

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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WHY PAUL WOULD BE UNPOPULAR TODAY

By JERRY DICKINSON

There is a preacher who preaches for a megachurch in Houston, Texas who has been described as “the most popular preacher in America.” The church he preaches for televises their worship services and he is seen all over the country. The church takes in 70 million dollars a year in contributions. He has written several best selling books and for one of his latest books he was paid an advance of 13 million dollars. Based on all the foregoing I can see why he is considered to be the most popular preacher in America. If the criteria for popularity is money and the number of people who follow you he certainly qualifies as popular preacher. But, I wonder, if the Apostle Paul were alive today would he be popular? Would he even be allowed into the pulpits of most churches today? I believe Paul would be unpopular today for the following reasons.

Style. The aforementioned most popular preacher in America begins every sermon with a joke. Sometimes his listeners send him jokes and he uses them to start off his sermons. He uses very little scripture and really his sermons are just feel good talks about how to be successful and get ahead in business and life. It’s the power of positive thinking wrapped up in a fluffy feel good package. Can you imagine the Apostle Paul beginning one of his sermons with a joke? In I Corinthians 2: 1-5 Paul described his style of preaching. “I came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified.” In Romans 1:16 Paul declared that the gospel he preached was the power of God unto salvation and in Acts 20:20-27 Paul reminded the Ephesians that he had kept back nothing that was profitable for them. “I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not

shunned to declare the whole counsel of God.” That kind of preaching would not make Paul popular today! It is the kind of preaching still needed in the world and in the church today.

Sin. The Houston preacher described above never preaches on sin. In fact, in one interview he was asked why he never mentions the words sin, judgment, or hell. He answered that he has not been called to judge people but to encourage and inspire them therefore he never uses those words. When I heard that answer I knew why he is considered the most popular preacher in America! The way to build and maintain a megachurch is to never preach about sin. Paul used the words sin, judgment, and hell in his preaching, however. In II Timothy 3 Paul wrote that perilous times were coming when men would be covetous, boasters, blasphemers, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, traitors, despisers of those who are good, and lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. By the way, if those times are not here already, may the Lord have mercy on us when they arrive! I think it obvious, however, that we are living in a time when it is perilous and dangerous to be a Christian and to take a stand against sin. In Galatians 5 Paul declares the works of the flesh are adultery, fornication, uncleanness, murder, drunkenness, etc. Are these still sins today? If so, it is the “calling” of every preacher to preach against them just like Paul did. If Paul were here today he would preach against sin and that would not make him the most popular preacher in America!

Pattern. If Paul were here today he would still preach that there is a pattern for the work and worship of the church. That would make him unpopular not only with outsiders, but with many people in churches of Christ today. The popular notion that it does not matter how we worship as long as we are zealous and sincere would

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Editorial

CRIPPLED PREACHERS

By HOMER A. GAY

The following article comes from the pen of Brother Homer A. Gay. It appeared in the February 1946 issue. Often time's preachers are called upon to give advice, but sometimes preachers need to be advised themselves. A preacher's influence is of paramount importance. In this article Brother Gay offers some great advice to preachers. Rick Martin

Paul says: "giving no difference in anything, that the ministry be not blamed" (2 Cor. 6:3). It surely is deplorable for anyone to be maimed or halt or blind from a physical standpoint, and it is sad, indeed, for a preacher to be thus handicapped. But, there are other handicaps that hinder a preacher far more than these physical defects. When we read the instructions that are given in the Scriptures to preachers as to their lives and their influence we can see the importance of them being always careful lest they should be crippled in influence. For instance we read: "In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine, showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you" (Titus 2:7-8). A preacher has crippled himself badly by not setting a good example in his life, his habits, his associations and his conversations. "Sound speech that cannot be condemned" covers a lot of territory. I have known of preachers being so anxious to straighten out troubles that they would talk two ways, that is, agree with both parties, and finally when it all came to light he would lose the respect of all concerned.

We read in 1 Tim. 5:22, "Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure." I have found by many years' experience that it keeps a preacher busy all the time looking after himself to keep himself pure.

A pure life is not just something to talk about: it is something to live-put into practice, and when a preacher falls beneath this standard he is badly crippled. Just one habit, that the world thinks nothing about others having, will cripple a preacher.

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QUERIST COLUMN

By *RONNY F. WADE*

Question: If an elder no longer has the confidence of the congregation, may he be removed from office? If so, how can this be handled?

