing is pleasing unto God. Good singing will make a good first impression on those who are visiting. And good singing makes for good preaching, which makes for a good meeting.

7. Encourage the Preacher. Most brethren are in the habit of expressing kind words of appreciation to the preacher after his sermon. These words are a source of encouragement to the preacher. However, consider being more specific in your comments. Instead of the normal, "Good sermon," why not pick out something in particular that he said and comment on that. Maybe it was a point in the sermon. Maybe it was a particular text that he used. Maybe it was an illustration. Doing this will assure the preacher that you really were listening to his sermon. Also, let him know that you are looking forward to the next sermon.

Those who are open to compliments should also be willing to accept criticism. It is not uncommon for preachers to say things that someone disagrees with, even during a gospel meeting. If you need some clarification on the sermon, or have a disagreement, by all means talk with the preacher about it afterwards. However, don't give him criticism as you are walking past him out the door. This is cowardly. Wait until others have had a chance to talk with him, then approach him with your ques-

tions or concerns. This may keep you at the building longer than you wanted to stay, but if it is important enough to talk to the preacher about, it is important enough to stay a little longer.

8. Reap the Harvest. A time of harvest naturally follows a time of sowing. God's word is a seed that is

The time after a gospel meeting is also a time for self-examination. Did the preacher touch on any areas that you need to work on? Make the needed changes in your life. This will truly make the gospel meeting a success.

sown in the hearts of men during a gospel meeting. God has promised that his word will accomplish what he desires and will prosper (Isa. 55:11). With all the effort that is put into a gospel meeting, there are bound to be fruits.

The time after a gospel meeting is the time to follow up on open doors,

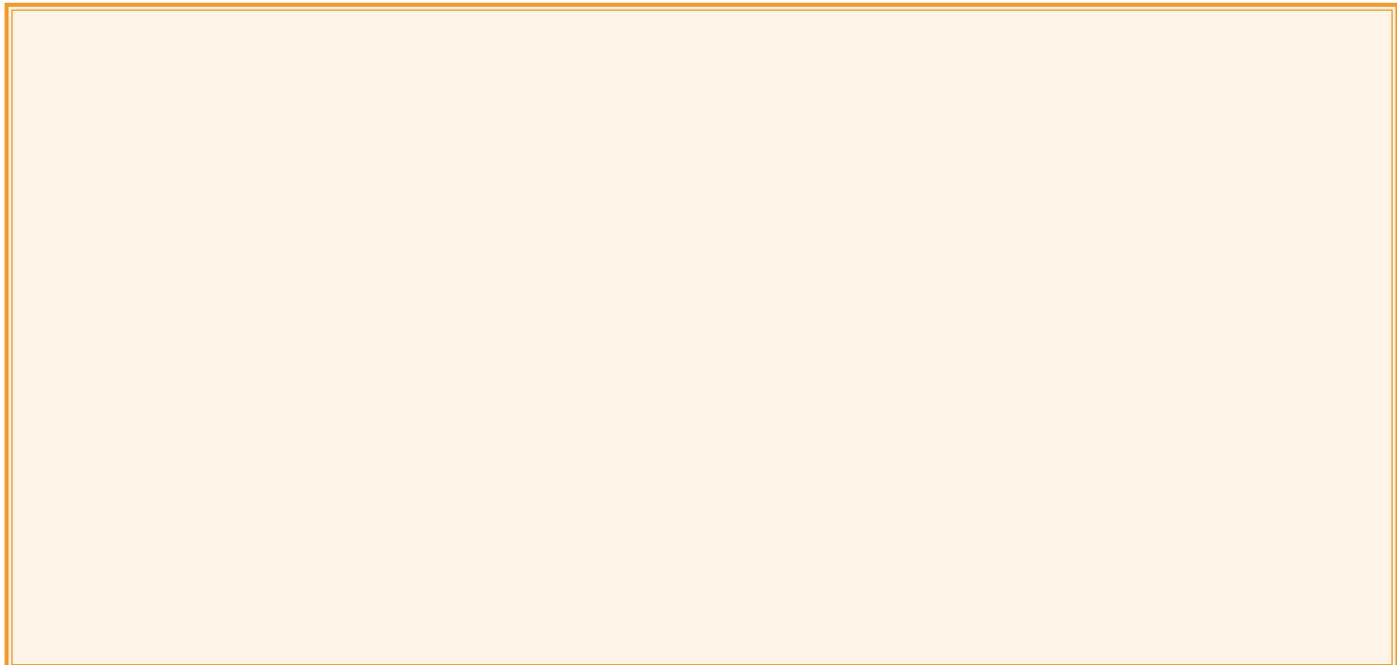
contacts, and opportunities that have presented themselves during the meeting. Call on those who visited during the meeting. Invite them back. See if they have any needs or concerns that you can address. Ask if they are interested in further Bible study.

The time after a gospel meeting is also a time for self-examination. Did the preacher touch on any areas that you need to work on? Make the needed changes in your life. This will truly make the gospel meeting a success.

CONCLUSION

While gospel meetings may not generate the interest from visitors (and even members) like they once did, they are not a thing of the past. If planned and used correctly, they are still effective ways of carrying out the work of evangelism and edification. As long as the gospel is preached, they are a success. However, like anything else, the level of benefit we get out of them will depend upon the level of effort we put into them.

801 Buttercup Dr., Edna, Texas 77957
athrogers@mindspring.com



Punctuality and Your Spiritual Focus

Michael Gibson

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things of the earth” (Col. 3:1-2).

In the verse above, Paul is admonishing the Christians in Colossae, and us today, to focus on spiritual matters and seek the things of God. What I want you to ask yourselves today, brethren, is how you can be setting “your affections on things above” if you are habitually late to the services? Since we, too, are risen with Christ, we are obligated to seek—put diligent effort into—putting *our* affections on things above.



“What is so bad,” you may ask, “about consistently being a few minutes late to services?” “Does the Bible have anything to say about punctuality?” I believe I can show you that it does! To clarify matters, let me make it perfectly

clear that I am not talking about one who is occasionally late or *one* whose good intentions to be on time are derailed by unforeseen circumstances. I am addressing the practice of arriving at services tardy more often than arriving on time.

Let’s examine this problem from a secular perspective. What happens to a child who is often tardy to school? The school usually punishes him for having excessive tardies in a given time frame. Wouldn’t most of us agree that the teacher has the right to inflict consequences on the student who constantly interrupts his/her class with his tardiness? What happens if you are late for a doctor’s appointment or a ball game (in which you are participating) or a tee time at a popular golf club? Most of the time you lose your spot! You would be forced to wait for another opening, or possibly even forfeit the game. What happens to the employee who always arrives late? What would you think of a preacher who was often late to services?

One who is consistently late is considered by most people to be selfish. Indeed, it is selfish to expect others to wait on you, or accommodate your tardiness. When you are late, doesn’t it show people that you consider your time to be more valuable than theirs? In the realm of attending church services, consider what message you send to the teacher or preacher when you are habitually late. How would you feel if you had prepared a speech and the audience couldn’t hear or was distracted from listening to you because people kept filing in the door five or ten minutes after you began? What of the Bible class teacher who has spent his spare time preparing lessons in which he always has to start over because of the disruption of the late student? It shows a lack of concern for the subject matter and the preparation that speaker put into his message. It also may cause the teacher to feel as if you really do not care for the effort they have put in. What reaction would visitors to the assembly have if one-fourth of our membership came in after the services started? Would it seem like a congregation of people who were “setting their affections on things above”?

So what does the Bible have to say about punctuality? Does God care if you are often late to worship? We read in Matthew 6:33 to “seek first the kingdom of God.” Jesus encourages Christians to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matt. 22:37). Is it possible to love him wholeheartedly and seek him first and still be habitually late to the assembling of his saints? Consider an example of five girls who were late to a wedding, as recorded in Matthew 25:1-13. They were unprepared for the coming of the bridegroom. Hastily, they attempted to get themselves ready and then appeared at the wedding only to find the door shut and their entrance denied. If these ladies had been on time, with the necessary supplies, they wouldn’t have missed out on the celebration they obviously wanted to attend.

Consider Ephesians 5:16: “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil”; redeem means to “buy up for oneself” (Vines). Paul is not asking us to buy back time, because once time is gone no amount of money can ever buy it back, but he wants us “to pay the necessary price in effort

and sacrifice to use properly the time (opportunities) we have now” (C.G. “Colly” Caldwell, *Truth Commentaries, Ephesians 247*). I have also heard this described as buying fruit in season. Here is the opportunity (season) set aside by the elders to study and worship God. If we are redeeming the time, shouldn’t we be there on time to study and worship our Creator? What better use of our time is there than to be together with those of like precious faith studying the word of God?

