

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

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

MARK 3:20-30

BY NATHAN BATTEY

People are frequently intrigued and puzzled by the words of Jesus when he stated, “But he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation.” Not only are people curious as to what blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is, but they also wonder if it is still possible today, or if they have committed it. How is it possible that a sin can never be forgiven?

In order to understand what it means to blaspheme the Holy Spirit, Jesus words in Mark 3:29 must be kept in context. Jesus had caused such a stir through His working of miracles (and casting out demons in particular) that a great throng surrounded him and his family began to fear for his safety (Mk. 3:21, 31-32).

Some of the scribes who were present and witnessed the casting out of the demons went to extreme measures in attempting to discredit Jesus. It was undeniable that Jesus had cast out demons by the power of God, yet the scribes were so hardened in their hearts that they are willing to accuse deity of consorting with devilry.

Jesus replied to the accusation of the scribes with a two-part answer. First, Jesus exposed the irrational logic of the scribes by stating, “And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end.” (Mark 3:25-26). It obviously makes no sense for Satan to overthrow his own

plans by casting himself out of people. Jesus went on to teach that in order to do what he has done, he must be stronger than the devil; this would make Christ equal with God and is a claim to deity.

The second part of Jesus’ reply is a rebuke and a warning; He warned the scribes that any sin can be forgiven except the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. The reason Jesus gave such a rebuke is because the Holy Spirit was the power through which he was establishing his ministry. The scribe’s accusation struck at the very core of Christ’s authority and claim to deity. If Christ allowed such accusations to go unchecked, everything that He came to accomplish would be undermined.

A parallel situation that should be considered in connection with Jesus’ warning is the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. Ananias and his wife Sapphira sold a possession, kept back part of the money, and brought a certain part of the money to the apostles claiming to have brought the full amount. Peter asked Ananias “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?” (Acts 5:3) Immediately Ananias fell to the ground and breathed his last. Later that day Sapphira came home and was asked by Peter if she and her husband had sold the possession for the amount her husband had claimed. When Sapphira agreed with her husband’s lie, Peter replied, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?” (Acts 5:9). Immediately Sapphira fell down and breathed her last in the same manner as her husband.

The reason God struck both Ananias and Sapphira down was not because of lying (for

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Editorial

THE IMPORTANCE OF BIBLE READING

By JOE NORTON

Back in the day when the center of American life was rural, and a significant part of the population lived in small towns or even on farms, people in a community knew each other really well. They knew which neighbors they could count on to help in time of emergency or in time of special need—they knew whom they could trust—they knew who lived upright lives morally—and they knew who was religious and who was not.

During that day it was reportedly known that if a person had a Bible question, he or she could ask a member of the Church of Christ and always get an answer. The question is: Do we as members of the Lord’s church still have that reputation today? We as individuals must answer this question for ourselves and we must answer it honestly. If we conclude that we fall short of that sterling reputation of our forefathers in the church, then we have an obligation to do something about it.

Peter teaches, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15 NKJV). Vine says the word “sanctify” means “the acknowledgement of the Lordship of Christ.” So we must first set Jesus apart as a significant factor in our lives and allow this decision to lead us to do the things He wants us to do. The only way we can come to this conclusion is to have a knowledge of His word—a knowledge that comes only from reading His word with the goal of internalizing it.

Serious reading of The Word equips us to be able to defend our faith. We can then give a clear and reasonable explanation of the scriptures to other people—we can explain our reasons for having such a strong hope of being saved and going to heaven. But Peter doesn’t

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QUERIST COLUMN

By Ronny F. Wade

Question: Please give us your thoughts on men and women smoking outside the church house before and after services.

