

# The Berea Baptist Banner

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

## The Blood Crying Against Herod

By Jeff Short

Mantachie, Mississippi

**"For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly"** (Mark 6:20). Christ declared



Jeff Short

John the Baptist as the greatest prophet that ever arose from among those born of women. John's birth was marked with extraordinary events, as was his later ministry. In like manner, the death of the Baptist is probably one of the most gruesome acts that we have record of in the Bible. He died as the first Baptist martyr; beheaded for the cause of Christ.

The events in our text happened after the death of John. The ministry of Jesus of Nazareth was growing, as John had foretold, and Herod heard of His fame. Herod believed this rising preacher was **"John the Baptist...risen from the dead"** (Mark 6:14). Some conjectured about His identity saying, **"It is Elias,"** and others supposed, **"It is a prophet, or as one of the prophets"** (Mark 6:15). However, Herod was unconvinced and said, **"It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen**

**from the dead"** (Mark 6:16).

Jesus was going about preaching and his disciples were baptizing. A great stir was being made by His ministry. Herod thought that it was the reincarnation of John the Baptist, whom he had killed, coming back to haunt him. Luke testifies that Herod **"desired to see him"** (Luke

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## Teach Us To Pray

By Ray Bennett

Ithaca, New York

**"And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples"** (Luke 11:1).

Doesn't it seem a bit strange that we live in a society that seeks to remove all religious elements from any form of public life or place, yet the same government



Ray Bennett

that wants to remove prayer from the schools and the Ten Commandments from government buildings is quick to ask us to *pray* whenever things don't go well?

As I type this, I have just finished a crash course in

Critical Incident Stress Management, where we are supposed to help emergency responders handle and release the stress that builds up in their calls, especially when they "lose one." Incorporated in that training, and rightly so, is the advice to us to utilize the same principles to keep us from burning out. We addressed the well-worn cliché, "do as I say, not as I do." But isn't that exactly what the government leaders, and ACLU, are doing to us?

The disciples asked the Lord to teach them to pray. Just that in itself should impress on us that prayer, that works, is not simply reciting "Now I lay me down to sleep," or repeating the so-called Lord's Prayer, a rosary, or the like. Whole books have been written on the subject of

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## The Mandate of Missions

By Milburn Cockrell

(1941 - 2002)

**"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world"** (Matt. 28:18-20).

These words of Jesus Christ do not sound any more faintly as they travel down the centuries of time to this present generation of disciples. These instructions which He gave concerning the spread of the gospel to all nations should



Milburn Cockrell

be heard with a greater distinctness today than at any time since the Apostolic Age. The mission of the church is missions, because missions are the heartthrob of the Word of God.

**"Jesus...Spake Unto Them"**

The words of the Great Commission were spoken to that company of baptized disciples who constituted the church then

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## The Lord's Going Before

By John Warburton

Part 1

(1776 - 1857)

**"And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee?"** (Judges 4:14).

You will find in the connection of these words that Israel was in great distress and that a very great and powerful enemy threatened to devour the people. This enemy had nine hundred chariots of iron, while the Israelites were but as a little flock of kids, and it appears that they were in great distress as a people and nation. In their distress they cried out unto the Lord.

What a great God is our God,



John Warburton

and ways by which He reveals His word to His children. He revealed His will to Deborah, a prophetess, for there were prophetesses in these days as well as prophets. The Lord

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that He should ever notice such creatures after all their provocations, and after all the dishonour done to His holy name. How wonderful are all His methods

## Satan the Serpent

By Billy Holbrook

Oblong, Illinois

**"Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"** (Gen. 3:1).

I believe that there was a reason why Satan took upon himself the form of a serpent or snake. His purpose here was to deceive Eve and that's what he did. When the Bible speaks of the serpent, it is most often speaking about Satan or it is a picture of Satan. We have different titles of God to reveal unto us His character and likewise Satan is



Billy Holbrook

called "Serpent" to reveal unto us his character. Satan's purpose has not changed from the time of Eve in the garden. He is still a deceiver, liar, and a murderer. What I wish to do is show some characteristics of killer snakes and Satan that "Old Serpent."

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## Teach Us To Pray

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prayer, so obviously we are not going to engage in a deep, exegetical, and exhaustive study of prayer, but if God permit, perhaps we can break down some of the greatest barriers to successful prayer.

Our Lord's answer to the disciples' request was two fold. First, He gave them a pattern prayer. According to the leading we are now feeling from the Lord, this will be a two part study, taking the pattern prayer our Lord gave us, and the two related instructions that are on either side of it, attempting to assist *our* prayer life. For this, we will leave the text in Luke and look at the more extensive text from Matthew 6:1-18, using just verses 7-15.

Verse 7, "**But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.**"

One of the most common complaints I hear, concerning prayer meetings or other public prayer occasions, is the

people are "praying by rote." That is essentially what the Lord is dealing with in this verse. We usually, and correctly, apply "**vain repetitions**" to the examples already listed, but the complaint we spoke of is a valid complaint concerning a repeated prayer list, over and over again. This is a difficult subject because there is nothing wrong with using a prayer list, and it is even recommended, so important items don't fall through the cracks, as it were. And we must never forget our Lord's teaching in Luke 11:5-10 concerning the importunity of prayer. We don't quit asking after the first or second request!

But, my friend, listening to you pray, I can usually pick up in a hurry if you are using 'vain repetitions' or if your prayer is from the heart, begging the Lord to grant your request. We'll say more about your requests later.

Verse 8, "**Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.**"

That well known and often quoted speaker and writer, "Someone," once said, "Being taken for granted was the highest form of complement." Of course, the meaning is that you are so trusted there is no doubt about your being there. So, this *also* becomes a difficult subject. "**For your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.**" So why are we encouraged to keep on asking? I suggest it is the proof of our sincerity. Yet, this verse goes hand in hand with the many verses that call for praying with the faith that God *will* grant your request. This, also, will get further attention later;

Verse 9, "**After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.**" Did you ever notice how *little* time we spend in *praising* God, but how *much* time we spend petitioning God? But the first item in our Lord's sample prayer is praise for God and recognition of His holiness. Have you ever heard the expression, "you catch more flies with honey?" Without bringing God down to our level, we can still safely say that when our prayers honor and praise God *first*, we can have a much greater faith that He will *hear* our prayers. 1 John 3: 22 is dealing with our life and lifestyle, not with the *manner* of our prayer, but the principle is well seen there. "**And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.**"

Verse 10, "**Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.**" Here is where we address the "requests" as we have promised to. In relation to this verse, there are two prerequisites and one promise. Even though there are a lot of other things said on the subject, it is still these three elements we must cling to.

1. Our requests must *first* seek the advancement of *His* kingdom. Matt. 6:33,

"**But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.**" Oh, too many, and too much of our prayer is "gimme, gimme, gimme." James gets involved with this when he writes, "**Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.**" (James 4:3)

2. We must pray in accordance with God's will. "**And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.**" (1 John 5:14) This in itself can take pages of study. If our only hope of answered prayer is that we ask for what God already as decided to do, why do we ask? Because our real prayer comes when *our* wills are aligned with *God's* will. "**Delight thyself also in the LORD;**" the Psalmist said, "**and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.**" Oh, it's too deep to deal with now, but our troubles really begin when we put *our* wills in conflict with *God's* will, and we love and desire what God hates. The Psalmist went on to say, concerning his own relationship with God, "**Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?**" (Psalm 139:21)

3. When our hearts are properly aligned with God, in prayer, we can claim the wonderful promise of Rom. 8:26, "**Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.**" Did you notice that our Lord puts our personal requests at the end of the prayer? It's that old chorus we used to teach to our children, about how to spell "joy, Jesus, Others, and You." The "I'm number 1" concept is not the *biblical* concept, but when we put ourselves in the proper place we will receive the blessings and the provisions.

In the first half of this sample prayer, we have dealt more with the proper *attitude* of prayer. In this second half of the prayer we can put those attitudes to work in three areas of Christian life that are too often neglected for no better reason than that they are not as visible as ethics. However, I submit that the neglect of these three areas does show in our ethical and practical lives.

Verse 11, "**Give us this day our daily bread.**"

Immediately after the initial praise to our Lord for who He is, we submitted *our* wills to His. We paraphrased that phrase as. "Thy will be done in *my heart*, or *my home town*, or, *my home church*, as it is in heaven." Our Lord introduced the whole pattern prayer by reminding us that God, our Father, (what a beautiful analogy for the *saint's* relationship with God) knows our needs before we ask. In another place, the Lord draws a word picture (see Matt. 7:7-11) assuring us that God will cer-

tainly give His children good gifts. And, incidentally, the pattern of scripture assures good gifts and provision, even to those who are *not* his children.

If you are *saved*, you are His child. If you are not saved, you are *not* His child. Please notice – I did *not* say, "If you are *religious*." I said, "If you are *saved*." Blunt? Yes. Harsh? Yes. But true? Also yes. The commonly accepted concept of the universal fatherhood of God is not a scriptural concept!

"The rain falls on both the just and the unjust" so there is validity to Rom. 2: 4 "**Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?**"

So in a proper prayer relationship, when we pray "Give us this day our daily bread," we are not so much *asking*, as we are simply acknowledging, and trusting God for our daily provisions. Notice the use of "this day" and "daily." We are not asking the Lord to establish a big 'bank account' for a rainy day; we are trusting him, as the song says, "One day at a time."

Neither does this trust leave excuse for not planning ahead and providing for the future, whether for the coming winter or for that inevitable time of unexpected need. (Prov. 6:6-8) The balance is found in Psa. 127:1. "**Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.**" We all know that our savings can vanish very quickly, so it is necessary to *still* trust God for daily provision. Consider the incident of the 'rich fool' (Luke 12:16-22). I leave you here with the words of Robert Burns, "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men Gang aft a-gley." Or as perhaps better known from John Steinbeck's book, "Of Mice and Men." "The best laid plans of mice and men oft' times go astray."

Verse 12, "**And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors**", with verses 14-15.

If we take a strict dispensationalist view of this passage we will tend to overlook the impact, saying that this is for the 'pre-church' or 'pre-grace' age, and is too legalistic for our time. We won't enter into that debate. (I am neither a dispensationalist after the strict pattern of Larkin, Darby and Scofield, nor do I advocate deserting the dispensationalist system.) But what we obviously have here, no matter where you stand on the dispensational spectrum, is a transition between the Old Testament system and the building of the first church. But note: Salvation has *always* been by grace!

A little later in time, our Lord establishes the 70 X 7 principle for the church. We have always advocated that sound deportment issues from sound doctrine. Likewise, a Christian lifestyle can only issue from Christian conversion. We who

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are, indeed, God's born again children, are expected to forgive as we are forgiven, **"forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."** (Eph. 4:32) Bill Gaither put it so well, "Forgiven, I can now forgive my brother." Our Lord's instructions in vv. 14-15 drive this application home, inciting fear.

Verse 13, **"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."** The best application of this principle is found in 1 Cor. 10:13, **"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."**

After all the comfort we are taught to gain from this verse, there is a threefold challenge in it also.

1. If we are not tempted beyond our ability, then our yielding has to be deliberate. Do I need to say anymore?

2. Compare Job. By allowing the temptation, God is expressing confidence in us. Our 'not yielding' is an important element in the angelic conflict.

3. If we are given a way of escape, we have not only sinned by the initial yielding, but by ignoring the 'escape ramp'; like the truck driver whose brakes failed while going down the mountain, and ignored the escape ramp that was there for just that purpose.

Verse 13 (cont.) **"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."** Please notice that the pattern prayer ends the same way it started – recognizing and confessing the honor and glory of God. That, in itself, says all that needs to be said.

I frequently hear someone complain, "I prayed, but God didn't answer my prayer." I usually refer to Ezek. 14:1-3 and 20:1-3. There is also the matter of James 4:3, and that of patience. But I suggest that our failure *here* is equally contributive.

Lord, teach us to pray.

## Satan the Serpent

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First of all, why consider the character of killer snakes? It is the purpose of Satan to kill. Satan deceived Eve and she took the fruit and gave it to her husband and mankind died that day spiritually and would also have to die physically. Romans 6:23 says, **"For the wages of sin is death."** Man is now **"dead in trespasses and in sins."** He is like Adam and Eve were after they took of the fruit and were no longer able to fellowship with God. Satan knew that sin would separate man

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from God for he himself was banished from the fellowship of God Almighty. He knew it would kill the relationship that Adam had with God. Man would now die physically because of his rebellion against God and I'm sure that Satan rejoiced in seeing that what God called "good" was now poisoned with sin and death. So, with those thoughts I thought it very proper to study the character of killer snakes and in so doing, I found many characteristics of Satan.

### All Snakes Are Hunters

**"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it"** (Job 1:6-7).

**"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour"** (1 Peter 5:8).

Satan is still doing the same today! He's not bound as many would believe today, but is loose, seeking to kill and to destroy. He's walking up and down; going to and fro, ready to devour any that he can find. When you see a snake on the move, do you think that he's out for a Sunday slither? He's out looking for food. Once a snake has eaten, for the most part, he lays around. Satan is a hunter, constantly looking for his prey for he is never full. He devours one and immediately goes looking for the next victim. Just because you see him active in someone else's life doesn't mean that he won't soon be after you.

It's much easier for a snake to kill or capture one rodent off to itself than to get one that is with a big group of rodents, because the snake is less likely to be seen. I know in hunting deer, it is the same way. It's much easier for me to sneak up on one deer than it is two or three. Satan is going to and fro, looking for that Christian that has gotten away from the fold off to themselves, just like the wolf who attacks the lone sheep. Don't think for a moment that you can overcome him by yourself. There have been many Christians that started thinking that they could make it just fine out on their own without the church. They shortly found out that they needed the people of God to look out for them.

One thing about the most deadly of snakes, is that there is a chance of being cured if you have immediate assistance. The worst thing that could happen is for you to get bit by a deadly snake and no one else be around to minister or to help you. No matter how big you are, you cannot handle it on your own. 1 Cor.10:12 says, **"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."** You're not going to stand out there on your own. You need God's people looking out for you and there to pick you up and minister to you if Satan and sin bite you.

A python and the Anaconda are not poisonous but they can squeeze the life right out of you. A python has been known to swallow a deer with 12-inch horns, a leopard, and even a black bear weighing 200 pounds! Satan will slowly squeeze the life right out of you! You won't think that sin is all that bad but then, all of a sudden it's got a grip that you cannot get out of. It squeezes you until you have very little or no fellowship with God at all. Don't you start thinking you don't need the people of God around you. They are looking out for you. 1 Timothy 3:7 speaks about the **"snare of the devil."** A trap is usually designed to capture something.

### Quickness Of A Snake

As mentioned, snakes are hunters and they also can strike quickly, and some can move very quickly. Some of the poisonous snakes can open their mouth, strike, and inject poison all within one second. The black mamba can travel in short bursts up to 15 mph. It is also a quick killer for two drops of its poison kills within 10 minutes. Likewise, sin and Satan is a quick killer. They can kill your fellowship with God and your testimony in just minutes.

A few minutes of sinful pleasure can destroy a whole life of godly example. Think of David and how quickly he fell. Consider Peter, how at one moment he was willing to fight for Jesus and soon after denied that he even knew Him. How many Christians were fine on Sunday and enjoying the Lord, but by Wednesday, they have been bitten hard by sin. Satan and sin, like a snake, can be on you before you know it, so be sober and vigilant, always on the lookout.

### Snakes Can Blend With The Environment

Many snakes look just like the environ-

ment they're around. One snake in the desert moves back and forth in the sand until all that's sticking up is his head. I think that's why snakes scare people so much, it is because a lot of times a snake is right there in front of you before you see it. I can handle seeing a snake if it's far off, but when I spot it and it's a few feet in front of me, then that's when I have a fit.

Satan likewise can blend in with God's people sometimes. Jesus said in Matthew 7:15, **"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves."** II Corinthians 11:13-15 states, **"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works."** Satan gets a seat in the church by blending in with the others. Satan can come at us religiously, quoting the Word of God and transforming into a minister of righteousness. We had better beware in the Lord's churches lest a Judas enters the flock in sheep's clothing.