Brethren, coming from a father of two small children, I know that it is not easy to get everything together and get to the church building before services are scheduled to begin. It takes forethought and dedication, but it can be done! We can be like Ezra, in the days of old, who “prepared his heart to seek the Lord” (Ezra 7:10). These are some routines that work for my family in our endeavor to be punctual. It may benefit you, as well, to try these practical tips to help you and your family get to services on time?

1. Have a plan. Resolve to get to the building ten minutes before services start.

2. Set a goal. Decide what time you need to leave your house so you’ll arrive at the building at your designated time. Make *every effort* to leave at that time—even if someone’s hair isn’t fixed perfectly or someone’s shoes are untied. If you make this a consistent policy your family will know what to expect and will adapt accordingly!

3. Think ahead. Lay out everyone’s clothes the night before or an hour before departure time.

4. Get organized. Gather Bibles and Bible class material beforehand so it’s easily accessible when it’s time to leave.

5. Take care of physical needs. Feed everyone in plenty of time to be finished and cleaned up before it’s time to leave.

Brethren, I know that you will find being punctual much better for your family than persistent tardiness. Consider these advantages to always arriving on time for worship.

1. You are calm and relaxed. You aren’t rushing around. You are preparing your mind to seek the Lord.

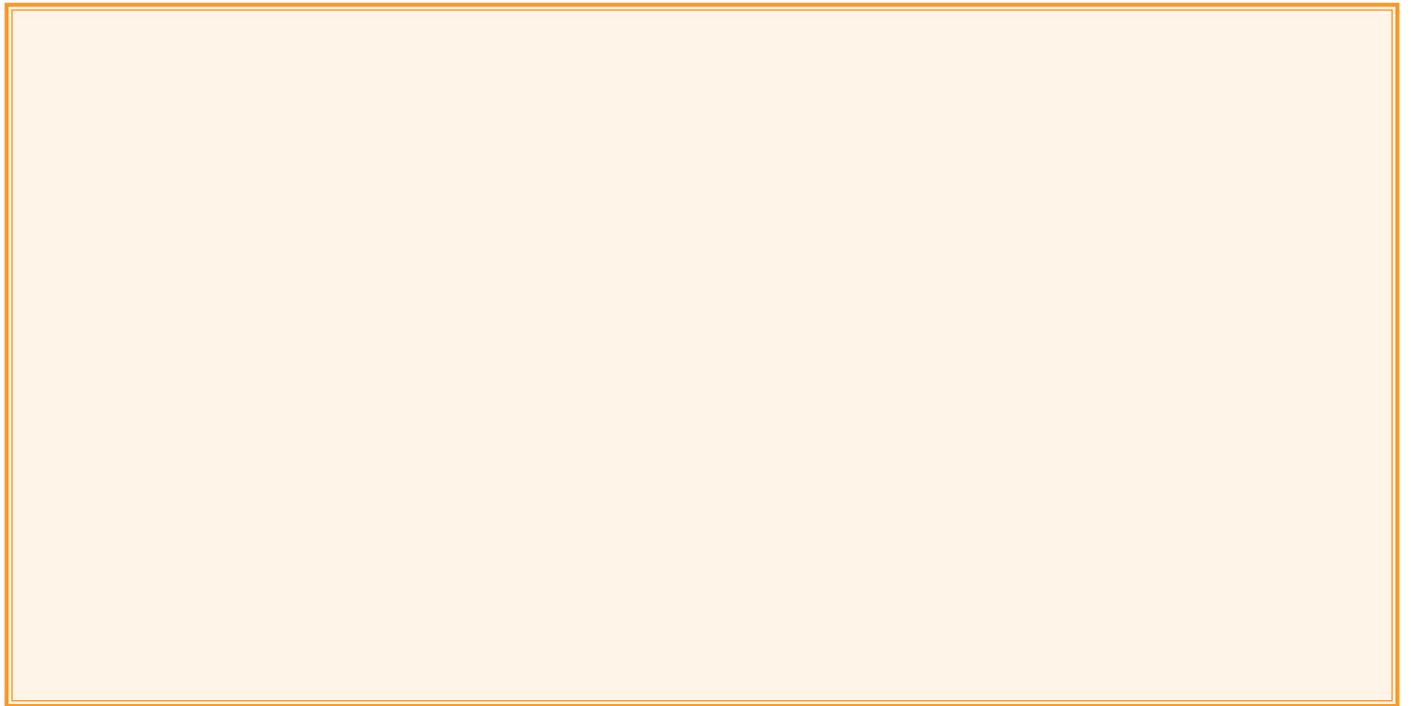
2. You can visit with fellow Christians before services.

3. You can situate yourself, your Bible, and your class materials in plenty of time for class.

4. You aren’t causing weaker brethren to be distracted by your late arrival.

Not only will your family benefit, but the services will be conducted in a more decent and orderly fashion (1 Cor. 14:40) if every member were to arrive on time for services. If we are truly setting our affections on things above, we will want to be present when the word of God is being discussed. Brethren, let us all strive to be more punctual!

2200 Palm Village, Bay City, Texas 77414
jag@warpspeed1.net



Baptist Church Opens Subway Restaurant

David Dann

On September 26, 2004 the Internet news website, www.wivb.com, posted the following story:

How does eat and worship sound to you? A Buffalo Church is the first church in America to open its own Subway Restaurant.

True Bethel Baptist Church on East Ferry held a grand opening inside the church Saturday.

Construction started several months ago on the 150 thousand dollar renovation project.

Pastor Darius Pridgen believes the Subway Franchise will help the church meet the needs of the community.

The Subway Restaurant employs 15 people.

The news of a Baptist Church in Buffalo, New York opening a Subway restaurant in its meeting place raises some important questions.

1. Is this what the church building is for? The article clearly states that the Subway restaurant is located inside the Baptist church building. In fact, the article goes on to say that, “True Bethel Baptist Church on East Ferry held a grand opening inside the church Saturday.” We understand the author’s statement that the grand opening of the restaurant was held “inside the church” to mean that it was held inside the building where the True Bethel Baptist Church meets. Is this the proper use of such a building?

While each local church must meet for worship (1 Cor. 14:26; Heb. 10:24-25), the New Testament nowhere specifies the type of building that must be used for these meetings. The church in Troas met in an upper room (Acts 20:7-8), while the disciples in Ephesus met in a school house (Acts 19:9). But the Scriptures do make clear that, regardless of where the church meets, its meetings are neither the time or place to take care of one’s physical hunger. The Corinthian church had not gone quite as far as the True Bethel Baptist Church in their desire to mix food with worship, but Paul sharply rebuked them anyway, saying, “But

if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment” (1 Cor. 11:33).

2. Is this what the Lord’s money is to be used for?

The article states that the installation of the Subway

restaurant in the True Bethel Baptist Church building is part of a \$150,000 renovation project. In other words, a considerable portion of the \$150,000 spent by the church was directed toward putting a Subway sandwich shop in the building. According to the Bible, each local church is authorized to raise funds by taking a free-will collection from among its members on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:7). With those funds, each local church is authorized to be about the work of spreading the gospel (1 Thess. 1:8), strengthening the members of the church spiritually (Eph. 4:11-16), and taking care of needy saints (Rom. 15:26). Where does the New Testament authorize a church to pay thousands of dollars of the Lord’s money to the Subway corporation for the purpose of opening a sandwich-selling business in its meeting place?

3. Is this how the church meets the needs of the community?

The article notes that the “pastor” of the True Bethel Baptist Church “believes the Subway Franchise will help the church meet the needs of the community.” The “pastor’s” belief displays a fundamental misunderstanding, not only of the nature of the community’s needs, but also of the manner in which the church should meet those needs.

Contrary to what some may believe, the needs of the community do not revolve around the need for a Subway sandwich. The great need of every community is salvation from sin (Rom. 3:23; 6:23) which comes only through hearing, believing, and obeying the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:36-38; Heb. 5:9). While the availability of a foot-long sub sandwich may satisfy the physical



“Grounds For Success”

Larry Ray Hafley

This was the title of a recent article in the *Houston Chronicle*. The “Abundant Life Church” (in La Marque, a Houston suburb), a “nondenominational church with a loyal customer base of about 3,000 ‘proudly brews Starbucks,’ as two new signs inside the church doors proclaim. Senior Pastor Walter Hallam and his staff have turned the church lobby into Jac’s, a coffee shop and bookstore that offers La Marque’s only access to the . . . Seattle-based institution with a devoted following of its own.

