

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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Baalism in the Church Today

by Jerry Bates

To even suggest that Christians today practice the same things that Israel and the Canaanites did in their worship to Baal would make most people cringe with horror. People would immediately cry out with a resounding NO! Certainly the exact rituals are not practiced today, yet the motives which prompted Israel to worship Baal are prevalent among modern day Christians.

The worship of Baal emphasized the subjective spiritual experience. It was a worship based on passion. Thus you had images, music, dances, sex, and sacred prostitution. It was a worship fulfilled through self expression. One writer said that in Baalism "...you did what you felt like doing when you felt like doing it."

That same desire for a "religious experience" is certainly prevalent today. People are refusing to worship God in the simple way that God has ordained because supposedly it is not "exciting" or "meaningful." People are seeking a "worship experience." Many refuse to worship with the saints because they "don't get anything out of it." Terms such as these exhibit a basic ignorance of what Biblical worship is, and many times are a protective cover for self-seeking. Religious feelings or thoughts are not necessarily worship. Entertaining activities such as dramas, films, plays, etc. are not proper activities for our worship to God even though they may teach a good lesson. *A Christmas Carol*, a story written by Charles Dickens, which has been reproduced for TV several times, teaches a good lesson, but would it be appropriate for the worship service? The Bible never uses worship as an adjective such as "worship experience." Our worship is not subjective nor purely private. Worship is not what one "experiences," but what one does. It has been that way since creation (Genesis 4).

Christ tells us the kind of worship which is pleasing to God. "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in

spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God [is] a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship [him] in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24). The worship God seeks is a response to His Word which comes from the heart.

Our worship is to be directed to God (Matt. 4:9-10) and each individual is to be involved. It is not something done for us. Certainly worship is to be meaningful and we should be benefited from having participated in it. However, leaving God's plan for His worship and adding modern day adaptations will not accomplish the desired result. It may be entertaining; it may be exciting; it may stir our emotions; and it may even teach some good lessons. (The worship of Baal likely accomplished some of those things.) But, will it prompt us to conform our lives to God's will? Will it glorify God? Our benefit comes only when we worship in accordance to God's will from our heart. We often hear it said, "To get something out of it, you must put something into it." That statement is certainly true and emphasizes the individual involvement of each person in all the acts of worship. Worship should be a time to show reverence to God and solemnly reflect on what he has done for us on the cross. When we realize what blessings we have through Christ, we will be moved to worship God. A true desire to worship comes from meditating on God's Word, not choreography or entertainment.

This doesn't mean all change is wrong or that "tradition" is all important. We must realize that just going through the "rituals": is not the worship God wants. The charge of those who advocate change that the "traditional worship service" has no spirit may be right in some cases. I fear some are just going through the motions. At the same time that we caution against the spirit of Baalism, let us examine ourselves and make sure we have the spirit God requires in our worship.

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BALANCE

by Ted Clarke

It has been often said, and rightly so, that one major characteristic which we all need in our lives is "balance." Balance might be defined as "the ability to go through life without drifting to extremes on either side." Having said that, it might be well to note that balance does not mean that all things are equal, nor does it mean we should only do things half way!

For example, the Christian is balanced when he/she **always puts God's will first** in one's life. It isn't, "This is for God; this is for me; this is for God; this is for me." Rather, Jesus said to "seek **first** the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). The first and greatest commandment is **always**, "You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength" (Mark 12:30). Paul prayed that Christians might "have a walk worthy of the Lord, **fully pleasing Him**" (Colossians 1:10).

A Christian is never so fully balanced as when he/she seeks to obey God. In Daniel 5:27, Belshazzar of Babylon was weighed on God's scales and "found wanting." He was light on faith and heavy on sins, unbalanced in God's sight. I've often had both Christians and people of the world ask me, "Don't you think a person can be too religious?" Upon questioning them as to what they mean, it is usually obvious that they want me to answer, "Yes," so that they can feel comfortable about their degree of faith and practice. Do you think John the Baptist, the apostles, and Christ were **too religious**? Was Paul **overly concerned** about religion? Were first century Christians **too pushy** about sharing their faith? We might like to say all of these were unbalanced, so that we could feel comfortable about ourselves, but we really know better.

