

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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Christians Need To Come Out Of The Closet

by James Balcom

In recent years we have heard much about homosexuals coming out of the closet. In fact, several legislators have revealed their true "sexual orientation" and other public figures have confessed to being "gay." Many of us wish they had stayed in the closet because their public confessions have made us nervous with their public acknowledgements. Some of the homosexuals have become quite militant. Scenes of them marching down major city streets with their highly eroticized sexual displays have created quite a scene as the public finally sees what they are all about – sex, pleasure and recruitment of young men and women. How can such a small group have so much political power? Jesus tells us how in Luke 16:8 "For the sons of this world are more shrewd in (dealing with) their generation (their own kind) than the sons of light." (NKJ) Parens added by writer. What can Christians learn from this group of sinful people that have been in the closet? If you come out of the closet, make yourselves observable, take a stand on issues; people will take notice.

Jesus said to His disciples in Matthew 5:14-16, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." All Christians are light in the Lord, (Eph. 5:8), and must shine as lights (Philippeans 2:15). We are workers together with Him. Christ wants his disciples to shine in the world, to expose darkness. In order to do this we must be active.

If we shine our lights we will be conspicuous, both by what we believe and by what we do. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. We serve as beacons for those lost in the world. We are directional signs on the highway. Sometimes we

are admired, imitated and esteemed by those around us; others may envy, hate or make fun of us. We must walk circumspectly (Eph. 5:15) because we are being seen and observed. Christ intended for his servants to be like candles that give light and not hidden in closets. We must shine by communicating what is good and helpful to mankind. We must not remain in obscurity and by our good living give evidence of our conversion. We should be involved in such good works that those outside Christ will be caused to think about becoming Christians. I believe this includes taking a public stand on the moral and ethical issues confronting our world. This includes being a good citizen of your State and the United States of America. This includes not only being against legislation that is anti-God, but taking time to vote! "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Eph. 5:13-17 – "But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. (14) Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. (15) See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, (16) Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. (17) Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." (KJV)

It's time for Christians to come out of the closet and make their voices heard on moral and ethical issues facing the church and society today. In Arkansas, gambling proponents are gathering their forces again after having their amendments thrown out by the Arkansas Supreme Court. Initially, our religious neighbors took the lead in confronting this issue. The Christian Civic Action Committee and the Arkansas Family Council, and other similar groups were in the forefront of the opposition to any gambling amendments. Where were the

members of the church of Christ? Except for a few preachers and church leaders, most were silent. Many of our own members may not be opposed to gambling or even feel it is wrong. Where were you in the debate?

One group in Northeast Arkansas was formed as the result of a meeting and discussion led by Leo Rainey of Batesville. Leo stimulated church leaders and soon an Anti-Gambling Committee was organized, money raised and pledged, and oppositional advertising was being created. Just before the election, the Arkansas Supreme Court threw out all amendments on legal technicalities. This group realized the gambling industry would be back in full force, renamed itself, stayed organized and decided to broaden its scope.

The new name is **Families First**, its purpose is to "promote positive moral and ethical issues affecting families. We are working for the betterment of our communities. We want to involve Christians in improving our society." We have had several organizational meetings and shortly plan on hosting all State legislators for lunch from the First Congressional District to let them know our position on gambling issues as well as other moral and ethical issues facing our families. **Families First** plans on beginning a newsletter, organizing a telephone network; acquainting lawmakers with the church of Christ, helping Christians become better informed on moral and ethical issues and strengthening families.

Once **Families First** is well organized, with a leader in each county in the First District, then we want to meet with other church leaders from the other parts of the State and share our mission and experience with them, hoping they will organize a Families First organization in other Districts. We believe it is time for Christians to come out of the closet and take a stand on issues which affect all of our families. We don't intend to reinvent the wheel and duplicate what other similar organizations are doing. Our main thrust will be to inform, inspire, motivate and encourage

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Mammoth Spring, AR 72554

Ted J. Clarke EDITOR

Phone (501) 625-3217

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Christians to take a stand on issues affecting the family. **Families First** does not take anything away from our main work as Christians in evangelizing, compassionate works, or edification. In fact, much of what we will be doing is for the edification of the church. And, this can be an effective evangelistic effort as it brings us in contact with other concerned citizens, community leaders and politicians.

Eph. 5:8-14 - "For ye were sometime darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (9) [For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth:] (10) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. (11) And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. (12) For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. (13) But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. (14) Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." (KJV)

What can you do to help? Would you become a member of **Families First** in your community? Would you become a part of a telephone network and contact at least 10 other Christians in your community when legislation is being considered and ask your local representatives to vote yes or no on that legislation? Would you encourage others to become a member? Would you contact your local news media and let them

know of your local committee's efforts and positions? Would you encourage your congregation to become more aware of how they can effectively stop the creeping tide of loose morals and ethics in our State and Federal governments? This is not a political organization, but is composed of Christians from all political parties. If you would like to have more information, or work to actively begin a local committee associated with **Families First**, you may contact me or other committee members for information. We will be glad to come and talk with a group in your community.