### Don't Play With Snakes

For the most part, snakes won't strike humans unless you catch them off guard or get too close. Usually, when they see you, they will go the other way. Leave them alone and they will more than likely leave you alone. The point here is not that Satan won't bother us if we don't bother him. But, no doubt Christians bring upon themselves more harm because they play around with sin and the Serpent. Ephesians 4:27 says to **"neither give place to the devil."**

Satan is already hunting for opportunity but let us not purposely or willingly supply it for him. You wouldn't want to give a snake opportunity would you? Would you want or let one stay in your house and harm your family? Yet sometimes we let our children play around with sin and the devil by letting them watch whatever on the TV, or listen to music that is not honoring to God. James teaches us to **"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you,"** but we are not resisting in so many ways.

You keep playing around with snakes, eventually you are going to get bit. We are also told to **"abstain from all appearance of evil."** If it looks like a snake, don't pick it up to find out! Sometimes Christians pick up sin to find out if it's sin. Their uncertain about how dangerous it is, so they go ahead and pick that sin up to find out if it really hurts that bad. Satan and Sin is like the spitting cobra, which aims the poison at your eyes. They want to get your eyes off of the light of Jesus and smite you with blindness that you may walk in darkness. But, they have to be close to do

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## Satan the Serpent

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that! Don't even come nigh to sin. Flee from it at all costs!

### Snakes Are Night Prowlers

Satan hates the light of the world, Jesus Christ. He desires men to stay in darkness concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ. **"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them"** (II Corinthians 4:3-4). Realize that if you are an unbeliever and in darkness and have not seen the light of the gospel that you are right where Satan, that old Serpent, wants you. But, I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord that He can overcome the power of sin and Satan!

II Corinthians 4:6 says, **"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."** Our Jesus can overcome the darkness that you might find yourself in, whether it be that you are lost or out of fellowship with God. Christian, are you having a hard time seeing Jesus in your life? Are your eyes dim because of sin? Turn to your Lord, confess your sins and He will forgive you. Walk in the light as He is in the Light! Don't give place to Satan to rob you of your Christian joy any longer.

### How To Kill A Snake

To kill a snake, you cut off its head. This is what the Lord said to Satan the Serpent in Genesis 3:14-15 after he deceived Eve. **"...Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."** At the cross, Christ gave Satan, sin and death a great blow to the head. He secured victory for all of His own. However, He has not completely put away that old Serpent just yet. Satan is still going to and fro. He still has his false prophets. He still attacks Christians and sneaks into the home and church. He still seeks to hinder us any way that he can (I Thes. 2:18).

Sin is still around and Satan is still busy, but we can have victory over sin through Jesus Christ and the work He did on Mount Calvary. I do long for the day when Jesus will completely put the Serpent away, never to do any harm again. **"And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever"** (Revelations 20:10). But until that day, dear Christian,

don't play around with Satan and **"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world"** (I Peter 5:8-9).

## Mandate of Missions

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in existence. If the commission was given to the Apostles only, then when the last Apostle died, the commission ceased. This would leave us with no command to evangelize the world today. But if the Lord gave the commission to the church, as an institution, and the church still exists, we are as much obligated to evangelize the world today, as were they to whom Christ spoke the commission personally. Those who deny the existence of the church during Christ's personal ministry on earth are without a commission to preach or baptize.

There are many reasons for believing these words were addressed to the church which Christ had recently organized. I believe that He spoke these words not just to the Jerusalem church, but to the church as an institution. First, these eleven disciples could not do what is commanded here. Eleven men could not have preached the gospel in all the world and unto the end of this age. Second, Christ could not be with these eleven men unto the end of the age, since all have been dead for centuries. Third, these eleven Apostles were the first officials of the church (I Cor. 12:28), hence Christ must have spoken to them as the representatives of the church. Fourth, it appears from Paul's statement in I Corinthians 15:6, that there were about five hundred gathered at this time, possibly the greater part of the church.

Some say the commission was given to the church, but they say it was only to the church of the first century. They deny the present churches are under any obligation to evangelize the world. I reject this idea, for Christ spoke to the church as an institution, as seen in the words: **"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."** The commission was given to a local church, as the representatives of all like local bodies. This being true, all like bodies existing now are under obligation to work for the evangelization of the whole world.

### "All Power is Given Unto Me"

Jesus Christ has complete and universal authority. He did not assume or usurp this power. It was given Him by the Father in the eternal counsel, at His incarnation, and His resurrection (John 5:27; 12:49; 13:3; 17:2; Matt. 9:8; 20:23; 21:23). As equal with the Father, all power was originally, legally, and essentially His. But, as the God-man, all power was given Him

in recompense for His work of redemption. The Father gave Him this power that He might be a mediator, redeem His people, gather His church, defend His elect, and subdue all their enemies. His power comprehends the universe, for He is **"Lord of all"** (Acts 10:36) in the upper celestial realm of Heaven and in the lower terrestrial region of earth.

Upon saying all authority was given Him, He told His church: **"Go ye therefore."** The word "therefore" means we are to look at what has gone before. Christ is saying, in effect, I Who have all authority am giving my church the authority to do missionary work. We are to be witnesses to all the world in the light of the fact that the One for whom we witness possesses all-comprehensive, all-sufficient, all-encompassing authority.

We do not witness by the authority of a missionary society or a denomination. Nor do we go out to witness because of the command of a despised Galilean or homeless teacher. Rather we go out to evangelize by the authority of a resurrected Saviour, endowed by God with universal authority. Let us go out with a deep and lasting conviction that we are sent in the Lord's service with authority, which surpasses any, obtained through earthly organizations.

### "Go Ye"

The Great Commission is the marching orders of every true church in existence today. We must go with the message of salvation because Christ has sent us forth. The first two letters of the word gospel is g-o. It is not God's plan that some should pray, others should give, and a few should go. The Great Commission says: **"Go ye."** In response to this command the early church members **"went forth, and preached everywhere"** (Mark 16:20); they **"went every where preaching the word"** (Acts 8:4).

Every church member is to go out and declare the gospel of salvation. Some may go across the street while others go to the foreign fields. The distance one travels is not the significant thing. Both those who go across the street and those who go across the ocean are desperately needed.

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

### "Make Disciples"

The gospel call is a call to discipleship. All who are truly converted will become disciples, for faith involves a commitment of discipleship to Christ. We make disciples by preaching the gospel. We are not to make church members, but disciples. One must be a disciple before he can be a church member.

Christ said the conditions for discipleship were: forsaking all that one has (Luke 14:33), bearing one's cross (Luke 14:27), following after Christ and denying one's self (Matt. 16:24). To disciple a person to Christ is to bring him into the relation of a learner of the ways of Jesus Christ. The learner must take Christ's yoke of authoritative instructions (Matt. 11:29). He must accept what Christ says because He said it. He must submit to His requirements as right because He makes them.

The church is to make real disciples, not false professors or hypocrites. Much Christian effort is being used to secure religious decisions on the basis of human persuasion and psychological manipulation. Multitudes of professed disciples believe they are somehow going to be saved, regardless of what the Scriptures say to the contrary. They say one who sincerely believes in Christ as personal Saviour is eternally secure no matter what takes place afterward. But there is a difference between belief from the heart and sincere mental assent, and the latter does not make one eternally secure.

### "All Nations"

The Jews had expected the Messiah to bring salvation to their own nation. Yet Christ commissioned the Jewish church to carry the gospel to all nations. This gracious commission was the foundation of their authority to go to the Gentiles. Thank God for this great truth: How I praise Him **"that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel"** (Eph. 3:6).

The Great Commission is worldwide. Mark's account reads: **"Go ye into all the world"** (Mark 16:15). Luke discloses: **"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations"** (Luke 24:47). Acts 1:8 informs us that the commission is to extend to **"the uttermost part of the earth."** In the parable of the gospel sower, Jesus said: **"The field is the world"** (Matt. 13:38). Paul said concerning the words of faith: **"Their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world"** (Rom. 10:18). To the Colossians he said: **"The truth of the gospel; Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world"** (Col. 1:5-6). Christianity is a religion for all the world. The commission of Christ reveals that the gospel is to be heralded to every individual person in the world in each generation until Jesus returns for the church. Christ in-

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# Outlines for Country Preachers

## by a Country Preacher

*Sermon Outlines by Milburn Cockrell*

### A FAMINE OF THE WORD

Amos 8:11-14

The Prophet Amos had warned of coming temporal judgments upon Israel. But in my text he makes known that in addition to all these other calamities there will be a famine of the Word. This soul famine will be a worse menace than a famine of bread and water.

#### I. THE WORD OF GOD IS THE TRUE NOURISHMENT OF MAN.

1. Every kind of life requires nourishment. Man's spiritual life is sustained by the Word of God alone (Matt. 4:4).
2. Only His Word satisfies the cravings of the human heart and solves the problems of life (II Pet. 1:3).
3. Here is wisdom for the ignorant; righteousness for the ungodly; comfort for the sorrowful; redemption for the lost; milk for babes and strong meat for mature Christians.
4. The light of nature makes known the existence of God, but the Scriptures alone reveal Christ (John 5:39) and the way of salvation (John 20:31; II Tim. 3:15).
5. The Word of God sustains spiritual life (Jer. 15:16) and promotes its growth (I Pet. 2:2).
6. The Word of God is more important to the soul of man than food for the body (Job 23:12).

#### II. CONTEMPT OF THE WORD MAY BRING A FAMINE OF THE WORD.

1. God had raised up and sent prophets to Israel, but they despised them and persecuted His servants (Amos 7:10-13; II Chron. 36:15-17).
2. A sovereign God can withhold religious privileges and leave people in darkness according to His good pleasure (Matt. 11:20-22).
3. When men despise the Word God removes it. God said: **"I will send a famine."** He sent 400 silent years on Judah (Ps. 74:9; Prov. 1:24-31).
4. Individuals can have a famine of the Word. A person may live by a true church, which preaches the gospel. Circumstances may move him away where there is no true church or gospel.
5. A church may have a famine of the Word. Worldly members may run off a man of God. The church may be unable to secure another true minister.
6. A nation can have a famine of the Word. True preachers can be removed from the land and the Bible be cast out of all public life.
7. The vast majority of people have lost their appetite for the Word of God. They are perishing, shriveling up, for the lack of it. They are dying for want of appetite. Men are not even conscious of their spiritual needs. Many don't come to hear the Word and others don't hear it after they come.

#### III. A FAMINE OF THE WORD IS THE SOREST JUDGMENT UPON A NATION.

1. Most blessings are not properly valued until they are withdrawn. Then they are missed—bodily health, political liberty, domestic happiness, etc.
2. How horrible when communication from Heaven is shut off!
  - (1) When this happens many questions remain unanswered for the human soul. Why am I here? Where am I going? How do I get my moral nature restored?
  - (2) If the law of God is withheld there is no sufficient guide through human life (Lam. 2:9).
  - (3) If the gospel is withheld, there is no peace of conscience, no sufficient inspiration for duty, no assurance of immortality.
  - (4) If revelation is denied there is no guide and nothing to govern human society (Micah 3:6-7).
3. This is a greater famine than one of bread, for the soul is worth more than the body (I Sam. 28:6; Ezek. 7:26).
4. A famine leaves a nation in a condition of dissatisfaction (v. 12).
  - (1) They wander with unsatisfied desires from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean Sea.
  - (2) They shall run here and there to see the Word without success.
5. A soul famine will cause the strongest to succumb (v. 13).
  - (1) The beauty of the virgin and the vigor of youth decay without spiritual knowledge. Physical suffering will follow spiritual famine (Prov. 13:13).

- (2) Look at the weak and discouraged Christians in the world!
6. A famine of the Word goes before a fall (v. 14).
  - (1) Fall into danger and the darkness of idolatry and superstition.
  - (2) Men who forsake God will, like Saul, consult wrong sources in vain. People go after the cults, the New Age, the lodges, the black arts, etc.
  - (3) Their condition is hopeless—"never rise up again." Without the Word there is no comfort or hope.
  - (4) When God departs none can deliver.

#### CONCLUSION.

1. Neglect of the Word is injurious and disastrous (Luke 17:22; John 7:34).
2. Now the Word is ours; let us listen to it with reverence and faith. Walk in the light or the darkness will come upon us.
3. Let us rejoice that our teachers are not yet removed (Isa. 30:20-21).



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tends for the message of salvation to be offered to all, and none excluded that does not, by their unbelief, and impenitence, exclude themselves.

#### "Baptizing Them"

Those who are made disciples by the preaching of the gospel are to be baptized by the authority of a scriptural church. They are not baptized to become disciples, but because they are already disciples. In Bible days, when a man believed, he was almost immediately baptized. Baptism is the first act of the born again soul in obedience to His Saviour. It constitutes our public profession of faith.

Modern evangelists and missionaries seem to forget this phase of missionary work. They aim only to make converts and then to leave them to join the church of their choice or no church at all. Thus, they only carry out the first phase of the Great Commission while ignoring the other two commands in the threefold commission. Shame on them for not receiving and doing all that Jesus Christ commanded them and us to do. Down with union revivals and interdenominational ministers who ignore Christ's commission and despise the church for which Christ died.

The Lord certainly does intend for all disciples to receive Bible baptism at the hands of an ordained minister in a scriptural church. The Scripture teaches that baptism puts us in the church or body of Christ; **"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body"** (I Cor. 12:13). Apart from this initiatory rite, no one can be a member of a local church.

Baptism is not a sacrament of grace and salvation, but it is the all-convincing proof that your heart is right in the sight of God. To neglect baptism will not send your soul to Hell, but it certainly indicates the state of your spiritual standing before God. Your inexcusable neglect and disobedience declares you not to be the friend of Christ: **"ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you"** (John 15:14). How can one be a disciple

of Christ if he is unwilling to do the first thing which Christ commanded every saved person to do?

#### "In The Name Of"

The baptismal formula for this age is seen in Matthew 28:19 to be in the name of the Trinity. So strong did the early churches hold to this that they practiced trine immersion. The baptismal formula reveals the equality in the Godhead and that each person is active in our salvation. We are baptized, not unto the names, but unto the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which plainly intimates these three, are one. Then we also see that baptism is administered by the church with the authority of the three Divine Persons in the Godhead.

To have this ceremony performed upon ourselves in the name of the Trinity is an oath of allegiance or pledge of devotion to God. To be baptized unto anyone is publicly to receive him as teacher and lawgiver. The Jews were baptized unto Moses (I Cor. 10:2). That is, they received the system he taught and acknowledged him as their lawgiver. Paul asked the Corinthians: **"Were ye baptized in the name of Paul?"** (I Cor. 1:13). He means were you devoted to Paul by this rite? He seeks to show the Christians that at baptism they are to give themselves to devotion to God.

Baptism is a solemn consecration to the service of the blessed Trinity. It is by Christ's authority, and those who receive it publicly declare they have submitted themselves to Christ's authority over their lives.

#### "Teaching Them To Observe All Things"

Those who are baptized disciples are to be taught by the church. They are to be taught since they have only started the course of the Christian life. They are to be instructed in what Christ commanded so as to render a lifelong obedience to all His teachings. The stress is not so much on teaching as upon the observance of His commandments. There is a grave difference in teaching one to know and teaching one to observe the things commanded.

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## Mandate of Missions Blood Crying Against

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The duty of the church is the latter of these.

The local church is responsible to the Lord for this teaching of new converts. It is the only institution which has the authority to do this job. Acts 13:1 speaks of certain teachers in the church at Antioch. In Ephesians 3:10, the Bible says the church is to make known the manifold wisdom of God in this age. Concerning the spiritual gifts of the ascended Christ to the church, Paul declared: **“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”** (Eph. 4:11-12). This is why one of the qualifications of a pastor in I Timothy 3:2 is **“apt to teach.”**

The church is limited in her teaching to all things which Christ commanded. The body of Christ is not to teach human inventions or the doctrines of men, but the institutions of Christ. She is not at liberty to leave out some of what Christ taught for the well being of His disciples. She must teach her members to observe all the things Christ commanded. There will never come a time when any part of Christ's teachings will become antiquated or untrue, inappropriate or needless.

### “I Am With You Always”

Jesus Christ has promised His personal presence to the church who is engaged in discipling others and in observing His commandments. But what about the church who does not carry out the Great Commission? Jesus is not with such a church (Rev. 3:20) and will soon remove her candlestick (Rev. 2:5).