Answer: When I first started preaching some sixty years ago, it was rather common to see both men and women smoking before they went inside the church house for services. Back then a few preachers would preach against the use of tobacco, but most would say little or nothing about it, other than they didn't like it or advise others to not take up the habit. At that time very little was known about the devastating effects that tobacco had on the health of the individuals who used it. Today, however, things are different. Modern science has confirmed what many suspected: tobacco is harmful to the body. Dr. Alton Oshsner, past president of the International Society of Surgery said "Every time a cigarette is smoked, it is like putting a clamp on the blood vessels. It has been shown that smoking even one cigarette will constrict the arteries, veins, and capillaries, and to that extent will slow down the blood circulation in all parts of the body, including the brain." The Harvard Medical School Health Letter (Vol. III, No. 6, April 1978) stated, "The good news is that we know the cause of at least 80% of the cases of this leading cancer killer---cigarettes." Dr. Curtis Torno, a Christian, wrote, "Smoking one pack or more a day will shorten one's life on the average by 12 years." We know now that health insurance and life insurance rates are higher for smokers than non-smokers. The American Red Cross states on its web site that "each year 390,000 Americans die from the effects of smoking." Cigarette smokers have more than twice the risk of heart attack, and two to four times the chance of cardiac arrest than non-smokers. Not only is smoking harmful to the body, it is also addictive. Many who smoke have tried to quit without success. Many smokers can't go thirty minutes without lighting up another cigarette. Some who smoke will deny they are dependent on tobacco until they try to quit. I have personally watched people who were dying in the hospital from lung cancer have a friend or relative hold a cigarette in their mouth while they puffed on it even though they were only hours away from death.

Anytime something overpowers us, we are then enslaved to it. "For by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage." (2Peter 2:19) There seems to be little doubt that someone who has to take one last draw on a cigarette before entering the church house and as soon as services are over smoke another one, is under bondage to tobacco. In 1Cor. 6:12 Paul declared that he would not be brought under the power of even those things that were lawful. Weymouth's translation of the verse reads, "to nothing will I become enslaved." Most people who smoke cigarettes will argue that they are not enslaved to them, yet they cannot do without them. Even when they try to quit, many end up going back to smoking, indicating that the habit was stronger than their will to quit. Addiction violates the principle of self-control (2Peter 1:5-10). A person addicted to smoking is not in control of himself. I think it is important for those who smoke to realize there is a vast difference between a "habit" and an "addiction." People who smoke need to realize that addiction is dependence which makes it far more than a habit. Those who smoke need to realize not only the detrimental effects it has on them, but the effect it has on others as well. The surgeon general of the United States issued the following statement about second-hand smoke "there is no risk free level of exposure to secondhand smoke." That means that if you smoke you expose your spouse, children, grandchildren and others to the risks involved in smoking. It also means that when you light up outside the church house you affect others, who come in contact with your smoke, to the dangers of tobacco.

These are my thoughts on the question submitted above. I would encourage all who are inclined to smoke to think twice about the results of such actions on themselves and others as well. (Send all questions to Ronny F. Wade P.O. Box 14352 Springfield, MO 65814 or ronnywade36@gmail.com)

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**HOMOSEXUALITY: "VILE"
AND "UNNATURAL"**

By ANDREW K. RICHARDSON

Be it love or be it lust? Nature or nurture? For decades now the "gay-community" and its supporters have been propelling two fatuous arguments, namely that "gay-marriage" is an issue of "love," and that homosexuality is a "trait" one is born with. For example, in the overturning of Pennsylvania's gay-marriage ban, the executive director of the state's ACLU, Reggie Shuford, stated that it was a momentous day for Pennsylvanians who "want to have their love and commitment to each other recognized (2014, May 20, emp. added)." "Vic" Walczac, the legal director, said, "There's nothing that the government can do that's more intrusive than standing in the way of two people who love each other and want to get married (2014, May 20, emp. added)." Of course, a host of celebrities have been singing this tune for years. However, the truth is self-evident, and Paul the apostle is everything but subtle about it in his letter to the Christians at Rome. Let's explore.

VILE AFFECTION

"Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves ...For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections..." (1:24,26, ESV)

Foursquare! To dishonor is to shame. Sexual activity with a like-gendered person is a shameful mistreatment of the human body. Paul writes on about men being "consumed with passion for one another" and "committing shameful acts." Our culture well understood this in the past, but, of course, after decades of moral spoilage, it now buys into the lie, and this degraded behavior, historically known as sodomy, has been successfully hammered and warped into an issue of love and commitment. Additionally, anyone disagreeable to it is often railed as a "hater." Paul sees it for what it is - lust, a "vile" passion, and a "dishonoring" of the body. Love it is not.

UNNATURAL

"For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error" (vv. 26-27).

We've all heard it-"they're born that way." Now it seems most of our country has been hoaxed into believing it. A Gallup poll from 2013 shows that the majority of Americans believe homosexuals are born as such. "Gay" from the get-go, as it is.

