

Our purpose is to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints,” and to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

OLD PATHS ADVOCATE

“To continue speaking the truth in love,” “endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace,” “keeping the ordinance as delivered.”

“Thus saith the Lord, ‘stand ye in the ways, and see and ask for the Old Paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest of your souls.’ (Jer. 6:16) “And they that be of Thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Paths to Dwell in.” (Isa. 58:12).

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NO. 3

SKIPPERS, FLOATERS & BLOATERS

By *TERRY L. STUDDARD*

In Luke 11:11-12, Jesus asks a very thought provoking question. 11 If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? 12 or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? In this discourse, Jesus has been teaching His disciples how to pray. He begins by giving them a model prayer that many even today erroneously call the “Lord’s Prayer”. Immediately following in verses (11-12) He is emphasizing God’s desire to have His people pray often and specifically ask for the things they need. Jesus certainly knew that men are anxious about day-to-day living and He drives His point home by telling His disciples that God already knows what they need and will answer their prayers in the way that is the very best for them. God has always provided for His people and their needs and His good will toward us is so proven that it should never be called into question or doubted. David said, Psalms 37:25-I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. In my 39 years as a member of the Lord’s Church, I have witnessed the fulfillment of this promise over and over again.

God not only provides for our physical needs but, in much greater and more grandiose fashion, provides for our spiritual needs. He provides the means of us knowing about Him and His will by giving us the Bible which through nothing less than a miracle has survived the onslaughts of time intact and complete. He freely, and without hesitation, gave His only Son to purchase our pardon from sin through the most gruesome death contrived by men and Hell’s

antagonist. He gave us the Church where we can gather with those of like precious faith for our enjoyment and the strengthening of our faith. Inside the Church, He established corporate worship where and only where we can offer to Him the praise of our lips, the consecration of our hearts, and the gifts of our prosperity. It is this last item that I want to elaborate on for a while.

God has always demanded that His people gather for corporate worship. It is well established that the Jews were fastidious in attending worship. Missing the assembly was not an option. It is also such an important part of the Christian’s life and service to God that Paul says in Hebrews 10:23-25 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for He is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 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. Paul goes on to say in the subsequent verse, Hebrews 10:26 - For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. In verse 26, Paul is talking about and warning against apostasy, the sin for which there is no forgiveness. It is no coincidence that Paul mentions forsaking the Truth and turning back to the world and/or false religion along with forsaking the assembly for the one follows the other as sure as night follows day. In light of this most solemn and emphatic warning, it is amazing that so many Christians hold the assembly of the Church in such low esteem. It is sad and alarming that just as the Israelites held in disdain the bread God sent from heaven (Numbers 21:5) many Christians are all too willing to trade God’s beautiful and essential gift of “gathering of ourselves together” for the serpents that the world has to offer. For the purpose

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Editorial

Contributing Editor’s Note: I was privileged to conduct the Arizona New Year’s Meeting. Brother Koby Coats gave this lesson and I thought it deserved a wider audience. I hope you enjoy it. I did. Douglas T. Hawkins

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS OF THE INTERNET

M. KOBY COATS

Given at the Tucson New Years Meeting.

This evening I want to examine something many of us use everyday. My generation has had access to the Internet all of our lives, and now the “World Wide Web” is integrated into all aspects of our society. I want to look at how we can apply the Bible to our online actions, and potential pitfalls we may encounter within otherwise innocent activities, leading us into sinful lifestyles. I’ve structured this lesson around the modern concept of the “Seven Deadly Sins” consisting of gluttony, sloth, greed, wrath, pride, envy and lust.

First Gluttony and Sloth

The concept of over-indulgence embodies the deadly sin of gluttony, and following right on it’s heels, sloth. We can find ourselves to be Internet gluttons with activities like Online Gaming or Pinterest. Neither of these activities are bad altogether. Gaming can provide amusement, and even teach skills. Pinterest is a wonderful tool for organizing ideas or projects and sharing them with friends. But if we overindulge with either of these activities we can find ourselves in a gluttonous lifestyle. Proverbs 23:21 tells us ‘the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags.’ I’ve seen people lose scholarships and be kicked out of college because they spent more time playing games than going to

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QUERIST COLUMN

By Ronny F. Wade

Question: Would you please explain the steps a church should take in withdrawing from a fallen brother or sister?