Answer: In order to correctly answer this question I would need to know WHY the man no longer has the confidence of the congregation. If he is no longer respected because he is standing up for the truth or is trying to scripturally carry out some aspect of his office, then the church is at fault for wanting to dismiss him, and he should not be removed. On the other hand if he has mishandled the work given him, failed to perform the duties incumbent upon him, or no longer meets the qualifications, and refuses to change then yes, he should be removed from office. The appointment to the eldership is not a life-long appointment. The idea that "once an elder, always an elder is neither logical nor scriptural. A man must meet the qualifications given in the scriptures in order to be appointed. If after being appointed he becomes a drunkard or quarrelsome, then he must be removed, because he no longer meets those qualifications. (See 1 Timothy 3: 1-7 and Titus 1 :5-9). Paul recognized that an elder could sin, and instructed Timothy: "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear" 1 Timothy 5:19-20). When confronted the person must repent. If they refuse to repent, then they must be removed. An elder who loses the confidence necessary to rule and lead the church should be willing to step aside, since there can be no government without the consent of the governed. How should such a removal be handled? The scriptures do not give us a step by step guide on this matter. I would, however, suggest the following: representative men in the congregation should approach the elder and discuss the reasons why they feel that he can no longer govern the church. If there can be no resolution of the problem, then the man should be willing to step aside in the interest of unity and harmony in the church. I cannot understand any man who would insist on continuing in an office when the church is unwilling to follow his lead. Perhaps the reason this type of situation arises is because the man was not qualified to be an elder in the first place. Unfortunately in some places brethren are so eager to appoint elders that they appoint men who have been coaxed or begged into becoming an elder who have no real desire for the office, and that in itself disqualifies them. Brethren, churches are far better off without elders than they are with unqualified men

servicing as elders. We need elders, but men who fail to meet the qualifications, are not elders even if someone appoints them.

Question: I am talking with a woman who was divorced several years ago. Her husband was unfaithful and admitted cheating on her multiple times, and even had a child outside the marriage. Does this woman have a right to divorce and remarry?

Answer: If the facts are as you relate them, she has both the right to divorce him and remarry another man, according to Matthew 19:9 "And I say unto you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and who ever marries her who is divorced commits adultery," and Matthew 5 :32 "But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery." It is always regrettable when marriages are destroyed by sin. Marriage and divorce should both be taken seriously. Neither should be viewed as a casual thing. Too many times people enter marriage without realizing the far reaching importance of what they are doing, and they exit a marriage in the same way. Our Lord gave one and only one reason for divorce and remarriage. To disregard his teaching is wrong, in fact just as wrong as going beyond his teaching and adding additional reasons for divorce and remarriage. Let us all do everything we can to preserve existing marriages, but never deprive one a right given to them by the Master Himself. (Send all questions to Ronny F. Wade P.O. Box 14352 Springfield, MO 65814 or ronnywade36@gmail.com

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CASTING STONES AT JESUS

By RICK MARTIN

In John 8:59 and John 10:31 we see that the Jews took up stones to cast at Jesus. When we remember whom they were stoning - the Son of Man - and the Son of God who was going about doing good, the sin is something awful to think about.

Men today are still stoning Jesus. Perhaps we shrink from the conduct of the Jews and cry, "shame on them." If He were here today in the flesh, as He is in spirit, I am sure there are ways we could hurt Him more than by taking up stones from the street and casting them at Him. Are you casting stones at Jesus? In this article, I want to notice three stones we often cast at Jesus.

1) First, men often cast the stone of materialism at Jesus. Many times, material things take precedence over Him. There is no doubt that we live in a rich nation. We in comparison to most people in this world are rich.

The battlefield that we face due to our riches is materialism; Matt. 6:21 "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." If your treasure is on earth, your heart is on earth. If your treasure is in heaven, your heart is in heaven. Materialism is defined as: preoccupation with or emphasis on material objects, comforts, and considerations, with a decreased interest in or rejection of spiritual, intellectual, or cultural values. Materialism is not merely being rich. When we are materialistic, we can manifest several different attitudes toward our material possessions.

Paul taught Timothy that it is possible to love money; 1 Tim. 6:10 "For the love of money is the root of all evil...". Rather than a medium of exchange or a tool in one's hand, money becomes a friend, a buddy. There is a brotherly affection for the dollar.

Often trust is placed in one's riches. 1 Timothy 6:17 "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy."

There is difficulty in parting with one's riches for Godly purposes. The rich young man had this problem; Matt. 19:21-22. Giving to the church and the needy is not done with a cheerful attitude, if done at all. However, if a carnal purchase for self arises, one does not hesitate.

Materialism is the tendency to horde up one's goods; Luke 12: 15 "And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

Materialism is constant self-indulgence. Those who are materialistic love their things. They believe the delusion that if they can just get a little more, they will be happy. Self-indulgence brought a woe upon the nation of Israel; Amos 6:1 & Amos 6:4-6.

Materialism leads to a neglect of one's spiritual life. The church at Laodicea thought they were rich, but they were destitute; Rev. 3: 17.

Materialism leads to participation in things that are evil. Riches tempt a person to do evil things; to earn more wealth in sinful endeavors. To use wealth to satisfy the demands of the flesh; 1 Timothy 6:9-10. This can be particularly true of the young who seek an education or big job that will lead them away from the church.

We must not let materialism destroy our relationship with Jesus. We cannot pick up the stone of materialism and cast it at our Lord.

2) Second, many cast the stone of indifference. The stone of indifference was one of the first cast at Him in the world. It began at the manger, going to the cross, and it is still being thrown.