5515 Old Walcott Road
Paragould, Arkansas 72450
(501) 239-4031

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Gambling is a curse on American society. Big money interests are willing to spend millions to make hundreds of millions. The poor and would-be-rich are deceived into thinking their dreams will come true and all their problems will vanish with just one lucky streak. But not only are the odds stacked against you, the desire to be and seeking to be rich are traps which very often lead to greater problems. Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10! Gambling is a moral issue, thus a Bible issue, and the **Fulton County Gospel News** will again seek to persuade and inform its readers regarding the principles of God's Word and gambling. We urge all of our Christian readers to become active in opposing the spread of gambling in our state. Become a part of **Families First** or some other group of concerned Christians who are uniting to fight the good fight in opposing gambling. For more information you may write to James Balcom at the above address or you may contact Leo Rainey, 1230 Marywood Drive, Batesville, AR 72501; phone (501) 698-2154.*

Do whatever comes your way to do as well as you can. Think as little as possible about yourself and as much as possible about other people and about things that are interesting. Put a good deal of thought into happiness that you are able to give.

- Eleanor Roosevelt

Have a heart that never hardens, a temper that never tires, and a touch that never hurts.

- Charles Dicken

If you are wrapped up in yourself, you are overdressed.

SAVED BY GRACE

Ephesians 2:8-9

by Joel Wheeler

The subject of "grace" is often misunderstood among religious people. The apostle Paul wrote, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God: Not of works lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). Most individuals take this to mean that God saves us by his grace and that we have no part in it. But these individuals have simply misread the verse to come to that conclusion. The verse does not say that we are saved by grace alone. In fact, the verse says "for by grace are ye saved through faith." These individuals leave out "through faith."

The word "grace" has several meanings and in Ephesians 2:8 it means "divine favor or gift," according to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance. Grace is a favor from God that cannot be earned.

Perhaps we could better understand this with an Old Testament example. Noah was "saved by grace through faith." In Genesis 6:5-7, God saw the wickedness of man was great and it repented Him that He had made man. God determined to destroy man, beast and the fowls of the air by flood waters. Then the Bible says, "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:8). Contrary to what some individuals say, there was **grace** in the Old Testament, But, did **grace alone** save Noah from the flood? Noah was saved by grace through faith. *By faith, Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became the heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Heb. 11:7).* If Noah had been saved by **grace alone**, God would have built the ark for him. But Noah was saved by his obedient faith. God told Noah that he would destroy the earth by water and Noah believed God and acted upon his faith. Noah was told by God the length, width, height that he should build the ark. God told him to use a specific kind of wood, to make a window, to make one door, to pitch it within and without. "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he" (Gen. 6:22).

There were two parts to salvation from the flood waters, God's part and Noah's part. God's part was **Grace**. God gave Noah a way to escape the destruction of the earth by the waters of the deluge. That was God's grace. Noah did what he

was instructed by God to do. That was obedient **Faith** on the part of Noah. The ark had to be built according to the instructions given by God (Gen. 6:22) and Noah had to get in the ark before he was saved from the flood. No one was saved outside of the ark during the great flood waters (II Pet. 2:5).

Just as grace and faith were involved in the saving of Noah and his family from the flood (Heb. 11:6; II Pet. 2:5), so are grace and faith involved in man's eternal salvation (Eph. 2:8). "For by grace are ye saved" (Eph. 2:8). is God's part in man's salvation. The "gospel is God's power unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16) and we cannot be saved without it. The gospel was given by God's grace that has been extended to all men. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men" (Titus 2:11). Man would have no way for his sin to be forgiven if we did not have the gospel which was given by the grace of God.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith..." (Eph 2:8). Faith is man's part in salvation. "But without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6). The Hebrew writer describes faith as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Our faith must not be in a multiplicity of gods, but the one God (Eph. 4:4-6). Our faith must be better than the faith of demons (James 2:19). Our faith must not refuse to confess Christ (John 12:42, 43).

"For by grace are ye save through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8). This is where the religious world gets confused. What Paul is saying is that salvation is not of ourselves. Faith is not the gift, salvation is the gift. "For the wages of sin is death: but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). God does not give us faith! God gives us evidence to consider and we can accept it or reject it.

If a man falls overboard from a ship into the high seas, he will drown if not rescued. If an individual from the ship throws him a lifeline, the man in the water must grab hold of it to be pulled to safety. The one in the sea can either accept the lifeline or reject it. The lifeline is the way to be saved from the sea. God's grace is the lifeline to lost man. The lost man must put forth the effort to grab God's lifeline or he will lose his

soul in eternal damnation. Jesus 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).

Man does not deserve to be saved and God does not owe salvation to any man. But God in his rich mercy has extended a way for man to be saved from eternal hell. Salvation is not unconditional, obedience is required. "And being made perfect he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him..." (Heb. 5:9). Jesus said, He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). The Bible teaches that salvation is not universal. "Not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21).

