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Why Is Church Attendance Declining?

Why has churchgoing in the United States declined by such a big percentage in the past 11 years? Weekly attendance at church by adults in America—as just revealed by the Gallup Poll—dropped from 49 percent in 1958 to 42 percent in 1969. The persons surveyed were not asked for the reasons, but it was noted that the drop among Roman Catholics was about twice as large as among the protestant groups and that the drift away is "principally among young adults of all faiths."

Many observers who have learned about the drop-off and have asked their friends about it have been told that there is widespread disapproval of the tendency of clergymen to preach sermons about governmental affairs rather than to deal with personal concepts.

While the "separation of church and state" is accepted as constitutional doctrine, many ministers nowadays believe in trying to mold public opinion by devoting sermons to political issues. If the preachings were confined to the obligations of individuals, telling them why they should lead orderly lives, there could hardly be any criticism. But many who have been attending church feel that the ministers have gone too far in putting so much stress on issues that are really not related to spiritual guidance.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

A large drop-off in attendance by Roman Catholics may or may not be due to the participation by priests in public affairs, but it is well known that in some parishes the clergy have been in the forefront of demonstrations and protests. The churchgoer expects to be given advice on personal living and to hear sermons which stimulate the individual to help his fellow man. Some of those who have quit going to church say that not only are they in disagreement with the preacher's views on public issues but that often the church services are not marked by thought-provoking sermons concerning the many frustrating problems of everyday life.

There has been a noticeable increase of sermons in recent years on highly controversial subjects that are being agitated in various public demonstrations, particularly by the young people. Many ministers feel that it is their duty to

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Touch Not, Taste Not

By Clovis Ragsdale

Man learned early in his existence how that he could partake of alcohol and over stimulate his body and achieve a "high" feeling. In the ninth chapter of Genesis we learn of Noah becoming drunken. In our present time drunkenness is one of the greatest curses we have to face.

It is estimated that close to eighty million Americans drink to some degree. This is over half of our adult population. One half of all arrests made relate to alcohol. Over half of all fatal highway accidents are caused by drinking drivers. The cost in dollars is impossible to estimate when we take into consideration the amount of time lost on jobs, insurance claims, doctors bills, and cost of alcoholic beverage. It would run into many billions.

The worst danger from use of strong drink is the danger of becoming an alcoholic. There are about eight million in the United States. Doctors now tell us that alcoholism is a disease and people who are addicted should be treated with pity and understanding instead of scorn as we have in the past. It is a three fold disease as it affects body, mind, and soul. The alcoholic "lives to drink, and drinks to live." It is most difficult to be cured of this disease, once it is fully developed. A strong will-power is needed and most who become alcoholic do not possess this trait. Methods of treating this problem have been developed that help in some cases.

We would like to point out that in recent years a new problem has developed. The use of dope. It has a similar effect on the body and it too is difficult to cure. It too affects the body, mind, and soul. The Bible condemns drunkenness as sinful. This would prohibit the use of extraction that would cause intoxication, whether it be dope, alcohol, or a chemical of any kind.

Soloman said in Proverbs 20:1, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." In the 23rd chapter of Proverbs we have a lot said about this problem. He said that at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.

To escape the danger of becoming trapped by this dangerous habit we should never take the first drink. For those who are drinking now and then it

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The Real Meaning Of Christmas

By Glynn Purdy

During the holiday last year, one of the local papers in San Augustine asked me to write an article on the above subject. The article was written and printed. So many were kind enough to express appreciation for the effort, both in the church and out, that I thought that it might be good to share it with our readers in the Fulton County Gospel News. So for whatever it might be worth, here it is. People mean well and want to do what is right, but some times get caught up in the net of certain practices, and not wishing to be different, many do things without knowing why. Others engage in practices which are not approved by them, yet lack the conviction to say "no".