Indifference is defined as: Little or no concern; Lack of feeling or interest; Mediocre quality. Indifference has always plagued society and God's people.

We see evidence of indifference to the truth. In some places, the truth is not preached at all. In other places, only part of the truth is set forth. Often Preachers do not try to fill their sermons with truth. Some congregations are not pleased with the pure Gospel that often condemns their evil lifestyles.

We see indifference to worship: In most congregations, attendance at the Sunday evening service or midweek service is far less than for the morning worship services. Some of this is understandable, but some is not. Worship has been changed in some congregations into a concert or circus to please man.

We see indifference to immorality: There is evidence of this all around us. People tolerate immorality on TV, in

the movies, and in music. Drinking, gambling, smoking, and sex outside of marriage is acceptable behavior. Adultery is tolerated in many places. Our speech and our dress often mimics that of the world.

We see indifference to the local congregation: Indifference to the local congregation is apparent. It is difficult to get members to work in the local church. Works of the church are not always supported by members (i.e., gospel meetings). Many churches are suffering financially because members do not give liberally. These are just a few areas of indifference. There are many others.

The lowest point as far as Christian conduct is concerned is manifest in the phrase, "I couldn't care less." This is the way some members feel. They won't say it with words, but their actions speak it far more eloquently than words ever could. Such have no active interest in the work and worship of the congregation of which they are a member. They are lax in their assembling for worship. They let other things keep them from worship and make no mistake about it missing the worship service for frivolous reasons is a sin; Heb. 10:25. They never take time to visit or call a sick brother. They do not engage in a private study of the Word; this fact is proven by their obvious lack of knowledge concerning that Word.

If you have been indifferent toward your responsibility as a Christian, and toward the church, you need to wake up! The Lord is coming one day, and you will stand before him in judgment. We are often guilty of "stoning Jesus" with our indifferent attitudes.

3) The third and final stone I want to mention is the stone of unbelief. The Bible emphasizes the importance of "belief"; Hebrews 11: 6. Those who approach God must believe that He exists. We must believe that God rewards those who diligently seek Him.

People who believe in God can be guilty of unbelief. Those who are familiar with Moses know that he believed in God. However, in Numbers 20 we read about an occasion when God said that Moses did not believe Him. In vs.7-8, God told Moses to speak to the rock, and He would give water. In vs.9-11, Moses struck the rock with his rod. God then said that Moses did not believe Him and He did not allow Moses to enter the Promised Land.

The Lord's work was hindered by unbelief. Jesus was raised in Nazareth, a city in Galilee. In Mark 6: 1-6 we read about an occasion when Jesus visited this area. Jesus and His disciples traveled to "His own country." Notice the reaction of the people when Jesus taught in the synagogue; Mark 6:2-4 "And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. But Jesus, said unto them, "A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." According to vs. 5-6, Jesus only healed a few sick people and marveled because of their unbelief.

Serious warnings concerning unbelief are given to Christians. In 2 Corinthians 6: 14-16 we see that we must guard against the influence of unbelievers. Much is said in Hebrews about unbelief; Heb. 3:12. Unbelief will lead to a departure from God; Heb.3:17-19. Heb. 4:11 warns that we must avoid the mistake of the Israelites. Unbelievers will lose their souls; Revelation 21:8.

We need to realize that in those moments when we violate God's will, we are essentially saying, "God, I don't believe you. I know what you have said, but I think I have a better way." Yes, we believe, but we have unbelief. We defeat the Lord's cause when we throw the stone of unbelief.

In closing, imagine the sadness felt by our Lord and Savior at the Last Supper, as He said, "one of you shall betray me." Or, when He was walking with them toward the garden and He says, "All of you shall be offended this night because of me." Or when He was in the garden and we hear Him saying, "What, could you not watch with me one hour?"

The stones that hurt Jesus the most are not the one cast by the unbelieving world; He expects that; it is the one cast by His own people. The stones of materialism, indifference, and unbelief are often hurled at Jesus. Remember that when we allow these sins to exist in our lives we are casting stones at Jesus.

CRIPPLED PREACHERS continued from page two

Many times the brethren are to blame for the preacher being crippled. It doesn't seem to matter so much if the average Christian gets in debt and fails to pay out, but that will ruin a preacher as quick as anything, and generally the brethren are to blame for his financial difficulties. They call him for their meetings, and they want him when they want him regardless of the preacher's job, crop, or anything else, and sometimes, regardless of the distance he goes, the sacrifice he has made to go, the loss he has sustained by being away from home, they figure to pay him about the average wage they get for the time he is there. If they do give him a pretty good support they may say "Now, we want you to find a place and hold a mission meeting somewhere"- when, maybe he has already held three or four mission meetings, without any support, that year.

Many congregations are seeing their duty toward the preachers and are doing better than they did a few years ago. But all should realize that our preachers are the representatives of the Church of Christ wherever they are, and anytime they have to "bum" a ride to and from their meetings, have to wear shabby clothes, and fail to pay their bills, the ministry is greatly hindered and the Church of Christ suffers a "black eye."