Answer: Withdrawal of fellowship is a very serious matter, and must be approached with caution. The goal of church discipline is the salvation of the guilty person. In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul addresses a problem in the Corinthian congregation involving immoral behavior. We are told that a brother in Christ was living with his step-mother and that even Gentiles did not approve of that kind of behavior. The church unfortunately boasted instead of mourning the situation. It just didn't seem to matter to them. They knew what was going on, but had made no effort to correct the situation. Paul commands that the man be "delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh." The command was for the church, in an assembly, to deliver or hand over this man to Satan and his dominion, so that he may experience the painful consequences of sin. Another reason for church discipline in this case is stated in verse 6 "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." In other words to allow sin to continue unchecked and unchallenged would have an adverse effect on the entire congregation. Others might be led to sin by concluding that the failure of the church to correct the situation was an indication that sin was acceptable. Later in the chapter the apostle explains exactly what the attitude and relationship of the church must be toward this individual. "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no not to eat" I Corinthians 5:11. This means we are not to socialize with a brother or sister who continues in the practice of that which is wrong. When church discipline is enacted it is the duty of the whole church to respect and honor it. Mike Willis in his Commentary of I Corinthians seems to have captured the gist of this verse when he wrote "Church discipline is social ostracism; therefore, it is effective or in effective in direct proportion to how well the members personally disassociate themselves with the sinner. If the congregation, as

a body, withdraws from a brother but individually the members continue to associate with him, the disfellowshipping will not be effective." In answer to the above question it seems appropriate that if a brother or sister is persisting in a sin parallel to the one here addressed in this chapter the following steps should be taken: first the person needs to be approached and confronted with the evidence of the sin, if the individual admits to the charges and indicates that he is willing to repent and confess his sin, the matter can be settled. If on the other hand the person admits not only to the sin, but also indicates that he/she plans to continue in that sin, it then becomes the duty of the church to discipline those involved. In a meeting of the church those involved in the sin must be disciplined and warned that unless they repent they will be lost. The church needs to be reminded of their duty to continue to seek and ask for repentance on the part of the guilty person or persons and to "no longer company" with the person until repentance takes place.

Question: In your column of January regarding Deut. 24. Are you saying that once a couple are divorced they can never work out their differences and go back together, remarry and serve God?

Answer: First of all Deut. 24 does not apply to Christians today. Secondly, people today who divorce for unscriptural reasons have no scriptural right to marry again. Should they marry anyway, I believe they need to terminate that unscriptural marriage. After this is done, if it is possible for them to return to their original mate I do not believe it would be wrong for them to do so. (Send all questions to Ronny F. Wade P.O. Box 14352 Springfield, MO 65814 or ronnywade36@gmail.com)

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of our brief discussion on this topic, I want to divide those who are prone to forsake the “assembling of ourselves together” for the purpose and intent God planned into three groups: “The Skippers”, “The Floaters”, and “The Bloaters”.

The “Skippers” are the Christians who have no real problem simply missing the assembly for just about any frivolous reason. As a youth, I remember a member who skipped Lord’s Day worship to enjoy a vacation where there was not faithful congregation. Upon returning, he arranged services so that he would have the first song. Prior to leading that song, he made his confession for missing services as though it was no big deal. I suppose at the time, it wasn’t a big deal to him but, I am glad to say that as time progressed, the Church became of paramount importance to him. However, many today still seem to think that any excuse will suffice for skipping worship. Some of the more common excuses we hear are: “I had a headache”, “I didn’t feel good”, and “I was just so run down, I needed a rest”. Have we forgotten that God in heaven sees all? One pitiful excuse that I find most amazing is, “I stayed home because my wife (or husband) didn’t feel well”. I can’t help but wonder if that same brother or sister will skip work the next day for the same reason and if so, how will their boss respond. There is a provision for missing the assembly to care for one who is so sick that they cannot be left alone. It is called “providential hindrance.” The flippant excuses mentioned above do not fall in that category. One variation of the skipper is the one who will attend morning worship and skip some or all of the other times the Church comes together. It is all too common in many places for the house to be full for Lord’s Day morning worship and there be hardly enough in attendance for the afternoon service to have worship at all. There have been all kinds of accommodations made for Christians with this problem including serving lunch and having the afternoon service promptly afterward. In my experience, that has not worked. In spite of all the efforts by well intentioned brethren, it is apparent that the problem is not the time the Church comes together but, rather with the hearts of those who don’t want to assemble in the first place. These Christians seem to find comfort in that the New Testament does not demand that the

Church come together other than the first day of the week. However, the “Skipper” needs to be reminded that when the leadership of the Church calls the Church together the members are responsible to be there. Peter admonishes Christians in I Peter 5:5 -Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Assembling ourselves together shouldn’t have to be a command but, rather a joy.

The next group that I want to mention is “The Floaters.” These are the Christians that float from one congregation to another so that you will never know where they will show up on any given Sunday. They never announce their affiliation with any single congregation or call it home. One reason to be a “Floater” is that if that Christian decides to be a “Skipper”, as they often do, it will be harder for others to know about. Another reason is to escape the responsibility of engaging in any of the work of any particular congregation. Some “Floaters” have even been known to pack a portable communion set and attempt to satisfy their conscience by having services in a rest area or along the side of the road while traveling. There has never been an example given in the scriptures for such behavior. Paul does however admonish us to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service (Romans 12:1). A “Floater” is hard for Church leaders to deal with. They get very upset if you ask where they were last Sunday or try to assign them any responsibility in the congregation. Doubtlessly that is their reason for floating - to escape any accountability. The “Floater” needs to be reminded that it is God that keeps the books and again He sees and knows all. When Paul was gathering relief for the needy saints in Jerusalem, he didn’t go to individuals. He approached congregations! If a Christian is going to have any meaningful service to God, it is going to be through the local congregation with whom he/she is affiliated and the “Floater” refuses to accept this responsibility.