One must realize that not only are we saved by grace (Eph. 2:8), but we are also saved by preaching (I Cor. 1:21), saved by the gospel (Rom. 1:16), saved by faith (Heb. 11:6), saved by repentance (Acts 17:30, 31; Luke. 13:3, 5), saved by baptism (I Peter 3:21), saved by confessing the Lord Jesus (Rom. 10:10), saved by works (James 2:24) and saved by hope (Rom. 8:24). Not one scripture can prove that we are saved by any of these **alone**. One cannot leave out part of God's plan and be saved.

328 Monroe St.
Thayer, MO 65791

SIN IS "TROUBLE"

by Brian W. Jones

The Associated Press recently reported that a 100-pound calf jumped into a suburban swimming pool in McDonald, Pennsylvania. Ironically, the cow's name is TROUBLE.

The cow struggled unsuccessfully to get out of the water. The owner of the pool tried to keep the calf's head above the water. Finally, fire fighters on the scene decided to call a tow-truck for assistance. The tow-truck hoisted the cow out of the water to safety.

The above story has some real parallels to Christianity. Some Christians tend to get as close as possible to the pool of sin without actually jumping in. However, the temptation to sin is extremely strong. By allowing oneself to stay within sin's range of influence,

many weak (and some stronger) Christians will jump overboard into the pool. They will enjoy the "pleasures" of sin for a season (Hebrews 11:25). Then they will realize the TROUBLE that they are in. They may even try to leave sin on their own. However, without God's help they will be unsuccessful. We too need to be hoisted to safety.

The only way to save a drowning sinner is through Jesus Christ. The sinner must decide to put away his sinful behavior (2 Cor. 7:9-10). Then Christ will hoist the sinner back into a proper relationship with Him (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:7-10).

Sin is TROUBLE. However, if you've fallen into its trap, there is a way out. Try practicing these guidelines:

- * Use God's word, Ps. 119:11
- * Guard the tongue, Ps. 39:1
- * Avoid evil companions, I Tim. 5:22
- * Confess to the Lord, I John 1:8,9
- * Go to the Advocate, I John 2:1

2900 Camden Ave.
Parkersburg, WV 26101

You can tell that a child is growing up when he quits asking where he came from and starts refusing to tell where he is going.

To belittle is to be little.

CONTRIBUTIONS

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WHEN MEN LEAVE GOD

by James D. Burns

In studying Romans 1:21-25, we detect this thought in these verses: when people have the wrong view of God, all of their thinking and actions become distorted.

Those of whom Paul wrote had a wrong view of God. "They did not glorify him as God, nor were thankful" (v. 21). Further, they "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man — and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things" (v. 23). He also observed that they "exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (v. 25). The concept they had was not that of the living and true God.

How did this affect them? They "became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (v. 21). A wrong view of God affected their thinking. Men can't think straight without God.

They had an inaccurate view even of themselves. "Professing to be wise, they became fools" (v. 22). Those who have degenerate thoughts of God have an exalted view of themselves. Although foolish, they view themselves as wise.

They "worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (v. 25). People tend to worship that which they consider greater than themselves. Evidently they considered creatures — men, birds, beasts, creeping things — greater than themselves and worthy of their worship and adoration. It is ironic that they had an exalted view of themselves, "professing to be wise," but at the same time such a low view of themselves they could honor creatures in their worship. Their thinking was certainly warped!

These verses also indicate that they "dishonor their bodies among themselves" (v. 24). He elaborates on this in following verses (v. 26-27). Considering the gods they worshipped and the distorted view they had of themselves, we are not surprised how they treat their own bodies.

When people have a wrong view of God, it affects all their thinking and actions.
3380 Coleman Ave.
Memphis, TN 38122

*He who sows courtesy, reaps friendship,
And he who plants kindness, gathers love.*

*Those who bring sunshine to the lives
of others cannot keep it from themselves.*

UPWARD AND ONWARD

by Tony Boyd

Christians are challenged at every stage of our development to move ever upward and onward. From the very beginning, the Christian journey is one of actively seeking improvement and growth. *"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also [in the likeness] of [his] resurrection: (Romans 6:3-5).* Paul's clear teaching that as we rise from the watery grave of baptism we are to live a new life, one totally different from before.

As we grow in Christ, our journey is also a forward one. *"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but [this] one thing [I do], forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14).* Our upward journey requires us to constantly press forward, toward new challenges and experiences within the body of Christ.

The ultimate goal of course, is heaven. The only way to reach heaven is by moving upward and onward. We cannot afford to remain satisfied with past accomplishments, nor with present conditions. *"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God" (Hebrews 6:1).*

An old song that is favored by many, is titled "Higher Ground." It says, "I'm pressing on the upward way, new heights I'm gaining every day. Still praying as I onward bound, Lord plant my feet on higher ground."

Is that your prayer for your life today?

HCR 81, Box 75
Salem, MO 65560

*All... have their frailties: and whoever
looks for a friend without imperfections
will never find what he seeks. We love our-
selves, notwithstanding our faults, and we
ought to love our friends in like manner.*

We cannot stumble when we are on our knees.

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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