

THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



June 25, 2015
Vol. 180, No. 26

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Messengers and guests at the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting June 16 were led by SBC President Ronnie Floyd in an emotional prayer service lasting more than two hours. Of the 5,406 registered messengers, 225 were from Alabama.

Photo by Paul W. Lee

Spiritual — awakening —

Hard, cold convention center floor no deterrent for SBCers in repentant prayer

Nearly 7,000 Southern Baptists gathered to pray during the Tuesday evening session of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) annual meeting June 16-17 in Columbus, Ohio.

People spent more than two hours in repentant prayer — in huddles, on their knees, on their faces, in their seats and at the altar — for prayerlessness, division, racism, prejudice and a multitude of other sins. They prayed for their churches, the SBC, missionaries, the persecuted Church, schools, the nation's leaders and more.

"God, revive Your Church," prayed SBC President Ronnie Floyd. "We pray tonight for spiritual awakening, the next great awakening."

Spiritual leaders from America's churches — including Hispanic, Korean, Native American and African-American pastors — prayed for an end to racism and prejudice as they pledged to work together "as one family."

The prayer event included participants around the world, connected by broadcasts from Daystar Television network and Salem Radio Network, as well as a live stream on the Internet. Early estimates indicated around 8,000 people joined in online.

"The only thing that can ultimately reshape America is a spiritual awakening and a great movement by God," Floyd explained to participants. "There has been no great movement by God without extraordinary prayer. When was the last

time you gathered thousands of people on a Tuesday evening and prayed for spiritual awakening across the United States? We have full confidence in what God can do."

'Greatest sin is pride'

Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church, Plano, Texas, called Southern Baptists to personal repentance.

"God is calling us to brokenness and humility," he said. "The greatest sin is pride."

Surrounded by others of Asian descent, Paul Kim, pastor emeritus of Antioch Baptist Church, Cambridge, Massachusetts, asked Asian-American churches to join him in "racial reconciliation ... in our land."

Ken Whitten, pastor of Idlewild Baptist Church, Lutz, Florida, noted a litany of sins he sees being committed by Southern Baptists, including — among others — skepticism, distrust and a lack of urgency to

reach the world with the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

K. Marshall Williams, pastor of Nazarene Baptist Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was the first of several to pray for racial reconciliation.

"The Bible calls us to be in unity," Williams exhorted prayer meeting participants. "It's not skin; but sin. Come together. Stand up and be the people of God. Rise up."

Vance Pitman, pastor of Hope Church, Las Vegas, Nevada, said, "I have read about revival. I have heard about revival ... but I have never experienced that kind of awakening where I live."

Pitman said he was not content just to read about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit but wanted the nation to experience it like never before.

Floyd urged pastors to hold a similar prayer service in their churches. The prayer guide is available at pray4awakening.com. (TAB, BP)

COMMENT

Convention Leadership Captures ‘Felt Needs’

The two individuals were presented at different times to the messengers participating in the June 16–17 Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) annual meeting in Columbus, Ohio. One did not say a word, the other spoke for about a minute. Neither was scheduled on the program. Yet the two represented the angst felt by many, if not most, gathered for this important annual meeting.

Barronelle Stutzman is a florist from Richland, Washington. When she declined to do floral arrangements for the wedding ceremony of long-time customer Robert Ingersoll, he sued her for discrimination. Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson joined the case charging Stutzman was guilty of discrimination because she “declined to use her creative skills to beautify” the same-sex ceremony.

Stutzman’s religious conviction that same-sex “marriage” is wrong counted for nothing. That she employed homosexuals and had sold flowers to Ingersoll for more than a decade did not matter. That she referred him to another nearby florist did not matter. Washington’s Superior Court found Stutzman guilty and now she may lose her business as well as her home and her retirement.

Kelvin Cochran is from Atlanta where he served with distinction as a fireman both locally and nationally. He was the city’s fire chief when, with permission of the city, he wrote a Christian book designed to help men grow as responsible leaders in their homes and communities. In the book Cochran had a paragraph stating that homosexuality was wrong.

That statement got him fired. Atlanta’s mayor said Cochran could not lead a diversified fire department if he believed homosexuality was wrong. The fact that he had led effectively for years and done so without complaint counted for nothing.

Stutzman and Cochran both embodied what many messengers fear. As American culture moves away from traditional Christian values, those who base their conduct on biblical teachings rather than political correctness may become victims of the change.

Identifying with the Church

Commenting on a statement about same-sex “marriage” released by former SBC presidents, Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church, Plano, Texas, warned the day may be coming when identity with a Bible-believing church may be costly. He shared the story of a member of his church who was employed by a nationally recognized firm. When the employee declined to participate in homosexual-affirming events sponsored by the employer he was reprimanded. Now that reprimand may prevent the employee from getting a raise or a promotion.



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

For messengers gathered at the annual meeting, Stutzman, Cochran and Graham’s unnamed church member all illustrate the nation’s promise of religious liberty is fragile, perhaps even broken. Jehovah’s Witnesses can be excused from classrooms when the Pledge of Allegiance is said but a Bible-believing florist is convicted and fined when she declines to participate in a same-sex “marriage” ceremony. A nationally recognized fire chief is dismissed when he expresses in a book his religious conviction that homosexuality is wrong.

Speaking out

How long before speaking out against homosexuality — whether in the pulpit or on the street corner or in the work place — will be considered hate speech? It already is in some European countries. And in the United States at least one governmental entity — the city of Houston — attempted to subpoena the sermon notes of pastors who preached against homosexuality.

With only days before an expected ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court on same-sex “marriage,” Southern Baptists encouraged one another to uphold biblical teachings about homosexuality and same-sex “marriage” regardless of what the court rules. Through sermons, statements and resolutions, Southern Baptists urged one another not to budge in their opposition to such practices.