"Christmas, derived from medieval Christes Masse, the Mass of Christ; the feast commemorating the birth of Christ, observed by the Christian Church annually on December 25. It was, according to many authorities, not celebrated in the first centuries of the Christian Church, as Christian usage in general was to celebrate the death of remarkable persons, rather than their birth. . . . In the Fifth century the Western Church ordered it to be celebrated forever on the day of the old Roman feast of the Birth of Sol, as no certain knowledge of the day of Christ's birth existed." The preceding paragraph is quoted from the Encyclopedia Americana, Page 623, Volume 6.

The Bible does indeed teach us to celebrate the death of Christ (1 Cor. 11:23-29; Acts 20:7), but does not tell us when, nor how to celebrate his birth.

There is much good in our National Holiday, called Christmas. The spirit of brotherly love, the concern for those who are less fortunate than most of us, the sending and the receiving of gifts and greetings of love, the gay attire of the homes and cities, the unselfish spirit which pervades the season; these indeed are good and desirable and truly are commendable attributes of mankind. But do we not sometimes tend to "save up" these things for once a year operation?

If this is so fine one time a year, how wonderful it would be if the same unselfish spirit existed each day of the

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EDITORS: Clovis Ragsdale
and James E. Henley.

Two Congregations Consolidate

The Moten congregation has consolidated with the Pilot Church and no longer meets in the Moten community where worship had been held for more than forty years. The Pilot congregation has been meeting for about three quarters of a century at or about the present location.

Plans for enlarging the present building are in the planning stage. Average Lord's day attendance runs in the sixties. Brother Clovis Ragsdale and Brother Billy Joe Gooden preach on alternate Sundays. Brother Ragsdale preaches also on the second and fourth Sunday nights. Four were baptized the third Sunday in October. A cordial invitation is extended to all who could come and worship with the Pilot Church. Meeting time is 10:30 each Sunday morning.

Touch Not (Cont.)

would be wise to think of drink as being just as dangerous as a poisonous snake and stay as far as you can from it. In the second chapter of Colossians, Paul instructs the christians in Colossae not to follow after false doctrines, especially those who taught that they should keep the Old Law. In verse twenty one he said: "touch not; taste not; handle not." This advice would be well to follow concerning the dope and alcohol that is so prevalent in our present generation. Young people need especially to be on guard against this problem for it can ruin their lives in this life and in the hereafter if they allow this problem to come into their lives before they reach maturity as so many are doing. Have enough character to say no to anyone who offers the first drink and you will never be sorry.

"I Sat Where They Sat"

SAD TIME IN THE LIFE OF GOD'S PEOPLE

About 590 B. C., about 4 years before the destruction of Jerusalem and about 132 years after Israel had been carried into captivity, many from the kingdom of Judah found themselves in Babylonian captivity. These people, most to say the least, had turned against God as they so often did and were now in a strange land, cut off from the prophets who brought to them the word of God. These people, as so many today, were in sin but without the opportunity to know God's will for them at the present time and present state of relationship with God. Today we, members of the Lord's church, are the custodians of God's word, and we, like the prophets of the Old Testament, must take this word to "all the world", or "every creature". The question in most minds is "Am I capable"? "If so, what is the best method of approach"?

GOD'S METHOD WITH EZEKIEL

God had a message of hope for these, His people, and it was God's will that Ezekiel, "Hear the word at my mouth and give them warning from me", Ezk. 3:17. But Ezekiel, being only human and very much like most church members today, was not anxious to go. But God left him no choice if he desired to save his own soul, so reluctantly Ezekiel proceeded to Telebib, by the river Chebar, where the people were in captivity. Now Ezekiel had an urgent message, his time was limited, he was on the spot, so the human way would have been to begin at once. But wait, GOD IS NOT READY FOR EZEKIEL TO BEGIN! Why? Because God knew that Ezekiel was not ready! For Ezekiel did not understand the environment, or the spiritual conditions of the people, nor the why of their spiritual condition. Jesus trained his apostles for three years, Paul was forced to wait for a time before he began in full sway to proclaim the Gospel

of Christ. Our main problem today is that too many members are not ready to teach, solely because they do not take the time nor effort, to understand the background, the environment, the problems, as well as the why of a person's spiritual condition, or religious affiliation. WE WILL FIND, THAT WHEN WE HAVE DONE OUR "HOME WORK" AND HAVE THIS KNOWLEDGE OF THE PERSON TO BE TAUGHT, IN OTHER WORDS WHEN WE ARE READY, THAT THE OTHER PERSON IS ALSO READY! God's method then and now, was and is, to put one's self in the other person's shoes and work with that person as if he were you in his position. Treat him as self! This is always successful!

