

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

"...Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body." - Ephesians 5:23

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REMEMBERING JESUS

by Ted J. Clarke

As each year draws to a close, our minds are directed toward the 25th of December as the traditional birth date for Christ. Most historical sources, even the *World Book Encyclopedia's* article on "Christmas," will admit that we do not really know the date of Christ's birth. However, since December 25th has become a "tradition" of long standing practice, that date will probably remain as a celebration of Christ's birth, observed by much of religious denominationalism.

What emphasis does the Bible put on celebrating the birthday of Jesus? In Matthew, chapter two, and Luke, chapter two, we have accounts of the virgin birth and infancy of Jesus. The only information that Matthew gives us about the childhood of Jesus is that he was raised in Nazareth of Galilee (Matthew 2:23). In Luke 2:39-52 we have only a few more details about Christ's boyhood and early manhood. Why is so little said about the Savior's early life for nearly thirty years? Why doesn't the Bible give specific information about how to observe Christ's birthday, or even say that it was a special day for the early church to celebrate? It must be obvious that it was **not God's intention** or he would have done so.

While the Bible is limited in what it reveals, God did inspire men to record all that he wanted us to know. Second Peter 1:3 says that we have all things pertaining to life and godliness through a knowledge of Jesus. The apostle Paul said that the Scriptures furnish us completely with what is needed for "doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Jude tells us that the "faith... was once for all delivered unto the saints" (ASV). If remembering Jesus by celebrating his birthday was important or essential to Christianity, God's word would have revealed it. Christ's virgin birth, in the lowly surroundings of the

manger, is revealed to us for our profit. The date of his birth is not revealed. Neither do we have much information regarding his childhood. Rather, the gospels move with rapid speed toward his manhood and ministry. It is Christ's life of service to mankind, climaxed by his terrible suffering and death upon the cross, that takes up the largest part of the gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Read them and see! Jesus tells us to take up our crosses, as he did, and to follow him, surrendering to his will for us (Matthew 10:38-39). In Matthew 22:36-40 Jesus issues the challenge for us to imitate his example of love for God and service to man. It is all right to see the cute baby Jesus in a cradle in the manger in Bethlehem. God revealed those things for us to know, but he did not reveal any special observance of Christ's birthday. Let us not linger long at the cradle. Move on quickly to the life of sacrifice and service and the challenges for us to follow Jesus. The Lord said, "...the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Babies do not provide much of an example for imitation, but the suffering, crucified and risen Redeemer does! Nearly everybody loves a baby, but how many in the world love and honor the Godly Man who died for them?

One cannot develop saving faith in Christ by simply remembering his birthday. It is sad that some have no remembrance of Jesus except as a babe in a manger, and even that is becoming more infrequent the more commercialized the "Christmas" season becomes. To really know about Jesus, one must read the gospel accounts of his life. Read of his life and teachings, spending much time meditating upon the scenes of his suffering and death upon the cruel cross, where Jesus gave his life that we might truly live (John 3:16). Re-

joice as you read of him having risen from the dead to be exalted as King of kings and Lord of lords. Study intently the "Acts of the Apostles" as they labor to fulfill Christ's commission to preach to the lost world and to guide the church of Christ in his way. Read the "Epistles" or letters, which Christ inspired certain disciples to write to churches and individuals who were struggling to live godly lives in a wicked world. You will be built up and encouraged by doing so. Only then can you really develop a saving faith in Christ which will enable you to overcome the difficulties of this life. Finally, read with excitement and anticipation the victory in Jesus which the book of "Revelation" sets forth. Our eternal home in heaven will not come just because we remembered a man-made holiday celebrating Christ's birth. You need to read and believe "the rest of the story," as Paul Harvey would say.