"Currently, 47% of Americans view being gay or lesbian as a sexual orientation individuals are born with, while 33% instead believe it is due to external factors such as upbringing or environment. That 14-percentage-point gap in favor of "nature" over "nurture" is the largest Gallup has measured to date. As recently as two years ago, the public was evenly divided" (2013, May 16).

Paul does not concur. He described sexual relations between women to be an "exchange of natural relations" for such that is "contrary to nature" ("against nature" - KJV), and continued to say the same for the men. Yet, one does not need to be divinely inspired to know the obvious. Despite the lie, the anatomy gives the truth away. How can a man be born "gay" if the male reproductive system is structured to function sexually with - and only with - a female reproductive system? The proof is in the plumbing! Yes, unfortunately for the advocates of the "they're-born-that-way" argument, their own bodies are a testimony against them. If you were born a man, then you were born to function sexually with a female, and vice versa. Nobody's "born with it" - the parts don't fit, as they say.

To further see the obvious nature of this sin, consider that if every human decided to have only homosexual relations from today forward, the human race would go extinct after the now-youngest generation died off. It doesn't get any

more contrary to nature than that. Of course, some might choose to utilize the natural process of reproduction through artificial insemination as some lesbian couples have done, yet, in doing so, how can they look anyone in the face and claim their sexual behavior is natural? La absurdité!

Consider this: those who want to justify sexual desires towards young children use the same two arguments to their advantage, saying its “natural” and its “love.” What’s good for the goose is good for the gander, right? When will society give the green-light on adult-child relationships? Certain portions of it already have, such as N.A.M.B.L.A. (North American Man-Boy Love Association), which is an advocacy group for pederasty, pedophilia, and homosexuality. All that is required for its eventual acceptance is the continuation of the current eradication of morality and the ever increasing indifference and hostility toward God clearly evident in our culture. Remember, previously, homosexuality wasn’t much less repugnant than what pedophilia is now. In fact, it was formerly designated in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders.

The best route for fornicators (a term for anyone committing any type of illicit sexual behavior) is to “flee” from such sin (1 Cor. 6:18, KM). Their only hope is to turn to God through Jesus Christ who is “not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Yet, rather than persuading sinners to repent, our culture chooses to happily march beside them in their iniquity, hailing vile affection as love, and unnatural relations as normal. “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!” (Isa. 5:20)

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“LICENSE TO SIN”

BY AARON BATTEY

Pretzels are a delightful treat, but as tasty as a pretzel is, Johann Tetzel was a man of extreme distastefulness. This loathsome fellow was a Catholic friar who lived in the days of Martin Luther (1400’s) and is best known for the selling of indulgences. Indulgences were basically a license to sin that came at a pretty penny marked up by Mr. Tetzel. For example, you want to commit adultery? Go buy an indulgence from Mr. Tetzel and you can commit all the filthy, satanic adultery your heart desires. Don’t worry; your sins are excused because of your worthy investment in that piece of parchment... a license to sin. Today hardly anyone remembers who Johann Tetzel was, but as the saying goes, “History always repeats itself.”

If you are a young person, you need to know how to respond to your friend who utilizes God’s grace as an indulgence. That’s right; people are using the free gift of God as a license to sin. The argument goes like this, “We are all sinners. We are going to sin no matter what, but its okay because God is gracious and forgives us whenever we sin. I know it’s wrong to lie, but isn’t it also supposed to be a sin to lust after a woman?! You just have to trust in the grace of God.” That argument sounds pretty attractive. If that argument was adorned in a dress and batting eyelids, any young man might fall for it. There is only 1000 things wrong with it.

God’s grace does not give us a license to sin. Paul addresses this very concept in Romans

when he declares, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? We should no longer be slaves of sin," (6:1-2,6). God's gift is free to us, but it was not free to Him. There is an old saying that there is no such thing as a free meal. The idea is that the meal cost somebody something whether it was free to you or not. God's grace is offered freely to us but cost Him the blood of His Son, Jesus the Christ. When proclaimed Christians use God's grace as a license to sin they are blaspheming the precious name of Christ and wiping their feet in His blood like the devil himself.