At the same time, messengers were advised to protect themselves, their churches, entities and institutions through knowing the law, adopting appropriate policies and practices and clearly communicating official positions.

While helpful and necessary for churches and related organizations, none of this helps people like Stutzman or Cochran who choose to live by their religious convictions in the public square as well as in the local church. These are the people who are on the front lines in the battle for religious liberty in America. These are the ones in primary peril in what many called the most serious threat to

religious liberty since the nation’s founding.

How can courts rule that businesses must revise dress codes in order to accommodate headscarves for Muslim women or the Army must violate personal appearance guidelines for Sikh soldiers but deep, biblically based internal convictions of evangelical Christians about moral conduct find little or no protection at all?

Thankfully convention dialog was free of “gay bashing” that sometimes characterizes discussions about homosexuality. Instead messengers were urged to befriend gays, get to know them, build relationships that can support honest discussions, welcome them to church and other activities. Parents of gay children were urged to love their children, not condemn them.

No one wanted to blatantly discriminate against homosexuals. At the same time, concern about Christians being forced to participate in activities that implied consent to such conduct was everywhere. It was what some might call “a felt need.”

Perhaps that is why some messengers came to the meeting in Columbus in the first place. Registered messengers numbered 5,406 surpassing last year’s total of 5,295. Perhaps that is why an unusually large percentage of messengers stayed to the end to hear an hour-long panel discussion about preparing churches for the expected Supreme Court ruling.

That “felt need” may have accounted, in part, for the participation in the prayer for spiritual awakening evening service June 16. The crowd seemed to be the largest of the convention. And it was a real prayer service. For more than two hours Baptists prayed — often on their knees.

Spiritual experience

Describing a prayer service is almost impossible. Suffice it to say it was a special spiritual experience the likes of which few have ever seen at a convention. Messengers seemed to agree the only thing that can reverse the nation’s cultural drift away from God is another spiritual Great Awakening.

There were other important parts of the annual meeting. Racial reconciliation became an important topic through an Executive Committee report and a convention-adopted resolution. World evangelism was highlighted in a joint missions promotion service sponsored by the International Mission Board and the North American Mission Board.

SBC President Ronnie Floyd deserves commendation for his presiding, his leadership and his vision that helped shape the annual meeting into what may prove to be a historical event. 🙏



"If ye continue in My word, then ... ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:31-32

(ISSN 0738-7741; USPS 011-080)

© The Alabama Baptist, Inc. is published weekly except for one week in July and December by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 1-800-803-5201. Fax: 205-879-6026. Website: www.thealabamabaptist.org. Email: news@thealabamabaptist.org or circulation@thealabamabaptist.org. Periodicals postage paid at Birmingham, Ala., and at additional mailing offices.

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'Rise up and lead'

— President's address —

'Rise up' in a 'dangerous, hopeless world,' Floyd exhorts

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) President Ronnie Floyd called for pastoral leadership in the nation's largest Protestant denomination to seize a "Bonhoeffer moment." Do this by refusing to be silent in the face of persecution, hold on to the Word of God, take heart and be encouraged, he said.

"The lostness has never been greater in our dangerous and hopeless world," said Floyd, pastor of Cross Church in northwest Arkansas, in his president's message at the SBC annual meeting June 16 in Columbus, Ohio.

"Everyone, and I mean everyone, needs to rise up and lead."

Punctuated by frequent applause, Floyd's message, titled "Now Is the Time to Lead," began with broadcast clips showing how "the alarm clock is going off in our nation and across the world."

Citing Romans 13:11 to declare it a "kairos" moment, Floyd described a season "fixed by a sovereign God as a true moment of destiny."

'Not to act is to act'

From Islamic militants' savagery and the horrors of human trafficking to the void of religious liberty that wrongly imprisons believers like Saeed Abedini in Iran, Floyd appealed for Christians to heed the warning of German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was killed in 1945 for his faith.

Quoting from "The Cost of Discipleship," Floyd said the opponent of the Nazi movement was right in saying, "Silence in the face of evil

is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act."

With 153 million orphans worldwide, one-seventh of the world living in extreme poverty, 750 million lacking clean water, continuing natural disasters and the global economy hanging in the balance, Floyd said the world is not only dangerous but living without hope.

He called on Christ-followers to decry all racism and prejudice as well as callousness over the estimated 57 million babies killed since the 1973 Supreme Court ruling on abortion.

"Now we await the outcome of the next possible Supreme Court ruling that could alter our nation's belief and practice on traditional and biblical marriage but also our historic commitment to religious liberty for all people," Floyd said, calling it a watershed moment potentially fueling "the already sweeping wildfire of the sexual revolution" beyond "anyone's control locally, statewide, nationally and globally."

He appealed to Southern Baptists to love all people "even if they are struggling with same-

sex attraction or adultery or anything else," aware that "we are all sinners in need of the Lord's help and grace."

Since neither the Supreme Court nor the culture is the final authority, Floyd insisted that he and thousands of pastors in the nation refuse to officiate any same-sex unions. Advocating freedom of religion, Floyd said Christians in America must stand for that priority, knowing it promotes the common good of the nation and the world.

A few hours after his address, Floyd was re-elected without opposition to a second one-year term as SBC president.

Also elected were Steve Dighton, senior pastoral adviser at Lenexa Baptist Church, Lenexa, Kansas, as first vice president and Chad Keck, pastor of First Baptist Church, Kettering, Ohio, as second vice president.

Floyd and the 16 living former SBC presidents also issued a joint statement June 17 declaring they will stand on the biblical truths concerning marriage despite anticipated legal and civil changes to the definition. (BP, TAB)



Ronnie Floyd

Photo by Matt Miller

President's panel on addressing same-sex 'marriage'

Christians should not undervalue the effect of love or the gospel in relating to gays and lesbians, but faithfulness to the biblical definition of marriage also will prove costly, members of a special panel said June 17.