Our Saviour is with the church who carries out the Great Commission all the days. His is with her members in the pulpit or prison, in fair days and foul, in winter days and summer, in days of failure and of success, in days of joy and of sorrow, in youth and old age, in days of life and of death. Christ is with His church to give her success in her ministry. He will be with the church till making disciples, baptizing, and building up by Christian instruction shall be no more.

### “Even Unto The End”

The Church is to enjoy the perpetual spiritual presence of Christ until the consummation of the age. Then His spiritual presence shall become a visible presence. In Revelation 1:13, we see Christ in the midst of the churches, and I am persuaded that there is never a day or hour when He is not with them since that time.

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9:9). He never did see Jesus until Pilate sent Christ to Herod during His trial sometime later. Herod wanted to set his conscience at ease. He wanted to see this upstart preacher and convince himself that this was not John the Baptist **“risen from the dead.”**

In this message, I wish to consider John the Baptist and how he came to the place of his imprisonment. Secondly, we shall consider King Herod and his crowning crime. This act was likely the worst thing he had ever done or would ever do in his life. Lastly, I shall endeavor to show how Herod himself was a double-minded man and unstable in all of his ways.

**I. Firstly, let us consider John the Baptist and note how he came to be imprisoned in the palace Machaerus.** The Bible tells us, **“Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake”** (Mark 6:17). It was primarily to appease his wife that Herod put John into prison. Why did Herodias have such a problem with the wilderness preacher?

John the Baptist was the one, according to prophecy, that was to come and prepare the way for the Lord. He came to preach and announce to the world that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, had come into the world. He came to baptize and make ready a people prepared for the Lord, from which the Lord would found his church. John had a great and important work to do. John was a man that had a single purpose in his life and that was to serve God and fulfill the ministry that had been given him.

John was a righteous man in his public and private life. Jesus said to the Pharisees, **“For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not”** (Matt. 21:32). Jesus was making a direct reference to the self-righteousness of the Pharisees. They thought they were righteous, but John was truly a righteous man. He came to them in the way of righteousness and holiness and they rejected him. Cold, carnal Christians, as well as open sinners, always feel threatened by the life of a truly righteous Christian. Consequently, they seek to find some reason to dismiss them.

John was also a rather strict and self-disciplined man. He moved himself out into the wilderness to prepare for his mission. He wanted to be away from all of the distractions that could hinder him. He distanced himself from the world. He made his diet of locusts and wild honey. He drank no wine nor strong drink. He set himself apart to the ministry that God had given him to do. However, he left the wilderness when it was time to preach and then he made contact with Herod.

Another noteworthy characteristic of John was that he was unaffected by pub-

lic opinion. John's life was not shaped by what people thought of him. He did not care what the Pharisees thought, what the Jews thought, what the Roman soldiers thought, or even what the Roman government thought. He did not care about what anyone else thought of him as far as his life, ministry and service to God were concerned. He was most concerned with pleasing the One who sent him.

When he went out preaching he did not do it to gain popularity. John was the type of preacher much like Paul and Jesus Christ; people either loved him or hated him. He was not driven by public opinion. He was not concerned with attracting great numbers. He did not court favor with any. He just preached the word of God and stood true to the ministry God had given him.

John's ministry was characterized with fiery preaching against sin. In fact, he was one that was continually denouncing sin in the world. John was not afraid to preach against sin. When I mention preaching against sin, I do not mean he just said the word “sin.” He was not afraid to preach against sin and tell the people what sin was and for what sins they needed to repent.

Consider what John said to Herod, **“John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife”** (Mark 6:18). Here is John the Baptist, in camel's hair and goatskins, coming in and telling the king what is not lawful for him. The king could have said, “What do you mean? I make the laws. I determine what is lawful and not lawful.” Nevertheless, John fearlessly rebuked the Roman governor.

Herod's brother, Philip, was married to Herodias. However, she began to desire Herod Antipas. Eventually, they conspired together, and she divorced her husband, Philip, and married Herod Antipas. Meanwhile, Herod Antipas divorced his wife and put her out to marry Herodias.

Herod married his brother's wife while his brother was still living. John denounced this great wickedness. He told him it was sin against God and a transgression of the holy law. John referred to the fact that there was a higher authority than Herod was. His preaching showed that a man might walk legally and technically correct according to the laws of the land, but there is a law of a much higher authority to which we must all answer. There is a higher law that our life will be judged by, which comes from an eternal, sovereign God who created the universe. It made no difference if he was a king or a poor man. There is a law of God and Herod had broken it.

The tense of the Greek verb in the phrase, **“John had said,”** is an imperfect tense and means that John continued to say. John did not just speak up one time but he continued to denounce and point out this sin to King Herod. He did not back off because Herod had all of his cro-

nies with him. He did not back down because the Pharisees were there persecuting him and railing on him to Herod. He did not cease because the public cringed at such bold statements. He kept right on denouncing the sin.

Persistence in rebuking sin was a mark of John's ministry. At another time, John denounced the Pharisees. He rebuked their self-righteousness and their trust in their heredity to get to heaven. John preached, **“Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham”** (Luke 3:8). He told them they felt they did not need repentance because of their lineage. He said they must bring forth **“fruits worthy of repentance.”**

He went on to say, **“And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire”** (Luke 3:9). John preached about a baptism of fire that was coming. What did he mean? He was preaching about a coming judgment. There is a time coming when every tree that is not a good tree will not stand and will be hewn down and cast into the fire. If with them the fruits of repentance and faith are not found, they will be cast into hellfire judgment.

This type of preaching was disturbing to the common people. Notice, **“The people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?”** (Luke 3:10). John answers them, **“He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise”** (Luke 3:11). In his response, he referred directly to that group's besetting sin. He addressed those that were covetous, greedy and uncompassionate to the poor.

Others were also affected, **“Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you”** (Luke 3:12-13). The publicans are the tax collectors who made their living by charging more taxes from the people than what they were supposed to pay. They kept everything they got over the amount that the Roman government required of the people. Some of them were very, very rich. It was common knowledge, and somewhat expected, that the tax collectors would operate this way. When the tax collectors came and asked, **“What shall we do?”** John did not shrink back from saying, **“Exact no more than that which is appointed you.”** He told them to quit stealing from the people.

There were still others that came to him and inquired, **“The soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do**

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**violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages**" (Luke 3:14). Here is another group of people with a particular problem of their own. The Roman soldiers would often get drunk with the power they had and would abuse the citizens or bring false accusations against them in order to receive bribes from them. They would get a pay-off to keep their mouth shut and in this way, they could make a little extra money.

John told them squarely, **"Be content with your wages."** Apparently, they liked to grumble and complain against their masters because they did not think they were being paid what they should have been. He told them to be content. John did not have a problem with addressing the problems of the day in plain language. This was just the kind of preacher John was.

In like manner, he denounced Herod and Herodias, and she hated him for it. **"Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not"** (Mark 6:19). She desired to kill John for the things he preached. Surely, John knew there were people that wanted to kill him. He knew that preaching what he did in front of King Herod probably would mean losing his life, yet he did not shrink back from it. Often, we are cowardly. We are afraid to preach too boldly or specifically. We are afraid of offending someone, or maybe we are afraid some will think our message too rough. John could have tried to save his life here, but he chose rather to serve God faithfully. John was not afraid to stand up against sin and this is essentially, what landed him in prison.

**II. Secondly, let us consider Herod's crowning crime.** Herod was a very corrupt man. He was a man who was guilty of nearly all vices. We can read of him and the corruption of his government in historical writings. He may have seemed like a moral figure publicly, but privately, he was very corrupt.

In our text, we have the crowning crime of Herod's life. It is just about the worst thing he could have done. Up to this time, he had done nothing that would compare with this. First, he casts John into prison. **"But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison"** (Luke 3:19-20). Luke is referring to the fact that John reproved him for marrying Herodias, and for his other sins. Herod's life was full of wickedness. According to Mark's account, Herod had to do something with John to appease his adulterous wife. So, adding to his list of crimes, Herod puts John into prison with-

out cause.

It is evident that Herod was a man who was swayed by many different opinions. Mark 6:17 tells us, **"Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her."** We are also informed in Matthew 14:3, **"For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife."** He bowed to the pressure from Herodias, his wife. She wanted John to be killed and in an effort to appease her, he put John in the prison of the palace Machaerus.

Though Herod was influenced by his wife, he was also swayed by the popular opinion of the common people. **"And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet"** (Matt. 14:5). No matter what Herod was, he was still a politician. Although he had John in prison and his wife wanted to kill him outright, he still feared the people. He did not have the political capital to be able to pull this off. He had too many of the multitude of the Jews that were sympathetic to John the Baptist. So, if he would kill John, it would have been a political suicide.

In step with his vacillating character, Herod was swayed by still another figure, **"For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly"** (Mark 6:20). Herod was even swayed by John the Baptist, the fearless, righteous preacher. Herod seemed to be afraid of John.

Herod was a man of differing tempers and moods. At times, he would be in a mood to kill John, but then he feared the people. At other times, he was very sympathetic to John and heard him gladly. Still at other times, he would physically fear him because he was such a righteous and holy man. He did not know how to figure John, because he himself was such an evil and corrupt man. He did not understand what made a good man tick. He likely admired John who was not swayed by any public opinion or pressure whatsoever. In Herod's world of politics and government, opinions were everything. Politicians change their mind and word as often as the wind changes.

There was perhaps even a little fear of God here. Herod was likely afraid of what God might do to him if he would do something to John, because John was such a good and holy man. But in the end, the evil influences won out.

Ultimately, Herod was swayed and taken captive through lust. Note in Mark's account, **"When a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee; And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in,**

**and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee. And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom"** (Mark 6:21-23). It is noteworthy that Herodias, regardless of how fickle Herod was, was not swayed by anyone's opinion. She hated John the Baptist and wanted him dead. Nothing changed her mind about that at all. Hers was such a cold and calculating malice that she waited until she had a **"convenient day."** She waited until the opportunity was there for her to execute her plan.

Notice also how wicked and corrupted this woman was, that she would prostitute her own daughter to something this sick. Herod had made a supper and everybody that was anybody was at this party. Herod threw a big bash for his birthday. They were doing the obvious things – eating, drinking all of the different wines. They were probably well drunk with wine by the time the feast was over.

It was not uncommon in a situation like this for professional dancers to be hired to come in and entertain the men after dinner was over. In this case, Herodias does not even hire others; she uses her own daughter. From the account, it seems there was something more provocative in what Herodias' daughter did than what was usually done. She went in and **"danced, and pleased Herod."**

The girl had such a power over him that he speaks out and says, **"Whatsoever thou wilt, I will give it thee."** Notice what he goes on to say impulsively, **"he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom."** This is interesting because it is not in Herod's power to give half of his kingdom away. That would obviously be the decision of the Emperor in Rome to whom Herod Antipas answered. We see what kind of influence he is under.

Through lust, Herod promised the girl he would give her anything she asked. He made an oath and swore with all that he could that he would give it to her. She went out quickly and asked her mother, Herodias, what it was that she should ask for. Her cold, malicious mother told her, **"The head of John the Baptist"** (Mark 6:24). Notice how depraved this is. She asked not just that John might be killed but that John's head would be cut off and brought before all the people and directly to Herodias that she might see it for herself. How corrupt this is!

The girl went in **"straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist. And the king was exceeding sorry"** (Mark 6:25-26). Up to this point, he had sought to kill John many times but was

afraid to do so. Now he has backed himself into the corner. He is once again swayed by another. **"Yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her"** (Mark 6:26). He was taken captive through the lust of the flesh. He was king and was being dictated to by some young woman that has pleased him with her dancing.

We see once again that Herod is swayed by opinion. He is sorry, but he has made an oath. Yet for the sake for those that are around him, he carried out this gruesome request. **"The king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison"** (Mark 6:27). What was John doing when they came for him? We do not know. I imagine by this time it was probably late in the evening. Perhaps John was sleeping. It is something to wonder about whether John knew this was coming. I imagine he had his suspicions about what was going to happen to him in this prison, but if he knew that this was the very night or not, we do not know. Did John ever see his executioner? We do not know. Perhaps John was asleep and never awakened.

Whatever happened, the executioner went to the prison where John was held for a year, and cut his head off, placed it in a charger and gave it to the young girl and she took it to her mother. Herod had the sight of John the Baptist's head before him in the middle of all the feasting and celebration. This is a gruesome thing to think about. This sight haunted Herod and when he began to hear some things about Jesus Christ, he thought it was John risen from the dead. I believe the vision of John's lifeless, decapitated head drove him crazy and haunted him throughout the rest of his life. I believe that Herod is haunted by that vision even today while he burns in Hell for his sins. Through all of this Herod was constantly swayed. He was never really his own man and ultimately lust brought him to this epoch crime.

**III. Thirdly, I want to look at the fact that Herod was a double-minded man and truly unstable in all his ways.** Herod was tossed to and from politically and publicly, but I believe the real struggle here was for Herod's soul. This account is not just simply of the fact that he beheaded John the Baptist and bowed to many different pressures, but there is a real struggle going on here for the man's soul. Let us consider what was happening here.

Our text informs us, **"For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly"** (Mark 6:20). It seems there were times, in certain moods and tempers, when Herod would hear the preaching of John the Baptist and receive it gladly. He would even agree with the

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## Blood Crying Against

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things John had to say. There were times he really held John in favor and respected him because of the righteous man he was.

Perhaps, there were times when Herod thought of himself about how spineless he was. Maybe Herod thought he would like to be like John the Baptist, who did not care about all the pressures and did what he did out of principle and a heart that was pure, true, and on fire with love for God. Maybe Herod even envied John sometimes.

Herod was somewhat physically afraid of him but he really did not understand him. Sometimes we are a little uncomfortable around people that are sincerely righteous people, because of their life. We cannot say the things we usually say and do the things we usually do while in their company. We feel a little rebuked by their life, whether they say anything to us about it or not. John likely made Herod uncomfortable at times. Herod had to believe that the things he had done were not right. He had to have a problem of conscience because he **"feared John."**

John the Baptist, being just and holy, had nothing to hide. His life was an open book. How many skeletons do you suppose were in Herod's closet? John had nothing to hide. This also rebuked Herod. Herod did observe him and **"heard him gladly."**

John had an affect on King Herod. John did not have a house or a family, just the clothes on his back. He came from the wilderness and preached to King Herod. Herod heard him and **"He did many things."** John the Baptist had an affect on Herod's life. It seems that after he had heard John the Baptist he would change his conduct a little. Maybe there were times he would be a better person when he had been around John, because he had been convicted by John's life and preaching. There was a real struggle for his soul. At times, Herod wanted to be good and better, but then, he would still yet buckle to the pressures that were on the other side.

Ultimately, he not only committed his worst crime through lust, but he also traded his soul for the lust of the flesh. Herod was one that was concerned about his standing, power and glory in this world. He was concerned with riches, castles and kingdoms. He was concerned about having the respect and reverence of his subjects. Ultimately, he was concerned about pleasure and committed adultery with Herodias. Lust has brought him to the point where he was lusting over his brother's daughter at the feast. He traded his own soul for the pleasures of life.

At times, Herod was brought to a point where he began to see there was a problem. He was brought to a point some-

times where maybe inside he wanted to change and be better but he just could not give up these things of the world that continued to hold his attention. He gained much of the world, but lost his own soul. I conclude then, that there are a lot of parallels in the life of Herod and many today. One of the problems is that, like Herod, men begin to think that salvation is an easy thing. Maybe they are like Felix who told Paul to go his way and when he had a convenient season, he would submit to what he preached. Men are deceived into thinking salvation is an easy and simple thing.

We have to realize that salvation involves an absolute creative miracle by a sovereign God. The Bible says that salvation is the forming of a new creation within an individual. What is it for the Lord Jesus Christ to shed blood, to take a sinner, wash them in the fountain of His blood, and make them clean and white as snow? It is not a simple and easy thing. It is not something that boils down to a little decision. Salvation is a miracle wrought by Almighty God. It is not something we call on at will. We do not command God to save.

The Apostle Paul said, **"When it pleased God... to reveal his Son in me"** (Gal. 1:15-16). What an act of regeneration it was to take Saul of Tarsus, who was murdering Christians, and make him white as snow and a preacher in the Lord's church. What a powerful work of God this is! Only God can do that.