We may sin as Christians, but we should not be "sinners". When Paul says in Romans 6:6 that we should no longer be slaves of sin, that is simply saying that Christians are not or should not be habitual sinners. Hopefully as Christians we have put off the old man (Eph. 4:22), and when we do sin from time to time, we confess that sin, repent of it, and ask for the grace of God. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us from all unrighteousness," (1 John 1:9). We should not accept incapability from the get-go and live off the grace of God like some undeserving Americans live off government welfare. - Aaron Battey

THE LORD'S SUPPER

By RICK MARTIN

Throughout history God has provided memorials. God saw the need for a memorial service for the Israelites, so that they might remember the Passover, Ex. 12:12-14. For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I [am] the LORD. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye [are]: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy [you], when I smite the land of Egypt. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an

ordinance for ever. The rainbow was put into the sky as a reminder to all people that God never again would destroy the earth by water, Gen. 9: 8-17. The Lord commanded Moses to preserve an omer of manna, Ex. 16:32-34. This was to be done to remember God's feeding of Israel in the wilderness. The purpose of these memorials was so future generations would not forget. Remembering is not an easy thing. Often the memories of loved ones fade from our minds when they are no longer physically present. We keep picture albums and build monuments, because our memories need assistance. Physical objects call our minds back to relationships and events that are significant events we want to remember, but fear we will forget. Thus, it is befitting that a memorial would be established in memory of the sacrifice of God's only son.

Almost 2000 years ago, Jesus met with his disciples in an upper room, Mk. 14:15 And he will shew you a large upper room furnished [and] prepared: there make ready for us. In a quiet and unassuming way, he instituted the Lord's Supper. Mk 14:22-25 And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake [it], and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave [it] to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God. This supper was introduced during the Jewish Passover. Although, he could have demanded it, Jesus did not authorize an expensive and elaborate memorial that only the rich could afford. He instituted a memorial with simple elements: an unleavened loaf of bread, and a cup containing fruit of the vine to be used as a memorial to Him. These simple and inexpensive items are available to all. This memorial has touched the hearts of rich and poor, educated and uneducated throughout the centuries of time. The Lord's Supper is a memorial. This was stated twice by the apostle Paul. 1 Cor. 11:24-25 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance

of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

When the time comes to observe the Supper we should be diligent in avoiding all distractions and we certainly should not be a distraction ourselves. Sometimes we may find it difficult to give our full attention to what is taking place. Every time we partake of the Supper, we should think about what we are doing. It is not a time to be playing with babies, thumbing through a songbook, clipping our nails, or balancing our checkbook. Participation in this memorial is a serious matter. In partaking we should look at our attitude toward God. We should think about what God and Christ mean to us. Thoughts of our salvation, the church, and the emblems involved in the supper and our dying Savior should be on our minds.

The Lord's Supper is an appointment that must not be missed. An invitation has been given by the King of kings and Lord of lords. The person who is striving to be an obedient servant of the King will not forsake the invitation. Briefly, we will notice three reasons why every faithful Christian will participate in this grand memorial every Lord's day.

We are the church of Christ: The early church ate the Supper every first day of the week. Acts 20:7 And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. Paul and his companions knew that just as surely as the first day of the week came around the Supper would be observed. Early Christians understood the necessity of meeting around the Lord's Table. Various religious organization observe the Supper at varied times. The Bible teaches that the Supper must be observed every first day of the week. Acts 20:7 is clear in telling us that the disciples came together on Sunday, the first day of the week. This passage tells us the purpose for their coming together. They came together "to break bread." The scriptures teach us that we are to meet every first day of the week. 1 Cor.

16:1-2 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first [day] of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as [God] hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. This conveys the idea of "every first day of the week". Every time there was a first day, they were to lay by in store. Paul said, so that there be "no collections made when I come." It is clear they were commanded to do this because Paul said, "I am giving you this commandment as I gave order to the churches of Galatia." When we consider Acts 20:7, together with 1 Cor. 16:1-2, we see: 1) they came together on the first day of the week. 2) They came together to break bread. 3) While gathered they contributed of their means. This happened every first day of the week. 4) Therefore, they must have come together to break bread every first day of the week. When we see the meeting was to take place every Lord's Day, and the purpose of their coming together was to eat the Lord's Supper, it is clear we are to eat the supper every first day of the week.

