

# FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS - 72554 EDITION

BI-MONTHLY PERIODICAL OF MAMMOTH SPRING CHURCH OF CHRIST

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## God Is Not Far Away!

Barry O'Dell

It is easy to read Hebrews 13:5-6, where the Bible says, “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” It’s easy to read Psalm 46:1 which tells us, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” But what about during the difficulties? What about the times of suffering and loss? What about the times when we feel like David when he wrote, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, and from the words of my groaning” (Ps. 22:1)? Had God forsaken David? All one has to do to answer that question is keep reading the Psalm. “You have answered me...For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from him; but when he cried to Him, He heard” (Ps. 22:24). God did not forsake David and, incidentally, God did not forsake His own Son on the cross! God did not turn His back on Jesus as Jesus accomplished His Father’s will for the salvation of mankind (Isa. 53:11)!

The nation of Israel became an apostate nation – separated from God – because of her

persistent sin (Isa. 59:1-8). Isaiah’s prophetic work was during the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (1:1). He warned the Southern Israelites of their sins. They had become a “sinful nation, laden with iniquity” (1:4). Where was God? Isaiah was commissioned to do his work in the midst of a “people of unclean lips” (6:5). Where was God? The nation refused to seek the Lord (9:13). Where was God? In the midst of his work as a prophet and among a sinful nation, Isaiah was reassured that God was still on His throne (6:1). God was not absent or incapable of saving His people. The solution to Judah’s problem of disconnect from God was, “I dwell in the high and holy place with him who has a contrite and humble spirit” (57:15).

If God seems far away, who moved? We cannot forget that God has never abdicated His throne! God has never changed the requirements of humble submission to His will in order to be close to Him. As a contemporary of Isaiah, Micah wrote, “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8).

There is no doubt that there are times in life when we **feel** as if God has forsaken us. That was

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“If God seems far away,  
who moved?”

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## God Is Not Far Away!...continued

precisely what David was expressing in Psalm 22. Think of the troubles that he faced in life, many of his own making. Adultery. Murder. The death of an infant. The revolt and death of Absalom. Dwelling in caves. He was surrounded by the enemy (Ps. 22:12-13). He felt completely powerless (Ps. 22:14-15). Yet, God had not forsaken him (Ps. 22:24)!

David may have **felt** forsaken in difficult moments, but he was not. God does not forsake His people who are following Him! The child of God is assured that he is *“in Him”* and that he can *“know”* that he is in Him (1 Jn. 2:3-6). One’s relationship with God is not determined by how he **feels** in a moment of time, but on conformity to his Father’s will (1 Jn. 2:3; 5:2-3). So, if God

**feels** far away, is He? Not necessarily. What causes the disconnect between man and God is sin. Those who live in sin are *“of the devil”* (1 Jn. 3:8). Those who have obeyed the gospel have the responsibility to *“walk in the light as He is in the light”* (1 Jn. 1:7). To pagans in Athens Paul said that God *“is not far from each one of us”* (Acts 17:27). What a wonderful and hopeful thought! While God is just and holy and will not tolerate sin, He is accessible. Anyone can be saved from sin, but it must be done on God’s terms and not our own (Rom. 10:1-3). Remember, God has not abdicated His throne! *“The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms”* (Deut. 34:27). If God seems far away, who moved?

### The God of Hope Has a Message of Hope

Barry O’Dell

**P**aul wrote to the church in Rome, *“Now may the **God of hope** fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in **hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit”* (Rom. 15:13). The books of the New Testament were originally written in the Greek language. The word translated into English as **hope** comes from a Greek word that means, *“expectation (of either good or bad); in the Christian sense, joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation.”*

There are many verses that show the above definition to be accurate. Christians can *“rejoice in **hope**”* (Rom. 5:2).

We read that *“**hope** does not disappoint”* (Rom. 5:5). *“But if we **hope** for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance”* (Rom. 8:25). Paul wrote of *“the **hope** which is laid up for you in heaven”* (Col. 1:5). There is the *“**hope** of salvation”* (1 Thes. 5:8). Jesus Christ is *“our **hope**”* (1 Tim. 1:1). God has promised the *“**hope** of eternal life”* and He cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

The God of hope has a message of hope. Outside of Christ there is *“no **hope**”* (Eph. 2:12). All spiritual blessings are *“in Christ”* (Eph. 1:3). If

a person has not been baptized *“into Christ”* (Gal. 3:26-27) and *“for the remission of sins”* (Acts 2:38) they are not in Christ. As such, they have no reasonable expectation, i.e., **hope** of heaven.