"SAT WHERE THEY SAT"

When Ezekiel arrived at Telebib, God let him wait seven days as he "sat where they sat" and understood the people and their environment, BEFORE he brought the message of God. AFTER Ezekiel "sat where they sat", he was "ASTONISHED", as you and I would so often be if we really took the time and trouble to look into the "why" of our friends and neighbors. Remember, EVERY PERSON, AT LEAST IN HIS OWN MIND, REAL OR IMAGINARY, HAS A REASON, OR EXCUSE, FOR DOING WHAT HE DOES AND BEING WHAT HE IS! Unless and until, we locate this reason or excuse, there is no hope of teaching this person. So if we do not plan to devote time and effort to this "undercover" work, we may often do more harm than good to "jump the gun" on our prospect! If his soul is worth the whole world, it is worth our whole effort to convert him. WILL YOU TAKE TIME TO SIT WHERE YOUR NEIGHBOR SITS? IF SO YOU WILL MAKE A FIND TEACHER!

GLYNN V. PURDY

MYSELF

Would you know the thought that came to me as I lay half asleep last night, that startled me, keeping me wide awake till the shadows took their flight? Then here is the thought that held me fast as it came in dark to me: "I shall have to live with myself, no matter where I may be; wherever I live, and how long I may live, and whatever the things I do, I can never get away from myself." That startled me, wouldn't it you? And so, as I never can hide myself away from myself, you see, I must make myself so I can like myself, fit for the whole world to see.

May We Always Have

Enough happiness to keep us sweet;
Enough sorrow to keep us human;

Enough faith in ourselves to give us courage;
Enough wealth to meet our needs;

Enough trials to keep us strong;
Enough failure to keep us humble.

Enough friends to give us comfort;
Enough determination to make each day a good day.

—Selected.

The Ultimate Concern

Scientific developments have solved complex problems. However, the most difficult problem cannot be solved or dismissed with mere scientific investigation. The most important consideration and most difficult problem of man is his soul.

Some scientists maintain views regarding the soul of man antithetical of those held by Christians. Many of these scientists would tell the world that mankind is the result of an evolutionary process continuing today. They discount any consideration of an eternal soul created by an infinite God.

Although many of the most famous scientists are evolutionists, this writer maintains a view that man has a soul which should be given special, specific investigation. My views are positive, logical, undeniable facts as presented in the Bible.

First, man has a soul because God "breathed into his (mans) nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). To deny this statement is to deny the honesty of perfection and boundless love of God. Simply, to question the statement is to question God. Scientists might question the sensibility of God and might, therefore suspiciously examine the sensibility of the question. The man who places unchangable confidence in God also places this unchanging confidence in the word of God.

Secondly, man has a soul because God "formed the spirit of man within him" (Zech. 12:1). It might easily be said that animals have souls. The scientist would tell us there are only three known Kingdoms in our world, viz., (1) the Mineral, (2) the Vegetable, and (3) the Animal. Few, if any scientists, would suggest that either mineral or vegetable kingdom has a soul, but there are those who suggest that the animal kingdom may have a soul since man is an animal. But this writer would go even further, pointing out that the vegetable kingdom has a soul. Everything that breathes or has life has a soul in the technical sense. However, man is distinguished from both the animal and vegetable kingdoms because God placed within man a soul or "spirit" which is eternal, making man an immortal being.

Thirdly, man has a soul because it is said, "the soul returns unto God who gave it" (Eccles. 12:7). God, at judgment, will either banish the soul into eternal anguish or admit the soul into eternal bliss, depending on man's use of his soul on the Earth.