We are family: The expression "breaking of bread" denotes fellowship, friendship, and companionship. Good families have a sense of "togetherness." Unity is important. 1 Cor. 10:17 For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. When the Corinthians lost their spirit of "togetherness", they no longer were partaking of the Lord's Supper, but rather it became their own meal. 1 Cor. 11:17-21. Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. In the Lord's Supper, we as Christians are bound to each other in the great and wonderful family of God. When we as believers partake of the Lord's Supper, we

share in communion and community with one another. Partaking of the Supper is not a private matter. It is a time when God's people portray their oneness. In the Lord's Supper, Christians are one body. May this bond of unity continue unbroken until Jesus comes again. No matter what our status in life may be, we meet around the Lord's Table as one.

We must be the right example: If one misses the Supper to work or vacation, everyone can easily see what is important to that person. It can easily be seen that Matt. 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you, has no influence in that person's life. Our observance of the Supper is more than a requirement; it is an active way of giving glory to God for our salvation. No child of God can afford to forsake the assembling of himself with the people of God to proclaim, or show forth the Lord's death until he comes. 1 Cor. 11:26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

Serving at the table

Not only is participation in the Lord's Supper a very serious matter, it is also a serious thing to be asked to serve at the Table. When one is asked to serve at the table they have been entrusted with a work of great importance. The words that are spoken at the table should prepare minds for communion. It is not a time to rehash the sermon nor preach one. I have been places where the speaker at the table used almost as much time as the preacher. Personal stories should be avoided. The Supper is a time to remember the Savior and nothing should detract from the occasion. When offering thanks the best and safest thing to do is follow the language of Paul found in 1 Cor. 10:16, The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? All confusion can be avoided when we use the language of the Apostle Paul. As long as there have been Christians, they have been gathering as a body on Lord's Day to remember the death of Christ. The Lord's Supper represents the hopes, promises and triumphs of the Christian message. May we continue

to observe the Supper as it was intended and look with a watchful eye for the return of our Savior. - Rick Martin 300 Clubview Terrace, Woodstock, GA 30189 mmartin@bellsouth.net



THE UNPARDONABLE SIN continued from page one

many have lied and not been struck dead because of it), but because they "lied to the Holy Spirit" (Acts 5:3), and "agreed to test the Spirit of the Lord." (Acts 5:9). Ananias and Sapphira had conspired together to test and undermine the apostle's authority. God killed both Ananias and his wife to prove a point: the apostles are inspired of the Holy Spirit, and their authority is not to be questioned.

Back in Mark 3, Jesus placed a high penalty on the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit because of the Spirit's vital role to the salvation of the world. Jesus was willing to be mocked, mistreated, slandered, and suffer personal offense, but if the will of God was to be accomplished, the Holy Spirit must be defended and hallowed. The extreme measures of the scribes called for an extreme warning; a punishment to be issued by deity.

So, can one today commit the sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit and never be forgiven of that sin? The answer is "No." Since miracles have ceased (1 Corinthians 13), it is no longer possible for people to witness a miracle and attribute such power to the devil as the scribes attempted to do. However, if one rejects the gospel that the Spirit came to establish, he or she will not inherit eternal life (Romans 1:16). - Nathan Battey nathanbattey@gmail.com



THE IMPORTANCE OF continued from page two

stop there. As we explain the reasons for our hope, we do so with the right spirit: "with meekness and fear." Even though we have found the Lord and have a strong faith in His word, we have no reason to be arrogant. We are not better than other people: we are just blessed

to be in Jesus. And if we have the same spirit that He manifested, we have a strong desire for others to know Him, too.

Bible reading is essential for pleasing God and going to heaven. We, as followers of Jesus, must make the scriptures a significant part of our lives every day. We must be Bible readers so that we can regain our reputation: "If you want an answer to a Bible question, ask a member of the Church of Christ."

Announcements

CHANGE OF SERVICE TIME

The Greater Hamilton congregation has decided to change Sunday afternoon service time to 3:00, starting April 5, 2015.