“Coffee around a church is not a novel idea,” Hallem said. “We just took it to another level.

“. . . It’s a ministry,” said Martha Bell, manager of the store and coffehouse. . . . “We do get people who come in here and ask for help. We pray for them.”

“. . . The café is an arm of the church, profits will go back into the church. . . .”

“Hallam, a cappuccino drinker himself, sees the café as a community service.

“. . . For Julie Harless, a church member for 11 years, the new café means she doesn’t have to drive ‘all the way to Baybrook to buy my coffee. As far as I’m concerned, it’s a God gift,’ she said.

“Vola Regini, a church member . . . wasn’t convinced the first time she heard of the idea. ‘I said, ‘What is going on here?’ I didn’t understand the concept behind it. But I said, ‘I know my Pastor hears from God.’

“. . . Regini also thinks the café might be a good way to evangelize in the community. But as Hallam sees it, the café was not set up to lure people to his belief in Jesus. It simply offers a spot for the many college students in the area to take a load off and have a revitalizing cup of coffee.



“Jesus won’t, of course, be leaving the building. ‘I won’t be in there too much myself, but someone were to ask me about Jesus . . . I mean, we’d love to talk about Jesus,’ Hallam said.”

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

What next? McDonald’s, KFC? If it is “a ministry,” and

hunger of those in the community, it will do nothing to satisfy their spiritual hunger. The church meets the needs of the community when it teaches the community about the saving message of Christ (1 Tim. 3:15). It is this vital truth that is conveniently overlooked by the True Bethel Baptist Church, as well as by all who would like for the church to engage in recreation and entertainment for the purpose of meeting the “needs” of the community.

CONCLUSION

The opening of the church-sponsored Subway restaurant makes one wonder what is next on the horizon. In what other corporate adventures may the wisdom of men seek to involve the church? How long will it be before a church

finds that it can function much more easily by having a Kinko’s on the premises? When will the first Starbucks grand opening inside a church building take place? When will a church decide that it can better “meet the needs of the community” by operating a bank, a laundry service, or a gas station? As the article notes, the True Bethel Baptist Church “is the first church in America to open its own Subway restaurant.” Unfortunately, it is not likely to be the last to embark on such a scheme in the name of religion. For, “evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13).

2427 Bent Tree Rd., Apt. 2522, Palm Harbor, FL 34683
ddann1@tampabay

What Is Required For Eternal Life?

John Isaac Edwards

In a Real Audio message on “Coming to Christ,” Max Lucado, preacher for the Oak Hills church of Christ in San Antonio, Texas and best-selling author, said, “In God’s sight all that is required for eternal life is your personal faith in him.” What saith the Scripture about this?

A GIFT IS REQUIRED

Paul said, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). Eternal life required God giving his Son. If it were not for the gift of God, there would be no eternal life!

OBEDIENT FAITH IS REQUIRED

Jesus declared, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). “Believeth” is a comprehensive term, including all that one does from hearing to obeying. One may believe in God, but if he does not obey he will not be saved (Heb. 5:9; 2 Thess. 1:8-9).

BEING IN CHRIST IS REQUIRED

1 John 5:11 records, “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” There are two ways we have eternal life in Christ: In hope (Tit. 1:2) and in promise (1 John 2:25). If we are outside of Christ, then we do not have the hope and promise of eternal life. How do we get into Christ? The Scripture says we are “baptized into Christ” (Gal. 3:27). Since eternal life is in Christ and the only way we get into Christ is by being baptized into Christ, then Bible baptism is required for one to have eternal life. In a television interview Lucado said, “I just don’t believe baptism saves you.” More is required than Lucado teaches. Many are being misled by the teaching of Max Lucado.

“a good way to evangelize,” how will some of our liberal brethren oppose the insertion of a Starbucks coffeehouse? For years, they have argued that their cafeterias and gymnasiums are authorized and justified because they are used to teach the gospel. That’s what these folks are saying about their Starbucks! So, shall we expect that churches of Christ will soon have “Happy Meals”?

Initially, one of the members, when she saw the Starbucks,” asked, “What’s going on here?” Well, “What’s going on here” is but an extension of the social gospel. The Lord condemned those who sought him for the loaves and fishes (John 6:26, 27); today, however, churches make their pitch with them. Thus, are we to understand that it is a work of God to “allure” the untaught with loaves and fishes, with coffee and savory dishes, but it is wrong for the individual to be enticed by them?

Though Scripture explicitly says, “the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking,” shall we say it is so nonetheless (Rom. 14:17; cf. 16:17, 18)? If Starbucks coffeehouses are “a ministry,” and “a good way to evangelize,” why did the apostles, say that they could not leave the word of God to “serve tables” (Acts 6:1-6)? According to the social gospel concept, dining rooms (a.k.a., “fellowship halls”) and

Starbucks cafes are an “arm of the church” and part of its “allure.” Since brethren have said the same thing about their in-house dining facilities (“fellowship halls”), what is wrong with the Starbucks café ministry?

The poor lady who initially questioned the Starbucks café finally justified it by saying, “I know my pastor hears from God.” Scripture furnishes us completely “unto every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). However, this lady knows her pastor “hears from God.” Did God tell her pastor something contrary to what the Holy Spirit teaches, “the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking”? If one’s pastor may authorize a thing, why object to the false doctrines and practices of Catholics who appeal to the pope on the very same basis?

Brethren, there are yet souls, some of them at that Starbucks café, perhaps, who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness. They know not how they may be filled. Privately, they realize their souls are starving for the true bread and water of life. They know they are being fed the crumbs of this world which will neither sanctify nor satisfy their soul’s needs. It is up to us to preach and teach the pure gospel of grace and to squelch the spiritual hunger that lines their forlorn faces.

The Original Church of Christ: Then and Now

Ron Halbrook

God created the spirit or soul of man in his image so that we can have fellowship with him for time and eternity. God as “the Father of spirits” creates all of us innocent, and he creates us with free will so that we can choose to obey or to disobey him (Heb. 12:9). “Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions [i.e., sinful plans and schemes]” (Eccl. 7:29). “For all have sinned, and come short

Christ would call the sinner out of his sins and alienation from God into a new, living, spiritual relationship with God.

of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Sin breaks our fellowship with God, but he sent his Son into the world to die as a perfect sacrifice so that we might have forgiveness and be reconciled to himself. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). The Bible records the promises and fulfillment of God’s plan to send his Son to live among men, to die for our sins, and to be raised from the dead as our Savior and Lord.

Jesus spent his life teaching lessons to prepare sinners to understand and receive forgiveness of their sins. John the forerunner announced the presence of Jesus in these words: “Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Jesus explained his mission in similar words: “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost”

(Luke 19:10). He spoke and taught as God on earth, the very source of truth and salvation: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). His word alone frees the sinner from his sins, as Jesus said, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32).

When Peter confessed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus responded by saying that upon this great bedrock or mountain of truth he would call sinners unto himself as the way of salvation, or, “Upon this rock I will build my church” (Matt. 16:16-18). The Greek word translated “church” refers to a number or group of people called out from one location, situation, or relationship into another. Christ would call the sinner out of his sins and alienation from God into a new, living, spiritual relationship with God. Through the preaching of his Apostles the church of Christ or kingdom of God would come into existence, i.e., men would be forgiven of their sins, be reconciled unto God, and thus enjoy fellowship with God (Matt. 16:18-19).

After dying on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world, Jesus Christ sent out his Apostles as eyewitnesses of his resurrection to proclaim the good news of salvation: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that

believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16). All the world must know that the Savior has come!

THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

After Jesus Christ ascended back to heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to guide his Apostles in proclaiming the gospel to all the world, beginning in Jerusalem in Acts 2. They preached the death and resurrection of Christ, showing that he is now sitting on his throne in the new kingdom of God. Sinners were urged to receive salvation: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). Three thousand people were immersed in water under the authority of Christ on that very day, and then others were added day by day: “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:41, 47). The church of Christ had now come into existence as men entered the way of salvation in Christ by obeying the gospel of Christ.

The church of Christ is not a man-made organization subject to the desires and demands of men, but it is a spiritual relationship and divine organization under the sole headship of Christ. God raised him from the dead and “put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23). Therefore, the original church of Christ has no denominational ties, no denominational name, no denominational creed, and no denominational organization.