Think about some of the sinful people in the Bible. Go back to the time of Joshua. We read about Rahab the Harlot. She is always referred to and is forever memorialized in the scriptures as "the Harlot." She was a prostitute. She was not involved in that sin at the time she comes into the story in Joshua, but that was her reputation. It was her life. However, Rahab is in the physical lineage of the Lord Jesus Christ. How clean can God make the vilest of sinners to take Rahab the harlot, cleanse her, make her white as snow and place her in the line of descendants from which the Lord Jesus Christ was birthed, a man that knew no sin!

So many today have boiled salvation down into a little simple formula. Just repeat some words and you are saved just like that. They claim it is so simple that even a child can repeat the formula and be saved. Salvation is not such an easy thing! It cost the Lord Jesus Christ His life and His precious blood on the cross of Calvary. It does not come easy and cheap. He payed the ultimate price for the redemption of man. Herod was deceived thinking salvation was a small matter. He thought he could go ahead and enjoy the pleasures of the world for a time and then at a time later, when he thought was appropriate, he could be saved. No such salvation was found for Herod! No such salvation was found for

Felix! No such salvation was found for Judas Iscariot! No such salvation is found for many today!

We also note that Herod heard John gladly and did many things as a result. A little bit of reform to our life is not enough, a little bit of turning over a new leaf, a little bit of deciding to be a better person. Maybe Herod thought he would try to be a little more like John. He would hear gladly and do many things, but those things were not enough. Simply believing some things are not enough. The devil believes, understands, and knows much doctrine of this Bible, yet he is not saved. The Bible says that the demons confess Jesus Christ, yet they are trembling in Hell. They are not saved. Just thinking we can believe a few simple things in our head is not salvation. It is not enough. Herod did many things at the preaching of John but it was not enough to save his soul.

In the end, Herod died because he could not let go of his sin. There were things in

the world that he was just too attached to. He was a double-minded man. He would go back and forth. At times, he was concerned about righteousness and other times he was a wicked, vile, and depraved man, cutting off the head of John the Baptist and putting it on display in front of his dinner party. How depraved and sinful was he!

John had preached to him about it not being lawful for him to have his brother's wife but Herod could not let go of those pleasures of the world that he clung to so much. Ultimately, he lost his soul because of it. It seems almost silly, but men are dying all the time because they will not let go of their sin. They think in their mind, "I would like to have Jesus Christ and salvation and something better but I just can't give up the things I love." Herod could not let go of his sin. He lost his soul and the blood of John the Baptist is crying out against him as a testimony to his sins.

## Studies in Esther 2:21-3:6

By Jeff Short

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In the previous study, we saw how the king had come to regret his actions as far as getting rid of the queen was concerned. He seemed to be depressed about it. His servants determined to try to find him another queen to take his mind off from Vashti. They purposed to go throughout all the 127 provinces of the kingdom and round up all the young virgins and bring them in before the King. He would ultimately make his choice of the best of them to be his queen instead of Vashti.

We also witnessed how Esther was chosen to be queen out of all the women that were brought before the king. We witnessed how her modest and humble deportment made her more beautiful. Her meek and quiet spirit gained her favor with all whom she had contact. She refused the worldly ornaments of superficial beauty and chose to appear before the king in her natural beauty. Despite the looks or contriving of all the other women, Esther was chosen to be queen.

Certainly, we see this as the hand of God's providence. Sometimes we cannot recognize the hand of God in very difficult things. Even Christians will depend upon the medical or scientific community for answers. We need to grow in grace and knowledge in recognizing God in everything, even in the smallest details that seem but trite to us. Scripture reveals God in the least details of nature, **"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father"** (Matt. 10:29). The sparrow is an object of creation without a soul. The relationship between the sparrow and God is that it is the created thing and He is the Creator.

That is all the relationship the sparrow knows. God wills the beginning of its life, the end of its life, and He works at all points in between.

We will do well to search for God in all ways. In this book, He has determined to bring His people to the very brink of destruction and to deliver them to the honor of His own glory. Therefore, in accord with His purpose, Esther was chosen out of all of the women and made the queen.

**Verses 21-23 – "In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those which kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus. And the thing was known to Mordecai, who told it unto Esther the queen; and Esther certified the king thereof in Mordecai's name."** Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate and there were two chamberlains, the king's servants, who were wroth. The Scripture does not say why. They were moved to envy and sought to assassinate the king. They **"sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus."**

We are not sure of their motives, though we can be sure that jealousy and pride played a part, as often they do in the actions of men. Men can usually act with wisdom, unless their jealousy is provoked or their pride has been injured. Many times, they then cease to act with wisdom and act more out of animal passion. Their judgment is curtailed in those situations. These chamberlains wanted to kill the king.

Somehow, the plot was discovered to

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## Studies in Esther

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Mordecai, "And the thing was known to Mordecai." How that he came to know about this conspiracy, we are not told. It is usually not wise for us to speculate too much, where the Word of God is silent. Note that Mordecai makes the plot known. He does not sit on this knowledge and do nothing with it. He does not seek to use the knowledge for his own benefit, rather he "told it unto Esther the queen." Mordecai was a man of honesty and loyalty. He was actuated by principle rather than a selfish desire to save his own neck.

Usually, folks are looking out for their own welfare and do not want to get involved, even though they might see something or know something that will be injurious to someone else. As long as it is not going to hurt them or their family, they will remain silent. Sometimes, we do our brothers and sisters in Christ a disservice when we see things that are injurious to them and we just let it go. Perhaps we are more concerned about being polite than truly being a help to our neighbor. Mordecai was a different sort of man. He was honest. Nobody would have known that Mordecai knew of the plot. How could anyone know that? However, he did know and felt it his duty to make it known unto the queen.

Esther "**certified the king thereof.**" She manifested her honesty and integrity by making the thing known to Ahasuerus. She did not just tell the king, but she told the king "**in Mordecai's name.**" Her strong character is revealed by her actions, confirming that her greater beauty was on the inside rather than the outside.

This act was significant because she did not desire any honor to herself that was not rightly hers. She was not just seeking her own. She could have told the king, not mentioned Mordecai, and took all the credit to herself. Nobody would have known, except Mordecai, and she could have been rewarded. However, she did not desire this honor. The Bible teaches us to "**Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips**" (Pro. 27:2). We are not to seek the praise of men, even though we may feel we deserve it.

She made it plain to the king that Mordecai uncovered the plot and told her about it, at some risk to his own life. Surely if the chamberlains plotted to kill the king, they would not have any scruples about killing some informant who was in their way. Mordecai was putting himself in danger by revealing the plot. He was more concerned with doing what was right than protecting his own comfort.

**"And when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out; therefore**

**they were both hanged on a tree: and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king"** (Esther 2:23). The king followed a due process to determine the integrity of the charges. He operated on the principle of evidence being necessary in order to one being found guilty. Sometimes, even though in America you are supposed to be innocent until proven guilty, especially in the political world, a charge alone is enough to make a man guilty, even though he is not found guilty in a court of law.

We can injure another simply by making accusations. If the accusations prove untrue, damage is still done to the person's character. We must be careful not to slander someone's character. We are accountable to God for it. Often, we jump to conclusions and speak before we have the facts. However, here Ahasuerus, as evil of a man as he was, gave some homage to justice and went through a due process in order for the conspirators to be found guilty. They were found guilty and were both hanged.

Note, "**it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.**" The king had a scribe, who was commissioned to be with the king, who recorded the notable events of the king's life and kingdom. This particular event was put down in the book of chronicles before the king. This record will come into the story later. However, it is interesting that he kept such a chronicle of his life. Such a record is valuable for kings and others in positions of great responsibility.

It is especially good for Christians to keep a journal of their life. An honest journal is useful to us for self-examination and accountability. Knowing that our life will be a matter of recorded history will motivate us to godliness. Even Ahasuerus had to be inspired by knowing that his acts were recorded for history.

A journal will also provide comfort and encouragement to us. We will be able to look back over our life and see the hand of God working. We will witness His mighty power in effecting deliverance for us when we thought there was no way deliverance could come. In this way, a journal will help to grow our faith.

Another good reason for keeping a journal is the benefit to our families, and possibly others, after us. A journal is the record of God's mighty works in our life, an account of our personal experience with the Almighty. The Psalmist desired this saying, "**This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD**" (Psa. 102:18). A journal is a written record of faith.

**Verse 3:1 – "After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him."** The wicked man Haman is here introduced into the narrative. He was promoted to a

position of great height in the kingdom.

Haman was the "**son of Hammedatha the Agagite.**" He was a descendant of the ruling family of the Amalekites. They were at the height of their power some thousand years before the time of this account. Haman was awarded honor because of his bloodline, though the record does not reveal exactly why the king promoted Haman.

His elevation was to a great position. His seat was "**above all the princes that were with him.**" He was made second only to the king himself in the entire kingdom. His power was almost unlimited. He is a ruling prince in the kingdom.

Ahasuerus has already manifested his wicked character. Likewise, Haman was certainly a heinous and wicked character. Sometimes we question why God would allow such wicked men to rule. What we know for sure is that this is in His will and brought about by His providence. The Psalmist said, "**For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another**" (Ps. 75:6-7).

The hand of God raises monarchs to the throne and likewise, sinks them as He pleases. Consider the case of Pharaoh. He was an extremely sinful and wicked man, but God raised him up to power. It was so with Nebuchadnezzar, he became prideful and arrogant about his promotion. He looked out over Babylon and began to congratulate himself and his power. God brought him back to his senses in realizing that God was the one that brought him to that place. The Apostle Paul wrote, "**The powers that be are ordained of God**" (Rom. 13:1). We certainly see God ruling in the appointment of rulers.

**Verses 2-3 – "And all the king's servants, that were in the king's gate, bowed, and revered Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence."** Haman had risen to a position of high favor with the king. The king even gave a commandment for Haman to be revered. It is not clear what this reverencing required. The word in the original conveyed the thought of prostrating reflexively in homage to royalty and could be applied to prostrating before God. Civil honor was not uncommon as a sign of respect to those that are in positions of authority and power over a nation.

Note that Mordecai "**bowed not, nor did him reverence.**" He refused. He would not do it. It would seem from this that the reverence commanded went beyond the usual and customary homage paid to dignitaries. John Gill believed that this was something unusual because the king issued a command for it to be done. If it were just the usual and customary respect, then why would the king have to issue a special command in order for it to

be observed?

**"Then the king's servants, which were in the king's gate, said unto Mordecai, Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?"** (Esther 3:3). The other servants wanted to know why Mordecai would not conform. All the other servants were going along with the law. Mordecai was rather acting on principle. This was something very unusual to the servants at that time, as it is to the world today. It is unheard of for someone to have such a high set of standards for their own life that they are not willing to concede even one point for convenience. Usually there will be many pressures to just go ahead, concede, and let that principle down.

Mordecai would not compromise and he maintained his standard. He had many try to persuade him. Why do people try to persuade others to do wrong? It is usually because they are trying to justify themselves. They feel condemned by someone acting so resolutely on principle. If they can get you to do the same as them, then they can excuse themselves. It is very important that we stick to our principles and standards as Christians, and especially as Baptists, in all things concerning our faith and practice.

**Verses 4-6 – "Now it came to pass, when they spake daily unto him, and he hearkened not unto them, that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand: for he had told them that he was a Jew."** Notice in verse 4 that the servants continued to nag Mordecai over this issue. They "**spake daily unto him.**" They would bow to Haman, and Mordecai would not. They tirelessly aggravated him about it. Mordecai, through all that pressure, would not concede.

**"He had told them he was a Jew."** This tells us that Mordecai was acting on principle. He determined that to do what was required of him would be a violation of his religion and service before God. We need more folks like Mordecai today. We need many that will stand up before the world and say, "I am not going to follow a multitude to do evil. I am not going to conform to the world's standards. I am a Christian and I am a Baptist!"

Haman became enraged that Mordecai refused to reverence him. "**And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath**" (Esther 3:5). His pride was wounded. Again, men may be able to make wise plans and decisions, but let their jealousy be provoked or their pride be wounded and many times their judgment will be seriously impaired. This was the case with Haman because "**he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone....wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai.**"

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# The Berea Baptist Banner Forum

Submit questions on any Bible topic

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

1. Does a church have the right to discipline a member for non-attendance? If so, does a church have the right to discipline a member for missing just one Sunday unnecessarily?— Ohio



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According to Matthew 18:18 we have scriptural authority as a church to obey all of the Lord's commands, including discipline. In I Corinthians 5:1-12 the Lord's churches are commanded to practice the act of church discipline.

Discipline by the church as to non-attendance must be governed by each local church as they feel led of the Lord, but there is no doubt that non-attendance warrants discipline.

The Church Covenant that all true Baptists covenant to keep when becoming a member of a true Baptist church declares that they solemnly promise to support the church by sustaining its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrine. One cannot possibly keep this covenant unless they are faithful in attendance. They promise to walk circumspectly in the world, to love one another, to remember each other in prayer, and to aid each other in sickness and distress. All of these can only be practiced if one is faithful in church attendance.

In scriptures, such as I Thessalonians 5:14, the church is told to warn the unruly, and when one fails to attend church they are a member of faithfully they are certainly acting in an unruly manner. This is seen in the fact that there is a scriptural rule that a member should always attend every service in Hebrews 10:25. In II Thessalonians 3:11-14 we are plainly commanded to discipline those who are disorderly or disobedient to scriptural teaching. "Disorderly" is a term referring to being out of step or harmony with those one has covenanted to be in unity with.

In Hebrews 10:24-31, we are shown how grievous the sin of not assembling or non-attendance is. The description of the sin of non-attendance as shown in the scripture demands discipline as much as other offences.

Failing to attend one Sunday service without a providential reason, seems a little arbitrary and without the compassion that a concerned church should have for a wayward member. Discipline should

never be practiced in a vindictive or arbitrary manner, but with the purpose in mind to restore the person and purify the church. Galatians 6:1 shows that truly scriptural church members deal with a wayward church member with compassion and desire to restore such a one. I must say in closing that as to how many services not attended would warrant discipline would have to be left up to the determination of the local church.

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Any true church certainly has the right to discipline (exclude) its members for non-attendance. In reality non-attending members have already excluded themselves because if they don't attend how can they be included? To forsake the assembly without a just cause is to be in open, willful rebellion against Christ and His church (Hebrews 10:25-26). It is not the missing of a single service that merits discipline but the open rebellion of a member that merits discipline. A church has the right to discipline a member for missing just one Sunday only if it is established that the offending member is in open rebellion against the church. A church must judge these matters. It is a great folly to ignore them.

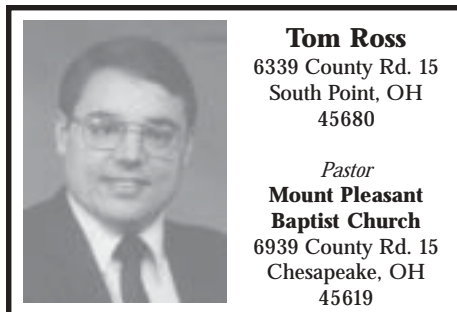
The word 'church' in the New Testament means "a called out assembly." Without the faithful attendance of its members a church does not even exist. Being a church member is not like joining some club where you pay your yearly fee and become a member regardless of whether you go or not. Attendance is an essential part of church membership.

Some churches set a time limit on how long a member may miss before they are disciplined. They say that if a member doesn't attend for three or six months or even a year then that member is to be put out. However we need to understand that after it is established that a member is in open rebellion against Christ, then we need to exclude that member immediately.

I Corinthians 5:4-6 says, "In the name

of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" Notice how they were to deal with this rebellious individual the very next time they assembled. Every day that an openly rebellious member is allowed to be in the church is a day that the church is allowing leaven in the body. If the church allows this then the church is being a partaker of that individual's sins. "Neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure" (I Timothy 5:22). Let me stress that we are not talking about small mistakes or minor sins of ignorance which are common in new converts, but open rebellion or willful sin. Some matters can and should be dealt with quickly and others may take time. The Word of God will guide us in every situation.

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Yes, a church has the right to discipline a member for non-attendance. We have a clear and direct command in Hebrews 10:25 that declares: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." When church members are unfaithful to assemble with the saints it is disruptive to the entire church body. The church is likened unto a building where every board and brick must be in place to insure aesthetic beauty and safety. The church is likened to a human body where each bodily part must be in place and functioning efficiently for the health of the whole body.