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The directories should be ready for shipping in April

Our Departed

Darrell Gene Brewer was born July 20, 1939 and was sadly taken from us on January 14, 2015 at the age of 75. He was preceded in death by his father Arlie, mother Alta, and grandson Tyler Brancato. He is survived by his wife of 53 years Patricia Gail, children Darin and Tina, grandchildren Taylor and Tanner, sisters Loretta and Jan, and many nieces and nephews. Darrell graduated from Arvin High

School in 1957, and then resided in Bakersfield from 1960 until his passing. He worked hard all of his life, and was a Painting Contractor for many years before his retirement. Darrell had many physical challenges over the last 7 months, yet he never complained. He was always just "Darrell". And though we mourn his passing, we are grateful for the Lord's mercy as well. It was determined a couple of days before he passed, that he had an aggressive form of pancreatic cancer, and would need to be on Chemo for the rest of his life. That was the one thing he didn't want. So we just say that our loss is his gain, and we long for a time when we all can be together again. The two most important things in Darrell's life were the church and his family. He was a charter member of the Lord's church on Planz Road in Bakersfield, and served as a teacher and leader for over 50 years. Darrell truly loved the church, and was a voice of conservatism in this area for which we are grateful. I am thankful to have had Darrell as my father in law and loyal friend. I will forever be grateful for the difference that he made in the lives of others, and especially in mine. It was very difficult to be in the Philippines when Darrell passed from this life, but I know that is exactly where he would have wanted us to be. He loved the work in the Philippines, and felt that it was one of the greatest works in the world. On Behalf of our family, we want to thank everyone for your love and support. We would also like to thank those who attended Darrell's funeral, many of whom traveled great distances to be there. Those at the funeral home told us that it was the largest funeral they ever had. The congregational singing was amazing led by Terry Osburn, and Darrell's grandson Tanner read beautiful words on behalf of himself and his sister. Darrell would have been very proud! I also considered it a great honor to conduct his service together with Darrell's lifelong friend Don King. - Frank Brancato

Field Reports

Johnny Elmore, 419 K SW, Ardmore, OK 73401, johnnyelmore@gmail.com, Feb. 8 - - I enjoyed the study in Oklahoma City, Dec. 15-18 and the subsequent New Year meeting conducted by the Edmond congregation. I commend Edmond for a job well done. Since then I have spoken at Ada, OK two times, spending time with Roger and Tina Cosby and enjoying seeing so many friends. I look forward to being at Sentinel, OK March 1. Also, I

expect to be back at Freeman Road with Roger Owens and congregation March 25-29. Come and help us in this gospel meeting if you can. I also anticipate being at Little Rock, AR April 3-5 and at Eleventh Street Acres congregation April 17-19. I consider it a privilege to be asked to speak at these congregations. Let us do all the good we can in all the ways we can.

Jerry Dickinson, misterjld@msn.com It is hard to believe that the year 2015 has begun, but I pray it will be a productive year for us all in the Lord's work. I am looking forward to the meetings I have scheduled this year. They include the following. After participating in the great annual study in Columbia, Missouri March 9-13, I will be in Pleasant Grove, Indiana March 15-22. The next few months include, Harrisonville, Missouri April 1-5; Allen, Texas April 17-19; a mission meeting in New Boston, TX April 27-30; Huntington, West Virginia May 3-10; Deer Park, Texas (with my brother Billy) May 20-24; Canyon, Texas June 3-7; Neosho, Missouri June 17-21; Walnut Grove, Kentucky July 12-19. May the Lord bless the church everywhere and may His Word have free course!

REPORT FROM THE PHILIPPINES- Frank Brancato 12718 Larkin Drive, Bakersfield, CA 93312, February 12, 2015, email: frankbrancato@sbcglobal.net. On January 27th Brother Don King and I returned from the Philippines. We are happy once again to report that the work in the Philippines is going well, and many are being added to the body of Christ. Our preaching itinerary began on January 11th in Makati City in Manila, and 12 were baptized that first service. We then traveled to Cauayan, Isabella and preached in Roxas, Santa Victoria Ilagan (a new work), Vilamor, Calanan, Dilag Tabuk City, and Kalinga, and 39 more were baptized. On January 16th we traveled to Ilocos Norte and stopped to preach in Lapogan and Cadingdongan along the way. It was very encouraging to see those who braved weather conditions on motorcycles to attend the worship. While in Ilocos, we preached in Solsona, Dingras, Gabut, and the provincial jail, and 24 more were baptized from those areas. On January 18th we traveled to Baguio City and stayed the night. The next day we