Also, there are preachers who cripple themselves along this line. When a preacher fails to keep clean, keep his head combed, shoes shined, clothes pressed, shaved, etc. he cripples his influence.

A preacher's attitude toward the opposite sex should be always guarded carefully. Paul told a preacher to treat "the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity" (1 Tim. 5:2). Not only should a preacher's life be free from immodest and sinful lusts, but it should be so free from it that no suspicions will be aroused. Because of a "little fun, with the best of intentions" a preacher's influence may be crippled for life.

Many preachers cripple themselves by not controlling their families. I do not believe the excuse, "Well, I am never at home" will satisfy the Lord, and I know it does not satisfy the brethren, nor the world. If being away from home causes one's children to go wild, then that preacher can do far more good by staying at home and

helping to bring his children up in the way they should go.

A man's body (spiritually speaking) may be weighed down and all out of proportion by a "big head." You know, "if a man thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself," and I have seen some of the worst "deceived" preachers of anybody in the world. The Bible says for "a man not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly" (Rom. 12:3). Some preachers get their heads so high that their feet wander from the "narrow way." Many young preachers, with much ability, have been crippled for life with a bad case of "big head." Older preachers, too, sometimes get to where they think they know so much and have such a reputation that nothing can overthrow them-they are then on dangerous ground!

It is bad to be crippled in anyway but when one is "crippled in the head" a cane or a crutch doesn't seem to help any. (1 Tim. 4: 16). "Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine"

REMEMBERING OUR DEPARTED

By GREG GAY

"As life runs on, the road grows strange
With faces new, and near the end
The milestones into headstones change,
'Neath everyone a friend."
-James Russell Lowell (1889).

Last year, at the funeral of a departed member of the 64th. St., Sacramento congregation, I recited the names of many of the members who have died in the 21 years we have been working with the congregation.

Those who have passed away from the congregation and their age at time of death include: Bill Agnew (73), Ruth Blankenship (93), Souny Carson (66), Paul Cowali (39), Charlie Galion (79), Ernie (70) & Nancy (67) Hall, Della Harper (97), Earl (95) & Flora (87) Helvey, Bertha Howard (98), Kim Howard (35), Dora Malig (91), Mary Marler (74), Ed Powell (95), Judy Helvey Soulsby (70), Lesia Soulsby (38), Mable Taylor (83) and Patsy Wilson (80). Please allow me to share a few memories of these dear brothers and sisters along with some lessons that can be learned from them.

Some of our departed were the last of their family to have an ongoing relationship with the church. For some, their children are members who are long decades out of duty and the next generations of the family may know little, if anything about God and the Lord's church. It is not unusual to see three and sometimes four generations of a family gathered at a wedding or funeral, of whom we only know the older generation. We can be reminded that our faith is not inherited and cannot be automatically passed on to future generations of our family, no matter how much we may desire it so.

Some of our departed were leaders in the church, active in leading worship, decision making, evangelizing, and helping the church get firmly established in Sacramento. For example, Ed Powell (95) was an evangelist and Earl Helvey (95) served the congregation as an elder. Both vividly remembered when the 64th. St. Church building was built, almost entirely with volunteer labor, and finished in December of 1954. To hear their separate stories of the construction, they each, individually, nailed every nail in the building and everyone else who was around in those days helped "a little." I'm sure both, as well as many others, helped a lot! We can be reminded that not all memories survive the decades as intact as we might believe.

Ernie Hall (70) was an interstate truck driver for many years and only attended worship when he was in town, despite our many studies and discussions about his choices. He eventually got off the road and made things right he said had bothered him for a long time, including missing worship to work. After his confession, he never missed worship and worked hard to be able to help in the services. I describe him as someone who could not carry a tune, yet would lead songs every time he was asked. It was difficult for him to lead a prayer, serve at the table, and teach, but he did everyone of those things to the best of his ability. I think of Ernie for a reminder to always be thankful for those in the brotherhood who are willing to help even beyond their talents.

Ernie's wife Nancy (67) loved to share news with everyone in the congregation about everyone in the congregation. For example, if anyone in the congregation was ill, Nancy would always call to check on them, multiple times. Whether they were the same, worse, or improved, she would then call everyone to let us all know. Her genuine concern for others made it easy to forget that every call she placed was from

her room in the nursing home where she was a bedfast patient, unable to walk or even scoot herself up in her bed in her last years. She is a reminder that all can help in some way, if we will.

Some of our departed were wonderfully hospitable: When Bertha Howard (98) was well into her 80's, she would invite a bunch of folks over and serve a huge meal. Her yard was full of roses which were wonderful to stop and smell during visits to her house. Up to her last days she enjoyed discussing current events and had passion about the goings on in the community and nation. Unlike most of us as we age, she rarely talked about her own health. She is a reminder that life is always full of beauty if we want to see it that way (her roses), we can find a way to serve others even as we age (her hospitality), and there are many fascinating topics to discuss with friends, even as our own world may be shrinking due to diminished health.