The second question is a bit more controversial to answer. Since every church is an autonomous, independent body they have the right to discipline members whenever they see fit. However, I don't

believe it is the better part of wisdom to discipline a member for missing a Sunday. "Missing a Sunday unnecessarily" could be interpreted a lot of different ways by a variety of people. I would rather give someone the benefit of the doubt and go the extra mile with them, rather than being hasty in church discipline. It is always easier to restore an offending brother before official church action is taken, than after. However, there must be some point in time when action must be taken. This must be determined on an individual case by case basis, in my opinion.

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Before answering this question, I want to first state that the Bible teaches us that each church is an independent organism which operates free from the control of a presbytery or another church. Each church has the right to operate in its own way so long as that way doesn't violate the teachings of Scripture. Though my answer should be considered, it should not be taken that I intend my thoughts to be the ultimate and final rule in all of the Lord's churches. The way in which a church carries out discipline varies from church to church. However, in all of the Lord's churches, we should desire our discipline to be well founded in the Word of God.

Having that said, a church has every right to discipline a member for non-attendance. It is a violation of God's Word and hinders a Christian's service to God. Heb 10:25 tells us that we should not forsake "the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." The word "exhort" speaks of summoning or instructing. This, in itself, speaks of a form of discipline. Discipline does not always refer to excluding. A church might discipline a member for non-attendance by removing his/her ability to vote in business meetings, take part in the Lords' Supper, or other functions of a church while placing some requirements on him/her to prove their devotion to the Lord and His church. Surely, there should be some step before exclusion. However, if we allow a member to stay away from the Lord's church without any discipline, we are not showing love for our brother or sister any just as sparing the rod shows the lack of love for a child (Prov. 13:24).

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# The Berea Baptist Banner Forum

Submit questions on any Bible topic

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

2. In reference to Matt. 18:15-17, how does this passage apply if the two people involved in the trespass are members of different churches? – Mississippi



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I believe this is a scriptural premise stated here for all believers and churches. It is a form that gives a standard for the basic way to correct offences between believers and churches. I believe it should be the rule used to correct offences between true Christians.

I do not believe that two Christians, even though members of different churches, would negate this scriptural command of correcting offences and should follow this manner in which offences may be corrected.

I personally believe that true born again Christians will seek to correct offences between each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, and I also believe sister churches should practice this rule. Individual believers or churches that will not seek to correct offences when made aware of them and forgive the offender according to this rule should be dealt with as this command declares. One cannot truly represent, glorify God, and be a true witness with malice, envy, jealousy, or hatred toward other believers whether an individual or church, and when they refuse to correct offences they should be treated as unbelievers in verse 17 until such time as they willingly correct this kind of unchristian behavior.

GARNER SMITH



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**“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be**

**established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican”** (Matthew 18:15-17).

Essentially the matter would be handled the same way. First of all notice from this scripture that if you are offended or have been trespassed against, it is your responsibility to privately go and tell your brother his fault. Most problems would be resolved right here if the offended party would do what is taught here.

When you approach your brother you must be kind and humble not making railing accusation but seeking to resolve the problem in love. This solves nearly all problems and it doesn't matter if you are in the same church or not.

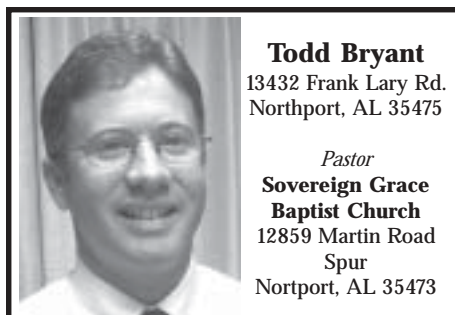
This is not what usually happens though. What usually happens is when people are offended they don't say anything at first, because they are too prideful to admit that they are offended. They have the attitude that they didn't do anything wrong so why should they have to go to their brother and tell him his fault. If you ask these people what is wrong, they act surprised because they think you should already know. They quickly become bitter toward the one who offended them and begin telling everyone else about the problem except the one who offended them. What foolishness! They begin to gossip and complain about the person that they have a problem with and they don't even have the integrity to go to person to deal with their problem.

Finally at some point the problem comes to a head and they explode at the person who offended them and this usually causes more damage than the original problem. If people would just follow God's instruction all this could be avoided. I personally have never had to go past the first step in Matthew 18:15 when I have been offended and went to my brother and kindly told him his fault.

However, in the case where you have to take further steps simply follow the same pattern. If your brother is a member of another church, make sure there are witnesses from both churches present to hear the whole matter and establish every word. This way if your brother still does not hear you then the members of his own church and his pastor can deal with him as they see fit. It is no business of yours beyond this

point except that your fellowship with this brother is broken, unless he repents. You and the church you are a member of have no authority over this brother. Usually when things get this far there is either serious fault with both parties or else the offending member is lost and **“let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”**

MATT JAMES



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**“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican”** (Mat. 18:15-17).

**A casual reading of this passage is enough to convince us that the primary application is for the local church.**

Three steps in reconciliation are involved here. First, go to the person with whom you have a problem alone and try to work it out between yourselves. This saves embarrassment and often can solve the problem. How many of our people should have followed these instructions and haven't. Many of our people, it seems, only gossip about another with whom they have problems rather than facing that person. This causes greater division and in no way helps a problematic situation. If we would have followed the simple instructions of the Scripture, many problems which have grown into great schisms would not exist. Primarily, this step involves members of the same church. However, there could be a secondary application concerning Christians of a different church.

The second step here is to take two church members (I would think preferably senior members with much wisdom and good reputation) to establish the facts

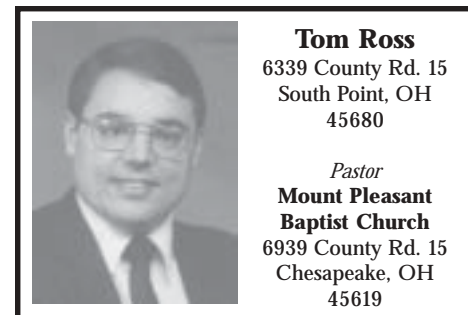
of the situation. Obviously, this primary application cannot apply to members of a different church. However, many times fellow Christians can be of some help between differing parties so long as each person is interested in working things out.

The third step is to bring formal disciplinary charges against a member before the church that both are a member of. As with the second step, the primary application cannot apply to members of a different church. In fact, there is no secondary application we could make here. A church has no authority over the members of another church. This is one of the reasons we, as Baptists, practice closed communion. We are instructed not to partake of the Lord's supper with those out of fellowship with the Lord and we only have that control over the members of our local church (I Cor. 5:11).

Having said all of that, I would say that the primary application of this passage without question refers to differing members of the same church. However, the first step of going to the person with whom you might differ could apply to other situations. The second step could perhaps apply so long as both parties are willing to listen to outside opinions. However, the third step could only apply to members of the same church.

We would all do good to follow these simple rules. So many of our Sovereign Grace Baptist people have divisions among them which are uncalled for and the reason is that these steps haven't been taken. It seems that our people are willing to divide over the simplest of issues while leaving the major tenets of the faith alone. A church should never divide over personal differences. As long as our primary desire is to magnify God and carry forth the commission, all other things should fall into place.

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Since each church is an independent, autonomous, self governing body there is no way that one church can exercise discipline upon members of another church. It is up to each church to respect and recognize the disciplinary action of another sister church, but no church has the right or authority to discipline another church's members.

The only way these verses can be applied between churches is in principle only. If a brother has an offence against someone, even if they are members of another church, they should go to them

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## Forum #1

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All discipline should be carried out with the earnest desire that it will help the one being disciplined. If the church disciplines because of malice, the church is in error just as a parent is who beats their child out of anger rather than love.

The second question doesn't give enough information to be answered fully without clarifying a few things first. It's not my opinion that a church should generally begin a discipline process if a member misses church only once unnecessarily, for what is necessary to you might not be necessary to me. As my grandfather has always told me, there is but one reason to miss church and that's "just can't get there." That having been said, we are to show forth a "pattern of good works" (Tit. 2:7). Likewise, I would think a person should show a pattern of non-attendance before the church enters into any form of discipline. I would not, however, think this is always the case. In some instances, the reason for missing church the one time needs to be considered. For instance, if a member misses a church service to attend a rock and roll concert, I definitely think the church should begin the discipline process immediately. This surely isn't the only reason, but, will suffice for now. Again, this is the reason that discipline is left up to each local church to consider for only that church knows the specific details concerning each situation.

We must keep in mind that there are two purposes in discipline. Firstly, discipline corrects an erring saint. Secondly, discipline weeds the lost out of the church. Therefore, we should contend for this truth just as we do other truths in God's Holy Book.

TODD BRYANT

## Forum #2

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privately and seek restoration of fellowship privately. They could even request that the pastor's of the churches meet with the brethren that are at odds and seek to restore fellowship collectively. However, that is about as far as you could take it without being meddlesome.

**"Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others"** (Phil. 2:2-5).

TOM ROSS

## Lord's Going Before

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has told us in the scriptures that it is not becoming the character of women to be preachers of the word; yet on certain occasions He has revealed Himself more conspicuously to women than to men, as in the present instance. Well, Deborah sends word to Barak, Captain of the host of Israel, that God would deliver this multitude into his hands, and tells him to go to the house of Israel, and take with him ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali, and **"of the children of Zebulun."** **"And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go. And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak"** (Jud. 4:6-9). Notwithstanding it would not be for his honour, Barak was willing to part with the honour if God would grant Israel deliverance from their enemies.

The text says, **"Up: for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee?"** So it appears that neither Deborah nor Barak should have the glory, but God; and both seemed quite willing it should be so, for says she, **"Is not the LORD gone out before thee?"** It proved so indeed, for when they gathered the flock of Israel to battle, God put the enemy to flight. The confused host of Sisera, and his nine hundred chariots of iron, were all driven away like nothing. God could upset in a moment all this mighty host, and Israel obtained the victory to the honour and glory of God; and when Deborah, after the glorious victory, came to sing her song of triumph, there is not a word of human praise in the whole of it. There is not one word about Deborah; and no thanks to Barak is expressed in this song, and not a word of the victories of Israel, valiant Israel! But all in the praise of the mighty power and glory, and wisdom and majesty of God, and of His kindness and goodness to His People.

Now in considering the words of our text, we are not to suppose that they are left merely as a history of Deborah, Barak, and Israel, and the events of this nation and people; but this is a lesson to God's dear Israel to the end of time. **"Is not the LORD gone out before thee?"** is the language of the text. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for instruction and reproof, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (II Tim. 3:16-17). In our text, there is encouragement and support, and direction to God's people to the end of the world.

I will attempt to show the tenderness, the mercy, the faithfulness, and goodness of God, in going before His people, in providing every comfort, and supplying every want, and bringing them at last to Himself, when they crown Him Lord of all for ever. I shall *first* show that the Lord has gone before His people as the God of nature, and in the works of creation. *Secondly*, that He has gone before His people as the God of providence, in supplying their temporal wants. And *thirdly*, I shall notice His going before His people as the God of grace. Recollect, it is God going before His people, not as the Arminians say, who are fond of leading God, and going before Him, and God coming after. Poor blind fools such as we are, should be glad of God to go before us and lead us, or else we should soon fall into some ditch.

1. What striking evidence have we of God going before His people in the works of creation! Before He made man, He made everything ready for man's reception, just like a man fitting up and furnishing a house, with every article for the accommodation of the occupants. What a wonderful God is ours! When my soul sometimes thinks solemnly of such a God, I am afraid to open my mouth before the great I AM, who spoke this world out of nothing into its beautiful form and order. Unless this had been revealed in God's Word, we never should have known anything about it. No mortal could have known that this world was once a dark chaos, without form and void, and that darkness covered the face of the deep. God spake the worlds into existence, and no sooner had His word gone forth, with a **"Let there be light: and there was light."** He spake and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. As Job says, He hung this earth upon nothing.

Wise heads tell us how this earth was made, and about the system of the heavens; but I never understood anything about their system. I read what God says in His Word; He made the sun to rule the day, and the moon to rule the night. He separated the waters from the earth, and He called them seas; He created by the breath of His power all the living creatures in the seas, and all animals for the use of man. And when He had formed this earth, and furnished this world, in all its beauty and glory, He last of all framed man out of the dust of the ground, and man became a living soul. There was the furniture of the world ready for man's reception; and the boundless seas, with all the living creatures it contains, the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field were given into the hands of man, and he was to be their king, and to have dominion over them all.

Many times when I have been riding on the coach, I have been struck with that beautiful animal the horse, and could not help reflecting on the team bending their necks to one man with all their vigour and

speed in carrying passengers from one place to another. I have thought, if these animals were endowed with a knowledge of their strength; where is the man that could tame them? Thus, when God created man, He brought him into the world with everything made ready for his reception—the earth with all its furnitures; and so framed that one nation cannot live without another, at least so far as the prosperity of the whole is concerned. When the soul is led to see the glory of God in His words of creation, and is enabled to recognize God as His Father, going before, providing all necessary things for his temporal existence, the true believer has a heart gladdened with faith's view of God in His works, and feels His presence, and adores Him as his *God* and *Father* in creation. My soul has been absorbed often in the contemplation of His wonderful works.

I recollect a poor old woman on a mountain in Yorkshire, when I was traveling some time since. I was tired, and wishing for rest, I asked if she would let me sit down, and she willingly invited me into her plain dwelling. I sat down and said, "This is a beautiful prospect, and the hills are covered with sheep and oxen, it is a delightful place to live in; surely you never know anything of trouble here? No one is here to disturb you." "Yes," she said, "it is a beautiful place; but only so to me when I can see my God and Father in it all." I was struck with the remark, and I asked her how she knew that God was her Father. She sat down and gave me a sweet and blessed account of the Lord's dealing with her soul, and how He brought her to the feet of Jesus, and revealed His love to her heart, and how beautiful all these scenes were when she enjoyed His smiles. I immediately felt a sweet union of soul to her, and we talked of the love and mercy of God together; and I felt that this earth, when it does not exhibit to us the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is a miserable place. I have never found it to be a truth that when we have the smiles of God as our Father, it gives a bright luster to the works of creation, and we see them in their true and proper glory; and we can then say with David, the sun, moon, and stars praise Him, and the firmament displays the glory of our covenant God.

Child of God—this God is your God. He has gone before you and before His people as the God of nature in all His wondrous works.

2. In the second place, God has gone before His people *as the God of providence*.

Wise men think that the reins are in their own hands; their great understanding, their care, diligence and prudence, bring them riches and honors, and pleasures. In the language of Scripture, they are burning incense to their own drag, and sacrificing to their own net. They will tell you of the degree of their ancestry;

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## Lord's Going Before

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they will trace their pedigree, and speak of the good management and virtues and exploits of their forefathers and of the benefits they conferred on this society and the other institution, and how they contributed to the wealth of the nation; but never a word about God going before them. David says, "They speak not through their throats." Aye, that is it, they spake not through their throats. It is a comical way for people to speak not through their throats. We find some people whose heart teaches their mouth, but of these proud boasters if may be said their mouth teaches their heart, and they have their wisdom and greatness to speak of. But God has hid all the glory of man from His people. God will not suffer His children to take glory to themselves; and he knows how to manage them to hide pride from their eyes.

David got on a slippery spot when he went to Achish king of Gath, and said to him on an occasion of war, "**Surely thou shalt know what thy servant can do.**" O, what words for David to utter! "**what thy servant can do.**" Not a word about his God, and what He could do. But the lords of the Philistines would have nothing to do with David. The Princes of the Philistines were wroth with Achish and said, "**Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to the battle lest, in the battle he be an adversary to us: for wherewith should he reconcile himself unto his master? should it not be with the heads of these men? Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, saying, Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands?**" Send him away, he shall not go with us. Achish had hard work with David's old man, and besought him to return again. David said, "**But what have I done?**" How lofty! But God knew how to take this loftiness down, and David's was not a very humble look: "Why," says Achish, "come, don't be offended, thou art as an angel of God in my sight; but the princes don't favour thee." Thus Achish soothed David's old man over, and he agreed to go back, and when he came in sight of Ziklag, on the third day he found the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag and burned it with fire, and had carried away every man's property, and wife, and children.