The last group that I want to mention is “The Bloaters.” The “Bloaters” are a lot like the “Floaters”, the exception being that they have their own reason for floating. They “blow up” (Paul calls it puffed up) at someone in their home congregation. Usually they

didn't get their way about something. Sometimes there is a decision that was made that they didn't like, or sometimes there was not a decision made that they wanted made. Their mode of retaliation is to "blow up" and leave under the cloak of being too pious to be able to stay. The "Bloater" needs to be reminded that they are still under the authority of the leaders of the local congregation and are to work with and through them in resolving problems (I Peter 5:5). If everyone left over every disagreement, where would that leave The Lord's Church in this world? Someone has to stay and fight the good fight of faith (Luke 17:3, I Timothy 5:20, II Timothy 4:2).

The obvious question is, "How should local Church leaders handle "Skippers", "Floaters", and "Bloaters?" Under no circumstances, should they have free reign of the Brotherhood. They set a bad example as they teeter on the verge of apostasy. Also, they forfeit any chance to be a good example to their family, brothers and sisters in Christ, or the community in which they live. The Bible prescribes only one remedy. They should be rebuked and if necessary, withdrawn from. Sadly, without qualified and zealous elders in the local Church this has not happened and is not likely to happen in the immediate future. I am aware that this sounds too harsh for many. But, be reminded that the first sinners in the Jerusalem Church paid for their lack of respect for God's Church on Earth with their lives and souls. On that occasion, God Himself was the administrator of the punishment as an example for those who came after and us today. As a result, the Church in Jerusalem grew by leaps and bounds. The Lord's Church of today would be better off with less, "Skippers", "Floaters", and "Bloaters." -Terry L. Studdard, 538 The Wagon Road, Piedmont, AL 36272 tstuddard75@bellsouth.net

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class or doing homework. I've known others that got the "just one more" bug and ended up spending 5 or 6 hours on Pinterest when they had other activities to accomplish. When the overindulgence of gluttony interferes with what we should be doing, that is sloth. "The soul of the sluggard desires, and has nothing," Proverbs 13:4. A simple "break"

becomes wasted time, and eventually, a wasted life. We are wasting God's time. If you find yourself spending too much time online, focus on self-control. We must control our minds like in Proverbs 16:3. "Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established." Lower the priority of the Internet in your life. Set a limit and keep to it.

The next deadly sin we'll look at is greed which is defined as intense and selfish desire for something. The Internet has made it possible for you to acquire anything you can think of with just a click of a button. Websites like Ebay and Amazon make purchasing simple and easy, and microtransactions of just \$1 or \$2 in Facebook games or App stores can add up very quickly. These impulse buys can easily get out of hand. We must remember what Matthew 6:19-21 says and instead of storing up treasures on earth focus on storing treasures in heaven. "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." We must not let the ease of online shopping consume us. Matthew 6:24 reminds us that we cannot serve two masters, so instead of loving money and material things, we should focus our love on Christ and the blessings we already have. The next 3 "Deadly Sins" focus on our interactions with others through Social Media sites like Facebook and Twitter.

You don't have to look hard to find Wrath online. The anonymity of the Internet has driven some people to post things that they would never say out loud. These comments come at a price whether they know it or not. Unlike a spoken word, which may only be heard by one person, everybody in the world can see any comment online. Ephesians 4:29 reads "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." These social media sites let us reach out our influence over great distances. If we're focusing on wrath we see in James 1:20 that we will hinder rather than produce Godly righteousness in others, and 2 Timothy 2 warns us to "avoid foolish and ignorant disputes." If we are getting wrathfully angry at comments people are making online, we probably need to examine

ourselves to figure out what is causing this. Is it something internal that we need to work out or correct? Let's look to Matthew 7:3-5 and before you let your anger flow against someone else for a speck of sawdust, first examine yourself to see if you have a plank in your own eye. Continuing with the idea of posting and commenting online, we'll look at Pride.

Pride is defined as a feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one's own achievements or to be especially proud of a particular quality or skill. The good feelings we have about our accomplishments become prideful when we start putting others down. Romans 12:16 states, "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited." We are all sinners Romans 2:23, and God sent his son to die for everyone, not just the most accomplished. People also use these sites pridefully by posting just to get attention instead of updating with information. Before making a post we should consider our motivations and if needed, humble ourselves before posting. Matthew 6:1 tells us, "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." So instead of boasting of your talents follow Romans 12:9-10 and outdo one another in showing honor to others. The opposite side what we discussed in pride is the reaction it can cause in others- Envy.