Some of our departed were late entries in the church, like Charlie (79). Charlie Garton's wife, Burlene remains a dear faithful sister in the congregation. Charlie spent most of his life not appreciating her faithfulness. Along the way, he was diagnosed with cancer, which caused him to think seriously about the hereafter. As he told me when we studied, "I want to go where Burlene is going," referring to heaven. When I baptized Charlie, he struggled to climb the ladder out of our ancient baptistery and crawled away from the edge, too weak to get up on his own. I can still see him crawling away from the baptistery, forgiven.

Sister Patsy Wilson (80) was a cheerful, quiet, steady member of the Lord's church. She too came to worship for many years without her husband, Leonard. Sometime before she suddenly passed away, he began coming to worship with her and, in the spirit of Charlie's words said, "I want to go where she is going," before he was baptized. Today, Leonard comes to worship alone, but with a smile that lights up the room, and with the hope of eternal life, like his dear wife had when she passed away.

These late entries in the church are encouraging reminders to never give up hope for the salvation of those we love who are out of duty or not yet Christians.

I previously mentioned Bro. Ed Powell (95). He baptized dozens in the Sacramento area working at his regular job

and doing church work in all his spare time. He never sacrificed truth for popularity and was not a respecter of persons in the process. As a result, some loved him and some did not, as we can imagine. When anyone in the church went astray, he was also very active in trying to get them back if he thought he had any influence. One time a family asked him to go see their relative who had quit going to church. Ed asked them, "Why do you want me to go see them. They don't like me at all." The family member replied, "Exactly, that is why we want you to go, they don't like you already."

One of my favorite Ed (95) stories is when he and Violet raised a bunch of chickens to put up to have meat for the winter. When time came to process the chickens, they did not have enough room in their freezer for all of them. Ed's sister Mable (83) graciously volunteered her freezer for the overflow. Months later, when Ed went to Mable's to bring his chickens home he discovered she had helped herself and there were few, if any left.

There are so many wonderful memories of those who are gone. Sister Mary Marler (74) had many illnesses in her last decades of life that were largely a mystery to her several doctors. Still, she came to worship without complaint and lived on her own as long as she could. She is the only person I have ever known who could still be working on her first small plate of food at a potluck a full two hours after beginning. She loved to eat, but she loved to visit even more. I can hear her laugh as I write these words.

When Sister Ruth Blankenship (93) was in a nursing home and did not know for sure who people were when they came to see her, including her own daughter, it was amazing to ask her the question, "Ruth, what church are you a member of?" She would immediately reply, "Church of Christ," with a sweet smile of satisfaction.

And finally, in my mind's eye, I can still look across the aisle to see Sister Flora Helvey (87), her mind devastated from Alzheimer's, sing out on the words to the old song, "Not a Step Will I Take Without Jesus." She was just a few days away from going into a nursing home to live out her last months. At that point, there was so much she had forgotten, but she could still sing praises to God with the confidence of a life-long Christian.

Oh, how we miss them all, our departed. Their ages ranged from their 30's to late 90's, but their deaths all

teach the same lesson. As the Psalmist reminds us to this day: "... we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away" (Psalms 90:9-10).

Our time to "flyaway" will come soon, no matter how many years we may have left in this life. If we live long, we will have much joy, but we will also endure much sorrow, fulfilling what the poet expressed, "The milestones into headstones change, 'Neath everyone a friend." When our own departure time comes, may we be remembered dearly by the living and, more importantly, counted among the faithful by our God.

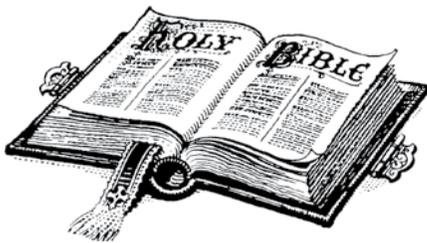
WHY PAUL WOULD BE continued from page one

be contradicted by Paul. In fact, it is contradicted by Paul in the epistles he left us. In I Corinthians 11:2 he praised the brethren for "remembering him in all things and keeping the ordinances as delivered." When Paul praised them for remembering him, he meant they remembered and recognized his apostolic office and authority. Paul, as an inspired apostle, set down the pattern for the observance of the Lord's Supper and he declared it should be kept as delivered. After giving a pattern for the assembly in I Corinthians 14, Paul says in verse 38, "If a man does not recognize this he is not to be recognized." In II Thessalonians 2:15 Paul admonishes us to stand fast and hold on to the traditions we have received by the word of God. He is speaking, of course, of inspired traditions. If he were here today Paul would preach that the traditions, ordinances, and patterns revealed in the New Testament must be kept today if we are going to serve and worship the Lord acceptably. That kind of preaching would make Paul unpopular even in churches of Christ!