Churches of Christ from place to place are united in faith and practice by a simple devotion to Christ as the Savior and the only head of his church. Because of this devotion to Christ, his individual followers wear his name as “Christians” (Acts 11:26; 1 Pet. 4:16), and Christians who join

together to serve him under his authority from place to place wear his name as “churches of Christ” (Rom. 16:16). In their individual capacity or in their congregational capacity, they wear no additional human names such as Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, Lutheran, or any other. In fact, they were forbidden to embrace such human names and loyalties because this practice would only divide the people of God who are united in Christ (1 Cor. 1:12-13).

THE TEACHING OF CHRIST: THE ONLY CREED

The teaching of Christ is the only creed in the church of Christ. Because of their unreserved devotion to Christ, these first Christians and churches of Christ regarded his word as final and conclusive on all matters, not subject to review or revision by anyone. The only rule of faith and practice is the Bible itself, with the New Testament as the full and final revelation of the gospel of Christ. The New Testament records “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

We cannot add anything or subtract anything from the original teaching of Christ, including what he revealed while on the earth and what he revealed through his Apostles after he returned to heaven. Jesus promised to reveal “all truth” to the Apostles he chose in the first century (John 16:13). He fulfilled that promise in the first century. Thus, he revealed “all things that pertain unto life and godliness,” and the Apostles wrote this revelation in the books of the New Testament so that we may “have these things always in remembrance” (2 Pet. 1:3, 15).

Therefore, in order to follow the original gospel of Christ, we must preach and practice *all* that is taught in the New Testament and *only* what is taught in the New Testament. “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11). If we add anything or subtract anything from the original gospel, we fall under the anathema of God: “But though we,

or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8-9).

The original gospel of Christ included the proclamation of the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and rule of Christ at the Father’s right hand (Acts 2:22-36; 1 Cor. 15). The original gospel of Christ included the record of the conditions or steps necessary for men to receive salvation from all past sins and to enter into fellowship with God: faith in Christ, repentance from sins, confession of Jesus as the Christ, and immersion in water for the remission of sins (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 8:26-40). This original gospel included the instructions Christ revealed for the work, worship, and organization of Christians united as local churches under his rule (Matt. 28:20; 1 Tim. 3:14-15).

THE WORK, WORSHIP, AND ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

The New Testament records the work of churches of Christ as evangelism, edification of the saved, and benevolence to destitute members of the church (1 Thess. 1:7-8; Eph. 4:11-12; Acts 2:43-44). The instruction for worship “in spirit and in truth” includes Christians meeting to share the Lord’s supper every Sunday, to give into the treasury of the church every Sunday, to pray, to teach God’s word, and to sing (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Eph. 5:19).

The pattern for the organization of churches of Christ reveals that local leaders should be appointed in each congregation to oversee its work and worship. These leaders are called *elders* or *presbyters* (because of spiritual maturity; Acts 14:23), *shepherds* or *pastors* (because they guard and lead Christians like a shepherd cares for sheep; Eph. 4:11), and *overseers* or *bishops* (because they manage and oversee the affairs of the local church; 1 Tim. 3:2). These terms are not different offices but refer to the same office of leadership under Christ in

the local church (see “elders,” “overseers,” and “feed” or shepherd in Acts 20:17, 28). These men are assisted by special servants called deacons. Elders and deacons are appointed when they meet specific qualifications given by Christ in the New Testament (1 Tim. 3).

The New Testament reveals no central headquarters, boards of directors, district overseers, archbishops, or super-organization over local churches, but only independent local churches under the direct authority of Christ. Evangelists or preachers along with other teachers proclaim the gospel to the lost and edify Christians, but without claiming supervisory power over them. Preachers have no legislative, executive, or judicial powers but are authorized simply to “preach the word” of truth (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

THE ORIGINAL GOSPEL REVEALED AND CONFIRMED IN THE FIRST CENTURY

The original gospel of Christ was fully revealed and fully confirmed by the miracles of the first century (Mark 16:15-20; Heb. 2:1-4). All of the miracles recorded in the New Testament were actual, historical events and they prove beyond all reasonable doubt the truth of the deity of Jesus Christ and the truth of all things taught in the New Testament (John 20:31).

According to Paul the Apostle of Christ, the miracles would continue as the means by which the truth was to be revealed and confirmed little by little, line by line, part by part until the process of revelation would be completed. “For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away” (1 Cor. 13:9-10). “That which is perfect” is identical to “the perfect law of liberty,” “all things which pertain unto life and godliness,” and “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jas. 1:25; 2 Pet. 1:3; Jude 3).

At the end of the first century, the miraculous process of revelation and confirmation ended because it had fulfilled its purpose. The miraculous gifts involved in this process were done away, just as the word of God had promised. The genuine miracles recorded in the Bible do not continue today because God is not revealing and confirming new truth. “All truth” is contained in the New Testament (John 16:13).

In the passing of the centuries, many people have made many changes in the original teaching of the gospel recorded in the New Testament.

THE ORIGINAL GOSPEL CHANGED BY MEN

In the passing of the centuries, many people have made many changes

in the original teaching of the gospel recorded in the New Testament. Teachers have appeared claiming faith in Christ but denying the reality of his miracles, denying his atoning death, and denying his literal resurrection. The steps or conditions for receiving salvation have been changed, with religious bodies teaching the opposite extremes of salvation by *baptism only* (infant baptism) or salvation by *faith only* (before and without immersion in water).

The work of the church has been expanded to include virtually every kind of human endeavor from politics to economic reform to secular education to recreation, but Christ revealed nothing in his word to authorize such activities in the name of the church. The original pattern of worship has been altered by subtractions (not sharing the Lord’s supper every Sunday) and additions (instrumental music, dancing, and drama). The organization of the church has been changed with all kinds of centralized boards, conventions, and headquarters totally absent from New Testament teaching. Christ never ordained a Vatican with its pope or a denominational headquarters with its president.

Denominational names abound which identify the human organizations, human leaders, and human loyalties of the various religions formed when men departed from the original church of Christ, such human names as Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, Lutheran, and hundreds of others.

SEEKING THE TRUE WAY OF SALVATION

In the light of these things, what should we do today if we are seeking the true way of salvation? We should recognize Jesus Christ as the original and only Savior, and learn from him about the original gospel, the original plan of salvation given by Christ, and the original church of Christ. If we lay our sins at his feet, they will be forgiven and we will be reconciled to God. The Savior offers salvation to all men: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16).

If we abandon all religions, religious practices, and human names not authorized by him, we can serve Christ individually as “Christians” and meet from place to place as “churches of Christ” just as occurred in the first century. We will restore and follow his original teaching in the New Testament about the work, worship, and organization of the church.

When Christ raises the dead and delivers his people to an eternity of fellowship with God in heaven, we will hear his welcome words, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34).

3505 Horse Run Ct., Shepherdsville, Kentucky 40165

Wonderful and Shameful

Rufus R. Clifford III

Like so many people in the world, I watched the devastation inflicted upon the people in Louisiana and Mississippi by hurricane Katrina. People left stranded without food, without water, without money, without all the little things in life that many of us take for granted everyday. I was impressed and proud to read of so many brethren rushing to the aid of other brethren who were homeless and destitute. I thought of what Jesus taught about loving our brethren and neighbors as ourselves and of the Holy Spirit's admonition to John in 1 John 4:20-21. Yes how truly wonderful it was and is to see congregations and individuals reaching into their treasuries and pockets and sending out so much money to help those who were and are in need. Wonderful I thought to myself and then shameful too. How I could I view such love, such willingness to help, such examples of true Christianity in action as being wonderful and shameful at the same time? Let me explain.

Being a preacher since 1986 I have labored part-time and full-time in striving to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. When I decided in 1997 to leave a very high paying job where I was making \$17 an hour plus benefits to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, I had to seek outside support as so many preachers have done and are seeking to do now.

Letters were sent to many congregations and many went unanswered while a few came back with the words every preacher seeking support learns very quickly, "We can't help you sorry, but you are in our prayers" or "We've already made out our budget for the year."

Finally after months and in some cases years, I received support from nine congregations to do the greatest work a man can do—preach the gospel in an effort to save souls. Many congregations could only support me for half the year so the process began all over again after six months. Some of them promised a year, others two, or a letter would arrive telling me the support was just going to end, with no explanation given. Like so many other preachers many times I was forced to simply inform the small congregation

where I preached that I would have to move, as I couldn't raise the support needed to stay.

I always found it interesting that many congregations would give support if I were moving to a particular area of the country! Did you know that treasuries unlock if you promise to move to certain states and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ? Each time I was forced to move due to lack of support the whole process of finding support would have to begin all over and with the process came back the letters of rejection. I mention these things because so many preachers are needing support and go through the many things I've mentioned.