Envy is the daughter of pride and stems from feelings of insufficiency. It is defined as a feeling of discontented or resentful longing aroused by someone else's possessions, qualities, or circumstances. Proverbs 14:30 says, "A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot." It is a cancer that slowly destroys us. There are two areas we can feel envy on this Social Media sites. The first is envying those NOT in the faith. Perhaps your friend is going to an event you couldn't attend because of your dedication to be at the Lord's services every first day of the week, or perhaps another friend posted a picture from a party you know you would not have attended, due to the activities occurring therein-- but boy,

does she look happy in that picture. Do you feel a wistful sense of longing? That's envy. Prov. 23:17-18 tells us, "Do not let your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day long. For surely there is an end, and your expectation will not be cut off." We should not envy the activities and enjoyments of those in the world. We know, as Christians, we live the better life. Our thoughts and actions should reflect that.

The second area is envying other Christians. Facebook is such a great way to share news with everyone far and wide quickly. When we see postings of engagements, new cars, or new grand children, are you happy for them or are you thinking, "I deserve that more than them?" All of these things are good and desirable. They are blessings from God, and it is not sinful to hope for them in your own life, but our attitudes might be. Rachel of Genesis envied her sister Leah's sons, even though Rachel was adored by their husband. Gen 30:1 tells us, "She said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!" Rather than be happy for her sister and for the joy it would bring their husband, she is envious and self-pitying. Surely, her reaction is not of God! So, how then can we prevent and overcome such envious thoughts that might arise while browsing social media websites?

First realize God has more in store for us. Jer 29:11 says, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

Second, pray for what we want. Luke 11:9-13 tells us to ask the Father because we know that even our earthly fathers can give good gifts, so how much more will our Heavenly Father "give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Also, know that God may not have plans that match our earthly wisdom--for his thoughts are not our thoughts, as we read in Isaiah 55:8-- but he DOES have good things in store for us.

Finally we need to be patient. We know that "for everything, there is a season" as we read in Ecclesiastes. We know that Abraham, "having

patiently waited, obtained the promise,” and while we are patiently waiting let us be humble and content “so that at the proper time, he may exalt you,” 1 Pet 5:6. God said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you,” and his grace is sufficient for us too.

Let us work against Envy and do as it says in Romans 12:15, and “Rejoice with those who rejoice.”

The final item in the list is Lust and unlike the other websites mentioned in this lesson, there are no online activities that are ok to partake in.

The World Wide Web has become a place where with just one click you can access pictures and videos to fulfill any lustful desires. This is an issue that is breaking up families, destroying marriages, and completely ruining careers and lives. Matthew 5:28 says that “everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” That’s what these sites are all about-- getting you to lust for those women or men that you’re seeing on the screen. I Corinthians 6:18 says, “Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.” So what do we do about this? 2 Timothy 2:22, “So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness.” Basically the Bible says get away from it by any means, and replace it with something wholesome.

I know I seem to be getting very passionate about this subject, but this is something I’ve struggled with and because I let it into my life for a long time, these desires still remain a thorn in my side. The easiest way to avoid all of the pain suffering is to not get sucked in to begin with. Parents, the biggest disservice you can do to your children is let them have a computer in their room or behind closed doors. Something that can have tremendous impact on our lives needs accountability. Kids, if you now resent me for the loss of your privacy online, I have to say I’m not sorry. In all honesty, nothing is private online, once it is out there it is IMPOSSIBLE to guarantee that it will ever

be fully deleted. Galatians 5:19-21 tells us if we give into these sinful desires we “will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Don’t let your eternal salvation be replaced with a momentary pleasure, which will never truly satisfy you.

To finish up this lesson I want to stress again that there are many good things about the internet, but if we let ourselves be consumed by it, we will lose our relationship with the one true God who created us and loved us so much that he sent his one and only cherished son to die a horrible death in order to save you and me.

Announcements

REPORT FROM THE PHILIPPINES Frank Brancato 12718 Larkin Drive, Bakersfield, CA 93312, February 6, 2014, email: frankbrancato@sbcglobal.net On January 22nd Brother Don King and I returned from the Philippines. We are happy to report that the work in the Philippines is going well, and many have been added to the body of Christ. Our preaching itinerary began on January 5th in Makati City in Manila and 13 were baptized that first service. We then traveled the next day to Baguio City, stopping to preach in Tarlac along the way. While we were in Baguio, we preached in Dagupan and Matulong, and 5 more were baptized. On Wednesday January 8th we traveled to Ilocos Norte, and preached in Solsona, Barangay, Dingras, Gabut, and Lopogan and 21 more were baptized. On Saturday January 11, we traveled to Cauayan, Isabella, and worshipped in Roxas on the Lord’s day. We preached all week at a number of places and enjoyed God’s increase as 35 more obeyed the Gospel. On Wednesday January 15th we held an all day Preacher’s study in Roxas, and had a very productive question and answer period following our presentations. We pray that much lasting good was accomplished, and that those Preachers returned home encouraged and edified. On Saturday January 18th we flew to the Island of Palawan and preached at a number of congregations over a two day period. It was wonderful to witness the power of the Gospel as 72 more were added to the body of Christ. The final congregation that we visited was converted out of digression two years ago. We

