

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

AUTOPSY OF A DEAD CHURCH

By KEVIN W. PRESLEY

Most churches will eventually die. No, the church of Christ will never cease to exist, but local congregations do not remain forever. The history of the church since Pentecost confirms this difficult truth. The churches that were established by the apostles no longer exist. Some were scattered or erased by persecution Others fell into apostasy. Perhaps some were simply victims of time and change. The church where you worship will likely eventually cease in that place. This does not mean that the message of Christ will not remain and continue to spread to new fields. It will. Each local congregation, however, will not always exist unless the Lord returns before time and circumstances change. The saddest fact, however, is that many churches do not have to die when they do. Their demise is premature and self-inflicted. Their condition is fragile and the failure of some function of the body will mean the end. They spend their latter days reminiscing about the church of a few years or generations ago, resting on past laurels, but doing no real work in the present and having no vision for a future. Many churches throughout the land are in desperate need of a revival; a return to spiritual health, fervency, and dedication. Without it, death will not be far away.

Some churches have already died, and they do not know it. Like the woman who lives in pleasure is “dead while she lives”, some churches “have a name that they live and are dead”. (1 Timothy 5:6; Revelation 3:1) This was the case with the ancient church in Sardis, one of seven in Asia Minor to which Jesus wrote and admonished them. Sardis appeared to most to be a model church but in God’s eyes, they were cold and lifeless. Like a corpse dressed in its best, laid out and made to look as life-like as possible and at peace and rest, Christ saw past the soft parlor lights, the fragrant, blooming flowers, and the effort to dull death’s harsh reality and instead, He saw the rotteness and stench of death. The city of Sardis was ruled by a series of kings known for their wealth and lives of luxury. The result was they were soft, weak and defenseless. More than

once, they were taken by surprise attack. Perhaps the city’s culture of wealth and ease quenched the Spirit’s flame in the church there which has often been the case in the history of God’s people. Homer Hailey said in his commentary that “Sardis was a city with a past, but no future.” The same could be said of the church in that city. It also describes some churches today. Regardless of when, how, and why, the death of a church is a sad thing to see, especially when its death could have been prevented. When a person dies and the cause of death is unknown or suspicious, a post-mortem examination is conducted. By examining the condition and contents of the victim’s body, why they died can usually be concluded. The same things that lead to physical death also lead to spiritual death. So, what if we conduct an autopsy on a dead church? What would it reveal?

NATURAL CAUSES

Some churches live a long time and finally die a natural death. There are often circumstances beyond our control such as demographic shifts in a community. As the community changes, young people grow up and leave for careers and embark on their own lives and the older people pass on, the church of our youth slowly fades away. What is to be done? Unless a church looks toward the future and takes necessary measures to ensure the light of truth remains aflame in its community, it will eventually die and the influence of truth in that place will die with it. A neighborhood or community dwindles leaving less new people to evangelize. The result is, the local church is left without much hope for a future. It is sad to visit rural places or neglected communities and think of the church there in the days of its glory. We must realize though that time makes changes. The memories may be sweet, but the church cannot live on them. In some cases, brethren could take steps to prevent the cause of Christ from dying in that part of the world such as being willing to move into a nearby, growing community or combine with another congregation in order to have the human and financial resources to make an impact in preaching the gospel in that area. If dwindling churches, however, are content to exist on the memories of Big Daddy and Mee-maw and

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Editorial

GIVING OF OUR MEANS TODAY

By DON L. KING

The subject of our giving is not often mentioned. Gospel preachers are normally fearless in dealing with most other matters, but not a lot is said about giving of our means. I don't mean to criticize anyone. Preachers may feel that their motives may be misunderstood if they preach what the Bible says about this matter. However, giving is indeed a Bible subject and that being the case, souls may be lost over a failure to give as prospered. Johnny Elmore once remarked: "If men are lost at the judgement, it will not make much difference whether it was because of covetousness or some other kind of sin." His point was that we may be lost because of many things. Therefore, it is obviously proper to ask ourselves the question: "Are we really giving as we should?" Are we giving the same now as we did several years ago although we make more now?

Every member of the church has a responsibility to give as he has been prospered. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 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." Notice, Paul said "EVERY ONE OF YOU." That leaves no one out. It is simple. If a member has prospered (gained, or made an income) he has a duty to see that God receives His part. If we fail in that, is it unreasonable to expect that the Lord will want to know why on judgement day?

Years ago, I read a story about a denominational group who needed to repair their building. It was in very bad condition. However, times were difficult and most were struggling to make ends meet. They came together in a business meeting to discuss methods of getting the needed funds. A few spoke up and said they could give a dollar or two and others said they might manage to give five dollars. A very wealthy member who could easily have financed the entire cost of the project said he could give fifty dollars. About that time a piece of plaster fell from the ceiling and hit the fellow. He said, "Uh, I mean five hundred." Someone from the back of the building said, "Lord, hit him again!" Just a story? Perhaps, but it does illustrate the point.

Congregations can also fail in their responsibilities to preach the gospel and support those who preach. Some may feel that it is their duty to see that the preacher does not get too much lest he succumb to the temptation to

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THINGS THE LORD HATES

By PAUL O. NICHOLS

In the scriptures we are told what pleases the Lord, and warned about things which the Lord hates. We are reminded in Rom. 11:22, "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." In Prov. 6:16 we are warned, "These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him." Jesus knew this and He was the perfect example of what God demands of all who claim to be Christians. He set the example for all His followers.

