

# 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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## The Scarlet Letter

by Ted J. Clarke

### Introduction

In 1850 the famous author Nathaniel Hawthorne penned his book entitled, "The Scarlet Letter". In this book women who committed adultery were forced to wear a scarlet colored "A" as a part of the punishment for their sexual sins. I do not remember much more about that book, but I know that in the Bible adultery has been marked out as a sin upon which God does not look favorably. Although today's society has included adultery as an acceptable sexual sin, God's word condemns it in no uncertain terms.

Under the law God gave to Moses adultery was prohibited in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:14). In Leviticus 20:10 both parties involved in adultery were to be put to death. While Jesus showed that adultery was not an unforgivable sin (John 8:1-11), He clearly taught that it was sinful (Matthew 5:27-28, 32). Christ's teaching also implied that unforgiven adulterers will not inherit eternal life (Mark 10:17-19). The Lord promised His apostles inspired instruction in "all truth," including "many things" He did not address while He was with them (John 16:12-13). As a recipient of this revelation, the apostle Paul lists adultery as a sin of unrighteousness which will keep one out of God's heavenly kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 5:19). Even though one may not be marked with the scarlet letter "A" to identify one as an adulterer, God knows all who are guilty and will not allow sexually immoral people to inhabit heaven (Revelation 21:8; 22:15). In addition to the passages already given, the Proverbs are especially rich in warnings to avoid the sin of adultery (Proverbs 2:16-19; 5:3-4; 6:24-33; 7:5-23; 9:13-18; 23:27-28; 30:18-20).

### Adultery and Forgiveness

Notice that the apostle Paul mentions adultery along with other sins such as

idolatry, thievery, drunkenness, homosexuality, etc., as sins which will keep one from heaven (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). This fact highlights the seriousness of these sins! How gracious God is to offer forgiveness for these sins through Christ (verse 11)! Can idolaters (those who worship other gods) be forgiven? Yes, assuming that they come to God through Christ and quit doing those things which make them idolaters. Can homosexuals be forgiven? Yes, if they obey the gospel of Christ and stop the homosexual acts. Well, can adulterers be forgiven? Absolutely! If they are willing to give up the things which make them adulterers, they can be "washed . . . sanctified . . . [and] justified in the name of the Lord, Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). Note that Paul says, "And such were some of you," showing that something(s) had happened to cause God to no longer look upon the Corinthians as being guilty of these sins.

First, it is plain that God assumed that these people could understand what was involved in these sins. Paul did not say, as some are saying today, "Well, there are a lot of different definitions of idolatry, stealing, homosexuality, and adultery. Equally educated and good men cannot agree on what each of these words really means, so there is no way we can take a stand on any specific meaning. We'll just have to let each person decide which definition he/she wants to follow. Let's be gracious and not judge another just because his/her definition isn't the same as ours." Brethren and friends, that kind of approach will allow anyone to prove anything and take a stand on nothing! Should we accept any and every definition of baptism just because everyone doesn't agree on immersion? This is the logical conclusion of the false attitude expressed in the quote above, and it is the direction in which many are headed. All of the standard works in the Hebrew

and Greek languages, from which the Old Testament and New Testament were translated, define literal adultery as sexual relations by a married person with another who is not that person's spouse (see FCGN, Vol. 27, No. 6 [June 1993], pp. 1-2). No one ever thought literal adultery should be defined to exclude the sexual aspects until some men began trying to find excuses to allow people to continue in adulterous marriages. Today, many believe that the Lord was too narrow-minded when He confined the right to divorce and remarriage **only** for the cause of fornication [sexual immorality] (Matthew 19:1-9). Consequently, these people try to get around the Lord's restrictions by redefining adultery. However, their effort fails. Does anyone really believe that Paul taught that idol worshippers could continue to worship idols or that homosexuals could continue to engage in such lewd acts? Why then should one teach that people can continue in adulterous relationships? Since Paul said, "And such were some of you," something changed, but God did not change these sinful practices into righteous ones!