What is the major difference between these people of God and ourselves? Perhaps the biggest difference is that they didn't care what others thought about them, as long as they knew they were

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pleasing God. We will always be unbalanced, "found wanting" (lacking) on God's scales, as long as we are more concerned about what others think about us, than we are with what God thinks of us. In Matthew 10:28 Jesus said,

"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell."

In John 5:44 Christ said,

"How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?"

Are you "balanced" according to people or according to God? As long as we do God's will, it ought not matter to us what people think. Paul said that it is a "very small thing" to be judged by people who do not know God's standard (1 Cor. 4:3, 4). May we all strive for balance by being more like God and Christ every day (Luke 9:23).

DEAD WEIGHT

I've been a dead weight many years,
Around the church's neck
I've let the others carry me,
And always pay the check.
I've had my name upon the rolls,
For years and years gone by;
I've criticized and grumbled too;
Nothing could satisfy.
I've been a dead weight long enough
Upon the church's back.
Beginning now, I'm going to take
A wholly different track.
I'm going to pray and pay and work,
And carry loads instead;
And not have others carry me
Like people do the dead.

**EARTHQUAKE -
A JUDGMENT FROM GOD?**

by Joel Wheeler

On January 17, 1994, at 4:31 a.m. Pacific time, an earthquake measuring 6.6 on the Richter Scale, hit the San Fernando Valley in California, killing at least 54 and injuring thousands of individuals. The quake, which was not "the big one" according to experts, destroyed over 1,000 buildings and broke up five major freeways. Fires erupted from broken gas lines and destroyed dozens of homes. Highway and building authorities said it would take more than a year for repairs to be made and for things to get back to normal. The estimated damage stands around 30 billion dollars and it only took 30 seconds to destroy what it took man years to design and build.

Is God punishing these people for their evil deeds? Some would say that God is teaching them a lesson because of their sins. Some even turn to Joel 2:10, Micah 5:15 and other passages to prove their point. But is this really the case? NO!

First, God sent the prophets to warn people to bring them back to a righteous way of living. Each time destruction came to a people, city or nation, **God warned them ahead of time!** God never destroyed any people without first sending a messenger. God sent Noah, "a preacher of righteousness" (II Peter 2:5), to warn the people of the coming destruction. In fact, Noah preached for 120 years while preparing the ark for salvation (Gen. 6:3). Another example of destroying the wicked is Sodom and Gomorrah, found in Genesis 19. Abraham, Lot, and his family were warned of the coming destruction of Sodom and the cities around them. The sons-in-law of Lot mocked when told of the destruction (Gen. 19:14). The people in Sodom and Gomorrah had the opportunity to repent and change their wickedness, but they did not. We have examples of God sending prophets to heathen nations. Jonah was sent to Nineveh preaching, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). God gave them forty days to repent of their great wickedness and they did.

Second, natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, fires and tornados happen to good people as well as the bad. Earthquakes are caused when the earth shifts to release heat and energy from underneath the surface. When cities build on a fault line, sooner or later they will know

it. Heavy rains will cause rivers to rage and wash away anything in the path of them. Fires are set intentionally, by carelessness, by accident, and by lightning. Fires can burn thousands of acres of forest trees before being contained. Tornados can rip through a town or rural area in a matter of a few minutes, causing a great amount of destruction. The frigid cold temperatures and heavy snowfall of January, 1994, have been responsible for over 100 deaths in the U.S.A.

One lesson we can learn in all of this is not that God is punishing people, but that man is not invincible. Though man can predict heavy rainfall, track hurricanes on radar, locate fault lines in the earth's surface, he cannot control what happens. Man has no power over nature. Natural disasters occur somewhere in the world every day and man is not capable of stopping them.

Another lesson we learn is that man's punishment for evil is not done on this earth, but at the day of judgment. Paul wrote, "For we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10). If our just punishment were on the earth, then there would be very few people living today.

We also learn that God chooses to warn us with his written word. Paul wrote about the judgment, saying that "God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel" (Rom. 2:16). Our Lord said, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

The apostle Peter wrote that God, "according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue..." (II Pet. 1:3). The "things that pertain unto life and godliness" include the facts that all men sin (Rom. 3:23) and the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). God has revealed a way of escape from eternal separation by the obedience of the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16; 6:17, 18). The natural disasters of life remind us of our weaknesses and should cause us to look higher than ourselves for answers. God's warnings through the written word, and our love for God should move us to obey Him.