The word of God points out the things the Lord hates. We are free moral agents, and can choose to conduct our lives to suit ourselves, or accept the directions of the Lord. The Bible is our guide book which instructs us as to what the Lord accepts and what He rejects. We are not mere robots, but are capable of making decisions for ourselves, and we must accept the consequences of those decisions. God has revealed His will to us through the scriptures, and we can either be guided by them or we can refuse and reject them. However, to refuse to conduct our lives according to the directions of the Lord means eternal damnation.

"These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked Imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren" (Prov. 6:16-19). The word translated "abomination" means "something disgusting". Since this is the case, it certainly behooves a person to carefully consider his own life and attitude.

The first abomination listed is "a proud look". "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (1 Pet. 5:6). "For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:11). There have been good men, including preachers, who have thought too highly of themselves, and have consequently lost their ability to be useful to the Cause of Christ. God hates arrogance.

The second abomination is "a lying tongue". We are told in no uncertain terms, "all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev. 21:8). Some people are incorrigible liars. They practice this abomination all their lives; it is a way of life with them. Nothing they say can be trusted.

Abomination number three on the list is "hands that shed innocent blood." No Christian is justified who sheds the blood of a fellow man. Jesus teaches His followers "be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16). The apostle Paul says, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood ... " (Eph. 6:12). Children of God are "peacemakers" (Matt. 5:9).

The next abomination to the Lord is "a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations". The person who is guilty of this sin has a tendency to allow his imagination to run wild and to engage in "evil surmising". Notice the word "deviseth", which suggests that he just makes up things with which to accuse others. He is delusional. This person creates trouble for others and can stir up strife in a congregation and he should be disciplined.

"Feet that be swift in running to mischief" is an abomination. It is a thing hated by the Lord. It has been said that some people are just three kinds of trouble - past, present, and future. And this is true of the person who is guilty of having "feet that be swift in running to mischief". If there is trouble in the church, you can usually find such a person is involved.

The last in the list is "a false witness". No one can trust his testimony under any circumstance. He will lie if he thinks it is to his benefit. Such a person will lie knowing full well it is wrong. There is a stiff penalty for lying in a court of law, but false witnesses run that risk. The penalty in the day of Judgment will be far worse and he will suffer the consequences in Hell forever, because it is an abomination to the Lord.

God wants no one to be lost. The apostle Peter makes this very plain. He declares, "The Lord ... is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9). Jesus said, "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him." And we can have this assurance, too.

TEN THINGS I WANT MY CHILDREN TO KNOW

By DAVID MACKAY

(continued from February OPA)

4. A good work ethic will serve them well: The Apostle Paul wrote: "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). It seems to me that the happiest men I know love to work. They know how to balance their lives between work, family, God, and play. They know how to receive the maximum benefit from each.

We have always stressed to our children the importance

of work. What we do on our jobs is a reflection of our character. Paul said, "With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men; Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free" (Ephesians 6:7-8).

Mankind benefits from work and industriousness. I want my children to know that work is a privilege, a challenge to indolence, an answer to boredom, and a place to invest one's energy - not to mention providing for one's own physical need and for one's family.

Work is also part of a spiritual persons make up. Throughout the Bible we are encouraged to be industrious, to be people of diligence, committed to the tasks in life that need to be accomplished. Diligence and industry are qualities that make projects successful. Work is the slayer of procrastination. Work enables us to fully comprehend and fulfill the Bible axiom, "I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). I want my children to know that if they are physically and mentally capable of working it is a moral, spiritual responsibility.

A lack of work destroys self-reliance, pride and confidence. Work builds all three. If you are an employee you owe your employer your best. A lazy employee doesn't simply hold a company back, he destroys its motivation and drive. A lazy athlete doesn't just weaken the team, he destroys its spirit and diminishes its will to win.

I don't want my children to dread work. I want them to thank God they are living in a country where they can provide for themselves and their families. Millions this day are desperate for such an opportunity. It is an honor to work, to be of sound body and mind that we can work. It has been said that "recession is when the man next door loses his job, depression is when you lose your job, and panic is when your wife loses her job."

5. Learn how to manage money: There are many important rules about managing money, but first and most important is simple: God first.

One man said there are 5 things that you can do with money: Give it, Save it, Invest it, Lend it, and Spend it. Notice where spending comes in on this list: Last.

You can tell much more about an individual's dedication to God by looking at that person's checkbook than by looking at his/her Bible. I am not talking about the checkbook balance. I am talking about where does our money go? Solomon said, "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase:

So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine" (Proverbs 3:9-10). "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10:22). "Evil pursueth sinners: but to the righteous good shall be repayed" (Proverbs 13:21).

I want my children to faithfully honor the Lord's command to give: "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" (1 Corinthians 16:2).

If someone has to be shortchanged, I do not want it to be the Lord. I want my children to know that we give to the Lord first. And we give the very best we have to offer. My grandmother once said, "If you can't afford it, don't buy it."

Money of itself is a tool. It is not good or bad. In our hands it will become one or the other. I will be proud of my children, not because of what they buy, but because of what they can do with their money. The Apostle Paul said, "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

I want my children to know it is a great honor to God to use their money unselfishly, and responsibly, without bragging and boasting. Remember, the Bible says, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

6. Keep a positive attitude: It is easy to become discouraged, cynical and negative. The development of a sense of humor with a balanced way of seeing things will help my children to be positive in nature. I want them to choose to look at life through eyes that try to see the best, not eyes always looking for the worst. I want them to know that as much as they can, to follow the Apostle Paul's advice in, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you" (Phil 4:8-9).

When was the last time we met someone who was truly content and at peace with the world? There are many such people. They usually got the wisdom to be that way by learning to follow God. They discovered a sense of inner peace and contentment through their

walk with God. I want my children to know that peace, contentment, and a positive life in large part start with a life centered on God. They will not be able to buy a house big enough, a car fast enough, or a lifestyle entertaining enough to satisfy this deepest of needs.