Every man must consider the reality of the soul on an individual basis. Regardless

The Real Meaning (Cont.)

year, as it should! Why not have the "real meaning" in our lives each day of the year? So instead of trying to "put Christ back into Christmas" (He was never in Christmas), why not let Christ dwell in our hearts and lives each day where he belongs? This is the only way that the intentions of the "meaning of Christmas", may have the desired impact upon a war-torn, hate-filled world! We have too many "once-a-year", or "once-a-week", Christ seeking people and not nearly enough "Christ-filled" people throughout the year! We need many, many more Christ-filled men and women, that people may know the "true meaning" of the will of the Prince of Peace! Will you help?

We need to separate the home from the church in items of worship. The Bible is clear on the worship of the church and we should know the difference between celebrating a National Holiday in the home and keeping the same National Holiday as worship in the Lord's church. The rules governing the home and the church are not the same! I believe in the "spirit of Christmas", but as there is no authority to bring special programs into the Lord's church concerning the birth of Christ, but is a direct command to have the Lord's Supper upon the "first day of the week" to "celebrate" his death until he comes again; therefore I leave the National Holiday to the homes and remember the Lord's death and resurrection in the church upon the first day of each week. This is by faith and pleases God, for God so commanded! Then why not put Christ in the hearts of men, and not try to "put him back" some place which he has never been in the first place! Church members, let us not over-react to the National Holiday in the homes and as a result lose our influence as a Christian in the local community. Give to God his dues and to Caesar his dues. There is no conflict! Christmas, like the piano, should be kept in the home and not brought into the church! Let us obey God!

Prayer For The Week

Lord, give us the power to live each day as if we were living that day at thy side. Grant us the peace of love and understanding of our fellow man.

—tmb

of the educated men. If in the search for that which lies beyond, one forgets about that which lies within, he has cursed his soul and lost his search.

—Mike Wilson
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Poem to the Editor

L - O - V - E

An "L", an "O", a "V" and an "E"
Spells love as we can plainly see.
Our Heavenly Father sends His
To all people everywhere freely.

The word is small,
The meaning is great.
Pass it on to others.
Do not hesitate.

Love for one another
Does not cost a thing;
When it is returned,
What great happiness it brings.
(G. A. Ammann)

IF ONLY . . .

If only I could sing a song for my master—
A new song, a sweet song, a song full and free.
If only I could write a poem for my master—
A poem that was all any good poem could be.
If only I could pray a prayer to my master—
A prayer full of meekness and gratefulness too,
If only I could speak a thought for my Master—
A powerful thought so enlightening and true
That the world could be moved at its might,
Then, in my sight, I would merit his favor.
But, in this lowly place, I know that God's Grace
Alone can save me; I trust in my Savior.

Ardith Brown

QUESTIONNAIRE

Do you in the church building occupy a pew,
Turn around to see what other's wear, or
Sit behind a head of uncropped hair??
Do you go to worship? to hear God's word
proclaimed and join in hymns and prayer.
Or to just wait until the service is over
to mingle with friends that are there?

Do you sit at the dining table
With the family by your side, and
before partaking of the food
Thank God for all He did provide?

The Christian Youth

By Felix O. Davis

Many older folks seem to have the idea that young people are all wrong. But they are farther from wrong in some ways than we older people are in many ways. Young folk usually stand for what they believe to be right. When we consider one of their favorite slogans, "Tell it like it is" we can see that they want the truth. There is no generation gap so wide that we older people can't bridge by being sincere and honest with them, for many of them are willing to talk about their problems, especially when away from the crowd where they do not fear embarrassment.

It has been rightly said, "The man who sells the boy the whiskey is the one who SHOULD be put in jail instead of the boy who violates traffic laws after he is intoxicated."

The happiest young people on earth are Christians with a clear conscience which is guided by the Bible. They can go forward and face an uncertain future here on earth, with a faith strong enough to surmount these obstacles, that the world puts before them, and know that Heaven is their final goal.

Let us briefly outline some Bible lessons that are necessary to save the soul.

What must I do to be Saved?