During the closing session of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) annual meeting, five panelists answered questions from SBC President Ronnie Floyd about how churches and pastors can minister in an American culture that increasingly approves of homosexu-

ality and same-sex "marriage."

Rosaria Butterfield, an author who has chronicled her journey from lesbianism to Christ, told messengers not to "deny the power of the gospel to change lives and to travel at the grass-roots level."

"Your friendships matter," But-

terfield said in explaining how to minister to gays and lesbians.

"Don't underestimate the power of genuinely loving people with a sense of fervency and consistency and honesty. [W]ith compassion, we're going to speak the truth in love, but we've got to show up to do it."

Ryan Blackwell, pastor of First Baptist Church, San Francisco, California, said, "Our churches should be the safest places to have conversations about same-sex attraction."

Butterfield agreed, noting churches should be a place "to work through who I am and whose I am, eventually."

Also on the panel were Matt Carter, pastor of Austin Stone Community Church; Russell Moore, president of the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission; and R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. (BP)

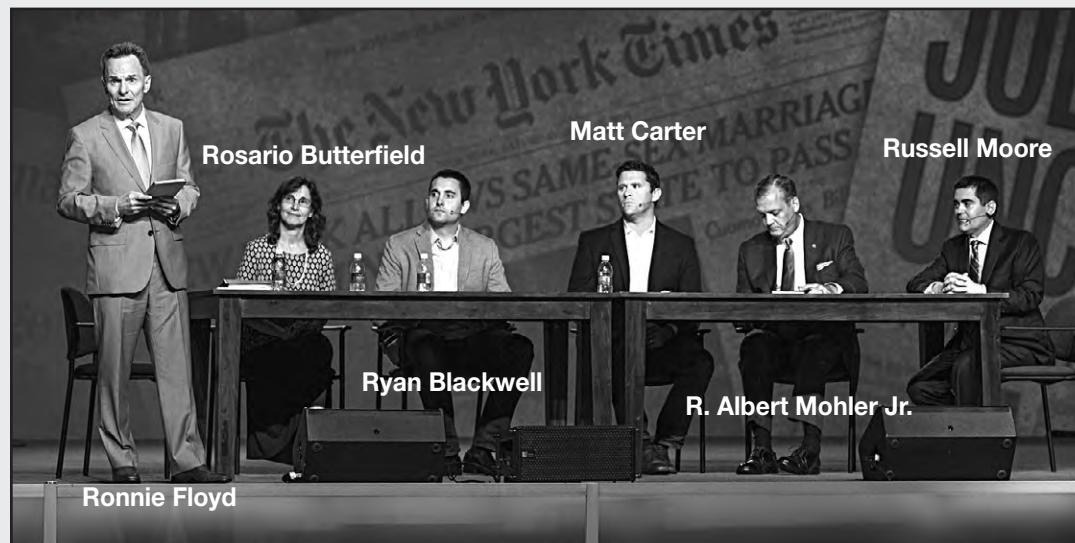


Photo by Paul W. Lee

SBC 2015

Convention business items

Messengers approve expanding NAMB's reach to some overseas work

A \$186.5 million Cooperative Program (CP) budget, an amendment to the mission statement of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and a name change for Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary were among the recommendations affirmed by messengers during the Executive Committee's (EC) report to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) on June 16 in Columbus, Ohio.

Messengers confirmed an update to the SBC constitution regarding qualifications for churches to send messengers to the annual meeting. Messengers also approved a recommendation to approve the use of electronic voting but rejected the EC's suggestion of removing the need for a quorum for voting on matters of business.

The 2015-16 CP Allocation Budget of \$186.5 million designates \$136,518,000 (73.2 percent) of that for world missions, \$41,328,400 (22.16 percent) for theological education, \$3,077,250 (1.65 percent) for ethics and religious liberty ministries and \$5,576,350 (2.99 percent) for the SBC operating budget. The International Mission Board (IMB) is slated to receive \$94,014,650 of the world missions budget; NAMB, \$42,503,350.

NAMB ministry change

Messengers approved an amendment to NAMB's ministry statement to include planting churches overseas in agreed-upon instances with IMB.

The amendment is similar to an amended IMB ministry statement in 2011 to allow IMB to assist with unreached people groups in the United States and Canada.

EC members were told during their February meeting that the amended NAMB statement will relate particularly to military chaplains stationed at bases overseas.

Golden Gate Seminary

Messengers voted to approve a name change for Golden Gate Seminary to Gateway Seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention. The vote was the first of two required to confirm the name change. Messengers at the 2016 SBC meeting will give final approval. The change is part of a transition process to move the main campus of the seminary from Mill Valley, California, to Ontario, California.

Messengers

Messengers gave the necessary second-year approval to officially revise qualifications for churches to send messengers to the annual meeting.

The proposal to revise Article III — with additional recommended adjustments to Article 14 and SBC Bylaw 8 — was a response to a motion from the 2013 annual meeting in Houston that requested updating messenger qualifications. All of the amendments took effect at the end of the 2015 annual meeting.



FRANK S. PAGE

Photo by Bill Bangham

Before the change, Article III stated that churches in friendly cooperation with the convention could send one additional messenger for every 250 members or for each \$250 per year "paid to the work of the convention." The \$250 amount dates back to 1888.

Under the new proposal approved by messengers, each cooperating church that contributes to convention causes during the preceding fiscal year will automatically qualify for two messengers. One additional messenger can be added for each \$6,000 the church contributes in the preceding year through the normative combination of the CP, designated gifts through EC for convention causes and/or to any SBC entity. And churches can now send up to 12 messengers rather than 10.

Messengers overwhelmingly approved the recommendation.