I want them to avoid at all cost the “If only” disease: If only I had more money. If only I could make better grades. If only we owned a nicer house. If only we hadn’t made that bad investment. If only I hadn’t come from such a bad background. If only she would have stayed married to me. If only our preacher was a better preacher. If only we could have children. If only we didn’t have children. If only the business could have succeeded. If only my husband hadn’t died so young. If only I had said no to drugs. If only they would give me a break. If only I was prettier, more popular, more outgoing, better looking. The list is endless. Woven through the fabric of all these words is an attitude that comes from the simplest choice to see the negative side of life, the choice to be unhappy about almost everything that happens. Taken far enough, it leads to the dead end street of self-pity. One of the most distasteful, useless, and inexcusable of all human attitudes.

Contentment, on the other hand, comes from another one of those simple choices, one that doesn’t allow ourselves or others to concentrate on our woes. We simply choose to create a different kind of list - a positive one - for if we won’t, people won’t stay around very long. Discontented souls soon become lonely souls.

I want my children to know that they can make the church better, their community better, their home better, and their workplace better, by refusing to become cynical and actively pursuing a positive commitment to spiritual growth and development through personal participation and involvement.

7. Pay attention to older people and little children: Our society values and admires youth. The cosmetic industry alone confirms this sad fact. In truth, the life I enjoy, and they enjoy, was in large part built upon the sacrifices, sweat, and toil of our older generation. My children will someday be where I am now and those who are blessed to be older than me. It is my prayer that they appreciate those that are their elders, those that the calendar has marked as being older.

Courtesy, respect and interest are but small tokens to offer to older people whose greatest joy in life is often the company and comfort of people. We read in Job, “With the ancient is wisdom; and in length of days understanding” (Job 12:12). I want my children to always remember that older people often have wisdom, insight, and understanding based upon years of learning

and experience. Far from being a burden, they often bring insight and wisdom into our daily lives if we will but take the time to be around them and listen.

It truly is a spoiled, self-centered, self-indulgent young person who does not have the time for nor interest in the aged. A visit, a meal, a call, a card, an outing, are all just a few moments focused upon someone else. I want my children to know that the aged deserve and need to be remembered.

8. Realize the importance of a balanced life: Solomon said, “Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Proverbs 30:7-9).

Solomon seems to be asking God to strike a balance between his needs and his wants. I know that all of us can slip into extremes that can harm our spiritual lives. We all need to pray to God to help us create balance in our lives. We need a healthy balance between work and play (too much of either is unhealthy and unbalanced). We need a balance between time alone and time with others. (Too much of either takes a toll on us). We need a balance between independence and dependence. (Either one all alone leads to problems). We need a balance between kindness and firmness, between waiting and praying, between resisting and cooperating. We need a balance between spending and saving. Between taking in and giving out. Between wanting too much and expecting too little. Between warm acceptance and keen discernment. Between grace and truth. Between faith and works.

It is interesting that Solomon had distilled his life and boiled it down to this: “Keep me from deceiving and lying. Give me neither too little nor too much.” An unknown author wrote about a balanced life, “Self-reliant, but not self-sufficient.

Steadfast, but not stubborn.

Tactful, but not timid.

Serious, but not sullen.

Unmovable, but not stationary.

Gentle, but not overly sensitive.

Tenderhearted, but not touchy.

Conscientious, but not a perfectionist.

Disciplined, but not demanding.

Generous, but not gullible.

Meek, but not weak.

Humorous, but not hilarious.

Holy, but not Holier-than-thou

Discerning, but not critical.

Progressive, but not pretentious.

I want my children to know that God is imminently capable of creating proper balance that can keep them healthy spiritually, emotionally, and even contribute to their health physically.

9. Give to the things in which you believe: Look for honorable opportunities for contributing. Paul reminds us of this great duty, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10).

We are to be happy when we give and feel the joy in giving. Give to those who are Christians and cannot repay us. Give to those in need that we become aware of. I want my children to know that there is a much larger world out there than themselves.

I fear that some of our people have forgotten this. One of the great blessings of having good jobs and good income is the privilege of helping others. Never mind the reason for their need. It is a satisfaction that is rewarding to the giver and encouraging to the receiver.

A man once said, "Do all the good you can, By all means you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can, At all the times that you can, To all the people you can, As long as ever you can."

10. Keep a clear vision of your life: In Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul wrote about our gifts. I want my children to identify their strengths and build upon them. I want them to make a difference. When they near the end of their lives I want them to look back and be able to say as Paul said: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Using 2 Timothy 4: 7-8 as his inspiration, my Dad [Paul Mackey] wrote these words: "The supreme attainment of life is to know God, the noblest purpose of life is to glorify God, the greatest aim of life is to please God, the greatest achievement of life is to be as Godlike as is humanly possible. The greatest need of life is to have an obedient faith in God and Christ. The highest goal in life is to be with God forever. Man's most valuable possession is his soul. The most coveted prize is the crown of life which God will give to all who have "fought the good fight...finished the course ... and kept the faith."

God gave Moses instruction on how to rear youngsters in the law of God. "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the

way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates" (Deuteronomy 6:7-9).

We read that parents were to teach God's laws to their children at all times throughout the day. My prayer is that God will help me to be that kind of father to my children. Wherein I have failed, I ask their forgiveness. It is my hope they will honor me in considering some of the spiritual values I have attempted in some small way to share today. May all of us as Godly parents and grandparents ever set before our children and grandchildren the model and example of a people who in word and deed, "Seek first the kingdom of God" and who above and before all, "Love the Lord with all our heart, with all our mind, and with all our strength."