David had now an opportunity to show what great things he could do, but how he is brought down. David and the people that were with him wept till they had no more power to weep; and were taught to consider that God must go before them; and so David inquired of the Lord in a most humble manner, saying, "**Shall I pursue after this troop? Shall I**

**overtake them?**" That was a little different from the swelling up before Achish, saying, "**What have I done?**" or, "**Thou shalt know what thy servant can do.**" David now wanted God to go before him. He had no one else to lean on but God's sovereign power to deliver him out of his trouble; and a wonderful deliverance it was.

We read that the people talked of stoning David, and there is not much difference between these people and our modern Pharisees, all sacrificing to their own drag. If any person once makes a slip, or fails, or meets with a misfortune, these Pharisees are sure to find some fault or another, that they had discovered some opportunities, or neglected something, or left undone something; and if they had done so and so, what would have become of them? Blind fools and ignorant souls, to think that God's mighty power rests upon *their* wisdom. What has man that he has not received from God? It is God that teaches man to plough and sow, it is God that gives all temporal goods. God is the God of providence as well as of nature; He gives all good things to those who love Him and obey Him. There are times and seasons when God's children do not know whence their blessings proceed, but they are all the free sovereign gifts of God. Child of God, seek God to teach you how to walk and to move in your business and employment, and to guide you in your ways. You cannot move in the scenes of life without God goes before you.

Jacob is a striking example of God going before His people. The Lord went before Jacob when he was with Laban. Laban thought he had a chance of increasing his wealth and riches, and he was fond like many others of a good deal of money. When Jacob comes to agree with him for wages it was agreed that Jacob should have all the speckled and spotted cattle, and all the brown cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats, and all the ringstraked. Jacob said, "**I will have what God gives me.**"

Thus Jacob threw himself upon God's providence; and so Laban looks on his flocks and says to himself, "Why, there are but a few of that sort, and they are a poor shabby set, I shall be quite as well without them, the others are *much* the best." Laban seemed mightily pleased, and the bargain was struck that Jacob was to have all the ringstraked and speckled, and spotted and brown among the sheep. By and by, the strong among the cattle became ringstraked. You will say that Jacob was crafty when he "**took him rods of green poplar, and of the hazel and chestnut tree; and pilled white strakes in them, and made the white appear which was in the rods. And he set the rods which he had pilled before the flocks in the gutters in the watering troughs when the flocks came to drink, that they should conceive when they came to drink. And the flocks conceived before**

**the rods, and brought forth cattle ringstraked, speckled, and spotted.**" But if God had not blessed the increase, Jacob could have done nothing at all. It was God's blessing to Jacob that caused him to be well paid against the will and inclination of Laban.

There may be some farmers here; if so I would advise you never to pinch your men of their wages, because if you do, you are injuring yourselves amazingly. Be liberal, for God loves liberality. When the poor are stripped of their rights God will reward their oppressors according to their desserts. So God rewarded Laban, and by and by all the cattle became speckled, and spotted, and ringstraked.

Laban's sons said, "Jacob is robbing us. He has taken away all that was our father's and of that which was our father's has he gotten all this glory. He will sweep the whole of the flock." God went before Jacob and determined to vex Laban; and Laban was very cross, and frowned upon Jacob. This was a grief to Jacob. He had married Laban's two daughters, and to think that his father-in-law now treated him with that distance, grieved him. But the Lord appeared to Jacob, and said, "**Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.**" Then Jacob sent and called his wives, and said, "**I see your father's countenance, that it is not toward me as before,**" let us go and obey the Lord. And away they went, and did not consult Laban; and he was told on the third day that Jacob had fled. Laban then took all his men and pursued after Jacob, seven days journey, and overtook him in the mount Gilead.

I have no doubt that Laban followed Jacob with a determination to strip him of all, and to take his wives and all that he had gotten away. But the God of Jacob appeared in a vision to Laban and said to him, "**Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad.**"

After parting with Laban, Jacob had another trial in meeting his brother Esau, and he retired to wrestle in prayer with his God, that the Lord who said unto him, "**Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred,**" would go before him, for his brother was coming with four hundred men; and Jacob saw no prospect but to be swallowed up. And there met him an Angel of the Lord, with whom he wrestled till the breaking of the day.

Some people's prayers are all very nice and prim, but they know nothing about wrestling with God, and having body and soul in agony that God would bend His ear to their requests. Jacob said, "**I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.**" Or, except thou go before me. Thou knowest my brother's rage, and what can I do without thee? And the Angel said, "**What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.**" And the Angel said, "**Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.**"

You wrestling souls who feel that God alone can save, wrestle with Him for His blessing, and you will be like Jacob—you will prevail. Jacob went to meet his brother, and he looked and saw Esau coming, and with him four hundred men, and Esau said "**What meanest thou by all this drove which I met?**" And Jacob said, "**These are to find grace in the sight of my lord.**" And poor Jacob falls into a posture of obeisance, and Esau bends under God's mighty power, and the strong sensibility of nature takes possession of his heart, and the feelings of humanity find vent. Esau ran to meet his brother and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept on each other's necks. Here you see what God can do. If you have to do with a tyrant or an oppressor who grinds the face of the poor, remember that he is in the hands of the Lord, and if your ways please the Lord, He will make even your enemies to submit. So the Lord went before Jacob afterwards, as we read in the history of Joseph; notwithstanding all his trials, when Joseph's brothers brought his coat rent to pieces and besmeared with blood, having sold him into Egypt.

Here I would have all you parents beware of one thing; never idolize one child more than another. There may be perhaps one dearer to you than all the rest, and it is likely you will have more trouble with that child than all the rest. Jacob had far more love for and more trouble with Rachel than with Leah. But God never suffered him to have much pleasure with Rachel. Joseph had a coat of many colours, and the poor lad was very fond of it; and he chatted to his father who was very fond of him, and seeing that Joseph was so great a favourite filled his brothers with rage. The little fellow began to tell a dream about sheaves, how his brothers were binding sheaves in the field, and his sheaf arose and stood upright, and how his brothers' sheaves stood around about, and made obeisance to his sheaf; and how he dreamed another dream, and the sun, moon, and even stars made obeisance to him. His brothers supposed he meant they would all be subject to him, saying one to another, "We are to be his servants, and to toil and work for him. We will settle this dreamer, and one day murder him."

But stop a little bit. God had gone before Joseph, and when his brothers were going to put him into a pit, a band of Midianites passed by that way, and Joseph's brothers said, "Let us not kill him—let us sell him to the Midianites." That was the first step towards the accomplishment of the prophecy that Israel should dwell four hundred years in a foreign land. Joseph's brothers took his coat, rent it, and brought it to their father. They draw near to their father and say, "**This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no.**" And Jacob said, "**It is my son's coat; an evil**

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## Lord's Going Before

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**beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. I will go down with sorrow to the grave.** "Joseph is not, and what have I to live for?"

Ah! Jacob, is this your wonderful acting faith? Is this strong Jacob, mighty Israel, who as a prince had power with God? What if Joseph was dead; could your God go wrong? There was unbelief here; faith was shut up, and therefore could not act.

Well, things go on till a famine is in the land. The Lord went before Joseph, and opened him a way to be next to Pharaoh; and gave him to see in a vision what would come to pass. Many times I have wondered why Joseph did not send for his father; but I believe that Joseph could not do this, and that God kept him back to work out His own immortal purpose, and gave Jacob to see the mighty wonders of God, and that God would have His own way.

Joseph in the course of events demanded Benjamin; and told his brothers they should have no more bread till they brought their younger brother. When they came to their father and told him **"Israel said, Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me, as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother? And they said, The man asked us straightly of our state, and of our kindred, saying, Is your father yet alive? have ye another brother? and we told him according to the tenor of these words: could we certainly know that he would say, Bring your brother down?"** Jacob had said, **"All these things are against me."** As big a lie as ever was told; but Jacob did not believe it was a lie at that time, for the appearance of things was against him. By and by Joseph sent the wagons. I have sometimes thought what a push there was to tell Jacob the tidings, and the poor old man's heart beating to hear the tidings and to see his Benjamin, when the brothers cry out, "Joseph thy son is yet alive, and is ruler over all the land of Egypt." No wonder that Jacob fainted. I believe that it would have been his death unless God had supported him. When he saw the wagons, the old man's spirit revived, and he said, **"It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die."**

What a divine glory would then shine on Jacob in seeing God go before him; and when Joseph met him, and they felt God's matchless goodness, they wept till they had no more power to weep. Jacob, after all his unbelief, died in peace, and the Lord delivered him out of all his troubles; he died in peace, and he went to his God through the riches of redeeming grace. In every circumstance of providence, God went before him.

To you that are in the midst of trials and continual toil and know not what to

do, I say: do nothing, sit still before your God, watch His kind hand, take no thought for the morrow, God has provided for today and will provide for tomorrow. Have you ever been in difficulties? To this moment has not God opened you a way? Why begin to entangle yourself in doubts and fears, and toil and moil about this difficulty and that difficulty? Let the day come, and let God stand to His word. He says, "Take no thought for the morrow; sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." Let the Lord stand to His word. Can God cease to be God? Can Omnipotence cease to be faithful? Can His mercy cease? Can His justice cease? No: or He must cease to be God. God has sworn by two immutable things to preserve and save His people through His beloved Son; and His people are promised that their bread shall be provided, and their water shall be sure.

Israel proved that God went before them in the wilderness and into Canaan, notwithstanding all their fits and starts of rebellion; sometimes wanting to have a captain and to return back again to Egypt. Yet God brought them into the land of Canaan, and there was not a hoof left behind. No one ever saw more striking proofs of the love of God to His people than Joshua, and yet even he doubted when Israel fled before the few that came out of Ai, and turned their backs on their enemies (Josh. 7:7). When tidings came to Joshua that Israel had fled, he rent his clothes and wept sore and said, **"Would to God we had been content and dwelt on the other side Jordan!"** As much as to say, What are we if God leaves us? It is no matter now that Joshua had seen of the power of the Lord. He exclaims, **"O LORD, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!"**

Some people are so strong and steady in faith, they surmount all their difficulties, never doubting the faithfulness of God. Joshua had no cause to sink. Human appearances were against him; but what had he to do with that? The Lord left him to himself, and his conduct was quite contrary to resting and trusting in God, for what a degrading speech is this, **"Would to God we had been content and dwelt on the other side of Jordan!"** As much as to say, "Would to God we had paid no regard to his commands."

This was the substance of Joshua's complaint. God commanded them to go up and take possession of the land, and when they were in a strait, the Lord brought His people from leaning on flesh and blood to rest on His own promise. Joshua after the defeat at Ai says, "Our enemies will hear of it, and they will surround us on every side, and cut us off," and then he exclaims, **"and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?"** As much as to say, Hast thou not promised to bring us up, and to place us in this land? but if our enemies cut us off, where will thy prom-

ise be?—where will thy honour and glory be? God could not get out of this. Deity could not get out of it. Do not think I speak with presumption. God had bound Himself by an oath that Israel should come into Canaan. He had bound Himself to give the Canaanites into the hands of Hebrews, and the land into their possession; and as soon as Joshua came upon this ground, God says the people have sinned, and discovers the cause of Israel's defeat. This cause being removed, Israel overcame their enemies; but this was all to the honour and glory of God, not to the honour of Joshua.

This is always the case, both as regards saint and sinner, God alone shall be glorified. When Joshua had brought the Israelites into the land of Canaan, and when he had become old and stricken in years, he gathered all the children of Israel together, and recited what God had done for them, and how rebellious they had been. Then he asks, "Has there any good thing failed of all that the Lord has promised? Has there any promise failed?" The whole congregation exclaimed, "Not one good thing has failed; all has come to pass."

Well, child of God, you too have had fits of rebellion; you too have been like Israel; and have wished you had never been born, and have been afraid you would never get through your difficulties. Has not your bread been given you? And has not your water been sure? Is not God maintaining His promise till now? There may be perhaps some poor soul here who has not a penny in the world, and not a loaf of bread in the house, and perhaps your rent is not paid, and perhaps you are afraid, poor soul, frightened you are, but your God has gone before you and as your day is, so shall the blessing be, until you

get home—until you arrive where you will never want more, but where you will be ever at home with your God. Your God has gone before you. God help you to trust in Him. I do not tell you if that is your duty and privilege, for you cannot trust Him, unless He gives you faith.

Some people always believe in God's promises, that had never any occasion to doubt them. But these people do not know what it is to trust in God. If there be any stir in the country, they are running about and afraid the banks should break. What poor silly unbelieving people; how the devil is deluding them! It is to trust God when you have not a morsel to eat! It is to cast your cares on Him, believing it will come in God's good time. It is to rest on His immutable promise; when poverty stares you in the face, God gives you this faith. I know what it is to have strong faith when I had not a leaf in the house, and bless God for such circumstances. When the soul trusts in God, it fears not any of these evils. I have known what it is to be working from four in the morning and to go home without a breakfast; and to envy every person that had a good coat to his back.

When God leaves a man, He leaves the man and the devil together, who drags him where he pleases. Nobody can manage the devil but God. There were some that would in the time of Paul order the devil to come out of persons possessed, but the devils leaped upon them and said, "Paul we know, and Jesus we know—but who are ye?" Nobody but God can manage the devil. I hope God will give you faith to resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

*(Continued in the next issue)*

## THE BIBLE AND NEWSPAPER

Readers of the BBB are urged to submit religious news items which they may read in their local paper or some other publication. In sending these please give the name of the publication as well as the date it was printed. We will not be able to print all which are submitted, but we welcome any item you may feel we should read. Send them to The Berea Baptist Banner, PO Box 39, Mantachie, MS 38855-0039.

### POLL: FAITH LIKELY TO AFFECT NEXT YEAR'S ELECTION

Lincoln, Neb. (RNS)—Nearly two-thirds of American voters say their religious beliefs will be an important factor when it comes time to cast their votes for president next year, according to a new Gallup Poll.

Sixty-four percent of registered voters say their "personal religious beliefs and faith" will help shape their vote for president; 36 percent say it will not.

Pollsters detected a "gender gap" between women and men: 44 percent of women said faith would be extremely or very important, compared to only 33 percent of men.

Albert Winseman, religion editor for

Gallup's Tuesday Briefing report, said the gap presents opportunities and challenges for both parties.

"The challenge for the Democratic candidate; whoever that may be, will be to make a real connection between personal faith and public life, something that most of the Democratic candidates have not yet done," he said.

President Bush, who has been open about his evangelical Christian faith, may have an advantage in areas that are traditional Republican territory—rural areas and suburbs. Only 30 percent of urban voters said religion will dictate their votes, compared to 41 percent of suburban voters and 46 percent of

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rural voters.

The poll of 867 registered voters has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percent.

(*Western Recorder*, 12/16/03)

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### AMERICANS WHO CLAIM NO RELIGION ON THE INCREASE

Washington (RNS)—Their numbers have more than doubled in a decade, to nearly 30 million. Organized as a religious denomination, they would trail only Catholics and Baptists in members.

They are the “nones,” named for their response to a question in public opinion polls: “What is your religion, if any?”

Some nones are atheists, others agnostics, still others self-styled dabblers in a variety of faiths and philosophies.

Despite their discomfort with organized religion, many consider themselves quite spiritual.

Nones are especially prevalent in the Pacific Northwest.

In Oregon and Washington, where 21 percent and 25 percent respectively, claim no particular faith, nones outnumber any single religious category.

“If people are interested in hiking on Sunday morning rather than going to church, that’s fine. The culture won’t say that’s unacceptable. In fact, the culture will say that’s perfectly acceptable,” said Mark Shibley, a sociologist at Southern Oregon University who has studied and written about nones.

Whatever the reason, nones grew from 8 percent of the U.S. population in 1990 to more than 14 percent in 2001.

That’s the conclusion of religion experts who compared results of the National Survey of Religious Identification, conducted in 1990, and the American Religious Identification Survey, which in 2001 sought to update the earlier poll.

“That makes nones the fastest-growing religious group in the United States, if you think about them as a religious group,” said Patricia O’Connell Killen, a professor of religious history at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Wash. “We’re just coming to grips with the reality that this group even exists.”

Nones could form a powerful constituency for marketing or political causes. But few see them that way, and even fewer try to communicate with them.

“Because of their indifference, they’re not in one place,” said John Green, a professor specializing in religion and politics at the University of Alcorn in Ohio. “It’s hard to put together a mailing list. It’s difficult to get them on the phone. You can’t call them together for a meeting.”