drove about 6 hours to the mountain province of Bontoc and had one service there. On January 20th we traveled back to Baguio and preached in Dagupan and Pangasinan. On January 22 we began our trip back to Manila, stopping in Tarlac along the way. It was encouraging to see the good crowd that assembled there, and 6 more obeyed the Gospel. On Friday January 23rd 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 36 more were added to the body of Christ. During our stay in the Philippines, 128 were added to the kingdom, and we give God all of the glory. I am so thankful to be a small part of this great work. Brother Don has taught me a great deal about foreign work, and it is always a joy to travel and work with him. I also enjoyed traveling and working with Brother Libertino, Brother Edson Danao, Brother Dion Danao, and Brother Dario Estivillo. These men were a great help to us and served as translators and companions. Please continue to pray for this great work, and for the faithful everywhere.

Roger L. Owens Neosho, Missouri 64850, P.O. Box 239. Greetings to all. What a blessing to begin a new year in service to our King and Lord. As most know I underwent bypass surgery on November 24, 2014. I am recovering with great progress the doctors tell me. I feel good and want to get back into the main stream but I must take a moment or two and reflect on getting better. I will be in Brumley, Missouri in January 7-11 to speak 4 times that week. I have already given sermons and lessons in Neosho about three times or so. I just started my study with the brethren here on Revelation. We spoke this past Sunday on the introduction to the book. While in Brumley I will be speaking on Old Things & New Things, Slothfulness, and two studies on the introduction to Revelation. I have a study with two wonderful young folks while in Brumley as well. Our monthly mailer covers the idea of making New Year resolutions and why they fail. The work in Wyoming is looking very promising with the potential for converting a number of folks from a cups congregation to one cup and one loaf. Thanks to Brett Hickey and the TV program we are

getting into thousands of new households. Like the apostle Paul I have moved from the city where the voice of truth seems to fall on empty hearts and deaf ears. I want to personally thank Joe Hisle as well for his vigilance in helping with that effort while I was being treated for heart issues. I would be remiss if I did not mention those of you who called, prayed, whole congregations many times, and fellow preachers and teachers who came by to see me and express their concerns. Many good sisters who sent food and letters. Thank God for our dear sisters. Brother Ronny Wade came by to encourage me and I love him for that. I am ever grateful to our pioneers of the word, our older preachers because so many of them called or wrote me with wisdom and touched me with thoughts of grace. The elders at Leawood Joplin, Missouri made special efforts to pray for me before and after my surgery and what a blessing to have that kind of help in time of need. I want to take a moment to mention brother Garrett Lorton who provided lunch from hundreds of miles away for my family and those who gathered as I underwent my surgery. I was touched by his thoughtfulness and support as he reached out to my loved ones in this trying moment with such tender care. I told folks that I went into the surgery knowing one thing. I was a winner either way it goes. If I didn't make it heaven would become my new home. If I lived, well as Paul said it, "To live is Christ but to die is gain." This year we must save thousands beginning with your personal invite to the neighbors next door and me to mine. May the God of heaven bless this brotherhood with peace and spiritual prosperity in 2015.

Don L. King, 1147 Sherry Way, Livermore, CA 94550, old_paths@juno.com. Feb. 14- Since Frank Brancato has sent a detailed report of the Philippine trip I will mention only that it was a good trip and a pleasure to work together with Frank and the good brethren in the Philippines. We have some fine men there who stand for what is right. We covered many miles together and our prayer is that it was pleasing in God's sight. I look forward to holding several meetings this year and will mention the places as the time is drawing nearer. Brethren, we do not have the luxury of letting down in the battle against error.

Satan never sleeps and we must be up and about the Lord's business. It was sad indeed to lose my old friend Darrell Brewer while we were overseas (see his obituary elsewhere this issue) but we try to always keep in mind that the Lord sees the end from the beginning and therefore always knows what is best. Our best to all the Brethren everywhere.



***THERE IS NOTHING
BEYOND YOUR REACH***

by Mark Doyle

There is nothing beyond your reach,
show me oh Lord undeserved loving kindness.
Turn an ear towards my petition for prayer
and an eye to this sinner.

Capture me oh Lord and carry me away,
to take refuge behind the walls of
your mighty fortress.

Forgive me oh Lord my many sins,
I hide nothing from you, my heart is open
to receive you, examine it oh Lord and
find me wanting, but make it yours.