You can study "the rest of the story" at the Church of Christ nearest you. There you will find others who share in the desire to speak where the Bible speaks and to be silent where it is silent. Those who assemble as congregations of the churches of Christ want to call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things in Bible ways, following Paul, who taught, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17). You will hear nothing taught but the Bible as we seek to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). You will find a friendly group of dedicated Christians ready to help you **remember Jesus** in the ways he has revealed. Remembering Jesus and his death, burial and resurrection in the Lord's Supper on every Lord's Day (Sunday) was a part of the faith once for all delivered to the first century church of Christ. Please read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 and Acts 20:7 and note that the very purpose for which they gathered was to "break bread" in observance of the Lord's Supper (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17). Remember also that Jesus said, "This do in remembrance

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Ted J. Clarke EDITOR

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of me." Is it not strange that men will invent a holiday by which to remember Jesus once a year, but will not truly remember him in the way and on the day which he ordained? Does your practice of remembering Jesus fit the tradition of men or the revelation from God's word, the Bible?

Resolve that you will follow Jesus and remember him every day (Luke 9:23), and especially every Lord's Day as you assemble with the saints to remember Christ in partaking of the Lord's Supper. Hebrews 10:25 warns against forsaking the assembling together of the saints. In that worship we remember Jesus, **his way**.

SIN + TIME DOES NOT = FORGIVENESS

by Arthur Pigman

The Bible teaches Christians that the proper way to have forgiveness of sins is to repent, confess, and pray. When Simon sinned he was told that he must "repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22). He did repent and pray, therefore, he was forgiven. Another requirement is that Christians confess their sins. In I John 1:9 we read, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." A Christian must repent, confess and pray in order to be forgiven of his sins.

Sometimes brethren operate by the formula that says $S + T = F$, or sin plus time equals forgiveness. They will commit a sin but will not repent. Then after a few weeks, months or years they will act as if the sin has been blotted out by the passage of time. It is the case that some will commit a sin in one state, leave and go to another state, and place membership with a new congregation without ever repenting of those past sins. They seem to forget that God knows all about all of us in all the world, and all of the time. Separating ourselves from sin with time or distance does not bring about forgiveness, even though some would like to believe that it does.

If that were the correct way to get forgiveness then Peter should have told Simon, "Yes, you have sinned, but just put yourself on probation for a few months, take a low profile in the activities of the church, then come back at a later time and everything will be all right." Or he might have told Simon to just go over and place membership with another congregation and act as if nothing had happened. Nobody over there will know what you have done and it will be just fine!

Passage of time does not bring about forgiveness. The children of Israel had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years because of their sin. If just the passage of time equaled forgiveness, then all of them should have been allowed to enter the promised land, but all of those who were 20 years old and above died instead of entering.

When a Christian sins he must not act as if he is too proud to repent. He must admit he has sinned, confess that he has sinned, and pray for forgiveness. Then he can be assured that God will forgive him.

The Bible formula for Christians to be forgiven is S (sin) + R (repentance) + C (confession) + P (prayer) = F (forgiveness). It is not S (sin) + T (time) = F (forgiveness).

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Life is like a cafeteria. One goes through, choosing as he goes. But, what he chooses must be paid for at the end of the line. "...For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Gal. 6:7)

DISCOURAGEMENT

by David Macy

The tempest of discouragement has sunk many a ship which once sailed toward the heavenly shore. It is Satan's most effective weapon against those who are striving for the eternal prize. When he gets our heads down and our spirits low, he is near victory, unless we rally and regain our faith that all things will work together for good if we are true children of God. "Behold, the Lord thy God hath set the land before thee: Go up and possess it, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not. Neither be discouraged." (Deut. 1:21). Discouragement kept most of the Israelites who left the land of Egypt from entering the Promised Land. Moses was their leader and he exhorted them not to fear or be discouraged. God had promised to be with them and fight their battles, but it seems they were determined to be discouraged in spite of all the things which were going their way. They sent twelve spies to survey the land and ten of these advance men brought back a discouraging report. They described rich land which flowed with milk and honey, but they also told of giants and great walled cities. When the people heard the report of the ten faithless spies, they refused to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land. All who were twenty years old or older when they left the land of Egypt perished in the wilderness. The examples in the Old Testament were written for our instruction (1 Corinthians 10: 6, 11). Let us not be like these faithless children of God who perished in the wilderness because of discouragement. The Lord has placed the sweet land of rest before us. Let us go up and possess it and never fear or be discouraged. We all have our failures and disappointments in life, but there is always hope unless we allow these setbacks to overcome and defeat us. A small boy at a lakeside resort launched a little boat of his own manufacture, one rather windy afternoon. The breeze filled the sails immediately, but instead of carrying the small craft on its course, capsized it immediately and sent it straight to the bottom. The young sailboat owner looked sober for a moment, then remarked, "That's a good wind for kites," and immediately went to get his kite!