are very happy to report that this congregation has remained faithful, and they are still worshipping according to the pattern. During our stay in the Philippines, 151 were baptized into Christ and we give God all of the glory. I am so thankful for the opportunity to be a part of this great work. Brother Don has taught me a great deal about foreign work, and it is always a pleasure to work with him. I also enjoyed traveling and working with Brother Libertino, Brother Edson Danao, Brother Dion Danao, and Brother Dario Estivillo. These men are tireless workers for the Lord's church and they were a great help to us on our trip. We were saddened to hear of the passing of Brother Eduardo Danao last December. Eduardo was a valuable preacher, translator, and good friend. However we were very encouraged to see that Eduardo's sons have carried on in his stead. Along with Brother Dario, and Brother Libertino, these men served as translators for us and they all did a fine job. Please continue to pray for this work, and for the faithful everywhere.



Alice Ann Prince Thompson (5/21/40 - 01/16/14)
- NOTE OF APPRECIATION -

On behalf of my wife, Alice Ann Thompson, my daughter Jill, and me, I thank you so much for your prayers, your concern for us, and your financial support during her illness. I wish I could have the opportunity to say this to you personally.

When doctor's in LaGrange told us that Alice Ann needed to go to a hospital that specializes in fungal diseases, several congregation and individuals immediately made it possible for us to travel to the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, FL and later to St. Joseph's (Emory) Hospital in Atlanta. This support also made it possible for me to take an early retirement so I could stay with her and care for her until the end. Thank you for that!

Several months ago I taught a lesson from John 13:35 where Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if you have love one to another." At the time, I thought I did a good job of explaining what that verse meant. I talked about how fellow Christians should care for, help and encourage each other. If one is in need--help him. If one needs to be comforted or if he needs financial

assistance - be there to help him. However, I didn't really understand what that verse meant until Alice Ann got sick. Brethren would shake my hand with a ten dollar bill or a twenty dollar bill pressed into my hand. They would hug me and whisper in my ear, "I know it isn't much, but we want to help." I knew they probably needed the money as much as I did. I now understand more about love than I ever did before. Love like what I experienced is very humbling. Thank you for all your love and support. I can't possibly remember all the names of those who supported us. However, if you prayed for us, if you gave financial support, if you visited us, if you sent a card or called us, or if you just worried about us--we thank you for that. I am proud to be a part of the family of God.

Despite our and the doctors' efforts, all treatments failed. Doctor's at St. Joseph's (Emory) Hospital advised that Alice Ann would not recover and suggested we transfer her back to LaGrange to West Georgia Hospice. They advised she would probably last no longer than three weeks. However, without strong medications or IV's she flourished for a while--her body became stronger and her mind more alert. We had good talks and visits together--something we had missed for months. I'm so glad we had that time together. She actually lived 22 weeks there. When you are 'given' 3 days to 3 weeks to live, 22 weeks is a long time.

Psalms 116:15 "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." Webster defines PRECIOUS as "something of infinite wealth or value". Something worth more than my finite mind can imagine (my definition). I thought the words "precious" and "death" don't belong in the same sentence. No one at a funeral would say death was "precious". I suppose that is because we are selfish people. We want to keep our loved ones with us forever if we could. We can't accept giving someone "precious" to death. So then, what does this scripture mean? For illustration only Heaven watches us every day. He who sees every sparrow fall, sees us. Heaven watched one day as a young girl of 15 years walked down the aisle of a gospel meeting and gave her life to the Lord. She repented of her sins and made the good confession, "I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God." She was buried in the watery grave of baptism and rose to walk in newness of life. Heaven watches as she grows in wisdom and knowledge of God's word. As

she adds Christian virtues to her life, she becomes a living example for her friends and coworkers and even for the members of the Church. She grows in her convictions and discipline. She is a virtuous woman, a Godly wife and a loving mother. She is "well reported of for good works, she has brought up well a child, she has lodged strangers, she has washed the saints' feet, she has relieved the afflicted, and she has diligently done all the good she could" (1 Tim. 5:10). Her husband, her child, her family, and even the Church are stronger because they knew her. Heaven continued to watch as her tired, weary body began to slow and weaken due to sickness and disease that invaded it. Heaven watched and smiled as "she keeps the faith, she fights a good fight, and she finishes the course." The "Good Shepherd" came to escort her through "the valley of the shadow of death". As Brother E. H. Miller used to pray, "that we might live so that when it comes our time to die that we might go to sleep in Jesus and rise on the morning of the resurrection to live with the Lord and all the redeemed in Eternity". In my mind I imagine a conversation in Heaven: the Father tells the Savior of Man, "This is what I had in mind when I sent you to Calvary."