AUTOPSY...continued from page one

insist on honoring family and congregational tradition over the advance of the cause of the Lord, that church is sure to die in a matter of time and it will often be a slow and painful death to behold and leave the few souls that remain discouraged and defeated. A healthy person considers and prepares for the future by trying to remain vital and taking reasonable steps to add years to life and a healthy church does the same.

TRAUMA

Other churches die traumatic deaths. It may be that the church was spiritually sick anyway, but it merely takes some sudden calamity to bring about its demise. If a church is not built on a firm foundation; its faith and allegiance to Christ sure and true; when trouble or opposition (from within or without), difficulty or crisis come along, that church will not stand. We are led to believe this happened to some of the churches of the first century. Persecution was a common experience for the early believers. Two pictures of the church emerge from those times. In Acts 7, with the stoning of Stephen, the first real persecution came against the church in Jerusalem. "...At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all SCATTERED throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." (Acts 8:1) This was surely a fearful and anxious time to be a disciple. The churches members had to disperse and scatter. But what came of them? "Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word." (v. 4) The result was the gospel was taken to new fields and new churches were established throughout Judea and Samaria. Though a disruption came, the church was not destroyed but rather thrived in the face of persecution.

It was a different case altogether when nearly 60 years later, Jesus admonished the churches of Asia Minor in the Revelation. This time Roman persecution was coming against them and as Christ walked among and inspected those churches, He issued a dire warning: repent of their worldliness, apathy, and compromise or disappear. "...repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent." (Revelation 2:5) How many of those churches were wiped out by the cruel armies of Domitian we do not know, but we may know that churches that are not anchored to Christ and built on a solid foundation will not withstand the difficulties that come against them. Many churches appear to thrive and ride high when times are easy but let times get hard and difficulties come (whether from within or without) and the true strength of the church will then be revealed. Churches that fail to establish sound and scriptural leadership and build members' faith on the rock of Christ and His word will suffer and their lampstand even be removed when tested.

STARVATION

The diet a church consumes is just as important as what is taken into the physical body. Without sustenance, the body will die. The body needs more than the milk on which life begins and starts to grow. It must move to stronger food to nourish, strengthen, and sustain it. (Hebrews 5:13-14). Jesus said we are not to "labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life ... For My flesh in food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed." (John 6:27, 55) A church that is not fed on the food of Christ and His word will die. It may, for a time, attract a crowd and appear vital and strong, but time will prove that any church not fed with the Word of God will eventually perish. The mission of the local church is not only to preach the gospel to the lost around it but to edify the saints within it. Churches that feed on a diet of social and political interests, worldly philosophy or psychology are not spiritually alive much less strong. Some congregations feed on an unbalanced diet. They feed week after week on positive platitudes, upbeat pep talks, and shallow devotionals that do not challenge members to deeper knowledge and holier living. I enjoy "positive" and upbeat preaching as much as anyone, but I also enjoy chocolate pie. There is nothing wrong with pie and life would be dull without it, in my opinion, but a constant diet of it will leave me fat, lazy, and malnourished. Does this not describe the spiritual state of some Christians and churches? They are bloated on the praise, commendation, and affirmation of feel good preaching and woefully lacking in the nutrition they need to grow and thrive in the Christian life. "Preach the word...Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." (2 Timothy 4:2) That covers the spectrum.

CANCER

Paul warned the erring church in Corinth that "a little leaven leavens the whole lump." (1 Corinthians 5:7) This was because they were harboring a man living in fornication. The apostle says urgent and deliberate action needed to be taken in order to discipline the sinning brother but also to protect the body. Sin is like cancer: you either get the cancer or the cancer will get you. Sin and immorality must be confronted and treated with seriousness, not swept under the rug. False teaching is a cancer that will claim the life of a church. When we are not circumspect about what is preached and taught from our pulpits, we leave the body vulnerable to infection, sickness, and eventually death. Peter warned of false prophets among the people saying, "And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed." (2 Peter 2:2) "Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition." Titus 3:10 Also see Romans 16:17-18. Cancer begins in one member of the body but left unchecked and unremoved, it spreads to the rest of the body. Thus it is with sin. The church that refuses to confront and deal with sin will eventually rue the day and pay the price.

HEART DISEASE

And finally, some churches die of heart disease. Years of neglect, laziness, and apathy catch up and the heart becomes diseased. In our modern age of wealth, luxury, and pleasure, some churches are dying of this terrible malady. The church at Ephesus had "left its first love" (Revelation 2:4). The church of Laodicea was "rich... wealthy...and in need of nothing" but unbeknownst to them "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" and Jesus was ready to "vomit them out of my mouth." (Revelation 3:14-19) When the pleasures and pursuits of our day deter and distract us from our love for Christ and His cause, we will die. It is no mystery why some American churches are in the throes of death today. Ball games, vacations, more money, bigger houses, newer cars, and finer clothes are draining the spiritual devotion and fervency of the church until it will die if it has not already.

May we heed the admonition of Christ: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Revelation 3:22) Let us learn from the autopsy of a dead church and not become the next spiritual corpse under post-mortem examination.