Baptism. If Paul were here today he would preach the same thing he preached about baptism as he preached 2000 years ago. He would not be popular and in fact many would accuse him of preaching "water salvation." In recounting his own conversion Paul declared that he was told, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." He immediately arose and was baptized, and it was after his baptism that he stopped praying and rejoiced knowing his sins

were forgiven. Paul preached that baptism puts us into Christ where all spiritual blessings reside. (Romans 6:3-5 & Galatians 3:27) Baptism is so essential to salvation that Paul commanded 12 men he met in Ephesus to be baptized a second time because their first baptism was invalid. I wonder what would happen if Paul told all those who have been baptized thinking they were saved before baptism that their baptisms are invalid and they need to be baptized again for the right reason? I do not think that would make him the most popular preacher in America!

The point to this whole article is, of course, that Paul would be unpopular today. The reason is not because Paul's preaching would change - it would not - it is because people have not changed. Paul was not popular in his own day because people did not want the truth, and that has not changed. Paul, undoubtedly, was not concerned about popularity but preaching the truth and so should we. I do need to say, in closing, that Paul was popular with those who loved the truth, and if I may say it this way, he was popular with the Lord. That is all that mattered to Paul, and may it be what most matters to us!



Bonds of Matrimony

HUGHES – BRANCH It was with great joy and celebration that a new Christian home was established on the afternoon of January 7, 2017. Hannah Hughes was wed to Cole Branch in a beautiful ceremony in Opp, Alabama. Hannah was raised by Christian parents, Jeff and Georgiana Hughes of Opp. Cole was also raised by Christian parents. He is the eldest son of Greg and Rachael Branch being reared in Oakdale, California. The event, held at the meeting place of the Church of Christ in Opp was attended by a large company of family, friends, and loved ones in Christ. The singing was some of the sweetest and most appropriate singing

I have ever heard at such a ceremony. It was a special and tearful moment when “A Long Line of Love” was sung since Cole’s late and beloved grandfather, Sam Branch, sang this song at Greg and Rachael’s wedding many years ago. The lyric was perfectly chosen because both of these fine young people come from long lines of love and faith. Hannah and Cole are examples of the Christian faith and will be a blessing to each other, the church, and the community where they live. They have made their home in Kinston, Alabama and we pray for them God’s very best as they embark on the rest of their lives together. It was a great honor to officiate on this special day in their lives. – Kevin W. Presley

Announcement

2017 ALABAMA NEW YEAR’S MEETING - The Alabama New Year’s Meeting is scheduled for December 27-31 in Dothan. The Hartford Highway Church of Christ invites you to come and join with them in this annual effort. Bro. Clint De France will conduct the meeting with various preachers participating. The theme will be “This Is A Day Of Good News” based upon 2 Kings 7:9. Flyers will be mailed soon. The host hotel is the Hampton Inn in Dothan, offering a special rate to those who identify themselves with the “New Year’s Church Meeting”. Their number is (334) 671-7672. Make plans to attend the meeting and stay if you can through New Year’s Eve when we will sing in the New Year. It is a wonderful service we hope you can be a part of. Most services will be held in the Honeysuckle Middle School auditorium on Honeysuckle Road in SW Dothan. We hope to see you there.

Our Departed

EPPERSON - Denise Epperson was born in Bakersfield, CA on July 30, 1946 to Herman and Jacqueline Davis and passed away June 9, 2017 at age 70. She is survived by relatives including a sister, Deborah, and brothers Sonny, Jeff, and Wally. Denise and her first husband Dale Epperson had 3 children: Denale, Brett, and Ty Epperson. She has one Granddaughter, Ashley

Epperson-Osburn of the Whispering Pines congregation in Oklahoma City. Denise lived some time in Idaho but spent most of her years in California where she attended congregations including Placerville, 64th. St. in Sacramento, Fair Oaks, and Bakersfield. She was living in Lemoor, CA at the time of her passing. I was honored to speak words of comfort to all who attended the Northern California service at Fair Oaks on June 29. Family and friends were also to gather in Bakersfield on July 1 for an additional memorial. -Greg Gay

BATSON - On June 28, 2017 brother Jim Batson passed from this life at the age of 77 years 1 month and 6 days. He leaves to mourn his passing three daughters, several grandchildren, one great grandchild and a host of brothers and sisters in Christ who cherished his friendship and association. Jim preached for several years among the churches of Southwest Missouri, and was well known for his stand for the truth. I had the honor of meeting Jim many years ago when he was working among the digressive churches in this area. When presented with the truth, he left false worship and spent the rest of his life trying to lead others to better understanding of the scriptures. He will be greatly missed by all those whose lives he touched. This writer has honored to speak a few words of warning and comfort to the large crowd who assembled to pay their respects to his memory. -Ronny Wade