Electronic voting

The results of a vote on SBC bylaw amendments to allow for electronic voting devices in the convention hall was delayed during the business session June 16 when a proposed amendment to the recommendation from the floor went to a ballot vote. The amendment passed and messengers approved the recommendation June 17 after voting to strike a portion of the EC's recommendation that removed the quorum requirement.

The EC's recommendation defined a quorum for voting on SBC business as those present at the time of a ballot, but messengers rejected that definition and left in place the minimum 25 percent of those registered requirement.

Electronic voting is only for messengers present in the convention hall. Voting by proxy is not permitted.

William Blosch, of Georgia, said allowing a quorum to be based on those present at the time of a ballot left room for too few informed messengers to be present to vote.

In its February meeting, EC reported electronic voting could allow the ability to schedule elections closer together and be more efficient in annual meeting programming.

Also during EC's June 15 meeting prior to the convention, the committee found Weatherly Heights Baptist Church, Huntsville, is not in friendly cooperation with SBC. (BP, TAB)

SBC messengers adopt 9 new resolutions

Messengers to the 2015 Southern Baptist Convention adopted nine resolutions — some on culturally divisive issues — with almost no opposition.

All the resolutions offered in the June 16 session at the SBC's meeting gained passage by unanimous or nearly unanimous votes.

Prior to the convention, the Resolutions Committee received only four resolutions, an unusually small number. As a result, the committee initiated more resolutions than normal, but committee chairman Steve Gaines said finding topics proved no problem. "There are so many pressing issues morally and spiritually in our nation right now, it really didn't take long to figure that out," Gaines said.

Approved resolutions

► Urged the Supreme Court in its decision this summer to affirm the right of citizens to limit marriage to a male-female union, reasserted the SBC's belief in the biblical view of marriage no matter how the justices rule and called for religious freedom for individuals and organizations who conscientiously object to same-sex "marriage."

► Called for SBC churches and entities to work toward racial and ethnic diversity in their leaders and encouraged Southern Baptists to be "faithful ambassadors of reconciliation."

► Affirmed the sanctity of human life "at all stages of development" and exhorted Southern Baptists to seek "the repeal of unjust laws and inhumane practices that degrade human life."

► Denounced all religious persecution and called for Southern Baptists to pray for persecuted Christians during personal times and corporate worship.

► Appealed to the North Korean government to respect human rights and urged the U.S. government to pressure North Korea to recognize the religious freedom of its citizens.

► Expressed grief over the destructive impact of pornography and affirmed the power of the gospel of Jesus to deliver those who have committed sexual immorality.

► Pledged a commitment by Southern Baptists to seek God and to pray that He would bring revival.

► Expressed gratitude to God upon the 90th anniversary of the Cooperative Program for His leadership in its establishment and encouraged Southern Baptist churches to consider increasing their giving through it.

► Thanked God and all those who helped with this year's meeting.

One Alabama Baptist served on the committee — Kathy Litton, member of FBC North Mobile, in Saraland. To read the resolutions, visit www.thealabamabaptist.org and search for "2015 SBC resolutions." (BP)

Alabama Baptists among those elected to serve on SBC boards

Alabama Baptists were among those elected at the 2015 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting to serve as members of SBC committees and as board members for SBC entities, denominational boards and seminaries.

Serving together

Those elected from Alabama are:

► Paul S. Hicks, pastor of West Jefferson Baptist Church, Quinton, replacing Steven W. Loggins, director of missions for North Jefferson Baptist Association, with a term to expire in 2019 on the EC.

► Timothy Cox, pastor of Liberty Baptist Church, Chelsea, and Joyce Overstreet, layperson from FBC Bay Minette, for the committee on nominations.

► Rick L. Lance, executive director of

the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, for a second term to GuideStone.

► F. Max Croft, associate pastor of Agape Baptist Church, Scottsboro, and Jay L. Wolf, pastor of FBC Montgomery for second terms as IMB trustees.

► Erin S. Bounds, member of North Valley Baptist Church, Odenville, replacing Larry E. Gipson, pastor of FBC Oneonta, with term to expire in 2019 as a NAMB trustee.

► Timothy M. (Mark) Hindman, member of FBC Prattville, for a second term as a Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary trustee.

► Gregory T. Pouncey, pastor of FBC Tillman's Corner in Mobile, replacing David E. Brown, Wheat Ridge, Colorado, who resigned, with term to expire in 2017 as a Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary trustee. (TAB)



Reactions

Alabama Baptists share about their convention experience

I was encouraged, convicted, inspired and moved. I'm so thankful that every report and presentation confirmed that the decisions being made in our entities are for the purpose of the gospel. ... I especially loved being a part of the prayer time on Tuesday night where thousands of messengers cried out to God for a new spiritual awakening in our time. I hope we all continue to pray for this personally and in our churches. I left Columbus with an even greater sense of urgency to see God work through His people to bring that next spiritual awakening in our land.

Dawn Cox
Liberty Baptist Church, Chelsea

In my 20 years as a pastor, the 2015 SBC in Columbus lifted me up spiritually more than any other I've attended. The two high points were:

1. The Tuesday night call to prayer. ... The Holy Spirit moved in my life and, I believe, in many others.
2. The joint IMB/NAMB sending service. ... I was near tears reading the testimonies of those called to go. I was also glad to hear David Platt answer any objections about the IMB policies that have been raised and, short of a little more emphasis on the Cooperative Program, I was pleased with his answers.

Pastor Greg Pouncey
FBC Tillman's Corner, Mobile

I left this year's Southern Baptist Convention in Columbus refreshed, renewed and reinvigorated. The atmosphere was electric. It was like a revival. ... There seemed to be a great desire to fulfill the Great Commission and reach America for Christ and I believe we can accomplish it. I certainly have a desire to lead my church to do our part for the Kingdom. I'm excited about the future of the SBC.