GIVING OF...continued from page two

use the money unwisely. It has been supposed that some preachers are only out for the money? Possibly, but have you ever met one? I have not. I can relate stories about preachers who have gone far beyond their financial

capabilities to go and preach. Most have preached for nothing more times than we might believe. I once had a conversation with a preacher who had driven a long distance from home, held a week's meeting at night, and recorded a total of thirteen television sermons during the days. For that work he received barely enough to get home. I said, "...how could you afford to do that? His answer was, "It was just such a wonderful opportunity!" Brethren, those are the kind of men we are privileged to have among us. Most are hard-working and dedicated to the Lord's work. We need to ask ourselves: In supporting evangelists have we always given them their just rewards for doing the Lord's work, and if we made a mistake was it on the side of liberality? If so, God bless you. If not, changes quickly need to be made. Generally speaking, preachers have to be very careful in order to survive on what they are supported. They must stretch their support as far as possible. My father had a motto he lived by, and I heard it often. He said, "I'll try to go where the brethren call, I'll try to go when they call, and I'll try to get by on what they pay me." Actually, that is what we all do if it is humanly possible. Most preachers are determined to preach no matter what the circumstances may be. I've known some who hitch-hiked to their meetings sometimes. Yes, they may have to do without some things they would like, or need, but they are going to preach! By the way, we need preachers! Young man, if you have an ability and a desire to preach the gospel, set your mind to become one. The Lord needs you now. Think on these things. DLK

Our Departed

ALLIE - Sam Allie departed this life on January 16, 2021 in Springfield, Missouri. At the time of his passing he was 74 years old. Sam is survived by his wife, Jana; children, Marc (and wife Deana), and Ryan (and wife Jennifer); grandsons Brandon (and wife Mariah), Connor, Corbin, and Max; one greatgranddaughter, Elliana; siblings, Sue Glessner and Warren Jr. He is preceded in death by Warren and Nona, his parents; Norman, Edgar Lee, and Jean, his siblings. Sam was born on May 3, 1946 in Tonasket, Washington. After moving to Springfield at a young age, Sam began working for Ameripride Linen at 18 years old, where he worked until his retirement in 2010. He married Jana VanStavern in 1973. He was devoted to his family and took great pleasure in spending time with them, especially his grandchildren. Sam obeyed the gospel while attending the Mission Hills congregation in Springfield, MO. When the opportunity presented itself to establish a congregation in Bolivar, MO Sam was eager and willing. Sam was an active and dedicated member of the Church of Christ in Bolivar, MO. Sam

was a stalwart in the Bolivar congregation often leading prayer. A private family funeral was conducted, with a larger memorial gathering to be announced at a later time. It was an honor, along with Billy Dickinson, to participate in Sam's funeral.

REID - Lillian Narelle Martin Reid of Kinston, AL passed away on January 31, 2021 at the age of 92. Sister Narelle was a long-time and devoted member of the Lowery congregation. Her snowwhite hair and bright blue eyes were just two of the things that made her a lovely lady. The most important characteristic was Narelle's faith in Christ and her faithful service through the years. She was a fixture at gospel meetings in southeast Alabama until her health declined. She came from a large family, being preceded in death by her husband, Clifford Paul Reid; a son, Keith; her parents, William Alfred and Martha Ann Harrison Martin; a sister, Sybil Lowery; and seven brothers. Her three children: Donna Spears Inabinett, Sherrie Phillips, and Ronny Reid along with their spouses are left behind along with ten grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren. She was beloved by all of them and by her church family and will be missed. It was this writer's privilege to conduct the service. She was interred in the Lowery cemetery where her body now awaits the resurrection of the just. —Kevin W. Presley

HILLHOUSE - Robert Dwane Hillhouse, Jr. of Claxton, MO was born to Robert Dwane and Helen (Southard) Hillhouse on Aug. 30, 1953 and departed this life on Dec. 26, 2020 at the age of 67 due to the effects of Covid-19. Survivors include his wife, Rose Marie (Burgess), with whom he celebrated 49 years of marriage on Nov. 27; two sons - Jerry Dean and his wife Krista of Fayetteville, AR and Robert Anderson (Andy) and his wife Kristina of Competition, MO; two brothers - David Hillhouse and wife Florence of Competition, MO and Danny Hillhouse and wife Sherry of Phillipsburg, MO; also 7 grandsons, 6 granddaughters and many nieces and nephews. Dwane was active in many types of activities during his life. First and foremost, he was a faithful member of the Lord's church, being baptized for the remission of sins in his early teens, and he helped to provide the Claxton congregation with the edification and leadership it needed. When I held a meeting at Claxton in July of 2018, his grandson Isaac (13 years old at the time) decided he wanted to obey the gospel. With great love and respect for his grandfather, Isaac requested that Dwane should be the one to immerse him into Christ, and so he did that day at Elk Creek with obvious pride and joy. When word spread throughout the community that Dwane had died, here is the statement that was heard over and over again - "I am a better person for having known him" Some of his proudest moments were spent helping young people

and having a positive influence on hundreds of them in the Boy Scouts. He spent almost 32 years working for the Missouri Department of Conservation doing forest management and fighting forest fires. He called it his dream job. He also trained fire departments on how to fight brush fires. As you can see, he has left behind an impressive legacy and will be greatly missed. Although it was a bitterly cold morning, a large crowd gathered for the graveside service on the morning of Dec. 29. His body was laid to rest in the beautiful, peaceful surroundings of the Claxton Cemetery just walking distance from their place of worship. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13) It was my privilege to speak words of tribute, exhortation and comfort.