Second, the Corinthians were "washed, sanctified, and justified" because they repented and reformed their lives. Repentance is properly defined as a change of mind that leads to a change of life (Matthew 3:8; Acts 26:20). Thus, thieves must come to agree with God that stealing is wrong and quit the practice. Likewise, homosexuals and adulterers must have a change of mind about their sexual immorality and give it up. Becoming a Christian does not make a thief's practice of stealing a godly occupation, and if a person is in an adulterous relationship and obeys the gospel, that fact does not make his/her sinful sexual relationship holy. God **will forgive** the past sins in one's life, sexual or otherwise, only if one repents and changes to live God's way. These Corinthians had done that as a part of being "washed, sanctified, and justified" by Jesus.

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More Scarlet Letters  
with Different Meanings

Adulterers are lost in sin and will be eternally condemned (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19; Hebrews 13:4). If we cannot know the true meaning of adultery, as some are presently saying, then we cannot know if one is guilty of it or not. Also, since people who commit adultery will be lost eternally, we cannot know whether or not we will be saved, since we cannot know whether or not we are guilty of the sin. The God of the Bible is a righteous judge! He does not tell us that adulterers will be lost eternally and then not give us the ability to know if we or others are adulterers. Jesus assures us that we can know the truth and be saved by it (John 7:17; 8:31-32; 17:17). That would include the truth about what adultery is, how to avoid it, and how to be forgiven of it.

We might suggest that another use for the scarlet letter "A" would be to hang it around the necks of those who deny that we can know what the Bible says about adultery. The "A" would stand for "agnosticism" (since these men say we cannot know what God's word says). The scarlet color would represent the blood of those adulterers who are not taught what to do to be saved from this transgression of God's word. Ezekiel 3:17-21 warns us that the blood of others will be on our hands if we do not warn them (see also Acts 20:26-27). The agnostic says, "I do not really know what to say about adultery," but God's

word is clear enough on this subject and every other subject that has a relationship to our eternal life, as previous Scriptures have shown. John the Baptizer knew what to tell Herod when the king had another man's wife. He told Herod, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife" (Mark 6:17-18). It was not a popular thing to preach, but John loved God more than his own life and feared Him more than men (Matthew 10:28; John 5:44; 12:42-43). Surely John did not enjoy telling Herod that his marriage was not lawful in God's eyes, but he had a duty to God and Herod to speak God's truth.

Another application for the scarlet letter "A" would be to place it on those who are "afraid" to preach what God's word says about adultery. Many preachers know what the Bible teaches on the subject but are afraid they will drive people off or that the elders of the congregation will drive off the preacher if he makes God's word plain on this topic. Again, the scarlet color would be the blood of those lost who were not told the truth so that they could properly repent of the sin of adultery. I know of congregations where Christians, who were clearly guilty of adultery, were allowed to come forward and say that they repented of their sins and were accepted into fellowship, even though they remained in their adulterous relationships. Neither the preacher nor the elders told these people that God's word demanded that they truly repent and reform their lives, including the giving up of their adulterous unions. **Remember, adulterers will not enter into heaven** (1 Corinthians 9:11; Revelation 21:8)!!! How can we be quiet about that?!

Others, whether preachers, elders, or teachers of God's word, seem to be afraid to teach non-Christians the truth about adultery. In teaching lost souls we may not always know that adultery exists in the lives of those whom we baptize, but when we discover that such is the case we must be as loving as Christ (John 8:1-11) and as bold as John the Baptizer (Mark 6:17-18). To do less than this is to fail to teach everything profitable and to neglect to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:20, 27). If we know that adultery exists in the lives of those with whom we study, we should teach them about God's word on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, making certain that they understand

what God expects as their response in repentance to the salvation Jesus offers. Would you baptize a thief who said he would not quit stealing, or a homosexual who intended to continue his/her sexual immorality? I could not do so, for repentance precedes baptism (Acts 2:38). Neither could I scripturally baptize any who refuse to give up an unscriptural marriage, which is in fact an adulterous union. Preachers, elders, or church leaders who sanction baptizing those who are living in adultery will be guilty of the blood of those whom they lead astray, for allowing them to believe that they are acceptable before God when in fact they are condemned. It would not be too strong to say that such leaders should have a scarlet letter "A" fixed to them to mark them as "apostates" from the moral teaching of God's word (Isaiah 5:20).