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"ROCK OF AGES"

by Harold Blevins

When Jesus and His disciples entered into Caesarea Philippi, they saw rock in evidence everywhere in this land of Herod Philip II (*Smith's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 2, page 1053). A preacher of a colorful century ago cited that it was a rock-bounded, rock-founded, rock-builed, rock-surrounded, rock-protected, rock-shadowed, rock upon which the Rock of ages built His church - rigid and righteous rock (*Letters and Sermons of T.B. Larimore*, p. 359). Rock is not good for gardening, nor for eating, but is excellent for constructing and protecting. Many used rock in just that way; for example, the Tyrians (1 Kings. 5 & 6; Isa. 23: 1-18; Ezek. 26-28). Since rock was one of the hardest substances known to man in that day, Christ used the figure and built His church upon such a fixed and firm foundation (1 Tim. 6:19; 2 Tim. 2:19; Matt. 7:21ff; Heb. 11:10; et al.).

Today, many ask, which is the correct church? Is it possible to know absolutely? Does one know for certain that one is in the **Church**? These questions can be answered in a set of scriptural sentences: *"He saith unto them, 'But whom say ye that I am?' And Simon Peter answered and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.' And Jesus answered and said unto him, 'Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'"* (Matt. 16:15-16).

CONFESSION

The church that Christ built was planted on the proposition that Christ is the Son of God, begotten of God, and sent from the living God (Phil. 2:5-8; Eph. 3:8-21). Everything about it is correct. The **Plan** is correct: saving souls by hearing (Rom. 10:17); believing (Jn. 8:24); repenting (Lk. 13:3, 5); confessing (Matt. 10:32, 33); and being baptized (Acts 10:48). The **Plea** is correct: come unto me, the Master (Matt. 11:28-30; et al.). The **Price** is correct: Christ paid it all (1 Cor. 6:20). The **Purpose** is correct: to save wretches such as Paul and ourselves (Rom. 7:24; 1 Tim. 1:15). The **Pardon** is correct: only God can pardon (Neh. 9:17; Isa. 55:7; Acts 22:16; Heb. 9:22).

CONFIRMATION

The past saw Satan walking before God, having been walking to and fro on the face of the earth (Job 1:7). Today the prince of the air has no such liberty. Why? God sent His Son to destroy the works of the Devil (1 Jn. 3:8). The Tempter still tempts, but not as He did in the days of Job. Again the past saw the Spirit of God appear as a dove at the baptism of Jesus, and a voice from heaven said, *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* (Matt. 3:11-17). At the transfiguration of Christ, God appeared as a voice out of the cloud, saying, *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him"* (Matt. 17:5). What Lord? *"Hear ye him."*

Today we hear Him via His word, the Holy Bible. We rejoice that the confession was made, since the correct church was built on the confession that Christ is truly the only begotten Son of God (Jn. 1:18; 3:16, 18; Heb. 11:17; 1 Jn. 4:9). Whence forth came that confession? Was it from man? The Savior said, *"...flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee..."* (Matt. 16:17). Hear it please, dear reader, the confession came **not** from man, but from *"...my Father which is in heaven"* (Matt. 16:17).

The Father Himself revealed Christ's sonship as the foundation for the true church, true indeed (Jn. 8:31, 36; 17:17; et al.).

CONFIGURATION

The church of Christ was built on the great confession that Christ is the only begotten Son of God. Therefore the church of Christ was built on a rock. What rock? Answer, The Rock! *"...And that Rock was Christ"* (1 Cor. 10:4). What does that mean? Friendly reader, this is figurative language. The Bible abounds in such: a man was a tree (Psm. 1:2); Herod was a fox (Lk. 13:31, 32); Christ was a door (Jn. 10:7, 9); and so many more. A serious student of the Book of books wants to know about metaphors, similes, and other figures.

Some would have us believe that the Lord built His church on Peter. Not so! Note: (1) Peter in the Greek is in the masculine (man), and rock is in the feminine (church). (2) Peter is a stone, and not a rock (Jn. 1:42). (3) Christ cited that God gave the confession as to the identity of the Christ (Rock), and not Peter (flesh and blood).