—Billy D. Dickinson

COLE - Howard Cole of the Manteca, CA congregation passed away on January 26, 2021. He was born August 29, 1941 to the late Latso and Lorene Cole and spent most of his 79 years on earth faithfully serving Christ and being a blessing to all who knew him. Born in Antlers, OK, Howard's family moved to the central valley of California when he was young where he later met Barbara Costa. Howard obeyed the gospel and he and Barbara were wed spending 55 years together and rearing three children in a Christian home. Though never a public teacher, Howard was a man full of wisdom and knowledge who helped lead the church in Manteca for several decades. He was the definition of meekness - strength under control. A tough outdoorsman, a drywall contractor of 60 years, and a man of firm convictions, Howard was also a gentle soul who cherished and worked for peace and quietly wielded a powerful influence in the lives of many. He was an avid fisherman, hunter, and loved the Sierra Nevada mountains where he spent many a day and night doing those things he loved. Above all, though, he loved his Lord, the church, and his family. His passing creates a great void in the church in California and in the brotherhood. He leaves behind his dear wife, Barbara, his daughters Rachel (Greg) Branch, Rebecca (Monte) Wood, and his son Aaron (Jill); his eight grandchildren, Cole (Hannah), Lane (Lexis), Wade (Taylor), and Kendra Branch, Ainsley, Addisyn, and Sydney Wood, and Aiden Cole. He was looking forward to welcoming his first great-grandchild in March. He is also survived by two brothers, Jim and Roger Cole. The graveside service was held in the peaceful Burwood Cemetery near Escalon, CA where his body awaits the resurrection of the just. It was this writer's honor to assist Bro. Alan Bonifay in conducting the funeral. Brother-in-law Ivan Costa led the beautiful singing. Bro. Greg Cardoza shared his memories of Howard and read a powerful and stirring poem composed by Howard's dear friend, Rod Wilson.

Touching eulogies were offered by his sons-in-law Greg and Monte and three of his grandsons Cole, Lane, and Wade. They spoke of their treasured memories of time spent with Howard and lessons they learned from him. Howard could have easily been a professional bass fisherman or a paid fishing guide. He told his grandsons that he did not desire to be such because he would rather spend that time fishing with them. It was time well invested for his shadow looms large in the lives of these godly young men. He was one of the most honorable and upstanding men I have ever known, and I will miss him, as will all who knew him. May God forever bless his legacy and his memory. —Kevin W. Presley

PRINCE - Jeanette Green Prince was born August 31, 1927. After 93 happy and fruitful years she passed peacefully at home on January 13, 2021. The daughter of William Henry Grady and Augusta Arizona Sears Green, she lived most of her life in Randolph County, Alabama. Sister Prince was a long-time, stalwart member of the Napoleon congregation. She was a virtuous woman as described by the wise man in Proverbs 31 and her children indeed rise up and call her blessed. She and her late husband, Calvin, raised eight children together, all of whom obeyed the gospel and have served the church down through the years. This, in itself, was one of the greatest accomplishments of her life. Two of her sons, Ronnie and Glenn, serve the Napoleon church as elders. Sister Jeanette was a beautiful lady all of her life and exuded kindness, humility, modesty, and southern grace and charm. She obtained a college degree and taught school for several years, retired from an investment company, and also helped at her daughter's daycare where she was much loved by the children. The private funeral service lasted more than two hours as many of her children and grandchildren shared memories and tributes of their 'Maw Maw'. They each told stories of sacrifice; hard work; wise counsel; a godly example; and most of all: love for the Lord and His church. The Prince family is known across the brotherhood for their love of singing and one of the great joys of Jeanette's life was hearing her family sing together. Their singing at the service was fitting and sweet. Brother Don McCord, a long-time friend of the family, wrote an eloquent and moving letter which son, Ronnie, read to all gathered. Her grandsons served as pallbearers and it was this writer's privilege to assist with the graveside service. She is survived by three daughters, Wilda Yarbrough (Max) and Kathy Prince, both of Woodland, and Rita Whitaker (close friend, Larry Thompson) of Roanoke; five sons, Ronnie Prince (Brenda) and Tim Prince, both of Woodland, Glenn Prince (Patricia) of Roanoke, Sidney Prince (Sandra) of Graham and Kenneth Prince (Karen) of Carthage, Mo.; 13 grandchildren; 12 great-grandchildren with one on the way; one great-great-

grandchild on the way; and sister-in-law, Cordie Bell Green of Woodland. She was preceded in death by her parents; husband, Calvin C. Prince; son-in-law, Dan Whitaker; two sisters, Catherine Morgan and Lillie Shaw; and two brothers, Napoleon Green and Clifford Green. May her many good works follow her into eternity and in the influence which she leaves behind on this earth. -- Kevin W. Presley

Announcement

NEW SONGBOOK-The new songbook, Redeeming Love, is at the printer and is scheduled to be released in April. The books may be preordered from Legacy Music Publishing. They will be \$5 each for orders of 50 or more; \$6 each for orders smaller than 50, and \$10 for spiral bound books. Shipping is additional. Demo CD's should be available close to the release date of the book. They will be \$15 each, plus postage. The book contains a good blend of old and new songs and we hope it will serve churches well. As soon as I am able to formulate an updated shipping cost estimate, I will update the website and orders may be placed there (legacymusicpublishing.com) or you may contact me at legacymusicpublishing@gmail.com or (334) 618-1550. Thank you for your patience with all delays in publishing the book and for your support of the book! -Kevin W. Presley

Field Reports

Paul O. Nichols, 14217 Rosehill, Overland Park, pn.wjn.ks@juno.com, February 8, 1922. The congregation at Stony Point, 7920 Kansas Ave., Kansas City, Ks 66111 still meets for worship three times a week, 10:30 AM, 2:00 PM Lord's day and 7:30 PM Wed. We practice sanitation, hand washing and face masks, and we are thankful for our seven good teachers who give an average of two lessons a week. We have another male member who let me know that he wants to become a teacher, too. That will be a new experience for him since he never has taken an active part in teaching, although he has been a member of the church for several years. We also have visitors from time to time in spite of the pandemic, and they are always welcome.