There are some religious groups (even in our small community) that will tell you that you can go to heaven after this life **only if** you have been individually predestined by God to go. Think about the **lack of hope** that a system like that promulgates! Yet, Scripture tells us that

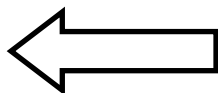
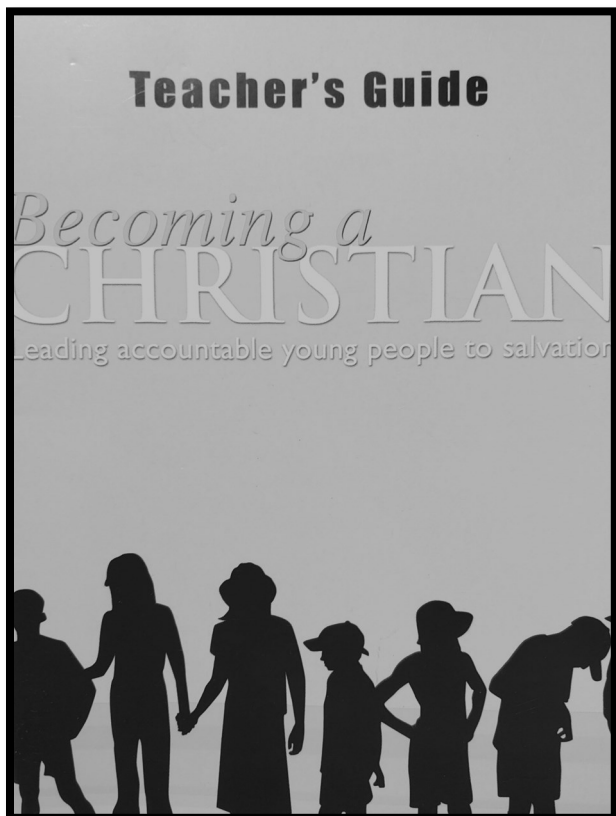
*“whosoever will”* can drink of the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17). Whoever is willing to submit their own will to God’s revealed will (*Scripture*) can

live in the hope - remember the definition from the first paragraph - of heaven.

Reader, do you sincerely, based on a knowledge of Scripture, have a reasonable and joyful expectation of being with God in eternity when this life is over? If not, why not? If not, would you be willing to study the Bible to learn God’s will for you life? Your eternal salvation is not dependent upon how you **feel** about it. You must do what God requires. You must come to Him on His terms!

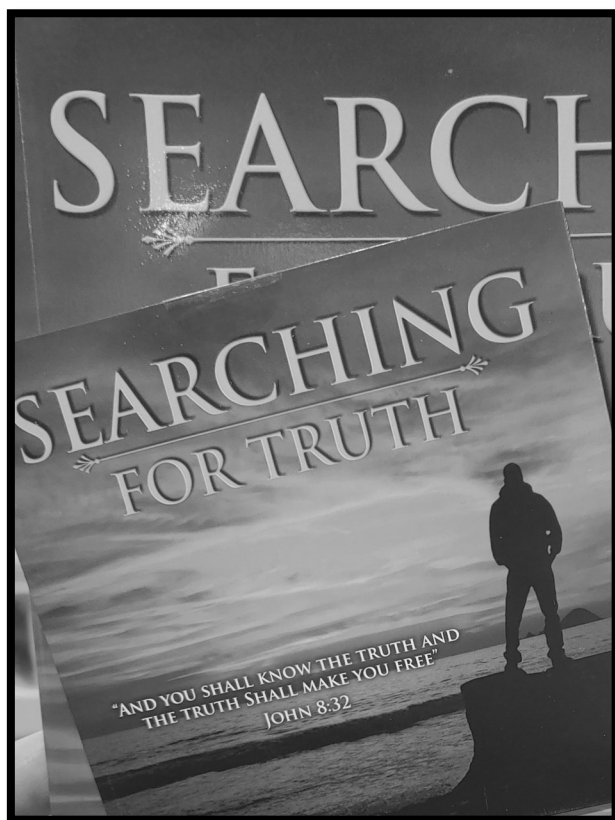
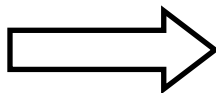
*“the joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation.”*

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### Unique features of the Church of Christ

- We use the Bible only (2 Pet. 1:3). We have no creed book, convention, or central headquarters.
- Our name is after the One who died to establish His church (Rom. 16:16).
- The church of Christ began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4).
- Jesus promised to establish His church (Matt. 16:18).
- That church was purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28).
- The church is married to Christ (Rom. 7:4).
- It was established in the first century (Acts 2:41, 47).
- Jesus is the one and only Head of the One Body (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23).
- You can only be added to the church by God Himself (Acts 2:41, 47).

### What about being saved?

- All people are saved by grace, though faith (Eph. 2:8-9).
- No one is saved by faith alone (Jas. 2:14-26).
- No one is saved by grace alone (Matt. 7:21).
- Jesus said that belief plus baptism will produce salvation (Mk. 16:16). That is a promise, not a command.
- The Bible teaches that repentance plus baptism produces remission of sins (Acts 2:37-38).
- Belief, confession, and baptism is seen in the account of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:37-38).
- The Corinthians heard, believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:8).
- Christ is "put on" in baptism (Gal. 3:26-27).
- The apostle Peter said that "baptism does save us" (1 Pet. 3:21).

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