Others would say that one church is

as good as another. Christ cited that there is but one "church" and that one church is His. *"I will build my church..."* (Matt. 16:18). Please note that He said: "I," which is the subject at hand; "my," which is in the possessive case (His and not constructed by man); and "church," not churches. "Church" is the singular; that is, the only one, or the one and only. The only begotten Son of God laid that foundation (1 Cor. 3:1-11), which necessitates the name: church of Christ (Eph. 1:21-23; Phil. 2:9). The one and only church (Eph. 4:4-6). God confessed it. Christ constructed it. The Holy Spirit confirms it. Since salvation is in that body (church), if one misses the identity of the church that Christ built, heaven will be missed (Eph. 5:23).

We sing the song:

*Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and pow'r.
(August M. Toplady)*

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A Good Marriage Is A Two-Way Street
That Is Always Under Construction.
"And they twain shall be one flesh"
(Matt. 19:5)

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A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

by Tony W. Boyd

Have you noticed how we seem to focus on the mistakes, flaws and errors in others? With our teens, we focus on the bad they do. When do we notice the good? Even in our preaching, we spotlight the bad teaching, false doctrine, church problems. Is it any wonder our young people are discouraged and often wander away from the church?

The other day, as I walked into the grocery store, a neighbor stopped me and complimented me on the bulletin we send out. I must admit that when he first started talking I expected some kind of criticism or negative comment. Instead, his positive comments and encouragement gave me a real boost for the rest of the day.

That discussion has weighed on my mind since that day. It was unfair of me to feel defensive. Have I become so used to criticism that I expect it from everyone? We seem to hear more negative comments and criticisms than we do positive, uplifting, encouraging statements. Is this the way it is supposed to be?

Christians are told: *"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another."* (Romans 14:19) Paul said in another place; *"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."* (Ephesians 4:29) It would seem by the tone of these and many other passages in the New Testament, that a major work of Christians is to edify one another. To edify means to build up, strengthen and encourage.

Solomon said: *"Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad."* (Proverbs 12:25) We all have had those days when it seemed that nothing went right. Didn't the sun shine a little brighter, and the flowers smell a little sweeter after someone we respect gave us a word of encouragement? This kind of positive stroking is so simple and inexpensive, yet so often ignored.

We should strive to encourage someone each day. A pat on the back, a positive word, a nod of approval—any or all can go a long way in making the day better and brighter. We should remember how good it feels to receive a word of encouragement, and using the principle of the Golden Rule, share that good feeling by encouraging someone else. Let us dedi-

cate ourselves to encouraging someone today and every day from now on.

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THE VOICE OF JESUS

by James D. Burns

One's voice is important in conversation, in public speech and in singing. The voice is a distinctive part of one's personality. We judge others in part by their voices.

We do not know the sound of Jesus' voice; there were no tape recorders to preserve this for us. But there are some things that can be said of His voice:

The voice of Jesus is the voice of authority. This is evident in the Sermon on the Mount, when "he taught them as one having authority" (Matt. 7:28). Even the wind and the sea obeyed Him (Mark 4:41). His authority rang out as He cleansed the temple (Matt. 21:12-13). Even the dead responded to His voice (John 11:43-44).

The voice of Jesus is the voice of instruction. No description fits Him better than "teacher." Nicodemus recognized Him as "a teacher come from God" (John 3:1-2). He invited His followers, "Learn of me" (Matt. 11:29). His followers were called "disciples" — learners. He was a teacher who knew whereof He spoke. He knew how to teach, using a variety of teaching methods.

The voice of Jesus is the voice of invitation. He invited two disciples of John to "come and see" and invited Philip to "follow me" (John 1:38-39, 43). He invited four fishermen to follow Him and become "fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). Read His great invitation in Matthew 11:28-30. Hear Him invite the rich young ruler to have treasure in heaven (Matt. 19:21).

The voice of Jesus is the voice of judgment. "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22). He identifies Himself as Judge in scenes of judgment (Matt. 7:21-23). He does likewise in the description of judgment in Matthew 25:31-46. It is before His judgment that we must all appear (II Cor. 5:10).

As we contemplate the voice of Jesus, we must hear the voice of authority, learn from the voice of instruction, respond to the voice of invitation and prepare for the voice of judgment.

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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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