Billy D. Dickinson, 2850 N. Oakland, Springfield, MO 65803, bddickinson@juno.com, Feb. 9. From the standpoint of holding meetings or traveling out of state, this year has been uneventful so far. I should be getting ready to attend the annual Mid-MO study in Columbia, but it has been postponed until May 3-7. The topic assigned to me has to do with civil government and the Christian's responsibility to it. A couple of weeks

later I am scheduled to be with the brethren in Blue Springs, KY on the dates of May 16-23. I am excited about holding this meeting for three reasons-- (1) It will be my first opportunity to preach for them in such an endeavor, (2) they have a great reputation of loving gospel preaching and being zealous when it comes to evangelism and (3) I will be more than ready by that time to get out of the house and travel to the beautiful state of Kentucky! Also, I will return to Columbia, MO to conduct a meeting (along with my brother, Jerry) on June 6-13. If my understanding is correct, this will be a special evangelistic effort that will take place in a nearby area where there is no faithful congregation. This, of course, will probably be contingent on how things are going with the pandemic. I'm thankful to report that both Judy and I have not been sick with COVID-19 so far. It is a strange disease that affects different people in different ways, and let's pray that things will get back to "normal" as time goes on. Most of all, let's pray fervently that the gospel will have free course and that all the scheduled meetings throughout the brotherhood will take place without hindrance!

Wayne Fussell, 6126 Land O' Trees, Shreveport, LA 71119, wfussell1@comcast.net. I have just read the February issue of the OPA. The field reports from bygone days carried me back to my beginning days as a fledgling preacher. I had the high honor of associating with most of those men. I really lament for the young people who did not get to know those great men. They were the men who kept us on the right track and away from digression. Our congregation here is doing well. We have young men and women who are stepping up and do great things for the Lord and His church. I had to cancel my meetings at Healdton, OK and Temple, GA because of COVID. I look forward to getting back to normal. God bless you all.

Kevin W. Presley, 108 Mulberry Court, Dothan, AL 36303, January 19, 2021. We look forward to a busy year in the Lord's vineyard, if it be His will. Besides the ongoing work with the television and internet program Let the Bible Speak, we look forward to continuing our monthly work with the Hillcrest, MS congregation and also a number of meetings across the country. In March, I am scheduled to be with the Piedmont, AL church as well as Stony Point in Kansas City, KS and West Monroe, LA. The television work continues to gain steam. We are now being broadcast in 15 television markets and our YouTube channel subscriptions have reached nearly 8,000 with some sermons viewed now almost 100,000 times. Technology has opened so many doors for sending the gospel to parts of the world we once could hardly imagine. Pray for this work as well as the work Brett Hickey and others are doing in using mass media to spread the truth. May your congregation prosper in whatever righteous effort you put forth in the

coming year. God bless the brotherhood all around the world.

Darrell Crawford, 2930 Harrison Ave, Unit F, Panama City, Florida 32405, bugz1955@hotmail.com. It has been way too long since I sent a report in the OPA. After the Hurricane in 2019 we were forced to move to Dothan, Alabama to have a place to live till our apartments could be rebuilt. In June of 2020 we were able to move back after a year and a half. The church continues to grow here. Just over a year ago we had a lady baptized into Christ, she has been faithful so far! She has a lot of baggage; we continue to work with her. Before the Hurricane hit the Powers that be stopped the Friday Fest, we had been working for about 4 years. It may not come back. We just recently started a weekly newspaper article in a local "Thrifty Nickel" paper. It is too early to have had any response from that yet. Time will tell. We have another lady from the community who was attending and showing lots of interest, but due to her job, and the Covid virus her employer won't allow her to come to worship for fear of infecting her disabled clients. She is looking for another job so she can come back to church. On a few occasions she and my wife were eating at a local restaurant, she began asking questions and they had an impromptu bible study while eating. We are praying that we can start door knocking again very soon. Pray for the work and for the brotherhood. May the Lord bless His church everywhere.

Terry L. Studdard, 538 The Wagon Road, Piedmont, Alabama 36272, (256) 913-7498, email: tstuddard75@gmail.com. It has been awhile since I last reported. During that time, we have been busy. In September, we took a trip into Maine that made it possible (and necessary) to worship with the congregation that meets at the Riverwinds Community Center in West Deptford, New Jersey. This is the first time we had the opportunity to worship there and what a treat it was! Jermaine Smith and Kaven Taylor, are the leaders there and they are doing a great job. Everyone there was so very hospitable and kind. I must make special mention of the young people there. Their interest and participation in the worship service was exemplary and is without doubt the product of wonderful parenting. We were there September 15th and September 22th and I was allowed to speak on both occasions. If you find yourself even remotely in that area, please make a point to visit! You will be richly blessed as were we. Our next appointment was at Phalba, Texas, October 13th through October 20th. We met the brethren there in Sulphur, Oklahoma five years ago. Being reunited with them each year since is one of the major highlights of the Sulphur meeting for us. Charles Usery, Revis Middick, and Malcolm Schwartz are doing a fantastic

job leading the congregation. All of the brethren and their wives go all out to make the preacher know he and his family are appreciated and loved. I wish I had space to name all of the members as they occupy a very special place in mine and Angie's heart. They are extraordinary in every way. The children are so well behaved and complementary. I love them all! The highlight of the meeting came the last Lord's Day when Courtney Usery obeyed the gospel. She is the daughter of Charlie Usery (Charles' and Fran's son) and Rissia Usery (Revis and Robin Middick's daughter). She is a wonderful young lady and we are so proud of her and wish her Godspeed in her new life.