Many nones believe in God. Nearly half “agreed strongly” that God exists.

“It is more accurate to describe them as unaffiliated than as non-believers,” said Ariela Keysar, study director of the American Religious Identification Survey.

(*Western Recorder*, 12/09/03)

### MOTHER FIGHTS FOR NATIVITY SCENE

Andrea Skorus, a Queens, N.Y. mother recently filed a lawsuit to challenge a New York City public school ban on nativity displays. She claims the ban “discriminates against Christian students since the public schools are allowed to display the Jewish menorah and Islamic crescent star.”

She filed the suit, along with her two sons Nicholas and Christos, after being told the boys’ Nativity scene could not be a part of their school’s holiday display. Brooklyn federal Judge Charles Sifton heard oral arguments last month and a decision is expected anytime.

In legal briefs filed by the city’s Dept. of Education, officials argue the nativity scene explicitly depicts Jesus as the Son of God, violating a “constitutional separation of church and state.” Officials chose a Christmas tree to symbolize the holiday, but Skorus says this is a double standard, “It’s a matter of what’s fair. . . the menorah is a religious symbol. The crescent star is a religious symbol. A Christmas tree isn’t.”

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### EFFORTS TO UNITE CHRISTIANS, MUSLIMS UNDERMINE THE GOSPEL, SOUTHERN SEMINARY PANELISTS AGREE

Louisville (BP)—Should Christians view Muslims as “monotheistic allies in the culture wars?”

Not according to panelists at a symposium sponsored by Southern Baptist Theological Seminary’s Carl E. H. Henry Institute for Evangelical Engagement.

The panelists, depicting Allah as fundamentally different than the God of Christianity, said efforts to unite Islam and Christianity threaten to compromise the gospel.

The symposium featured seminary President Al Mohler; Russell Moore, assistant professor of Christian theology and executive director of the Henry Institute; and Ergun Caner, associate professor of theology and history at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va. Peter Kreeft, professor of philosophy at Boston College, who was scheduled to speak was unable to attend due to a family emergency.

More than 500 people listened as panelists responded to Kreeft’s book, “Ecumenical Jihad,” in which he argues that Christians and Muslims hold many beliefs in common as monotheists and must unite in the fight against secularism. Fighting between the two religions, Kreeft writes, unnecessarily detracts from positive work that could be accomplished.

Caner, who was a Muslim for 20 years before converting to Christianity, said Kreeft’s view ignores irreconcilable differences between Islam and Christianity.

“To say that our. . . monotheistic religions worship the same God, that as sons of Abraham we can unite on a common cause of this said God against the threat of humanism, in my mind ignores the central tenets of each system and insults the adherents of each

system,” Caner said.

Though Muslims believe that Allah is the sovereign creator, they deny other facets of the Christian doctrine of God such as the Trinity and the deity of Christ, Caner said.

“It is not the same God,” he said. “The Koran is explicit not to say Trinity. . . We’re not talking about the same God.”

In fact, Islamic eschatology teaches that one day Jesus will return to “break all the crosses” and “kill and send to hell every Jew and Christian who did not accept Allah,” Caner said.

“As much as I would love for there to be unity, you cannot unite with those who seek your death for the sole reason of your conversion,” Caner said.

Mohler said Kreeft’s thesis stems from a false notion that all monotheists share a common worldview.

Among the sharp differences between Christianity and Islam, Mohler said, is Christianity’s insistence on the full deity of Christ versus Islam’s denial that God could ever have a son.

“The issue. . . is the doctrine of the Trinity, in particular the doctrine of Christ,” Mohler said. “We must face the fundamental question of how one knows the one true and living God. The Scripture is abundantly clear that God is known through Jesus Christ the Son.”

Islam, in contrast, insists that “Allah is one, and he has no son,” Mohler said. “The only ground of our Christian identity is. . . the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord.”

(*Western Recorder*, 12/09/03)

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### BUSH SEEKS TO RETURN ‘GOD’ TO THE PLEDGE

By Joyce Howard Price

The Bush administration and a public interest law firm representing 260,000 Americans—68 of them members of Congress—on Dec. 19 asked the Supreme Court to overturn an appellate ruling that found the Pledge of Allegiance unconstitutional because of the phrase “under God.”

Justice Department lawyers argued in a brief filed on Dec. 19 that the recitation of the pledge in public schools “is a patriotic exercise, not a religious testimonial.”

“The reference to a ‘nation under God’ in the Pledge of Allegiance is an official and patriotic acknowledgment of what all students—Jewish, Christian, Muslim or atheist—may properly be taught in the public schools,” the administration argued in its 63-page brief.

The American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) in a separate friend-of-the-court brief filed on Dec. 19 said Congress added “one nation under God” to the pledge in 1954 to reaffirm that the nation’s Founding Fathers believed “freedoms come from God” and “to distinguish America from atheistic nations who recognize no higher authority than the state.”

“The recitation of the pledge in public schools does not violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and is part of an American tapestry of patriotic and his-

torical references that date back to the founding of our nation,” ACLJ’s chief counsel Jay Sekulow said in an interview.

The Supreme Court announced in October that it would hear an appeal to the ruling by the 9<sup>th</sup> U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco, which said a pledge that included references to God, should not be recited in the public schools.

In declaring the Pledge’s reference to God unconstitutional, the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit said it violated the First Amendment as well as Supreme Court precedents. The Supreme Court has already ruled that schoolchildren cannot be required to recite the Pledge.

Both briefs also contend that Michael Newdow, the California atheist who brought suit challenging the Pledge, did not have legal standing because he is a non-custodial parent with no decision-making authority over his 9-year-old daughter’s education.

“The right to control the education of a child is invested in the mother,” who in this case has legal custody of the child, Mr. Sekulow said in a telephone interview.

The mother has said she and her daughter are Christians and do not share Mr. Newdow’s antagonistic view of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Lawyers for ACLJ, which specializes in defending religious freedom and other constitutional law, filed the brief on behalf of a bipartisan group of 68 lawmakers—six senators and 62 House members—and 260,300 citizens, including 2,600 children.

Gene Kapp, a spokesman for ACLJ, said the six senators involved included one Democrat, Zell Miller of Georgia, and five Republicans: George Allen of Virginia, Sam Brownback of Kansas, James M. Inhofe of Oklahoma, Trent Lott of Mississippi and Ted Stevens of Alaska. Of the 62 House members who joined in the filing, 59 were Republicans.

In the brief, the ACLJ also contends that if the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit’s decision stands, it will put at risk the teaching of many historical documents, as well as the performance of choral music that includes religious references and that the court “prefers atheism over religion even to the extent of censoring the historical fact that the United States was founded upon a belief in God.”

Mt. Sekulow said the ACLJ and those they represent in the legal petition hope the “high court will reject the flawed legal reasoning of the appeals court and uphold the constitutionality of the pledge, including the words ‘under God.’”

The appeals court decision was roundly criticized by federal officials at the time. Attorney General John Ashcroft pledged to “spare no effort to preserve the rights of all our citizens to pledge allegiance to the American flag,” and the House of Representatives voted 400-7, with 15 members voting present, to condemn the decision.

Justice Antonin Scalia recused himself from the Supreme Court’s consideration of the issue after he told a religious group that courts went too far to keep religion out of public schools and other forums, and that

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lawmakers rather than judges were better suited to decide the Pledge question.

The Supreme Court is expected to hear oral arguments on the case in early 2004.

*(The Washington Times, 12/29/03)*  
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### NORTH KOREA LEADS IN RELIGIOUS ABUSES, U.S. OFFICIAL SAYS

By Julia Duin

North Korea is the world's worst abuser of religious rights, and France is going overboard in banning Islamic scarves, according to the U.S. ambassador-at-large for religious liberty.

Meeting with reporters to deliver an annual State department report on the status of religious freedom in 192 countries, John V. Hanford on Dec. 18 criticized French President Jacques Chirac's call for a law to ban certain religious apparel, including Islamic scarves, in French public schools.

"All persons should be allowed to practice their religion without government interference as long as they are doing so without provocation," Mr. Hanford said. "President Chirac is concerned to maintain France's principles of secularism, but religious freedom is a non-negotiable as well. This is a secularism that excludes too much."

He also termed North Korea as "the worst religious freedom situation in the world" and "ruthlessly efficient: at barring outside observers. However, there are many credible reports on frequent torture, imprisonment and execution of members of underground Christian churches, he said.

The report, in its fifth year, was mandated by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act. Mr. Hanford termed the state of world religious freedom as often "fragile, neglected and violated" and said he was "very concerned" about the growth of anti-Semitism in Europe and in Turkey.

European governments are taking this problem more seriously, he said, "not that they weren't before, but there's a new emphasis" with government commissions on anti-Semitism being formed in France and Greece.

Worst-case governments in the massive report included Burma, China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea and Vietnam. President Bush raised the issue of religious freedom with visiting Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao during his recent Washington visit, Mr. Hanford said.

A second tier of other oppressive countries included Islamic states: Iran, Iraq (before the U.S. invasion in March), Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and the two aggressively secularist central Asian republics of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Two countries that showed improvement this past year, Mr. Hanford said, were Kazakhstan and Laos, which he visited in October.

"Laos has shown significant improvement," he said, as it no longer is forcing evangelical Christians to renounce their faith.

"We're very pleased they have moved away from that. The last group of religious prisoners was being released as we arrived in the country. A number of churches have been reopened. There still are problems, but that is at least a partial success story."

But Vietnam, he said, is worse, even though the country has released some religious prisoners. Its Christians in the central and northwestern highlands are undergoing "severe" persecution, he said, where some have been arrested, raped and sometimes beaten to death. In one province, he added, there were 150,000 Protestants and only two government-approved churches, whereas there once had been 380 churches.

The State Department, he added, also is concerned about the direction the new Afghan constitution is taking regarding its interpretation of Islamic law.

"The current draft of the constitution being considered by the lova jirga [the Afghan grand council] says that no law can be contrary to the 'sacred religion of Islam,'" he said. "Who is going to interpret this clause, and how are they going to interpret it?"

The constitution also says followers of other religions will be allowed to perform "religious ceremonies" but these ceremonies are not defined, he added.

"There's an awful lot that has to do with religious practice that has nothing to do with a ceremony," he said. "Freedom of religion is neither denied, but it's certain not fully guaranteed."

"We are encouraged to find that sharia [Islamic law] is not specifically a theme of this constitution and the language that might refer to sharia is minimal. We want to make sure we don't end up with Taliban lite." *(The Washington Times)*.

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### CALIFORNIA JUDGE ALLOWS SAME-SEX 'MARRIAGE LAW'

By Cheryl Wetzstein

A California judge has ruled that the state can begin implementing its sweeping domestic partnership law in January, despite legal protests that the new law illegally creates same-sex "marriage."

Sacramento Superior Court Judge Thomas Cecil's decision on Dec. 18 was hailed as a victory by homosexual rights groups. But traditional values groups, which are suing to block the new law, were heartened that Judge Cecil did not throw out their case altogether.

"We are pleased the judge did not dismiss the case. It is proceeding," said Joseph Infranco, vice president of the Alliance Defense fund of Scottsdale, Ariz.

He said that the next legal arguments before Judge Cecil would likely be in the spring.

At issue is AB 205, which was signed in September by former Gov. Gray Davis. The new law extends "the rights and duties of marriage to persons registered as domestic partners on and after Jan. 1, 2005." The new rights include child custody, child support, court immunity, medical leave and debt liability.

Homosexuals and unmarried heterosexuals over age 62 can register as domestic part-

ners in California.

State officials were making plans to mail information about the new law Jan. 1 to registered domestic partners when two traditional values groups sued to stop them.

The first goal is to stop the government from spending funds "to publicize 'gay marriage by another name,'" said Randy Thomasson, executive director of the Campaign for California Families.

Mr. Thomasson and his group, which is represented by Matthew Staver of Liberty Counsel in Florida, say AB 205 violates the voter-approved Proposition 22, which says "only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California."

Proposition 22 "was intended to protect the institution of marriage, including all rights, benefits and duties of marriage," says the Alliance Defense Fund, which is representing state Sen. William "Pete" Knight, lead sponsor of Proposition 22, and the Proposition 22 Legal Defense and Education Fund in a separate but similar lawsuit.

Homosexual rights groups applauded Judge Cecil's decision to deny the plaintiffs' request to block California from implementing the new law.

The ruling "is a victory not only for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, but for all fair-minded Californians who believe that families should be treated equally under the law, regardless of the gender or sexual orientation of family members," said Geoffrey Kors, executive director of Equality California. *(The Washington Times)*.

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### ABORTIONIST CONVICTED

Brian Finkel, a Phoenix abortionist who describes his murderous ministrations as doing "the Lord's work" (see "The Abortion Underworld" in our January 15, 2001 issue), was found guilty on December 2 of 24 counts of sexual abuse. "More than 60 women complained Finkel inappropriately touched them. . . during abortions and examinations," summarized the LifeNews wire service. More than 30 women "told of similar patterns of harassment" and abuse at Finkel's hands, despite the fact that none of them had ever met the others. The jury acquitted Finkel of 34 additional charges.

In a 1999 interview with the *Phoenix Times News*, Finkel told a reporter: "This is my abortion machine, where I do the Lord's work. I heal the sick with it. . . Got a Tech 9 [machine pistol]. Every gynecologist needs a Tech 9, so I could have more rounds, 'cause they're bringing me more Christians. There's a Smith and Wesson .40 and a few rifles, for crowd control, down at the [abortuary]." He and his wife Diane aborted their first child, whom they later referred to as "Ernie the Embryo."

According to Bruce Miller of Arizona Right to Choose, a pro-abortion group, Finkel is "an unrecognized hero in our community" who hasn't "gotten the accolades I think he should get." But John Jakubczyk of Arizona Right to Life, speaking after the verdict, concluded: "It was his total lack of regard for women that [was] his downfall."

*(The New American, 12/29/03)*

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### FIDEL'S MANY FRIENDS

The United Nations Human Rights Commission voted against condemning Mr. Castro's oppression and even rewarded him by re-electing Cuba to another three-year term on the commission. Cuba triumphantly proclaimed its re-election as "undoubtedly a recognition of the Cuban Revolution's work in human rights in favor of all our people." White House Press Secretary expressed the administration's contempt for the decision saying, "Cuba does not deserve a seat on the Human Rights Commission. Cuba deserves to be investigated by the Human Rights Commission." Many "intellectuals" and a number of Hollywood actors saw it differently. A group of more than 160, including singer Harry Belafonte and actor Danny Glover, issued a declaration critical of the United States and supportive of the Castro regime titled, "To the Conscience of the World." "A single power is inflicting grave damage to the norms of understanding, debate and mediation among countries," said the declaration. "At this very moment, a strong campaign of destabilization against a Latin American nation has been unleashed. The harassment against Cuba could serve as a pretext for an invasion." Director Oliver Stone's obsequious documentary on Mr. Castro, "Commandante," was pulled by HBO but why did they undertake the project in the first place? Mr. Castro's brutality is nothing new. Mr. Stone said of Mr. Castro, "We should look to him as one of the Earth's wisest people, one of the people we should consult." How true that is, should we ever decide to implement torture techniques against convicted terrorists. Director Steven Spielberg gushing over his pow wow with Mr. Castro said that it was "the eight most important hours of my life." Kevin Costner described his meeting with Mr. Castro as "the experience of a lifetime" and Jack Nicholson called him "a genius."

*(The Schwartz Report via The Baptist Watchman)*

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### BAPTIST CHURCH BAPTIZED HOMOSEXUALS

The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina has expelled a Cabarrus County church for failing to repudiate the lifestyles of two homosexual men the church had accepted as members and subsequently baptized. While the Convention has previously ejected three of its churches for ordaining homosexual clergy or blessing homosexual unions, the decision to kick McGill Baptist Church out of the state's largest religious body marks the first time the Convention has targeted a church for discipline simply for choosing to tolerate openly homosexual individuals in its congregation. The Convention's action was based on a 1992 policy that forbids churches to exhibit "public approval, promotion or blessing of homosexuality." In a comment to Associated Press, the Convention's leader, James Royston, called an openly homosexual lifestyle "un-Biblical and therefore un-Christian." But ac-

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## Mini-Edition

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



### Character

When we say an individual has character, we usually mean that person has the positive virtues of honesty, decency and integrity and will make the right decisions in life. Actually, everyone has character, according to the book definition of character, which is, "Distinctive qualities of a person or thing" or in other words, good or bad characteristics. Every individual has either good character or bad character. Listed below are some of my thoughts on good character.