I've also noticed many preachers when looking for a congregation put in their ad "*Seeking self-supporting congregation.*" Why? Because so many treasuries are locked tight to the man who does the greatest work in the world! Why do I see this as shameful? Well, if we make some comparisons I think you will see my point.

1. Those who are suffering due to hurricane Katrina have a need!
2. Gospel preachers seeking support have a need! (1 Cor. 9:14; 11:8, 9).



How many preachers out there are getting by on little to nothing because churches claim they can't help and then suddenly a need arises (Katrina) and suddenly e-mails are sent across the country and churches and individuals willingly and surprisingly send thousands of dollars to help the brethren in need! Have you considered how this looks to that preacher to whom you sent that letter or worse yet didn't even take the time to respond to him? I'll tell you if you are curious, *wonderful and shameful!* God knows what a congregation or individual can or can't do and we all must answer for that in the last great day (2 Cor. 5:10).

Is it good to help those brethren who have been affected by Katrina and are in need? Certainly it is for how can we claim to love God and not help our fellow man! Wonderful

What the Lord Requires

Marc W. Gibson

Micah 6:6-8 is one of the most significant and well-known passages in the Old Testament:

With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or ten thousands rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?

The prophet contemplates what the Lord requires of man when he comes before the most High God. One idea would be to offer to God multitudes of sacrifices and offerings. He suggests thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil, and even one's firstborn. Yet, will countless sacrifices and offerings *alone* please God? If I keep piling on the rituals of worship, will God be forced to count me as faithful?

The prophet then says that God has shown man what is good, and what he requires of man. It is not a mystery too complicated to understand. The principles of goodness and righteousness are the basis of all true service and worship of God. This passage sums it up in three principles:

DO JUSTLY

Man is required of the Lord to "do justly," or to act properly. To do what is just, or proper, is to act according to the divine standard of the law of God. Man must live by a standard of right and wrong, and God provides us with the only absolute and complete standard of truth. This is important in a world that blurs the distinctions between right and wrong. God has shown us the truth and how to live by it so that we may "do justly."

LOVE MERCY

Man is also required of the Lord to "love mercy," or to follow after compassion and kindness. There are those around us who are in need of mercy and compassion, and we are to love our neighbors as ourselves (Rom. 13:9). Jesus showed compassion (Mark 1:41), and we are to show mercy (Jas. 2:13; 3:17). This is a fundamental trait of one who would follow a merciful God.

WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD

Man is required to "walk humbly" with his God. To "walk" with God is to align one's life with the statutes and will of the Father. "Can two walk together unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3). If we walk with God, we are following his steps and direction, not our own. To walk "humbly" indicates a complete submission of our will to God. We

indeed to see such an outpouring of funds that were previously locked tight or unavailable now sent freely to those in need. I'm personally glad those congregations found that money that they told that preacher they didn't have, aren't you?

I'm not trying to bring people down but only to make them examine their hearts. Many times congregations and individuals are quick to help needy saints if a catastrophe has befallen them and this is good and right. Let us not forget though that God cares about the one just as he does the many and for a congregation to claim it can't help that preacher be it monthly or a one time support and then turn

around and help the many says something about our hearts! Jesus wants us to help brethren who are needy, be it many or be it one (Matt. 25:45)!

"Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, insomuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."

Yes it's WONDERFUL AND SHAMEFUL!

300 Scenic Dr., Shelbyville, Tennessee 37160
carey4102@aol.com

must follow God in complete and submissive obedience in all things, like Jesus who said to his Father, “Not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).

One commentator said, “This verse is considered by many to be one of the most comprehensive and all-embracing statements in the Old Testament” (Homer Hailey, *The Minor Prophets* 214). It teaches that it is not mere ritual that pleases God, but a total and complete submission to God’s will in our minds and lives.

Samuel told King Saul something similar to this when he rebuked the king for disobeying God and using “offering sacrifices” as an excuse:

Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams (1 Sam. 15:22).

Hear the words of David as he recognizes the true idea of repentance:

For you do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; you do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are

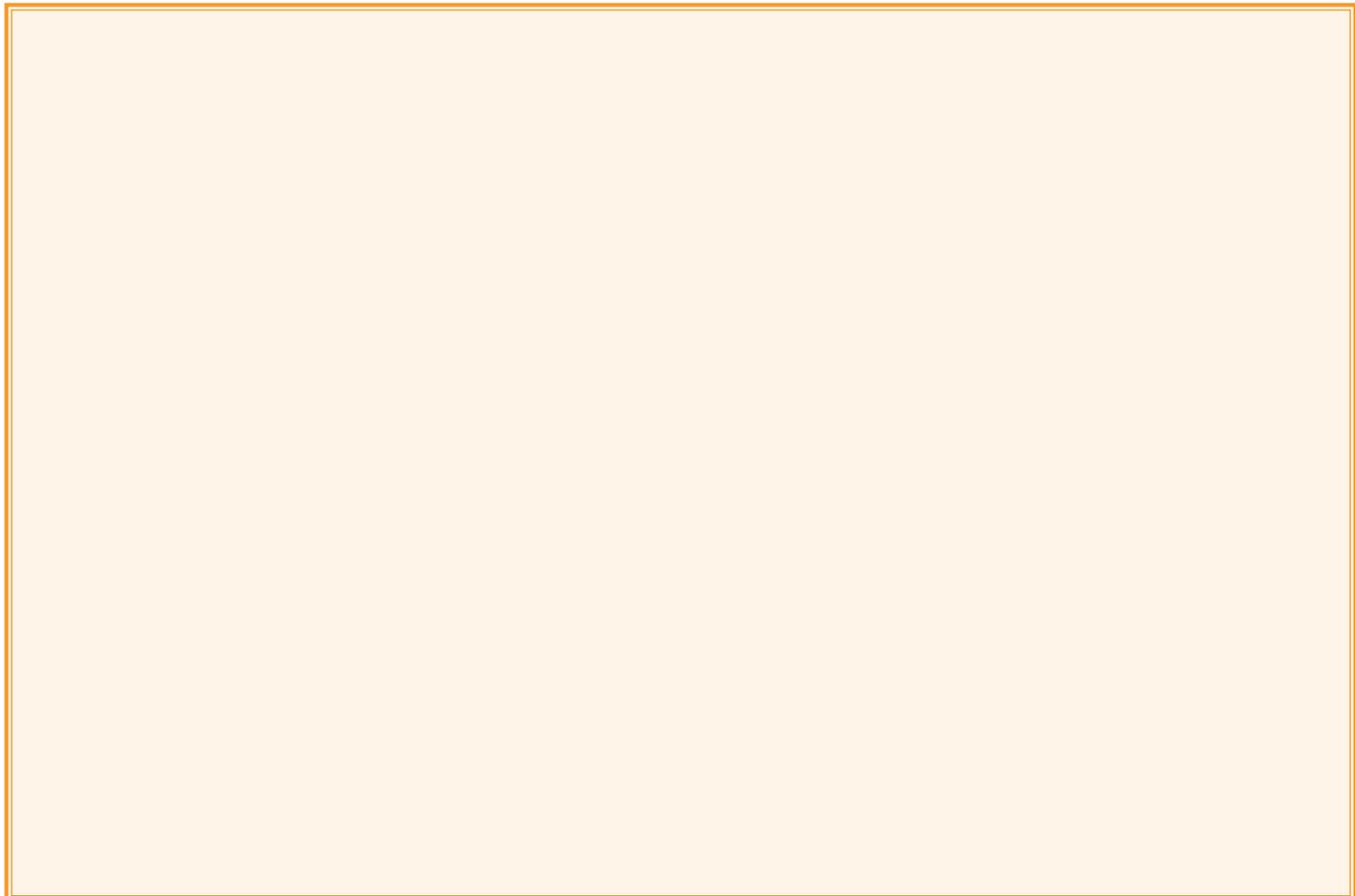
a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, you will not despise (Ps. 51:16-17).

Finally, hear a scribe as he comments on the Scripture that Jesus identified as the “foremost commandment” (Deut. 6:4-5):

And to love [God] with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, *is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices* (Mark 12:33).

Jesus saw that he “answered wisely” and told him that he was “not far from the kingdom of God” (v. 34). This scribe understood that all worship and service unto God must first be based on a total devotion and love for God. This is still what the Lord requires today of his servants in the church, the kingdom of God’s dear Son. Are you walking humbly with your God?