Conclusion

A person or congregation that ignores God's word on adultery will ignore the authority of God's word in other areas when it is convenient to do so. Of course, no one is going to literally hang a scarlet letter on another to identify him/her as guilty of a particular sin. We do need to remember that all of our sins are known to God (Hebrews 4:13) and that we will give an account of ourselves on the judgment day (Romans 14:12; 1 Corinthians 5:10). We will not be excused from the sin of adultery by saying, "Well, Lord, this preacher told me I was O.K.," or, "Well, the elders never said my marriage was wrong. Why blame me?" Some people who are in adulterous relationships keep on asking preachers and elders until they find one who will tell them what they want to hear. Such people do not love the truth and usually persecute those who teach the whole truth of God's word (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 2 Timothy 4:2-5).

Admittedly, there are some complex issues involved in divorce and remarriage which are difficult to deal with. People can weave such a tangled web of sin in their lives that one cannot often give such people the encouragement that they would like to hear. At times a preacher or elder might have to say, "There is no solution to your situation except for you to leave your adulterous relationship." John the Baptizer told Herod that (Mark 6:17-18); Jesus implied the necessity of it when He taught

that remarriage was possible only by the innocent partner of an adulterous mate (Matthew 19:9). Other remarriages are adulterous, except in the death of a spouse (Romans 7:2-3). Peter said that Paul gave some teaching that was "hard to be understood," but not impossible (2 Peter 3:15-16). With diligent study one can know God's truth regarding adultery, live to avoid it, and teach others the truth about it. If I did not believe this, I would not pretend to be serving the God of the Bible or try to save people by teaching them the gospel of Christ. Remember, "fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4), and He will judge you and me if we do not teach the truth about these things (John 12:48-50).

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*You can never do a kindness too soon, because you never know how soon it will be too late.*

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### Jotham's Parable of the Bramble King

by H. Joe Spangler

"And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you. The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us. But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon" (Judges 9:7-15). ". . . whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning . . ." (Romans 15:4).

At the death of Gideon, Israel forgot

him and his work to bring them out of apostasy, and began to worship Baalberith. Gideon died, leaving 70 sons (including Jotham) by his wives and one son (Abimelech by his concubine in Shechem (Judges 8:32-35). At this point Abimelech connived the men of Shechem into making him their king instead of any of the 70. Receiving their appointment, he proceeded to slay the 70 upon one stone at Ophrah. Jotham hid himself during the ordeal and upon hearing of it proclaimed the above parable. For three years the men of Shechem allowed Abimelech to cruelly reign over them until they sought to ambush him. However Abimelech, learning of their plot, escaped and defeated them, destroying their city and sowing it with salt, making it useless! Ah, they failed to heed the parable of the bramble king and its fire destroyed the mighty cedar (cf. Judges 9:1-6).

The lesson for us is this: When good men won't lead or serve, evil ones will; where God's people won't labour, Satan will; when God's men don't stand for the truth and stomp out error, Satan will sow his damnable seed and salt on his adversaries (God's men). Letting evil reign will destroy us just as it did the men of Shechem.

Are we not in danger of letting the bramble rule? Consider the area of educating our young. Public education has been and still can be a blessing, yet in the last few decades the bramble of humanism has taken over our school systems. The floodgate was opened with the famous Scope's Trial and allowing the lie of evolution to be taught in our schools. A casual look at the system reveals that the brambles have tumbled into and oversee textbooks, teaching colleges, and the public education system in general. Fires will come out of these brambles; generations who will know not God. While our children spend 30 hours a week at school versus 4 hours in Bible study and some time in home instruction (?), we better stand up and warn our children of the fallacy of evolution and humanism and instill faith in Jehovah.

Due to relaxing our battle against Satan, his vanguards have taught our nation that it matters not what a man believes, nor how he lives. Such bramble doctrines as "faith only," "grace only," and "universalism" are relied on as protection against the fires of the last

day (cf. 2 Pet. 3). Many a cedar will fall in flames because good men fail to rise in battle and rescue a mighty forest that could be to the glory of its Maker (cf. Acts 2:40; Eph. 3:21). Where are the legions of men and women who will stand up and protect their neighbors from the "wages of sin"? If good men will not stand, evil will surely stand in their place and triumph.