Pastor Craig Carlisle
12th Street Baptist Church, Gadsden

Best convention I have attended. Loved the new format. Walked away from Columbus inspired, renewed and refreshed. It was very refreshing to see the multiple generations and ethnic groups engaged in making the SBC a more diversified and evangelical denomination.

Ben Kelley
FBC Montgomery

Alabama Baptists David and Katie Kizziah and their daughter, Karis, are among 59 missionaries and church planters 'sent out' from the SBC annual meeting June 17 in Columbus, Ohio.



Photo by Paul W. Lee

Illuminating the darkness

IMB, NAMB recognize 59 missionaries, their sending churches

In a darkened convention center hall filled with Southern Baptist messengers, individual pinpoints of light illuminated the darkness. Moments earlier, in passionate pleas, International Mission Board (IMB) President David Platt and North American Mission Board (NAMB) President Kevin Ezell asked Southern Baptist messengers not to be cold toward the vast lostness in the world. Instead join in God's global mission as church planters, missionaries and sending churches to take the light of the gospel to a dark world, they urged.

IMB and NAMB partnered June 17 in a Church and Mission Sending Celebration to recognize 59 missionaries and church planters and their sending churches during the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) annual meeting.

Platt said in his message, "The stakes are too high, the gospel is too good for us to settle for incremental increases in Southern Baptist church planters and missionaries. We need to open the door for tens of thousands more people to engage the nations with the gospel.

"Wouldn't you want that to be our legacy? Don't we cry out for God to bring a Moravian-type missions movement among us so that our legacy might be a convention of churches who send thousands, tens of thousands of God-exalting, Christ-following, Spirit-led, biblically faithful, people-loving, high-quality missionaries and church planters across North America and the nations for the sake of God's fame?"

The Sending Celebration symbolically

celebrated commissioning the new missionaries and church planters to share Jesus as the Light of the World (John 8:12). Christian artists Shane & Shane led the audience in worship.

Of those featured, 27 will serve in North America in the Northeast, South, Midwest, West and Canada, while 32 will serve overseas in East, Central and South Asia; North Africa and the Middle East; Europe; Sub-Saharan Africa and the Americas.

Stationed throughout the crowd, missionary families and representatives of their sending churches stood with an open lighted "book" illuminating their faces while information about the missionaries and their work was displayed.

On stage Ezell interviewed Chuck Herring, pastor of First Baptist Church, Collierville, Tennessee, about being a sending church pastor. Herring has led the church to adopt an unengaged, unreached people group in South Asia and send a family to plant a church in Toronto.

Sending church role

"It's good for our church to have ownership of a church plant in an unreached part of North America," Herring said.

Being a sending church does not require a large congregation or a lot of money, Ezell said. "It's about having a big heart and compassion and a passion to reach people here and around the world."

Prior to the sending celebration, Platt and Ezell delivered their entities' reports to convention messengers.

Messengers resoundingly affirmed Platt

following his report on the IMB trustees' recent policy changes.

In May, trustees voted on a statement of qualifications that must mark every single IMB missionary: a vibrant disciple of Jesus who is making disciples; called by God and affirmed by church leaders and IMB; committed to the vision, mission, values and beliefs of IMB; and a baptized Southern Baptist church member "with a clear conviction of truth" as expressed in the Baptist Faith and Message.

IMB took these steps to "tether ourselves in the tightest possible way to the confessional statement that unites Southern Baptists," Platt said. Contrary to what some news sources falsely reported, he added, the policy in no way signals a change in practice regarding how IMB works in relation to Southern Baptist doctrinal distinctives or a shift in IMB missionaries' practice when it comes to issues like tongues or private prayer language.

"To be crystal clear, IMB missionaries do not and will not in any way promote speaking in tongues or private prayer language," Platt said. He noted that he and IMB have deep concerns about this issue, which is why IMB has an intentional appointment, training and supervisory process.

Additionally, the new policy that replaces the previous policy on divorce simply means that if a person has divorce in their past, they are not automatically disqualified from playing a part in spreading the gospel overseas, he said.

During the NAMB report, Ezell shared that Southern Baptists started 985 new churches in 2014, which is a 5 percent increase over the previous year, and that 58 percent of them were non-Anglo. (BP)

To learn more about being a sending church, visit imb.org/send or namb.net/mobilizeme.

SBC 2015

'All for You'

WMU Missions Celebration participants hear stories of surrender, sacrifice, service

National Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) elected Linda Cooper, of Forest Park Baptist Church, Bowling Green, Kentucky, to serve as national WMU president during its Missions Celebration and Annual Meeting on June 14-15, at First Baptist Church, Grove City, Ohio.

Cooper replaces Debby Akerman, who has served as president for five years. In her final presidential address, Akerman thanked those present at the meeting for the opportunity to serve WMU.

"Contrary to what some might think, you are not sitting in circles with your hair of blue simply reading missions articles," she said. "You are praying for our missionaries as the day begins; going out in active community missions to the many places where the hurting are found. You are going out through relationship building and steady witnessing to the up-and-out as well as the down-and-out. And you are leading missions teams to go across North America and to the nations of the world."

Wanda Lee, executive director of national WMU, said the missionaries "are the primary reason we are here. We are here to know more about their work and how we may partner with our missionaries around the world as they share the gospel."

During the two-day meeting, some 500 people participated to hear how missionaries and ministry workers live out the year's theme, "All for You," through wholehearted surrender, sacrifice and service.

Pray for those hurting

Capt. Michael Coleman, a U.S. Army chaplain who also serves with the North American Mission Board (NAMB), challenged the audience to educate themselves about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), pray for those who are hurting and be a friend to those who come to their churches.