6708 O’Doniel Loop W, Lakeland, Florida 33809



Rebaptism

Jay Horsley

Wednesday night, quite unexpectedly, a long time member of the congregation came forward at the invitation not to confess sin, but to be rebaptized. They explained that they were concerned that their previous baptism as a young person had not been for the right reasons. We happily rebaptized them.

Although such is not a regular occurrence, it is neither unique nor unusual. Gospel preachers tell of rebaptizing those in their 40s, 50s, 60s and even 70s after these people have been involved in local congregations for years. During at least one gospel meeting the visiting preacher rebaptized the local preacher.

Why does this occur? Should it be encouraged? What should our response be? Should we encourage it?

Rebaptism occurs when one who has been baptized previously comes to the understanding that their baptism was not according to the scriptural pattern. When we teach denominational people the gospel way of salvation the question of baptism always comes up. “But I was baptized as a baby.” Some object when we teach the necessity of faith before baptism. Another says, “They only poured water on me” when we teach about immersion. Yet another says, “I was told I was being baptized because I was already forgiven” when shown the gospel purpose its as remission of sins.



On all occasions where the subject, purpose or form of baptism was incorrectly taught and practiced, we wish to shake the confidence that men have in error and bring their thoughts and actions into line with truth. Rebaptism (really a first

scriptural baptism) is the only answer.

But what about cases like our recent one, where the person had been brought up and trained in the truth of

God’s word on this subject? What was taught and what was practiced appeared to be the truth. What was the need for rebaptism? Most cases of rebaptism have one or both of these elements involved in the original baptism: (1) The person involved was very young—the vast majority of rebaptisms are of people baptized under the age of twelve—some as young as seven or eight. (2) There were often others (friends, fellow Bible class members, fellow campers, etc.) being baptized at the same time.

Later, sometimes many years later, after many hours of struggling with their conscience and losing many hours of sleep, the one who was baptized comes to the conviction within themselves that they were baptized with the right form and confession, but not fully for the right purpose—an appeal to God of good conscience calling on his name for forgiveness of sins, because they were too young to be accountable and understandingly confess Christ or they did so because of peer or parental pressures.

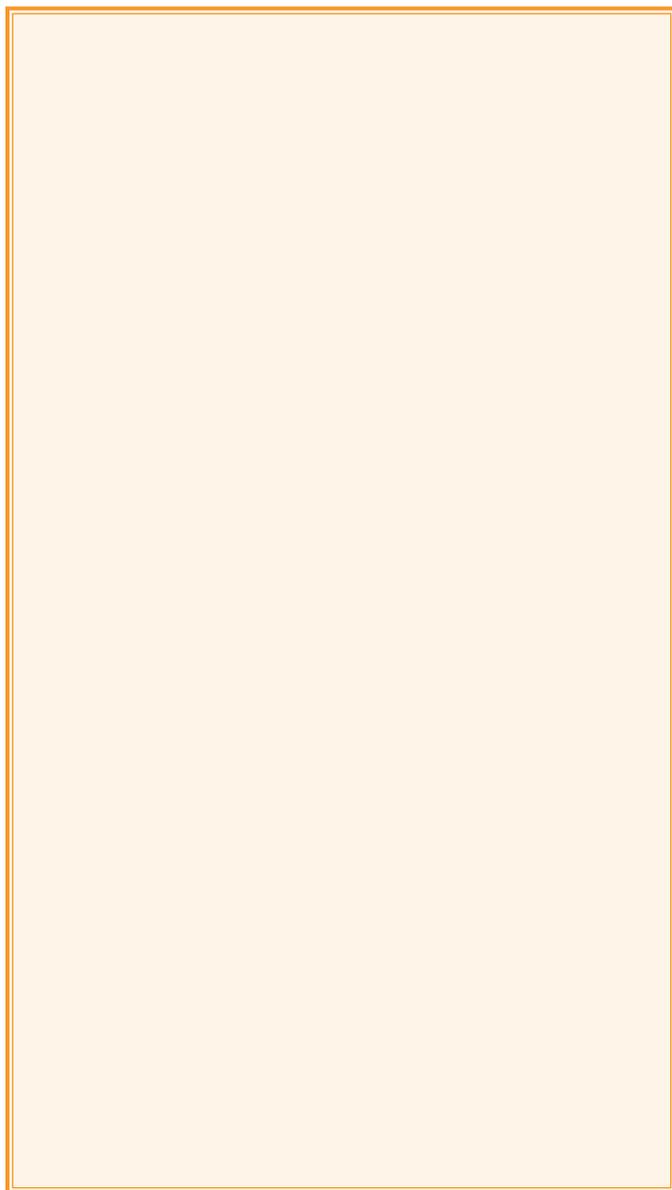
What should those who come to heart-felt conviction on these matters do? Be baptized in the right way, from a full heart immediately.

But let us also be careful not to sow seeds of doubt into the minds of faithful brethren concerning their own baptism because a few are convinced they were mistaken in earlier times. When we teach about *all* that baptism does, all its connections to the one true church and kingdom entrance and leaving the domain of darkness and the world of sin, we do so because such teaching must be done so that Christians understand and preach the importance of baptism and error is defeated. Fuller and fuller understanding of baptism, and what a momentous occasion it is for us, is part of our maturing and growing in the truth—not a requirement for baptism. The full understanding of the symbolism of baptism (cf. Rom. 6) and all the significance of it (not to mention the all the implications that come from believing and living by faith, and all the ramifications of repentance) are not yet in the minds of those who need the salvation that is in Jesus Christ; they are not even to be point of being babes in him yet. Often we do things, especially begin to do things, and only later fully understand what we have gotten into. Growing in Christ and in his grace and knowledge

doesn't mean we must be rebaptized because back then we didn't understand all we know now.

The more anyone knows concerning repentance of sins, the design and purpose of baptism, and the kingdom of God before being baptized as a believer in Jesus Christ, the better. But in the New Testament, those who believed in Christ through the preaching of the gospel and who wanted the salvation that is in him alone could be (and sometimes were) taught enough to obey in a single lesson. They heard and believed in Jesus the Messiah and Savior, had a repentant heart and were baptized on basis of their good confession, not because they had a certificate of completion from a catechism class.

5000 Harbor Light, Dickinson, Texas 77539
preacher@dickinsonchurchofchrist.org



“Paul and Silas” continued from front page

Have you ever considered that these disciples could not tend to their own wounds or the wounds of each other, since they were fastened in the stocks? How could you rest in this situation? You couldn't lie down on your back. Miserable circumstances. Have you ever considered that they were probably sitting there in a puddle of blood? I have to tell you, that's never happened to me. My problems are small. Do you know what else they were doing? *They were singing!*

GOD WANTS US TO SING

We are all aware that God wants his children to sing. We are commanded to teach and admonish one another and to praise God. But in most congregations there are those who don't sing, for whatever reason.

This didn't happen that night, but try to imagine a scenario. Imagine Silas saying to Paul, “Paul, let's sing!” Paul says, “Silas, you know I can't carry a tune in a bucket. You're a good singer so I'm going to leave the singing to you.” Silas says, “But Paul, we've got a lot to sing about and look at the opportunity here!” Paul replies, “I've been singing all my life. I've done my part. Besides, we don't have any songbooks. Even if we did, it's dark in here so how would we be able to see?” Silas responds, “We can't let this opportunity slip away.” Paul replies, “My voice is a little raspy tonight. Nobody wants to hear my fog horn of a voice. Anyway, I can't remember the words without a songbook. And I'm so mad right now that I'm just not in the mood for singing. And, good grief Silas, it's nearly midnight! Whatsa matter with you? To be honest I don't feel like singing and nobody can make me. Besides, my back . . . kinda hurts.”

Paul and Silas sang that night. We ought to be ashamed to make those worn out excuses that we've heard for many years. Here were two crusty old disciples. I bet it didn't sound anything like the Florida College chorus or the Harding choir or some professional gospel group or a “praise team” from some church. But it was beautiful in the ears of God and it had an effect on those who heard. *These were spiritual men!* It had *nothing* to do with creating a spiritual atmosphere with external enhancements. They had not just been through an emotionally moving worship service. No stained glass, no dynamic sermon. It had everything to do with their faith and *the fact that they were not thinking of themselves.*

They were in the most *unspiritual* atmosphere imaginable. If anybody had a right to forego singing that night, they did. But they sang. They sang from memory, sitting there with their feet in the stocks, no way to get in a comfortable position, just sitting there in a puddle of blood.

Have you ever considered that if you are ever a prisoner of war or kidnapped by terrorists that you will have to rely totally on your memory for any hymns you might want to

sing or any Scriptures you might want to hear or share? The fact that Paul and Silas could remember the songs tells us they were used to singing. You can't remember them if you don't sing.