PRECIOUS (worth more than we can imagine)- "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." For the Christian, these two words (Precious and death) do belong in the same sentence. It proves the love of God (John 3:16).

Please continue to pray for me for now; I am not nearly as strong as when she stood by me. In Christian love, Larry Thompson and Jill Stone 202 Mimosa Terrace LaGrange, GA 30241

Our Departed

THOMPSON: It is with sadness that we herald the passing of Alice Ann Prince Thompson. Alice Ann as she was affectionately known departed this life January 16, 2014 at the LaGrange Hospice center, after an extended illness. She was the daughter of Foster and Elizabeth Prince, the wife of Larry Thompson, the mother of Jill Stone and the sister of Betty Jean Scott, Ruth Maharry and Lavelle Parker. Alice Ann was an accomplished cook, seamstress and an outstanding singer. Her beautiful soprano voice was legendary. She sang with a number of groups and for years appeared on

our T.V. program out of Springfield, MO as one of the singers on that broadcast. To know her was to love and appreciate her. She possessed a charming personality, a quick wit, and was a joy to know. Her convictions ran deep and were not for sale at any price. She was respected by both family and friends. The memorial service was conducted from the Murphy Avenue Church of Christ building in LaGrange where she had attended services all her life. A near capacity crowd gathered to pay their respects to her memory. Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to all her family, especially her faithful husband Larry who stayed by her side and tenderly cared for her during the long months of illness that preceded her death. This writer, and Brothers Rick Martin, and Kevin Presley conducted the memorial service. A group of Christians including Kevin Presley, Philip Prince, Lynn Sessions, Dwayne Snow and Le Ann McArthur touched our hearts with their beautiful singing. She is gone, but not forgotten. Her memory will linger with many of us as long as we live.

Ronny F. Wade

BROWN- Emma Naomi Brown passed away December 30, 2013, at the age of 95. She was born May 22, 1918 in Purcell, Oklahoma. She was the daughter of George Robert and Leone Pearl Helterbrand. She married Edward Oral Brown in 1936. They moved to McAlester in 1946 where they raised their six children. Survivors include her daughters, Elaine Elmore and husband Vernon, Christine Vemer and husband Bill, Mary Davis and husband Raymond, Jo Etta Stachmus and husband Charles, and Reba Hollis. She had 22 grandchildren and numerous great-grandchildren. She is also survived by her sister, Marie Martin, who is 97, her sister Gloria Wehrenburg, her brother Carl Helterbrand and wife, Opal and her sister-in-law Ada Helterbrand. Her son, Bob, preceded her in death. I first met Naomi when Judy and I moved to McAlester in 1972. She sort of adopted us as her own children and because I was so young, she always introduced me to people as "our little preacher." Naomi was always at church, usually bringing some of her grandchildren with her. Her mom and dad were charter members of the C & Tyler Church of Christ, and now some of Naomi's great-grandchildren attend the same church. She will be missed by them and all who loved her. Jerry Dickinson

SEARS- George Edward Sears passed away on January 30, 2014, in Deer Park, Texas, at the age of 74. He was born on August 2, 1939 in Shreveport, Louisiana. He is survived by his loving wife of 53 years, Iwona J. Sears, his sons, Charles W. Sears and wife, Heidi, Wesley G. Sears and wife, Cindy, his daughter, Twila J. Daniel and husband Charles. He is also survived by his granddaughters, Amanda Weiberg and husband Zachary, Kayla Ellis and husband Jason, and Haley Sears and his grandsons, Charles W. Middick, Austen C. Middick, and Hayden Sears. I first met George and Iwona when I was 16 years old. Actually, they knew me before I knew them when I was just a boy. In about 1967, my family began to worship at a church where they (along with Gerald and Margie Hill) attended. This church used individual cups though they opposed Bible classes. My family left and began worshipping scripturally a few months later. A few months after that, the Sears and Hill families also took a stand for the truth. In 1980, we moved back to Houston and had a chance to get to know George and Iwona more intimately. George was an unforgettable character. I took two trips with him to Mexico to visit churches we supported and those trips were profitable, memorable and because of George, fun. George loved his family and he passionately loved The Lord and His Church. His bigger than life presence will be missed. Ronny Wade and I shared our memories of George and spoke words of comfort to an audience of over 300. The congregational singing led by Randy Ballard was awesome. Jerry Dickinson