Coleman served on WMU's initial task force to begin the organization's Project HELP: PTSD. He said it was important for churches to be prepared for those who are



Photo by Matt Miller

Anna Mary Byrdwel (left), of Kentucky, pets a llama with the Good News Llama company at the national Woman's Missionary Union annual meeting and Missions Celebration on June 14 after an afternoon session at FBC Grove City, Ohio.

returning to the U.S. from battlefields, but he warned it was not a strategy for building church membership.

Terry Dorsett, executive director of the Baptist Convention of New England, also shared stories about wholehearted surrender. Previously Dorsett and his wife, Kay, served as NAMB church planters in Vermont.

Christian workers David and Alicia shared about their ministry work in Southeast Asia where their family of four has served for three years in a city of 3 million people, finding ways to share the gospel with unreached people groups.

Marion G. "Bud" Fray, a retired International Mission Board missionary who served in Zimbabwe and South Africa, also shared during the meeting. He, along

with former missionary Kim Davis, are the authors of the 2015 WMU emphasis book, "Both Feet In: A Journey to Surrender, Sacrifice and Service."

During an afternoon of interactive options, Fray signed copies of his book. Outside the church, The Good News Llamas ministry of southern Ohio had two llamas available to visit. The ministry shares the gospel through their llama farm and taking the animals to events.

Other news

► Tana Hartsell, of Charlotte, North Carolina, was elected recording secretary.

► Arlene Miller, of Crofton, Kentucky, received the 2015 Dellanna West O'Brien Leadership Award. (BP)

Pastors Conference focuses on theme 'He Must Increase'

Participants encouraged to 'just look to Christ' in midst of adversity

Pastors and churches must humble themselves and pursue a closer walk with God if they want to experience His peace, joy and purpose, speakers said at the 2015 Southern Baptist Pastors Conference on June 14-15.

Twelve pastors — including five with Alabama ties — preached on the conference theme "He Must Increase" from John the Baptist's statement in John 3:30.

David Platt, International Mission Board president and former pastor of The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, headlined the conference.

Speaking from Revelation 1, Platt said, "John gives us what is quite possibly the most majestic portrait of Jesus ever penned on paper. It's as if the Holy Spirit was saying to a struggling church in the first century, 'Look to Christ. Just look to Christ.' ... I'm assuming that some — maybe many — of the pastors and wives in this room are discouraged or disheartened, struggling

in some way in your life or in your family or in your church, and I'm convinced the Holy Spirit is saying to us all across this room: 'Look to Christ. Just look — look to Christ.'

"As long as this Christ is in the middle of His people then nothing, no matter how fierce, can or ever will destroy them," Platt said. "No matter how great the struggle or how glaring the weakness; no matter how rough the road or how profound the pain; no matter how serious the threat or steep the trial; no matter what this world and all the spiritual forces of evil in it throw at you, know this: Jesus Christ on high has got your back."

Clint Pressley, pastor of Hickory Grove Baptist Church, Charlotte, North Carolina, and former pastor of Dauphin Way Baptist Church, Mobile, preached from Ezekiel 37:1-10 and encouraged pastors to not be fearful of desperate situations.

"Don't be afraid, brothers and sisters, if God calls you into the valley of the dry bones," Pressley said. "You stand there with the Word of God; you preach the Word of God and beg the Spirit to come give life."

"Don't be afraid to walk into something that doesn't make sense to anybody but you and the Lord."

Steve Gaines, pastor of Bellevue Bap-

tist Church, Cordova, Tennessee, and former pastor of Gardendale First Baptist Church, said pastors must pray with fervency, faith and forgiveness if their ministry is to follow the model for biblical revival.

"The difference between us and the early Church is that we don't pray like they prayed," Gaines said.

Preaching from Mark 11:22-25 when Jesus told His disciples how to move mountains through prayer, Gaines lamented how some movements like Word of Faith have abused this passage with a "name it and claim it" mantra. Instead, Gaines said, pastors should follow the example of men like 16th-century Scottish minister John Knox and risk their lives to pray for revival.

"If we want God to birth a revival, we must labor in fervent prayer," Gaines said.

Faith and forgiveness

In addition to fervency, Gaines said pastors should learn to pray with faith and forgiveness. Faith, Gaines said, is placing trust and dependency in God and His promises. And prayer will not be effective unless believers first forgive those who have wronged them, he said. Closing with the "Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor," Gaines encouraged participants to seek

out those who have hurt them and forgive them in Jesus' name.

Pisgah native Ted Traylor, pastor of Olive Baptist Church, Pensacola, Florida, said he believes the Southern Baptist

Convention is living in "a day of broken favor and broken union," similar to the two staffs called "Favor" and "Union" cut by the Old Testament prophet Zechariah (Zech. 11).

"We lose favor when our lives are for sale at any price," Traylor said. "A people who understand that their sins have been paid in full are not for sale at any price, but I'm fearful some of us as pastors ... may sell out."

Vance Pitman, pastor of Hope Church, Las Vegas, Nevada, and son of Alabama Baptist evangelist Bob Pitman, said Christ's increase in a minister's life means that they are called not only to a church, but also to a city. Ministers who gain a heart for the city "develop a passion to multiply the church" and "a passion for multicultural expressions of the gospel," he said, which in turn connect the pastor with God's global Kingdom work.

John Meador, pastor of First Baptist Church, Euless, Texas, was elected president of the 2016 Pastors Conference. Willy Rice, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Clearwater, Florida, served as president this year. (BP, TAB)



PLATT



GAINES

ERLC, IMB partner to stand up for religious liberty

The Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), in consultation with the International Mission Board (IMB), will develop “strategic relationships” to mobilize churches for defending religious liberty and advocating social justice across the world. The announcement was made during the ERLC report at the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Columbus, Ohio, on June 17.

ERLC will do this through an international religious freedom office in the Middle East, which will:

- ▶ Provide training resources for churches and organizations on issues related to justice and religious liberty.