"Is any among you cheerful? Let him sing praises" (Jas. 5:13). So how could Paul and Silas sing? They were happy! They had found the "peace that passes understanding" (Phil. 4:7). There is a kind of peace, tranquility, and happiness that transcends our earthly predicament and doesn't depend on the circumstances and counts it a joy to suffer for Christ. These were spiritual men and *they were thinking of others*. They had just healed a maiden girl. There were the prisoners and jailer. Possibly they were thinking of the infant church in Philippi for as soon as they were released they met with the newly formed congregation and *encouraged them!* (v. 40).

THE JAILER

Here was a man who was on the very edge. He was within fractions of a second and fractions of an inch of taking his own life when he heard a voice that offered him hope. Within moments here was a man whose emotions were stretched from one extreme to the other. He had gotten as low as a man can get. From a state of despair and desperation he rises to *heights of joy* as he and his family and these two prisoners sit at his table! (v. 34).

What stretched this man's emotions from one end to the other? *It was Christianity!* Jesus Christ can make life worth living! No, he hadn't heard the gospel yet (not till v. 32), but he had seen Christianity *in action!* These were unique prisoners. (1) They were honest in not escaping, even though they didn't deserve to be there. Rare indeed! (2) They were singing hymns of praise. In most cases, if any singing is going on it is "Gloom, Despair, and Agony on me. . ." (3) They saved his life. He represented the government that put them there. They could have said, "Tough luck, Buddy. Serves you right. We're outta here." Most hardened criminals will kill in order to escape.

SOME CONTRASTS

Here were some beaten down prisoners who should have been miserable, yet they're happy! Here was a man who was in power and authority—a free man on the outside. He should have been happy, but he was miserable! He saw the contrast and it caused him to blurt out loud a question that many people are ashamed to ask: What must I do to be saved?

We see another contrast in how we treat others. The principle of Christianity is that we should love people and use things (Luke 6:31; Eph. 4:28; Matt. 25:14-30). Men often reverse that. They love things and use people. Those men who brought the charges did not love the slave girl as a person. They used her as a thing—like a freak in a side show. Paul and Silas not only silenced some unneeded ad-

vertising but they freed her from the clutches of the devil and his cohorts. They loved her.

With what smugness the jailer must have thrown Paul and Silas into the inner prison and clamped them into the stocks. At that point there was no love for these prisoners. But they not only saved his life. Ultimately, they also saved his soul. The jailer had seen enough Christianity in action to give him second thoughts. Paul and Silas were looking for opportunities. That's how spiritual men think.

HIS CONVERSION

In answer to his question, they told him to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 31). It is one thing to tell a person to believe and quite another to tell him *what* to believe. They had done the one but not yet the other. We could proclaim all day for people to believe on the Lord, but they can't respond until they know *what* to believe. It is in the next verse (v. 32) that they *spoke the word of the Lord to him*—without which no man can be saved (Rom. 1:16). If he was saved when they told him to believe (v. 31), then he was saved before he heard the gospel (v. 32), making the gospel unnecessary!

Upon hearing the "word of the Lord," the jailer and his household were baptized *immediately*. This writer is aware and has participated in some inconvenient baptisms—driving in a blinding storm, hospital baptisms, breaking the ice on the pond, etc., but there surely has never been a more inconvenient baptism than the one we read of here in Acts 16. (1) An earthquake had occurred. We should never do anything rash after an earthquake for it can lead to disaster, especially in the darkness; (2) They had been through an emotional upheaval with the jailer almost taking his life; (3) The wounds of Paul and Silas needed attention; (4) They had to go elsewhere for the baptizing; (5) It was after midnight. Yet it couldn't even wait till the next morning!

What could possibly have made this so important that he was baptized immediately in spite of all the inconveniences? Was there anything in "the word of the Lord" that would bring on this urgency? What had the Lord said on this subject? "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). That's what made it so urgent! This was the answer to the question he had asked. Did you notice that the jailer never made any of the arguments against baptism that false teachers often make today? He had a different attitude toward "the word of the Lord" than those who make these arguments.

LESSONS FOR CHRISTIANS

These events happened in a short period of time. We should never underestimate our influence, even in a brief encounter. Look at how they changed this man's life! Does your Christianity show when you are in dire circumstances?

I have often wondered why Paul didn't tell the authorities immediately that they were Roman citizens instead of waiting till the next day to inform them that they had been beaten contrary to Roman law. Perhaps some providence here. If he had done that he might never have met the jailer, and we wouldn't have this moving account of the events that led to this man's conversion. And the church at Philippi might not have become the beacons of light that they became (Phil. 2:15). As a charter member, I have often wondered just what part the jailer and his family played in that little epistle of joy in which some form of that word appears so often (Phil. 4:4). It may be that farther along we'll understand these things.

Paul and Silas sang that night. *And what a night it was for singing!*

P.O. Box 600844, Jacksonville Florida 32260
rlb612@aol.com

“Abortion” continued from page 2

womb are making it impossible to describe the unborn as a “mass of tissue.” Medical and technological advances are redefining the abortion debate.

Efforts have been made to define “personhood” by both sides in the debate. The Pro-abortion side minimizes personhood to such a degree that even the recently born would not be labeled a person. The Pro-life side defines person by saying, “if you are conceived by human parents, you are human.” This definition makes life begin at conception and would make IUDs and RU-486 abortive rather than preventive.

There have been several approaches to abortion taken by legal authorities which may be broken into the following four categories:

§ Prohibition. This approach makes abortion illegal, making it a criminal act to perform or solicit to obtain an abortion. This was the law in most of the individual states prior to the 1973 Supreme Court ruling. In 1965, for example, all fifty states treated abortion and attempted abortion at all stages of pregnancy as felonies, subject to certain exceptions. Many countries which have prohibitive laws still make exception in the case of rape and incest.

§ Permission. Many countries have laws that permit abortion so long as one meets certain criteria, which must be approved by government officials or other officially approved decision makers. The criteria include such things as the mother's health is in jeopardy, it poses a psychological risk, how far developed the baby is, etc.

§ Prescription. Under the model of prescription, the government compels or virtually compels women to obtain all of the abortions that the government wants. Countries such as China which has been struggling for population control have prescriptive laws. Since 1979 Chinese couples wishing to bear children have been authorized to have only one child, and then only after securing a government permit. The consequences of the approach include female infanticide and abortion for sex selection.

§ Privacy. Under the privacy model, which is the model followed in the U.S., the government is not involved in the decision to have an abortion. That is decided by the woman and her doctor without governmental interference. In this model the issue is “women's rights.”

Those who approach the issue from a Pro-abortion point of view argue that one needs to make a distinction between morality and law. Pro-lifers respond by stating that many moral issues are also legal issues, such as “thou shalt not steal,” “thou shalt not kill,” “thou shalt not bear false witness.” This issue is complicated by trying to determine which moral issues should also be legal issues (lying?, adultery?, fornication?, gossip?) and by the fact that we live in a pluralistic society, one in which the Christian ethic is no longer the majority view. What does quoting the Bible mean to those who do not accept it as having authority over their lives? One response to this has been to argue for the Christian view based on something other than what the Bible teaches. (For example, one might argue against a business which markets pornography by arguing that it affects property values, attracts an unwholesome element in the community, leads to child pornography, etc. rather than arguing on the basis of Matthew 5:27-28 that whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.) This approach against abortion has been used in arguing for the rights of the unborn, controlling abortion through advertising and zoning restrictions, informed consent laws, requirement that a second physician be present when administering an abortion, etc. Most of us could better participate in the debate in the public square if we would become more adept in arguing these moral issues in terms that the unbelieving public will accept.

When the issue is reduced to its simplest form, one's position on abortion stems from his religious or world view. Those who deny there is a God and/or deny that the Bible is a revelation from God (such as is the case in most liberal Protestant denominations) tend to favor the Pro-abortion point of view. On the other hand, those who believe in God and accept the Bible as a divine revelation from God which should govern the ethical conduct of those who believe its teaching generally are Pro-life. As one of the latter, I believe that all men are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26) and should be treated equally in the eyes of civil law. I believe

that the unborn is a baby, not a mass of tissue. No one can prove conclusively that the unborn fetus is not human life and, in the absence of unimpeachable evidence, those who take the life of the unborn at the very least *may* be taking human life and at the very worst are committing murder. Those who are committed to following the Bible believe that references to the unborn in the womb as babies show that they are human life and should be treated as persons (Luke 1:41, 44; Gen. 25:24; 38:27; Ruth 1:11; Job 3:11; 10:18; 31:15; etc.). A woman's rights end when her rights deprive the unborn child of its right to life. Admittedly there are moral dilemmas which doctors face when they must treat a condition in the mother that unintentionally takes the life of the unborn (tubal pregnancy, uterine cancer, etc.), but these exceptional cases should not be used to argue for moral principles for daily living.