(1) *Character is doing the right thing simply because it's the right thing to do.* Dr. Bob Jones Sr. used to say, "There is never a right time to do the wrong thing." Amen! In today's society of relativism, people are often more concerned about making decisions based on expediency, convenience, popularity or profit, rather than on what is right. Consider modern politicians. The old proverb of "The squeaking wheel is the one that gets the grease" is true as politicians bow to the demands of those who apply the most pressure. We are told that WE should apply the pressure concerning moral issues, but even then, they would be bowing to our pressure and that would be wrong. Politicians should vote for right not because they are pressured into it, but because right is right. Period! But don't hold your breath.

(2) *Character is consistent.* Someone else has said, "Character is what you do in the dark"...and I will add it is also what you do on vacation or away from home. Character will stay on course when others are watching us and when they are not watching, because character knows God is always watching, and He is the One who defines right and wrong, not circumstances and situations.

(3) *Character makes decisions for you.* This is just good practical sense. There should be no debate in decisions when you know right from wrong. If it's wrong, don't do it. If it's right, do it. I know it sounds too simple, but sometimes the truth is so simple, it is profound.

(4) *Character produces peace and paves the way for happiness.* Too often, a wrong decision is made to avoid discomfort, unhappiness or hurt feelings, but happiness is not to be the final goal in every situation. Kids are allowed by parents to run wild just to keep them happy. An individual once told me that she just wanted children to be happy. This was to justify allowing them to do anything they desired. Well, I just want children to have character. Happiness will follow from the peace produced by character. Besides, happiness is not a commodity that can be given. People choose

to be happy or unhappy. Even our forefathers knew they couldn't grant happiness, that it must be secured by the individual, hence the phrase, "the pursuit of happiness." Giving things to people does not guarantee happiness. It actually impedes it. Happiness is the by-product of doing the right thing and aligning life's priorities correctly. Here's a word for Grandparents of today. A lot of Grandparents need to wake up and break the destructive cycle of permissiveness they started with their own children and are now perpetuating tenfold in their grandchildren. In doing so, they become double failures as parents and unleash a generation of ingrates on society. Grandparents should love their grandchildren by re-enforcing the teaching of their parents, not counteracting it.

(5) *Character determines actions.* Except of course, for Bill Clinton. Remember the lie we were told, that character doesn't matter, that what a man does in private has nothing to do with who he is publicly and that it will not affect how he makes decisions? Yeah, right! I remember the words of an actor who played the character of Bugsy Malone, the notorious gangster, on a radio drama. Bugsy was trying to win over his latest girl and said, "All this business you see me do (murder, gambling, prostitution), it's not who I am; it's what I do." Sorry Bugsy, the two can't be separated. WHO we are determines WHAT we do, for **"as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he"** and **"from the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh"** Jesus said.

Character is not stumbled upon and seized by chance. It is instilled on purpose through diligent teaching and modeling. Who will this current generation of children look to for examples of character?



### Bible & The Newspaper

*Continued from page 276*

cording to AP reports, Steve Ayers of McGill Baptist claims his church never asked the men if they were homosexual. "Jesus told us to fish for people," Ayers says, adding, "It's not our job to sort the fish. He'll take care of any sorting." (Jenni Parker, *Agape Press* via. *Plains Baptist Challenger*)

### Studies in Esther

*Continued from page 269*

He became so enraged that just to kill Mordecai was not enough. That would not appease him. He wanted to get his whole nation and people, to destroy all the Jews. He was full of wrath. He was not acting rationally.

Haman has a "join me or else" type of attitude. He is the type that cannot stand for anyone to disagree with them. Everyone had to subscribe to his opinions and follow him, or he was just not satisfied. Being the corrupt man that he was, he was willing to kill anyone that would not conform.

In conclusion, I wish to draw your attention to three notable events of providence in our text. The first event is the conspiracy to kill the king. Why did this conspiracy come about at this time? What the motivation was behind this plot is not known. However, that it was at this particular time and moment in history that they determined to kill the king is noteworthy. It was in God's providence that it came about. Additionally, how was it discovered by Mordecai? It was known by him because it was in God's purpose. The Psalmist wrote, **"The wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain"** (Ps. 76:10). God did not permit the king to be killed at this time, although he was killed later by assassination. He did permit the conspiracy to be discovered and that by Mordecai. The events are here set into motion by which the people of Israel are brought into great jeopardy. In the book of Esther, these events are in providence like a chain, link by link, leading up to the deliverance of God's people and His glory.

The second notable event of providence was in the promotion of Haman to a position above all of the princes. He was obviously a man that was of the character to be angry and seek to kill all the Jews. God's purpose is shown on both sides. God's hand is seen in bringing the Jews near to destruction as well as delivering them from that destruction. We see here not only God's hand in the good things, but in the evil things also. Job asked, **"Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"** (Job 2:10).

Is it possible for us to explain fully how God works in both the good and evil? No, we cannot explain or even know it fully. However, we know that He is working because His Word tells us so. We can then expect God's hand in Haman's promotion. Haman was honored. He was promoted highly and held in high favor by king Ahasuerus. He was also the very character that was going to get agitated with the Jewish people. This truth reveals to us the absurdity of human pride. Haman was very prideful. He probably thought that he was promoted because of his

greatness. He reveled in his leadership abilities and perhaps his lineage. However, no man promotes himself in the world. This is all God's working.

Thirdly, we note providence in the refusal of Mordecai to bow to Haman. If Mordecai was right, and this was a violation of the Jewish religion, it is interesting that the king would give such a commandment. This lays the groundwork for Haman to execute his plot, because the king had given a commandment. It was not just a matter of etiquette and protocol, because the king commanded it to be done. If Mordecai was wrong, it is interesting that the contention existed between Haman and Mordecai. We have seen the providence of God in these seemingly minor details in the unfolding of this story.



### GLEANINGS

#### THE TESTIMONY OF CHRIST TO THE SCRIPTURES

By A. M. Hodgkin

**"Abraham rejoiced to see my day;"** **"He [Moses] wrote of me."** **"David then call him [Me] Lord"** (John 8:56; 5:46; Matt. 22:45). We have in these words of our Saviour abundant authority for seeking Him in the Old Testament, and also a confirmation of the truth of the Scriptures themselves. To those of us who believe in Christ as truly God, as well as truly Man, His word on these matters is authoritative. He would not have said, **"Abraham rejoiced to see My day,"** if Abraham had been a mythological character; He would not have said, **"Moses wrote of Me,"** if the Books of Moses had been written hundreds of years later; nor would He have quoted from the 110<sup>th</sup> Psalm to prove that David called Him Lord, if that Psalm had not been written till the time of the Maccabees.

With regard to our Lord's reference to the Books of Moses, the testimony is peculiarly emphatic. It was no mere passing reference to them. The whole force of the argument again and again lies in the fact that He regarded Moses, not as a mere title by which certain books were known, but as personally the actor in the history which they record and the author of the legislation which they contain. **"Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law?"** (John 7:19). **"Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?"** (John 5:46, 47). He condemned the traditions with which the Pharisees overlaid the laws and teaching of Moses as **"making**

*Continued on page 279*



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Continued on page 279



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*Continued from page 278*

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Printing ..... 525.40

Postage ..... 834.43

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Total Expenditures ..... 5,739.67

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Bank charge ..... -18.43

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ENDING BALANCE ..... \$4,446.70

**BEREA BAPTIST BANNER**

**2003 YEARLY REPORT**

Beginning Balance ..... \$6,979.25

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Wages ..... 43,200.00

FICA ..... 3,286.39

Dividing Checks ..... 8,698.47

Bank Charges ..... 215.53

Order of Checks ..... 67.53

Total Expenses ..... 77,294.68

..... \$4,437.79

Mistake on 2 checks ..... +9.25

Mistake on Bankstatement ..... - .34

Ending Balance ..... \$4,446.70

**BEREA BAPTIST BROADCAST**

**Financial Report**

12-1-2003 to 12-31-2003

Beginning Balance ..... \$608.27

**RECEIPTS:**

Berea B. C., Mantachie, MS ..... 400.00

Berea B. C., West Point, TN ..... 100.00

Grace B. C., Corbin, KY ..... 2,200.00

Briar Creek B. C., Williamsburg, KY ..... 225.00

..... 2,925.00

TOTAL ..... 3,533.27

**EXPENDITURES:**

Radio Time ..... 852.00

Postage ..... 18.50

TOTAL EXPENDITURES ..... 870.50

..... \$2,662.77

Mistake on Bankstatement ..... + .04

BALANCE ..... \$2,662.81

**CORBIN, KENTUCKY REPORT**

Beginning Balance ..... \$251.52

**RECEIPTS:**

Grace B. C., Corbin, KY ..... 2,000.00

Total ..... 2,251.52

**EXPENDITURES:**

WCCT ..... 200.00

Mistake on Feb. report check was for \$220 not \$160 .. 40.00

Total Expenditures ..... 240.00

.....

ENDING BALANCE ..... \$2,011.52

**BEREA BAPTIST BROADCAST**

**2003 YEARLY REPORT**

Beginning Balance ..... \$1,888.96

RECEIPTS ..... 12,622.41

..... \$14,511.37

**EXPENSES:**

Radio Time ..... 10,057.80

Tape Production ..... 440.00

Postage ..... 340.80

Dividing checks ..... 1,000.00

Bank charges ..... 110.00

TOTAL EXPENSES ..... 11,948.60

..... 2,562.77

Check never cleared ..... + 100.00

Mistake on Bank Statement ..... +.04

Ending Balance ..... \$2,662.81

**BEREA BAPTIST BROADCAST-Corbin, KY**

**2003 YEARLY REPORT**

Beginning Balance ..... \$1,893.32

Receipts ..... 2,000.00

..... \$3,893.32

**Expenses**

WCCT ..... 1,881.80

Ending Balance ..... \$2,011.52

**Gleanings**

*Continued from page 277*



## Gleanings

Continued from page 279

by Moses to give it greater weight in bringing about the much-needed reforms. Would our Lord—who is Himself the Truth—have thus countenanced a book full of untruths, and have used it in the critical moment of His conflict with the devil? And would not “the father of lies” have known perfectly well if the book had been a forgery?

When Christ commenced His public ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth with the words of Isaiah, “**The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor;**” He said, “**This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears**” (Luke 4:17-21). In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord said, “**Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled**” (Matt. 5:17-19).

In these days we have many books about the Bible, but very little searching of the Scriptures themselves. A careful study of what Jesus Himself says about the Old Testament Scriptures, asking for the light of the Holy Spirit upon the pages, would well repay the Bible student. Very few realize how abundant are our Lord’s quotations from the Old Testament. He refers to twenty Old Testament characters. He quotes from nineteen different books. He refers to the creation of man, to the institution of marriage, to the history of Noah, of Abraham, of Lot, and to the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah as described in Genesis; to the appearing of God to Moses in the bush, to the manna, to the ten commandments, to the tribute money as mentioned in Exodus. He refers to the ceremonial law for the purification of lepers, and to the great moral law, “**Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,**” both contained in Leviticus. To the brazen serpent, and the law regarding vows, in Numbers. We have already dwelt upon His threefold quotation from Deuteronomy. He refers to David’s flight to Abiathar the priest, to the glory of Solomon and the visit of the Queen of Sheba, to Elijah’s sojourn with the widow of Sarepta, to the healing of Naaman, and to the killing of Zechariah—from various historical books. And as regards the Psalms and the Prophetic writings, if possible the Divine authority of our Lord is yet more deeply stamped on them than on the rest of the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> “**Have ye not read?**” or “**It is written,**” is the ground of Christ’s constant appeal; “**The Scripture cannot be broken,**” “**The Scriptures testify of me,**” “**The Scripture must be fulfilled,**” His constant assertion. Questioned concerning the resurrection, Jesus

answered, “**Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures. Have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.**” Our Lord here attributes the skepticism of the Sadducees partly to their not understanding the Scriptures, He proves from the Bible the fact of the resurrection, and He asserts that the very words uttered by God are contained therein (Matt. 22:29-32).<sup>3</sup>

As He drew near to the cross, our Saviour’s testimony to the Scriptures has a still more sacred import. “**Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished**” (Luke 18:31). “**For I say unto you, that this which is written must be fulfilled in me,—And he was reckoned with transgressors: for that which concerneth me hath fulfillment**” (Luke 22:37, R.V.). On the night of His betrayal, in the shade of Olivet, three times our Saviour points to the fulfillment of these Scriptures in Himself (see Matt. 26:31, 53, 43; Mark 14:48, 49). Three of His seven utterances upon the cross were in the words of Scripture, and He died with one of them on His lips.

But perhaps the strongest testimony of all which Christ bore to the Old Testament was after His resurrection. On the very day that He rose He said to the two disciples going to Emmaus, “**O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself**” (Luke 24:25-27). Not only did He sanction the Scriptures, but also that method of interpretation, which finds throughout the Old Testament a witness to the Messiah of the New. Thus on the very first day of our Lord’s return He resumed His former method of instruction even more emphatically than before, proving His claims not so much by His own personal victory over death as by the testimony of the Scriptures. After this Jesus appeared to the eleven and said: “**These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must**

be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them; Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day” (Luke 24:44-46). Even those who would seek to place limits upon Christ’s wisdom and knowledge during His life on earth would surely not extend this to the period of His risen life. And it is during this period that He sets His seal upon the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, the three-fold division of the complete Old Testament Scriptures according to the Jews, the very same Scriptures that are in our possession today.

But, lest even this should not be enough to confirm our faith, we are given in the Book of Revelation a glimpse of our glorified Saviour, still “**this same Jesus,**” still quoting from the Scriptures, and still applying them to Himself. He says: “**Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death**” (Rev. 1:17-18). And again: “**He that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and he that shutteth, and no man openeth**” (Rev. 3:7). Here He quotes from the two parts of the one Book of Isaiah, from chapter 44:6, which says: “**Thus said the LORD, the King of Israel, and his redeemer, the LORD of hosts: I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. . . . Fear ye not,**” and from chapter 22:22: “**And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.**”

Truly the key—not only of life and death, but the key to the Scriptures—is laid upon His shoulder, and He still unlocks the meaning of the book of those who are humble enough for Him to unlock the understanding of their hearts.

### FOOTNOTES

1. *Old Testament Criticism and the Rights of the Unlearned*, J. Kennedy, M.A., D.D.
2. *The Continuity of Scripture*, Wm. Page Wood, Vice-Chancellor.
3. *The Saviour’s Bible*, Newman Hall, LL.B., D.D.

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Annual Area Fellowship Meeting will be held March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2004 at the Berea Baptist Church, Mantachie, MS. Services begin at 10:00 a.m. A noon meal will be served at the church. Afternoon services to follow the Noon meal. Brother Mark Minney is one of the scheduled speakers.

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The 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Berea Baptist Hymnal is being reprinted in the Philippines. We are obtaining a number of copies of this reprint. Any church or individual wanting to purchase these can order them from the Berea Church Bookstore. Price to be announced.

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We now have a sample lesson packet of the Sunday School Lessons that Sister Janet Pugh has been working on. Any church wishing to obtain a sample please contact us.

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The New Testament Baptist Church of Burton, Ohio, will receive resumes to fill the senior pastoral position. Reply to the church at PO Box 840, Burton, OH 44021.

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The Citrus Missionary Baptist Church of 6690 Turner Camp Road, Inverness, FL, in honor of their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary will be hosting a Bible Conference February 13<sup>th</sup> thru 15<sup>th</sup>. Services will begin at 6:30 p.m. Friday and 10:00 a.m. on Saturday and Sunday. For more information please contact Pastor Troy Sheppard at 352-860-1636 or by email at [tsheppard@shadrach.net](mailto:tsheppard@shadrach.net).

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The West Milton Baptist Church and Pastor Mark Clark will be holding their annual seminar Saturday February 21<sup>st</sup> starting at 9:30 a.m. The theme is “A Christian’s Responsibility”. A lunch will be provided. Speakers include Shawn Berry, Larry Lafferty, Dan Gordon, Robert Keller and Garner Smith.