BRADFORD - Vivian Rosalie Bradford, 85, of Belton, Missouri, passed away January 15, 2014, at St. Joseph Hospital, in Kansas City, Mo. Rosalie was born December 18, 1928, in Miller County, Missouri, the daughter of John and Alpha Abbott Wright. She was preceded in death by her parents and one brother, John Wright. Rosalie is survived by her husband, James Bradford, of 60 years; three sons, Jim Bradford and wife Patty; Larry Bradford and wife Barbara; John Bradford and wife Sarah; one daughter, Kathy Boek and husband Mark; eleven grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. She is also survived by four sisters, Aliene Currence and husband Wilford, Glenna Ewing, Leta Grogan and husband Harold, and Beverly Cobb. Rosalie was a long-time member of the church in the Kansas City area and a vital part of the church

in Harrisonville for the last nineteen years where she leaves many beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. Rosalie was a quiet and unassuming person but strong in faith and always dependable. She was a homemaker, always encouraging and supporting her children and the work of the church. She was given to hospitality as she cared for many a young man who came to their home while her children were still at home, in addition to taking care of granddad Bradford in his declining years. Truly, "her children arise up and call her blessed" as Larry spoke so appropriately of his sweet mother. Brother Ron Alexander and the writer endeavored to speak words of comfort and warning to the large crowd of family and friends who gathered for the funeral service. Burial was in the Belton Cemetery, Belton, Missouri, where she awaits the resurrection of all the redeemed. John D. Pruitt

Field Reports

Douglas T. Hawkins 409 Worthington Pl. Richmond, KY 40475 (859) 353-2538 douglast69@bellsouth.net - February 4, 2014- We have been meeting with the Blue Springs congregation with greater regularity. As I have indicated before, I have been limiting my visits to other congregations so that I can be at home with my family more. One night this past month, as I read my two younger boys (ages 10 and 5) a Bible Story before bed, I thought to myself that this has to be among the greatest work that I can ever do. Actually, among the greatest work is our good example that we try to set before them, but we also have to be instructing our children. Let me encourage parents not to let the critical moments pass. I believe those critical moments are just time itself. It's not a huge defining moment in life that makes the difference in our children. It's having many moments of conversation, training, and time with them. May the Lord bless our homes.

Roger L. Owens/ Freeman Road Congregation Neosho, Missouri. The new year is here. The past year had many high points but too often filled with disappointment and sorrow for many. Yet in the darkest hours of Winter great things can and do happen when God is in it. Our meeting with Kevin Presley was one for the record books. I am still hearing folks talk about what a great meeting it was for this area. I have never heard Kevin do better. In December I had spoken on the subject of

life's disappointing moments. Kevin had perhaps one of the greatest lessons on the subject I have ever heard. Kevin spoke about walking through the darkness. Brethren this is one of those sermons you must listen to and really hear and spend some time meditating upon its words. The short meeting fell between two of our worst winter storms. The week of the meeting we had sunlight from heaven as it came shining through the darkness to warm our spirits. We experienced crowds from far and near. We had community visitors almost every service. The singing was second to none well at least for us. We have one soul who was ready to be baptized but his preacher told him basically not to darken our doors again. We will continue to reach out to him until he tells us to stop. The congregation was so encouraged by Kevin and Bethany being with us. It will take years for us to stop talking about the meeting that was so needed. Kevin's gentle humble words were what we needed, but his firmness and authority left no stone unturned. I too have developed a greater appreciation for this man of God and his sweet wife. I know they have God's interest at heart and the salvation of lost souls. I am in the middle of seeking for someone to help us out in Casper Wyoming. Brethren if you have a zeal to work and develop a congregation this is an area that needs just that. I plan a trip in April to search out the town of Riverton. I just started a new newspaper article that is short and to the point. I am already getting feedback. Once each month I go to Brumley to help out conducting services and starting a new study to develop local teachers. I have been given a number of leads and names to visit and follow up on. I am so excited for the things God is going to do this year through his people. I am encouraged because Kevin Presley came our way and gave us a shot in the arm and a charge to our hearts and we love him for what he does in the kingdom. God bless brethren and please pray for us. My address is Roger L. Owens P.O. Box 239 Neosho, MO. 64850 / rowens700@yahoo.com

Bennie T. Cryer, 4635 Larkin Rd., Live Oak, CA 95953, Feb. 4, I continue to receive cards and e-mails from churches and church members and I appreciate them all and the prayers you have prayed in mine and Joann's behalf. It has been a year now since they discovered I had cancer and I have gone through 3 series of chemotherapy treatments. My last one ended December 24. I am

feeling much better now. My next appointment with the doctor is March 21 and he plans to set up another catscan to see if I have developed further problems with cancer. We are growing in membership at Olivehurst. Two young men have been baptized recently and there are some others that have an interest in being baptized. Last Sunday we had more than 40 in attendance. The Lord has blessed us all and may God bless all of you.