As Christians, let us pray that this moral scourge of abortion, which is estimated to be taking 1.5 million lives a year, may be removed from our land.

6567 Kings Ct., Avon, Indiana 46123, mikewillis@indy.rr.com

Preacher Needed

Des Moines, Iowa: The Des Moines church is looking for an evangelist to help them grow spiritually and numerically. They are a small congregation of about 35 that represents the only faithful church in a metro area of approximately 500,000. The members are looking for an enthusiastic, scripturally sound evangelist. At this time they are able to provide partial support, but their goal is to grow so that they can ultimately provide full support. If interested, please contact Mark Hetrick at 515-964-5951, e-mail: markahetrick@mchsi.com.

Quips & Quotes

Republicans Split Over Religion's Growing Role in Their Party

"March 28 (Bloomberg) — Republicans, who have profited politically from emphasizing faith and family values, are now finding those same issues dividing the party.

"Economic conservatives and secular Republicans complain their message is being drowned out by Christian conservatives preoccupied with banning abortion and gay marriage and limiting stem-cell research.

"On the other side, 'values' advocates say they have provided the party with crucial support, particularly in 2004, when they mobilized religious conservatives to go to the polls to help re-elect President George W. Bush.

"Such concerns are turning long-simmering Republican tensions over the role of religious conservatives into an election-year split in a party already strained by differences on the Iraq war, immigration and government spending.

"There is a great deal of concern about this seeming attempt to couch everything in religious terms,' said Christine Todd Whitman, the former governor of New Jersey. 'We're not a narrow-minded nation, and at least some of the people trying to define the Republican Party are coming off that way.'

"If anything, religious conservatives deserve a greater Republican commitment to their agenda,' said Tony Perkins, president of the Washington-based Family Research Council.

"We had reason for people all across the country to be engaged at unprecedented levels,' said Perkins, whose group is organizing a 'values voter' summit in September. 'It made a difference in states that were very closely divided'" (http://www.momentmag.com/olam/Apr06/MOM-2006-04_mazar.html).

Afghan Convert to Christianity Is Released, Officials Say

By Sultam M. Munadi and Christine Hauser

"Kabul, Afghanistan, Tuesday, March 28 — The justice minister announced Tuesday that a jailed Afghan man who faced the death penalty for converting to Christianity has been released.

"The man, Abdul Rahman, who had been accused of apostasy for abandoning Islam, had been in custody for weeks but had not been formally charged.

"The justice minister, Sarwar Danish, said Mr. Rahman had been released to his family on Monday night. Mr. Danish said he did not know where Mr. Rahman was" (Published: March 28, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/28/international/asia/28afghan.html?_r=1&th&e).

Christians in Afghanistan: A Community of Faith and Fear

"Afghan converts to Christianity lead dangerous lives and must keep their faith secret to avoid persecution by police, Islamists or even their own neighbors, says a report in Spiegel Online. For 36-year-old Hashim Kabar, anything that could out him as a Christian has been put out of sight, out of fear. He is afraid that what happened to Abdul Rahman, another convert to Christianity, might happen to him. Despite the fact that international pressure prevented Rahman from being sentenced and perhaps executed, Rahman's story illustrates the extreme stress that those who turn away from Islam experience every day. 'We must recognize that freedom of religion, as promised by the Afghan constitution, does not exist,' says Kabar, sadly. 'But maybe it's good that the international community is now aware of that.' Kabar converted to Christianity 20 years ago, when such a thing was not as taboo as it is today. 'There were a lot of churches, both in Kabul and in the country,'

he says. 'Back then the two religions coexisted here almost peacefully.' But that all changed when the Taliban came to power in the mid-1990s" (<http://www.crosswalk.com/news/religiontoday/1386441.html>).

DeLay Defends Religion In Politics

By Carrie Sheffield

"Embattled Rep. Tom DeLay (R-Texas) received three standing ovations yesterday when he spoke at a 'War on Christians' conference in Washington.

"Vision America is sponsoring the two-day conference. While introducing DeLay, Rick Scarborough, founder of Vision America, said, 'Here is a man that I believe God has appointed.'

"'God always does his best work after a crucifixion,' Scarborough said, referring to DeLay's recent troubles. The former majority leader faces a difficult re-election race in the wake of his indictments on money-laundering and conspiracy in Texas.

"Quoting former President Reagan, DeLay told the crowd, "As morality's foundation is religion, religion and politics are necessarily related" (<http://www.hillnews.com/thehill/export/TheHill/News/Frontpage/032906/de-lay.html>).

Poll: Americans See, Hear More Profanity

By Jocelyn Noveck

". . . Nearly three-quarters of Americans questioned last week—74 percent—said they encounter profanity in public frequently or occasionally, according to an Associated Press-Ipsos poll. Two-thirds said they think people swear more than they did 20 years ago. And as for, well, the gold standard of foul words, a healthy 64 percent said they use the F-word—ranging from several times a day (8 percent) to a few times a year (15 percent). . . .

"Younger people admit to using bad language more often than older people; they also encounter it more and are less bothered by it. The AP-Ipsos poll showed that 62 percent of 18 to 34-year-olds acknowledged swearing in conversation at least a few times a week, compared to 39 percent of those 35 and older.

"More women than men said they encounter people swearing more now than 20 years ago—75 percent, compared to 60 percent. Also, more women said they were bothered by profanity—74 percent at least some of the time—than men (60 percent.) And more men admitted to swearing: 54 percent at least a few times a week, compared to 39 percent of women. . . .

"The AP poll questioned 1,001 adults on March 20-22, with a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

"For those who might find the results depressing, there's possibly a silver lining: Many of those who swear think it's wrong nonetheless" (<http://apnews.myway.com/article/20060329/D8GKU61G0.html>).

California Presbyterians Appeal Ruling Over Gay Weddings by Minister

"Friday, March 31, 2006 — Marin, Calif. (AP) — A committee that serves as the legal arm of the Presbyterian Church in Northern California is appealing its case against a minister who officiated at the weddings of two lesbian couples. The prosecuting committee of the Presbytery of the Redwoods plans to appeal a regional church tribunal's ruling this month that Rev. Jane Spahr did not commit misconduct when she performed the same-sex ceremonies. The official Presbyterian Church position is that marriage is reserved for a man and a woman. But after a two-day trial, the tribunal held that Spahr acted within her rights as a minister by following her conscience and presiding at the weddings. 'The church said God loved everyone, and for years I believed it,' Spahr said on March 3 after the tribunal ruled. 'Today, for just one moment, to hear this is remarkable.' The appeal will go to the church's Synod of the Pacific, which oversees parishes in Nevada, Oregon, parts of Washington and Idaho and Northern California. Spahr says she hopes the case will give her another opportunity to speak out against the denomination's position on same-sex marriage" (<http://www.sovo.com/2006/3-31/news/religion/ribs.cfm>).

San Francisco Leaders Assail Christian Youth Rally of 25,000

"San Francisco (AP) — A Christian youth rally that drew more than 25,000 people to AT&T Park last weekend met resistance from city leaders and some residents over its conservative agenda in a largely liberal, gay-friendly metropolis.

"The two-day 'Battle Cry for a Generation' aimed at luring youths away from a popular culture that organizers said glamorizes drugs, violence and sex.

"Similar rallies are set April 7-8 at Detroit's Ford Field and May 12-13 at Philadelphia's Wachovia Spectrum.

"Ron Luce, whose Texas-based Teen Mania sponsors the events, urges a 'reverse rebellion' against corrupting influences such as MTV and the online meeting hub, MySpace.com. The rallies featured Christian rock bands and promote a Christian alternative to MySpace.com, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

"Last week, the city's Board of Supervisors passed a resolution condemning the 'act of provocation' by an 'anti-gay,' 'anti-choice' organization that aimed to 'negatively influence the politics of America's most tolerant and progressive city.'

"Luce said it was the first time one of his meetings has been officially condemned.

"When Luce led a pre-rally teen meeting outside City Hall, Democratic state Assemblyman Mark Leno told counter-protesters that Battle Cry was a 'fascist mega-pep rally' and attending teens should 'get out of San Francisco'" (<http://www.forbes.com/technology/feeds/ap/2006/03/30/ap2634282.html>).