- ▶ Create original content to raise awareness and champion advocacy through research and storytelling.

- ▶ Collaborate with Baptist Global Response for advocacy and awareness of human needs opportunities.

- ▶ Develop strategic relationships with like-minded organizations to advance advocacy efforts.

Travis Wussow will serve as ERLC’s director of international justice and religious liberty and oversee the new office.

Extending advocacy

Wussow most recently served as an ERLC legal consultant and as an executive pastor and the general counsel for Austin Stone Community Church, Austin, Texas.

He received a bachelor of business administration degree in finance from the University of Texas at Austin and a doctor of jurisprudence degree from the University of Texas School of Law in Austin.

“I’m honored to have the opportunity to serve the ERLC and to extend the ERLC’s capacity to confront international religious liberty and international justice issues,” Wussow said.

“Every day around the world, religious minorities face persecution and millions of people are held in slavery. We look forward to advocating on their behalf.”

IMB President David Platt said, “Surrounded by the global reality of religious persecution and driven by our love for God, we must act. In a land of religious liberty, we have a biblical responsibility to stand up and speak out on their behalf.” (ERLC)



MOORE

Celebrate diversity

20-year review of race relations shows progress, more work needed

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Twenty years ago Southern Baptists repented “of racism past and present” and officially apologized to all African Americans. The apology was made in the form of a resolution at the 1995 Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) annual meeting in Atlanta.

Last week at the 2015 SBC annual meeting in Columbus, Ohio, messengers received a report on progress made in the denomination’s efforts in racial reconciliation since that apology. They also learned that 16 percent of new trustees and board members in SBC life were non-Anglo.

Overall the consensus was that positive progress has been made but more is needed. “I’m pleased with the efforts made by the convention to be more inclusive,” said John King, church and community relations specialist for Birmingham Baptist Association. “I appreciate the intentionality on the part of the leaders to celebrate the diversity and reach out to all races and ethnicities. While there is room for improvement, it is a sign of progress.”

More diversity

Rosevelt Morris, senior associate pastor of Sixth Avenue Baptist Church, Birmingham, said he has been attending the SBC annual meetings since 1998 and noticed a lot of the same people leading year after year. “We have too many people that are a part of this convention ... (to see) the same faces over and over leading in various ways,” he said.

But this year was different. “I have never seen as many African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans and Asian

Americans on the stage at one time since I’ve been coming to the SBC,” he said. “It is my hope that we utilize many more people that make up this diverse and growing convention.”

Morris’ suggestions will now be easier to track following messengers’ approval of the motion made June 16 by Alan Cross, pastor of Gateway Baptist Church, Montgomery. His motion commended the SBC Executive Committee’s (EC) printed progress report on race relations.

Cross actually came up with the idea for a 20-year report in 2014 and made a motion to messengers at the SBC annual meeting in Baltimore to that effect. The motion was referred to the EC and a task force was named to prepare the report.

“The report tells us where we were, how far we’ve come and how far we can go,” Cross said when speaking for his motion on the convention floor. “By commending this report, it can be information for our nominators going forward.”

In an interview with *The Alabama Baptist* following the annual meeting, Cross said he wants people to think about the trustee nomination process differently.

Instead of thinking about people they know, he wants those serving on the Com-

mittee on Nominations (CN) to think about people they don’t know.

“Is there an African-American brother or sister who has not served before? ... Think about it differently,” he said, noting items 3, 4 and 5 under the report’s Summary and Findings section.

Item 3 deals with CN members developing a list of nominees that reflect intercultural diversity.

Item 4 requests a public report of the racial and ethnic composition of the CN and Committee on Committees each year.

Item 5 suggests that publications like *The Alabama Baptist* help report what God is doing through the ministries of SBC entities and highlight participation of ethnic churches and church leaders.

The emphasis to further diversify SBC

boards and committees ultimately pushes the gospel forward, Cross noted. “This stands to get more people involved in SBC, which leads to increases in ownership, giving, missions and reaching America and the world. That’s really my goal.

“I want to see different ethnic groups [unifying together] so the gospel can go forward,” he said. “The leadership is taking this issue very seriously and trying to facilitate change.” ☞



Photo by Adam Covington

K. Marshall Williams, pastor of Nazarene Baptist Church, Philadelphia, calls Baptists to love one another regardless of ethnicity. Read the full race relations report at www.thealabamabaptist.org.

Charleston church shooting is one more incident in pattern of racist sin in America, SBC leaders say

For many, the massacre at a black church in Charleston, South Carolina, is simply another mass shooting. But for African-Americans, church violence has historic dimensions.

The attack June 17 at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church reflects “a pattern of random, racialized violence against religious institutions,” said Valerie Cooper, associate professor of black church studies at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.

Here are some examples of black church violence over the years:

- ▶ The Charleston church was torched centuries ago. It burned in the 1800s during a controversy surrounding Denmark Vesey, one of the church’s organizers, who led a major slave rebellion.

- ▶ Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, was bombed in 1963. Four girls who were in the church perished.

- ▶ Martin Luther King Jr.’s mother was killed in church. Alberta Williams King died June 30, 1974, just after playing “The Lord’s Prayer” on the organ at Atlanta’s Ebenezer Baptist Church. Her son was assassinated six years earlier.

- ▶ More than 70 black churches in the South were burned, fire-bombed or vandalized between January 1990 and April 1996.

- ▶ Hours after the 2008 election of President Barack Obama, Macedonia Church of God in Christ, Springfield, Massachusetts, burned. Two of the three co-defendants admitted they burned the church to denounce the election of the nation’s first black president.

‘This must end’

According to a statement released by several Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) leaders after the recent Charleston shooting, “virtually every week we see yet another incident pointing to the sin of racism in American society, from unarmed African-American men and children killed in the streets to worshippers gunned down in their pews. This must end. And the church of Jesus Christ must lead the way.”