Separate me oh Father from evil and
evil men, separate me oh Lord from sin.
Know my weakness and be my strength.

Carve your name in my heart,
let me wear it as a yoke on my shoulders.
Be my treasure oh Lord.

Your son, your servant,
let me hear you call me by name
and I will know your voice.

Save me my Father,
save me my Master,
save me from the clutches
of unrighteousness.



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THE BACK PAGE...

CAN I GET AN AMEN?

BY CARL M. JOHNSON

I was listening to the radio several years ago as I was driving through Memphis, Tennessee, and I discovered a live broadcast of a religious revival being conducted at a local church. Apparently, the services had been running for a couple of weeks. I do not remember much of what the preacher said, but I recall vividly that at one point in the sermon he stopped and severely scolded the audience for its apparent inattention. He shouted, "CAN I GET AN AMEN?!!" He continued, "You people are supposed to be fasting and praying during this revival, but apparently you've had a 'Big Mac attack' and your stomachs are full and your eyelids are heavy! But, if I don't start getting some Amens from you I'm gonna come out there and hit you with this microphone!"

In the Scriptures, when the word "Amen" is uttered as an enthusiastic approval of something said by another, it means, "that is most assuredly the truth." As in the heavenly worship of Revelation 5:14, the four beasts respond to the praise of all creatures with their Amen, so the men of the congregation of the church respond to the praise of God by the speaker with their Amen. The Amen is thus a response, since the people are responding to what has been said by another (C.f. Theological Dictionary of the NT, Vol. 1, 336-337; Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon 32; Analytical Greek Lexicon 18).

While this custom is as old as the church itself (The practice originated in the Jewish synagogue before the establishment of the church, and passed over into the assemblies of the church, Thayer 32), its practice in the Lord's church today varies from congregation to congregation. Some churches never respond with Amen to the preacher, others will respond occasionally, while still others respond regularly and frequently, the verbal response coming only from the men because women are instructed to remain silent (1 Cor. 14:34).

The practice is most common in African American congregations where it is referred to as the "call-and-response" tradition. This model features the message of the preacher being received by the congregation and the feedback (response) which comes from the congregation. The audience response involves both verbal and non-verbal communication. In the call-and-response pattern, the Black preacher speaks and the congregation responds with, "Amen," "Yes Sir," "That's right," etc. (Dr. James O. Maxwell, Don't Know Much About Church History 137).

Dr. Maxwell explains, "the audience is the very heart of the Black pulpit. If it is a fact that in other preaching traditions more emphasis is placed upon the form of the sermon than upon the congregation and what is happening in it, this is certainly not true in the Black preaching tradition. Some preachers may deliver messages as though their audience does not exist or is not a vitally necessary part of the communication event. Such a practice, however, for the most part, would destroy the pulpit function for African Americans" (137-138).

Regardless of traditional backgrounds, any preacher is inspired if he can see his audience is tuned-in to what he is saying by their verbal or non-verbal feedback. The late E.H. Miller once stopped abruptly in the midst of his sermon and told the congregation that had been vigorously responding with Amen to everything he said, "Brethren, saying 'Amen' to me is like saying 'Sic 'em' to a bulldog. If you don't slow down some we are going to be here all night!"

Another obvious use of "Amen" is when it is uttered in response to a prayer. In such cases the word is generally translated "So be it." Thayer says that in the "Christian assemblies when he who had read or discoursed had offered up a solemn prayer to God, the others in attendance responded with Amen, and thus made the substance of what was uttered their own" (32).

The one who leads prayer in the assembly is speaking to God, NOT to the audience (Mt. 6:9). However, he IS speaking on behalf of the audience. Therefore, he needs to speak in a way that the audience can hear him clearly and understand what he is saying. If they cannot, it makes no difference whether he is speaking in a foreign language or just not speaking loudly and clearly enough, the congregation is denied the opportunity of validating the prayer and making it its own by saying Amen at the end (1 Cor. 14:16).

It is a little unsettling to me if there is not a single Amen offered in response to the prayer in the assembly. I realize we can say Amen silently or quietly to ourselves, but if the prayer is sincere, reverent, and Scripturally sound, let the brother who led it know you agree with the content of his prayer and that you are endorsing his words to God. Do not leave him wondering why he cannot get a simple "Amen." Amen? cmjthebackpage@gmail.com