Greg Gay, 3816 Tambos Trl, Edmond, OK 73034, papagreg@aol.com, 916-804-3787, February 9, 2021. December 23 through January 9 I was in the hospital for a stroke and pancreatitis. That was not quite what I had planned to do during those days! I am seeing specialists to find out how to prevent both from happening again, if possible. The stroke was mild, thankfully. While it left me very weak, there are only a few lingering concerns, mainly left-side facial changes with mouth sensation, swallowing and vocal cords. My speech therapist has released me with instructions to talk and sing a lot to recover vocal strength and range. While I still do not sound like me to me, others say they cannot tell a difference when I speak. I am to continue physical therapy through the end of February to work on regaining strength and stamina. In the meantime, my problems are few, and blessings are many! I have resumed preaching at home and plan to keep my 2021 preaching schedule as planned, Lord willing. The virus may keep all of us home again this year, of course. Certainly Covid-19 continues to remind us we never know what tomorrow will bring. Our sadness is great with the losses we have had all over the brotherhood. Last week I recorded another video for the private (by invitation only) Facebook Group: "God's Good News from Greg." The group continues to grow while I have been ill and now has over 2,200 members from 58 nations. I am thankful to be able to work with and have the support and encouragement of our home congregation, Piedmont, OK. I just completed an online study with the men on teaching. Since we are currently only having one assembly each week, we had the wonderful problem of having faithful men who are ready, willing, and able to speak with no opportunity to do so. The leaders have solved that problem by adding an additional speaker to our service. A less experienced speaker goes first for ten minutes or so, followed by a more experienced speaker, who concludes by offering the invitation. Thank you to all those who have sent cards and contacted us in any way to offer encouragement and for all the prayers offered on my behalf.

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WALKS THROUGH THE BIBLE...

THE BONES OF JOSEPH

By JERRY DICKINSON

“And Joseph said to his brethren, ‘I am dying, but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.’ Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, ‘God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.’ So Joseph died, and they embalmed him and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.” (Genesis 50:24-26) “By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instruction concerning his bones.” (Hebrews 11 :22)

The bones of Joseph are mentioned four times in the Bible. Besides the two references above, Exodus 13:19 says that Moses took the bones of Joseph out of Egypt when the Israelites made their exodus out of Egypt. They carried those bones across the Red Sea and into the wilderness. Those bones were carried by Israel for forty years during their wandering in the wilderness. Finally, Joseph’s bones were carried across the Jordan and into Canaan, and apparently kept safe until the conquest of the land. Joshua 26:32 indicates that the bones were buried after the death of Joshua. Finally, over 200 years after his death in Egypt, the bones of Joseph were buried in Shechem, in the plot of ground which Jacob had bought as a burial place for his family.

Apparently, the disposition of bones had great significance in Biblical times. Certainly, Joseph was concerned about what was going to happen to his bones after his decease. Paul declares it was “by faith” that Joseph gave instructions concerning his bones. This concern about bones is not peculiar to Joseph. In fact, I started to entitle this article, Bones, Bones, Bones! Joseph’s father Jacob made Joseph promise not to bury him in Egypt, but to take his remains back to Canaan. In I Kings 13, a prophet predicts that King Josiah would dig up and burn the bones of the false prophets on their altars. The old prophet who lied to this man of God and caused his death, buried the younger prophet in his own tomb. He then instructed his sons to be sure to place his body, when he died, next to the bones of the young prophet. Really? Why? The old prophet knew the young man’s prophecy would be fulfilled and he didn’t want his bones dug up and burned.

Sure enough, hundreds of years later when good King Josiah dug up the bones of the false prophets the grave of the young prophet was left undisturbed, and so the bones of the old prophet were preserved as well. Then, too, there is the strange incident where a man was being carried on a bier to his burial and the pall bearers dropped his body into the tomb of Elisha, and when the dead man’s body touched the bones of Elisha he came back to life. Bones, Bones, Bones! When we were in Israel years ago, we were shown a site where several ossuaries had been found. An ossuary is a small box or coffin used to keep bones. Our guide explained that the body in Biblical times was placed in a tomb and then after the body decayed loved ones would come and collect the bones of their deceased and put them in the ossuaries. They were careful, our guide told us, not to mix up bones. They did not want to have any extra bones in the ossuary on resurrection day! We all smiled, thinking surely the Lord would know whose bones were whose! My brother Billy was on that trip and I was reminiscing with him about the bones and he pointed out that the Jews, as a rule, did not cremate the bodies of loved ones. They even went so far as to collect their bones and put them in boxes. Whatever else this signifies, it certainly shows they believed in the resurrection of the body. They wanted to be sure the body was buried and in one place in anticipation of the resurrection of that body. Of course, God can resurrect a body no matter what becomes of it. Early Christians were burned to ashes, eaten by lions, etc. and God will raise them up and give them a new body.

This leads us back to Joseph, and his commandment, by faith, concerning his bones. What did it mean? We must not forget that coupled with the instructions about his bones were the words, God will surely visit you and bring you out of Egypt back to the land of Canaan. This was God’s promise. Egypt was not the land of promise - it was Canaan! Joseph was embalmed and put in a coffin. That coffin, as we have already shown, was kept and carried by the Israelites for 200 years before being finally buried in Canaan. It was a transfigured coffin. It came to represent to the children of Israel God’s promise. That coffin containing the bones of Joseph symbolized the fact that death is but a stage completed, and a symbol of a new stage begun. The death of Joseph was a forward step in the divine plan. Joseph knew that. He said, “I am dying, but God will surely visit you.” I die - but God! The Hebrew writer emphasizes that Joseph’s faith was greatest, not at seventeen when he was sold by his brothers yet remained faithful to God. Nor was his greatest manifestation of faith when he resisted the temptation of his master’s wife, nor when he maintained his integrity though falsely imprisoned. Not even when he forgave his brothers for their treachery, realizing it was not them but God who sent him to Egypt.

No, it was on his deathbed when he gave commandment concerning his bones that his faith shined the brightest. Joseph’s transfigured bones declare that God is not finished with us at death. Joseph’s bones still speak of light, glory, and hope!