HONEYCUTT - Louise Honeycutt, our resting sister in Christ. Sister Louise Honeycutt passed away June 25th 2017. She was born January 11, 1923 in Neosho, Missouri. Louise faithfully attended West Highway 60 congregation. Louise had been sick for a long while but always came to worship services when possible. She always spoke words of encouragement to those who knew her, but especially to the preachers and teachers. She was 94 years 5 months and 14 days when her spirit left her body. Someone had placed a fork in her hand inside her coffin. The meaning behind this symbol is this, "The best is yet to come." For faithful Christian's the best is yet to come. She held to her hope in Christ and served the Lord for a long time. Her family filled the room at the service in honor to her. Many from her Christian family, friends and guest came to support her earthly family in this dark hour of death. Louise did not fear death because she knew the best was yet to come. She had requested me to preach her funeral service many years ago. I was humbled and honored to speak words of comfort to those that gathered. -Roger Owens

Field Reports

Greg Gay - 5109 Chicago Ave., Fair Oaks, CA 95628, 916-804-3787, papagreg@aol.com, July 1, 2017. We were at McGregor, TX June 11-18. I missed those who have passed away since my last meeting but was excited to see the group that remains joined by new members and adult kids who have moved back to the area. There were a good number of outside visitors, plus I was glad to see preaching brethren Johnny Herrera and Greg Robbins, who is living there now. Cassie was able to join me on this trip which made the time all the more enjoyable for all. We certainly treasured being with Wayne McKamie and being able to visit with Jean who remains in an assisted living facility.

From McGregor we spent a few days in Ada, OK visiting family, including my sister, Vicky Holt who has a recent diagnosis of ovarian cancer. As I write, she is in the hospital recovering from surgery that went well. Thanks to all for continued prayers on her behalf.

Our next stop was an enjoyable time at Weatherford, TX. Outside visitors were many, including members and the preacher from an area multiple cup congregation. Many came from congregations in the Metroplex including, as someone remarked, "enough preachers to hold the Sulphur meeting." I enjoyed being able to see Richard Bunner, Joe Norton, Bob Johnson, Nathan Battey, Brett Hickey, and Melvin Blalock who continues his great work in this area. We enjoyed staying with Gary and Carol Robinson, plus were kept busy having meals and visits with many others.

Our work continues at 64th St. in Sacramento. Brett Hickey held an excellent meeting for us in April. Our preparation included inviting the several hundred who have responded to the TV program the last several years from the immediate area. We had some visitors and hope for more opportunities with that group. We had two baptisms during the meeting, and one since the meeting, for which we are very thankful.

Ronny F. Wade - P.O. Box 14352 Springfield, MO 65814 or ronnywade36@gmail.com. July 17 - Yesterday we closed a meeting at the Walnut St. church in Cleburne, Texas. Large crowds greeted us every night. At times we had to put out folding chairs to accommodate the

crowd. Brother Melvin Blalock works in this area and is to be commended for his tireless efforts in promoting the Lord's cause. Several churches in the Dallas, Ft. Worth area assisted with their presence at every service. July 26-30 we are scheduled to be with the church at Alderson, OK and August 13-17 Greenville, PA.

Carl M. Johnson - 1400 Northcrest Drive Ada, OK 74820, cmjthebackpage@gmail.com. July 6 - I just closed a meeting in Indiana, Pennsylvania. The meeting was well-attended by sister congregations and we had a few visitors from the community. I enjoyed the hospitality of longtime friends Don and Melissa Dunlap during my stay. Dave and Mary Lou McKinney, whose 50th wedding anniversary preceded the meeting, celebrated the anniversary during the meeting by renewing their wedding vows in a ceremony at the church building on Saturday in front of family members, including all three of their sons and their families. It was my honor and pleasure to officiate the ceremony. Dave and Mary Lou reserved a beautifully decorated room at a local restaurant for the group to eat dinner together and enjoy pictures from their 50 years of marriage. It was a very nice occasion. May God continue to bless them both. I recently was able to attend a couple of nights of Kevin Presley's meeting at Galey, Oklahoma. En route to the airport in Oklahoma Cit to fly to Pennsylvania, I stopped by the Moore congregation and heard Wayne Fussell preach an excellent sermon on "Attitudes Toward the Word of God." Phyllis and I were also able to attend one night at the Sulphur, OK Fourth of July Meeting, where we heard George Battey, Greg Jordan, and Brett Hickey. I am scheduled to preach here at home the next three services and then Phyllis and I shall head to Temple, Georgia, to begin a meeting July 16-23. Next month we are scheduled to be in Bedford, Indiana, August 20-27. Please continue to pray for us.

Kevin W. Presley - 108 Mulberry Court, Dothan, AL 36303 July 23, 2017 – It was recently my pleasure to be with the congregation in Galey, OK for a meeting. Galey is just outside the city of Ada where I lived for the first 5 years of my time as a gospel preacher. Galey was gracious in those days to invite me to come and preach for them on occasion and it was an honor to return many years later to conduct this meeting. I made my home with Ken and Kathy Holland and enjoyed renewing our friendship and reminiscing about old times. Crowds were outstanding throughout most of the meeting and I pray good was done by our time together. Today, Bro.