Don L. King, 1147 Sherry Way, Livermore, CA 94550, email oldpaths@juno.com Feb. 12- During the month of January Bro. Frank Brancato and I traveled to the Philippines. The trip was a great success (see Frank's complete report in this issue) with 151 baptisms. This was in great part due to the hard work the local preachers had been doing long before we arrived. I enjoyed being with Frank, and believe he is growing as a gospel preacher. I am especially happy to see the growth preachers there have made since last year. I am still having a little trouble sleeping the night through because of the time zones we had to deal with but it is getting better. The church in Fremont has finally made the move to Livermore, Ca. This is only about 16 miles North of where we were in Fremont but the situation is better for the church to grow and we pray for that. Recently, I had the enjoyable task of baptizing two young ladies who are dating our two Grandsons. Celeste was baptized in Stockton and Kendall in Livermore. We are very happy for this and pray the Lord's choicest blessings on them both. We are seeing teaching talent develop in Livermore from our young men and what a pleasure it is to witness that. If you visit the church in Livermore, we are now meeting in a rented place directly across the street from 2020 Research Dr. where our new building will eventually be constructed. If you are coming from the Valley, exit on Vasco Rd. and go South to East Avenue. Turn left on East Avenue and go left at the first street. That is Research Dr. The empty lot where the new building will eventually be located is directly across the street from the rented building. We now worship at 10:00 A.M. and 3:00 on Lord's Day, and at 7:00 Wednesday evening. All are welcome. We ask your continued prayers.

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A FRIEND OF SINNERS

By CARL M. JOHNSON

During one night of a gospel meeting last year, I made the point that obedience and service are the dominant characteristics displayed by Jesus during His earthly ministry and they form a pattern He expects His disciples to imitate. A visiting brother seemed to take exception to that characterization and told me quietly afterwards that he prefers to think of Jesus as “the friend of sinners” rather than the suffering obedient servant.

We must never accept one biblical characterization of the Lord to the exclusion of others, and I am not certain what the brother was thinking, but I have learned many would-be followers of Jesus are turned off by an emphasis upon the importance of obedience.

The gospels, however, undeniably portray Jesus as the suffering obedient servant. The suffering of Jesus is the climax of Mark’s story, and the scandal of His death cannot to be denied. He is fearful before His suffering, fails to defend Himself before His accusers, is mocked and scourged, is betrayed by one disciple, denied by another, and abandoned by them all. He dies in apparent desolation. Yet Mark’s telling of the story interprets these events not as the death of a sinner cursed by God, but as the “Son of God” who knew His fate, accepted it, and understood it in light of Scripture. Jesus is portrayed as one who dies in the most radical obedience to God. He declares, “Not what I will but what you will” (Mk. 14:36). Also, His death is the most radical sort of service to humanity: “This is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many” (Mk. 14:24).

The image of Jesus as the one who suffers in obedience and in service is not found only in the crucifixion story, but it dominates the earlier part of Mark’s gospel as well. In Mark 3:6, a plot to destroy Jesus is begun, and it is followed by three increasingly explicit predictions of His crucifixion (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). A misunderstanding arises among His followers concerning discipleship, and Jesus responds to each misunderstanding in a way that connects discipleship to His own destiny: those who wish to follow Him must take up their cross and give up their lives (8:35-37); they must be like children and servants of all (9:35; 10:43). In short, Mark asserts, a disciple must follow the path of the Messiah: “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many” (10:45).

The epistles also teach that Jesus’ loving obedience and service form a pattern that must be imitated by His followers (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 2:1-11; Heb. 5:8-9). One of the more obvious and striking examples is found in Galatians 2:20, where Paul declares, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” Here Paul explains that the death of Jesus is an expression of Jesus’ obedient faith in God and His sacrificial love for humanity. Paul concludes believers must imitate the pattern demonstrated by Jesus’ death.

The clearest example of this pattern in Paul’s writings is in his letter to the Philippians (2:1-11). In the most concise Christology in the Bible, Paul says Jesus took upon himself the form of a servant and became obedient unto death, “even the death of the cross” (2:7-8). Paul prefaces his remarks by instructing, “Let this mind (attitude) be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (2: 5). They are to follow the pattern of a Messiah whose servant-like obedience to God is the paradigm for mutual service within the community (2:1-4).

The link between Jesus’ obedient service and our own is also stated clearly in Hebrews 5:8-9: “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”

In view of these passages it would be foolish for any professed follower of Jesus to minimize the importance of obedience. Obedience may sound to some like a reprehensible burden, but to those with the mind of Christ it is a gentle yoke imposed by love.

The expression “friend of sinners” is used only once to describe Jesus and it is an expression of slander. The Pharisees accuse Jesus of being “a gluttonous man, winebibber, and a friend of publicans and sinners” (Mt. 11:19). The words paint Jesus as a morally-lax and self-indulgent man who consorts with the lowest sinners of His day.

The expression can be changed to one of praise, however, if we link it to obedience and service. If sinners will obey the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16; 2 Thess. 1:8) and become His servants (Mt. 10:45), Jesus becomes our Savior and Lord and thus the greatest friend we shall ever have. cmjthebackpage@gmail.com