If you have failed in something you have attempted, the very circumstances which caused you to lose may be an ad-

vantage when you try something else. Don't sit down and sulk because your boat went to the bottom. The very wind that capsized it may carry your kite higher than you ever dared to dream.

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DAVID and BATHSHEBA

by Allen Webster

(Please read 2 Samuel 11-12)

There are times in life when one split second can make or break the balance of one's days. A decision made in the heat of the battle or the heat of the moment can literally alter life's course.

Our preparation for these moments makes the difference. If we have properly trained our minds and developed our characters, we will be able to make wise decisions and live without regrets (2 Cor. 7:10).

We find David's moment of truth in 2 Samuel 11. He was the greatest man in all the earth—king of God's people—rich—many wives—several children—popular—powerful—happy. But this evening he would go for a walk that would change his life. As was the custom, he walked along the palace roof in the cool of the day. From this vantage point he saw a beautiful woman, Bathsheba, bathing herself. He lusts, commits adultery, and, eventually, murders her husband. His bad decision is the blotch on his great life.

From this chapter, we learn several valuable lessons.

DAVID DID NOT GO TO WAR WITH HIS ARMY (11:1). When spring rolled around, it was time for kings to go to war, but this year the great warrior king decided to stay home and let Joab lead his forces against Ammon's capital city of Rabbah.

"An idle mind is the devil's workshop," the old-timers told us. David can vouchsafe for it. If he had been in the battlefield, he would not have been on the palace roof! Who is more likely to fall into sin today—one who is busy worshipping, studying, visiting, fellowshiping, or a "Sunday Christian"? Obviously, a moving target is harder for the devil to hit!

BATHSHEBA BATHED WHERE DAVID COULD SEE HER (11:2-3). The Bible does not indicate whether or not she purposely washed in public view. At the least, she

was careless about exposing herself. At the most, she knew of the king's walking habits and deliberately placed herself where he might want her in his "harem." (The Bible records no resistance when she was summoned.)

From this we learn to be careful not to cause others to lust. If we deliberately dress in a way that excites lusts in the opposite sex, we are as guilty as they are (1 Tim. 2:9). We should not be careless in this for it is better to drown than to cause a brother to stumble (Mt. 18:6).

ADULTERY IS A TERRIBLE CRIME (11:4, 5). Of the sins that can be committed, adultery is among the worst. It is a sin against God (11:27), one's spouse (Mt. 19:6), the other person (1 Cor. 6:9) and one's own body (1 Cor. 6:18). It is the only sin that can Scripturally break up a marriage (Mt. 19:9).

It is terrible in its consequences (11:5). Many lose their heads in lust and bring an unwanted child into the world. This often begets further sins of abortion, child abuse and even suicide.

ONE SIN OFTEN LEADS TO ANOTHER (11:6-27). In order to cover his sin, David tried to deceive Uriah (11:6-11). This failed, so he got him drunk (11:12-13; cf. Hab. 2:15). David finally stooped to plot the murder of his loyal subject (11:14-25). He sent Uriah's death warrant by Uriah's own hand and involved Joab in his sin.

Sin cannot be covered up or swept under the rug (Num. 32:23; Gal. 6:7; Rm. 6:23). It is progressive in nature (Psa. 1:1). Could such happen today? Has a young man ever gone dancing, lusted after his date, given into fornication, fathered a child, hated its mother for "causing him such heartache," lied to his friends and family and coerced her to kill the child with abortion?

Do not ever say, "That could never happen to me." David was a "man after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22) and it happened to him. Do you suppose David thought it would happen? But then came Bathsheba. Christian teenagers are not immune to such pressures and many are living with the consequences. Parents, Bible class teachers, preachers—it is better to talk about it before there is a problem (2 Tim. 2:22). Adults are not above such temptations. How many have begun flirting with a co-worker only to end up with a broken heart and a broken home?