Joe Hisle concluded our summer meeting at Earlytown, AL and it left us built up and enthused. Joe still preaches with all of the fire and enthusiasm of years gone by and our hearts 'burned within us' as we heard the old Jerusalem gospel repeated again. My travels take me to Piedmont, AL (July 26-30) and Little Rock, AR (July 31-Aug 6) and then our annual singing in Marietta, GA from the new songbook on August 19. I appreciate the church at Mariette for hosting this singing year after year and for their constant encouragement of good singing and the songbooks. In fact, I truly appreciate the good reception the new book WONDERFUL NAME has received. If you have not ordered, get in touch with me for more information. We are looking forward to both the TN and TX Labor Day meetings and then a busy fall schedule of travel. May the Lord bless you all.

Am I Growing Better?

*Is the world growing better?
Is a question that is frequently asked,
Are the people of this generation
Any better than those of the past?*

*But a more important question
One that brings it closer to home
Am I growing better,
Scattering sunshine where I roam.*

*Am I more studious of the Bible,
Do I read it every day,
Am I a light that's leading,
Others from their erring way?*

*Am I more dutiful
Than I was one year ago?
Do I always stop and think,
Or sometimes judge before I know?*

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THE BACK PAGE...

THE CULTURE WAR CONTINUES

By CARL M. JOHNSON

In early 1996, I received a call from East Central University here in Ada, Oklahoma, asking if I would be willing to give the invocation and benediction at the annual spring commencement ceremony. Prayer is always in order and I thought it might be a good idea to get the name of the church out in the public marketplace so I agreed to do it. I learned later that two atheist professors confronted President Bill Cole and said that if ECU was going to have prayer during the commencement ceremony, they would refuse to attend. They argued that ECU is a state-supported university and a prayer would be a violation of the US Constitution's First Amendment concerning separation of church and state.

President Cole was unfazed. He told them both firmly, "We ARE going to have prayer at the commencement and BOTH OF YOU ARE GOING TO BE THERE!" Subsequently, I led the prayers at commencement, both professors were in attendance, and they behaved themselves very well. I gained a great deal of respect for President Cole's strong leadership on that occasion. I offered the invocation and benediction again at commencement in 2000 and 2005. However, when President Cole retired the administration yielded to pressure and suspended the tradition of prayer during the annual graduation ceremonies.

Unfortunately, the local culture wars led by atheists and secularists did not end with this particular skirmish. On June 20th of this year ECU received a terse letter from the Washington DC office of "Americans United for the Separation of Church and State" (AU for short), demanding the school remove all religious icons from the historic Boswell Chapel on ECU's campus.

AU was founded in 1947 to challenge legally anything they consider a violation of separation of church and state. Several years ago the group filed a lawsuit to stop the teaching of creationism's "intelligent design" in Dover, Pennsylvania public schools. More recently, AU has filed lawsuits to push marriage equality for gays and lesbians, and has fought any kind of religious freedom laws that would allow government officials to refuse to serve the LGBT community. UA also pushed a lawsuit all the way to the US Supreme Court protesting the practice of city councils opening its sessions with prayers.

Kathryn P. Boswell Memorial Chapel was opened in 1957 as a private gift to ECU from S.C. Boswell in memory of his wife. The colonial-style chapel was intended for use by campus religious groups and by community members for weddings and other special ceremonies.

AU argues that the cross on the steeple, the Bibles in the pews, and the "Christian altar" inside the chapel violate the US Constitution's First Amendment concerning separation of church and state. The group has given ECU 30 days to get the cross down and the Bibles out of the pews, or else.

According to Ada News, new ECU president Katicia Pierson quickly agreed to the group's demands, has already removed the Bibles from the chapel, and is moving quickly to remove any other icons such as the small cross on the steeple or pictures that might suggest Christianity.

I am not an advocate of religious icons. I shall leave that advocacy to the Roman Catholics and others. Whether or not there is a cross on the steeple of Boswell Chapel is of no concern to me. However, I am concerned about the larger picture. Every lawsuit AU files is an effort by this atheistic and secular group to eradicate Christianity from the public marketplace.

I would really like to know who made the initial complaint. I have lived in Ada all my life. All of my family have degrees from ECU. My wife Phyllis worked at ECU for 40 years. One of my brothers was an administrator and another taught Spanish at ECU. When I am home I work out at ECU's wellness center. There is hardly a day I am not on campus or near it. Yet, until this story broke in the news I didn't even realize there is a cross on top of Boswell Chapel. You would have to be looking for it in order to see it and complain about it. So, I wonder who initiated the complaint. Why would a nationally organized group of bullies such as AU pick on a university in a small town in Oklahoma- the heart of the Bible Belt-about a small chapel with a cross on top and Bibles in the pews on the inside. It seems so ridiculously petty to me. Could the rabble-rouser be one of our own distinguished secular professors again?

I have a hunch that AU could go to any state capitol on any given day and find Bibles lying on the desks of many of our elected officials. Do you suppose AU would consider that fact a violation of church and state? Put on your spiritual armor brethren because we continue to be at war with our culture, and there can be no conscientious objectors to this war (Eph. 6:11-17).