1. Hear God's word. (Rom. 10:1-18; Jno. 8:32).
2. Believe in Christ. (Jno. 20:31; Heb. 11:6).
3. Repent of all past sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30,31).
4. Confess faith in Christ. (Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:10).
5. Be Baptized into Christ. (Acts 2:38; Acts 8:38; I Pet. 3:21; Mark 16:15, 16; Matt. 28:19; Rom. 6:4; Acts 10:48).

What Church Should I Join?

1. None. The same process that makes one a Christian also makes him a member of Christ's Church. (Acts 2:41).
2. Let Christ add you to His church, (Acts 2:47) after you have believed in Him, repented of all sins, confessed faith in Him, and been baptized into Him.
3. There is only ONE New Testament Church (Matt. 16:18). a.) There is one Lord, one Faith, and one Baptism. Eph. 4:5). b.) There is one Body. (Eph. 4:4). c.) The Church is His Body. Eph. 1:23, 23; Col. 1:18). d.) Therefore there is only one New Testament Church.

Can one be saved outside the New Testament Church?

1. No. Christ purchased the church with His blood. (Acts 20:28).
2. He is the Saviour of the Body. (Eph. 5:23) and the Body is the Church. (Eph. 1:22, 23).
3. All the saved are added to the Church. (Acts 2:47).

Faith, Hope, Charity

By James D. Jarrett

"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things, for now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face; Now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." (1 Corinthians 13:11-13).

In the past two weeks, we have studied two most important qualities which are fundamental to the proper living of the Christian life. They were faith and hope. The above passage contains both of these qualities plus a third, the quality of charity.

Charity may be defined as, "Christian love", The American College Dictionary. Thus in this article we will consider the words, charity and love as both pertaining to Christian love and will use the words interchangeably.

Charity or Christian love transcends and builds up Christian faith and Christian hope. Without love then, there can be no true faith or true hope. Charity is an integral part of Christian living. The apostle Paul in our text boldly declares that true Christian love is the most vital of all the Christian virtues.

It was love which sent Jesus into the world to live, suffer, and to die so that we might be able to live with him in the life to come. (John 3:16)

Not only are we to have love, but we are to have it fervently or intensely. "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves; for charity shall cover the multitude of sins". (1 Peter 4:8) Love causes us to be good to our neighbor. "And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his neighbor also." (1 John 4:21) We come to God through love. "And we have known and have believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." (1 John 4:16)

Charity is to be desired not only because of its intense nature in this life, and not only because of its all encompassing nature, but because it is the greatest of the three abiding principles. (1 Cor. 13:13) Charity surpasses faith and hope not because they are insignificant, for they are greatly significant. They are essential to Christianity.

Charity surpasses all other virtues because it is eternal in nature. As Matthew Henry has said, "... in heaven faith will be swallowed up in vision, and hope in fruition. There is no room to believe and hope when we see and enjoy—When faith and hope are at an end; true charity will burn forever with

Why Is Church (Cont.)

discuss the problems of government and that they are entitled to do so under the "free speech" clause of the Constitution. But they rarely say anything about the ban on prayers in the public schools. Yet, in many instances "church and state" are blended in the minister's discussions of subjects relating to governmental policy in national and international affairs.

There still is some confusion in the public mind over the restrictions upon prayer which the Supreme Court has ordered. Most people don't realize that the high court ruled merely that no state or city government or public-school authority could prescribe a prayer which students are required to say. There is no prohibition whatsoever against prayer itself if it is conducted by students during a brief recess in classroom work and participation by other students is not compulsory.

SCHOOL RESTRAINED

A vast number of persons have been reading that prayers are uttered at the opening of both Houses of Congress each day and often at other public ceremonies. They don't understand, therefore, why the schools have been singled out for the restraints which have been widely publicized in the last few years.

Youth has always gotten some inspiration in the schoolrooms through the recital of prayers. But today the banning of prayers in the schools has deprived children of "a long-standing opportunity to become impressed with the importance of prayer in their lives. Maybe the statistics will continue to show a decline of interest in church services among young people.

I believe this to be very timely, and I wonder if the Church of Christ, is also a victim of the same problem.

Glynn V. Purdy

the brightest flame—and where God is to be seen as he is, and face to face, there charity is in its greatest height—there, and there only, will it be perfected."

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