The heat of the moment changed David's life. God forgave him, but he lived with the consequences. May we learn what God has revealed to us from this dark chapter in Israel's sweet singer's life.

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SMOKING KILLS

by David Wade

The headline reads, "Survey: Even researchers receiving tobacco money readily admit smoking kills" (Washington [AP] Daily Mountain Eagle, Thursday, June 27, 1991, B5). The article states a survey of scientists who get research money from the tobacco industry shows most of those responding believe cigarette smoking causes serious and often fatal diseases.

The report appeared in the American Journal of Public Health, and the information was gathered from 77 of the 166 researchers who responded to the survey. According to the report, 94 percent agreed that even second hand smoke is harmful to non-smokers. Also, 91 percent agreed that most lung cancer deaths are caused by smoking.

Brethren, most of us have known for a long time that tobacco products are very harmful to one's health. And in view of this research, the disputers of fact should be silenced. And yet, some in the Lord's

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CONTRIBUTIONS

CHURCHES

| | |
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| Church of Christ, Moody, Mo. | 25.00 |
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church still maintain by their actions that it is perfectly permissible for Christians to smoke. To some, it is such a controversial subject that they refuse to speak out against it. K. Michael Cummings, a senior research scientist at Roswell Park Cancer Institute in Buffalo, New York, says, "The industry says that there is controversy about smoking and disease, and it's our position that saying there's controversy is the same as saying there's controversy over the shape of the earth." Cummings, who led the study with others at his cancer institute, and Ronald Davis of the federal government's Office on Smoking and Health, said the survey shows the tobacco industry "does not accept the opinions even of scientists whose research it funds."

While the church in many quarters has been negligent to discourage smoking among its members, much of society, apart from the church has moved to ban smoking in public places. Many places of business now prohibit smoking of their customers and employees who are on the job. More and more hospitals are banning smoking. Some airlines and public transportation systems now ban smoking. These restrictions are certainly welcomed by those who do not want to breathe second hand smoke and to have their hair and clothing inundated with the foul odor.

Smoking is one of the most antisocial habits of our society. The smoker thinks he has the right to cause everyone around him to smell like he does. The smoker thinks he has the right to pass on to others a measure of the health risk he is taking.

In addition, smoking is one of the most time wasting habits in our society. First, there is time wasted when one must "take a break" and smoke. Second, the time of employment needed to pay for the habit is wasted. Third, the time smoking literally takes from one's life span is a waste of tragic proportions. Some have conjectured the average loss of one minute of life span per cigarette, others, one hour loss of life span per pack. Even conservative estimates can add up to a big minus of years in one's life span! What a waste! Time is the stuff life is made of! And what about eternity? Will God justify such harm and waste? "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are Gods" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). "Be not

deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:7-8).

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Rules for Raising Delinquent Children

The following was given out by the Houston, Texas Police Department:

1. Begin with infancy to give the child everything he wants. In this he will grow up to believe the world owes him a living!
2. When he picks up bad words, laugh at him. This will make him think he's cute. It will also encourage him to pick up "cuter" phrases!
3. Never give him any spiritual training. Wait until he is 21 and then let him decide himself!
4. Avoid use of the word "wrong." It might develop a guilt complex!
5. Pick up everything he leaves lying around - books, shoes, clothes. Do everything for him so that he will be experienced in throwing all responsibility on others!
6. Let him read any printed matter he can get his hands on. Be careful that the silverware and drinking glasses are sterilized, but let his mind feed on garbage!
7. Quarrel frequently in the presence of your children. In this way they will not be too shocked when the home is broken up later!
8. Give the child all the spending money he wants. Never let him earn his own. Why should he have things as tough as you did!
9. Satisfy his every craving for food, drink and comfort. See that every sensual desire is gratified. Denial may lead him to harmful frustration!
10. Take his part against neighbors, teachers and policemen. They are all prejudiced against your child!
11. When he gets into real trouble, apologize for yourself saying, "I never could do anything for him."
12. Prepare for a life of grief. You will be likely to have it!

Criticism is like fertilizer-the right amount does wonders, but too much is fatal!

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2,3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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