Many a Diotrefes will wreak havoc in the church if good men fail to lead and serve as overseer of the Lord's church. If good men had taken a stand and disciplined, Diotrefes could not have gained his one-man control. Without the willingness of John, no doubt he would have continued his reign of terror (3 John 9, 10). When good work is left undone, sin triumphs (James 4:17). If knowledgeable men and women will not teach a Bible class, the bramble will rule. When Christian men won't pitch in to care for the building and grounds, the work goes undone, is done inadequately, or is done by those who have neither the time nor health to perform the task. When good men won't visit the sick and seek and save the lost, who will? When the Lord's people don't give of their means to do the good work of the church, who will? When godly men won't take an aggressive role as deacons and elders, the work load must be carried by a few and thus the bramble tax. When Christians no longer encourage their own to be preachers of the gospel, the bramble grows up in the pulpits of our land and chokes out the Word. The same can be said about papers and schools run by the brethren. It is high time the bramble be plucked out, lest it destroy us!

How thankful we should be for those godly men and women who will stand for what is right and do what good must be done. Let us thank our Bible class teachers and encourage them in the work. Let us express our appreciation for elders and vow to them our complete support. Let us lend deacons our encouragement and support. May God bless such and send us more Jothams.

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*Although experience is the most expensive teacher, it has the advantage that we don't forget the lesson so soon.*

**10 Ways to Find Time to Read the Bible**

1. Wake up ten minutes earlier each morning and read.
2. Put a Bible portion under your pillow to read each night before sleep.
3. Talk less and you will have a few more minutes to read.
4. Keep a copy on hand in the kitchen or at the telephone to read while you "hold."
5. Carry a copy of the Bible in your purse or pocket to read while waiting for doctors, unpunctual people, etc.
6. Never go on a trip without your Bible.
7. Keep a copy in the glove compartment of the car.
8. Remember, a Bible in your hand is worth two on the table.
9. Turn the TV off and read to your children.
10. Read a verse or two at mealtime when all the family is together.

*It is much easier to make ourselves conform to the Bible than to make the Bible conform to our ways - and much more honorable.*

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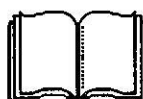


**Recommended Reading**

**Shall We Restructure the Church?**, edited by Curtis A. Gates, is the 1995 lectureship book from the Memphis School of Preaching. This book is not an attack on personalities. Rather, it "explores the implication of modern attempts to restructure the church of Christ, in light of the revealed Word of God" (Gates).

The book contains 47 lessons delivered by faithful men of God and also has eight women's classes. Thomas B. Warren, Winfred Clark, Roy J. Hearn, Dub McClish, Joe Gilmore, Ted Knight, Robert R. Taylor, Gary Colley, and a number of other great gospel preachers explore the theme depicted above. Special sections include an Introduction to the theme, The Lord's Church Under Attack, Truth, Morals, Various Heresies, False Teaching, Influences Upon the Lord's Church Today, The Threat of Liberalism, Safeguarding the Lord's Church, Innovations in the Worship of the Church, The Lord's Church, and Women's Classes. This is literally a handbook on matters which are leading the Lord's church into apostasy today. Every elder and gospel preacher should have a copy in order to inform themselves of the serious problems which plague the church today. Every church library should also have a copy and members should be informed of such and encouraged to read the book. The book is dedicated to Roy J. Hearn, who served as the director of the Memphis School of Preaching for 17 years.

You will be amazed at the wealth of material contained in this book! It is 839 pages long and filled with information on men and movements in our midst which seek to lead us astray. But these lessons not only tell about the problems which beset us, they also deal with solutions from God's Word! Yes, the book names names of some prominent false teachers to alert elders, preachers, and congregations to the dangers of associating with such men (1 Timothy 1:19-20; 2 Timothy 1:15; 2 John 9-11). If you are concerned by the attempts of some to turn the church into another denomination, you will want to study this book. You can purchase this book from the Memphis School of Preaching, 4400 Knight Arnold Road, Memphis, TN 38118. The cost is \$14.00, plus postage and handling. That is a lot of book for the buck.



**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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