The statement — released by SBC President Ronnie Floyd; Philadelphia pastor K. Marshall Williams, president of SBC’s National African American Fellowship (NAAF); California pastor A.B. Vines, NAAF’s immediate past president; and Russell Moore, president of the SBC’s Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission — expressed solidarity with “our brothers and sisters in Christ” at the Charleston church.

“The brutal massacre of those in prayer at Emanuel ... should shock the conscience of every person,” the statement read. (RNS, BP)

Across ALABAMA'S Associations

To submit news items, email news@thealabamabaptist.org or call 205-870-4720, ext. 100, at least three weeks prior to the event.

BESSEMER

► **Shady Grove Church, Bessemer**, will celebrate its 107th anniversary and 99th homecoming June 28, 11 a.m. A luncheon at noon will follow along with a special singing. For more information call 205-424-6443. Patrick Buckner is pastor.

COLBERT-LAUDERDALE

► **Eric Taylor** is the new pastor of **Lee Heights Church, Florence**. He previously served as pastor of Focus Church and Journey Church, both in Auburn. He holds a master's degree from Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. He and his wife, Sonja, have two children.



TAYLOR

CHOCTAW

► **Lisman Church** will celebrate its 100th anniversary June 28, 11 a.m. with special music and guest speaker Bill Wallace, director of missions for Hale Association. The day also will be the church's final service before

it closes. A fellowship lunch will follow the service. Rodney Tyson is pastor.

CLAY

► **Center West Missionary Church, Delta**, will celebrate its 100th anniversary July 11, 10 a.m. A luncheon will take place at 12:30 p.m. Randy Harrelson is pastor.

SHELBY

► **Justin Massey** is the new student pastor of **Siluria Church, Alabaster**. He is a McCalla native and a student at the Birmingham extension of New Orleans Seminary's Leavell College. His first day was June 22. Michael Brooks is pastor.



MASSEY

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN

► **Donald Vaughn** is the new pastor of **Shady Grove Church, Collinsville**. He began in early June. Vaughn is currently enrolled in biblical studies courses through the New Orleans Seminary extension center in Rainsville. He

previously served as pastor of four churches including New Bethel Church, Fyffe, and Mount Zion Church, Section. He and his wife, Balinda, have two children and four grandchildren.

WALKER

► **Macedonia Church, Jasper**, will host evangelist David Ring on July 26, 11 a.m. Donny Elliot is pastor. ► **Dennis Culbreth**, pastor of **First Church, Jasper**, since 2010, recently resigned. He will become director of missions for Hamilton Association in Chattanooga, Tennessee, July 6. He and his wife, Marybeth, have three children.



CULBRETH

COFFEE

► **Whitewater Church, Elba**, will hold VBS on July 13-17, 6-8 nightly. Richard Collier is pastor.

WINSTON

► **First Church, Double Springs**, will host Christian comedian/musician Brother Billy Bob Bohannon on July 12, 6 p.m. Phillip Twilley is pastor.

ST. CLAIR

► **First Church, Springville**, will hold a debt-free celebration service June 28, 10:30 a.m. Chip Thornton is pastor.

TUSCALOOSA

► **Carrolls Creek Church, Northport**, will hold a homecoming service July 12, 10:45 a.m. Guest speaker will be David Mills, pastor of Shiloh Church, Ralph. A covered dish lunch will follow the service. Alan Roggli is pastor.

TUSKEGEE LEE

► **Salem Macon Church, Notasulga**, will celebrate 175 years of ministry in a homecoming service July 19. Everyone is invited. Mike Stephens is pastor. ☪



Andalusia's West Highland marks 75th year

In a joint service June 7, West Highland Baptist Church, Andalusia, commemorated its 75th anniversary and homecoming celebration. Several members were recognized for their years of service to the church including Betty Reynolds, 74 years; Sue Reeves, 72 years; Rosalyn Tiller, 66 years; and Bob Reynolds, 40 years. Ottis and Betty Reynolds were recognized as the longest-serving family with more than 65 years of ministry involvement.

Leroy Cole, Covington Baptist Association representative, and Dalton Campbell, Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative, each presented a plaque to the church. David Richburg was the guest speaker and Jane Graddy led music.

Each family that participated in the service received a copy of the church's history and a CD of photos, said anniversary coordinator Juanita Windham. Participants also could view memorabilia from the church's past in a separate room during the time of fellowship and lunch following the service.

Larry Stewart is pastor. (Maggie Walsh)

Fayette's Unity Baptist 'presses forward' on 125th

Unity Baptist Church, Fayette, celebrated its 125th anniversary May 3 with the theme "Looking Back, Pressing Forward."

During the 10:30 a.m. service, participants viewed a slideshow of pictures of previous members, structures and historical artifacts and heard a summary of the church's history read by a deacon. Kathy Reed, who has been a member of Unity Baptist for more than 50 years, was recognized and Jerry Armor, Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative, presented a plaque to the church. Former pastor Bobby Robbins spoke.

A time of fellowship and lunch followed the morning service and allowed participants to view the 13 tables, one for each decade of Unity's existence, decorated with historic items.

The afternoon service featured music from members and concluded with prayer for the future of the Fayette Baptist Association church. Phillip Clark is pastor. (Maggie Walsh)

Moundville's Pleasant Hill celebrates 175 years

Music and memorabilia marked the 175th anniversary celebration of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Moundville, on May 3.

Pleasant Hill Baptist began its celebration service at 11 a.m. and featured guest speaker Victor Bonner. Historical presentations were made by Angie Cooper, Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative, and Bill Wallace, Hale Baptist Association director of missions.

For participants to view during the noon lunch, anniversary committee member Betty Shaw "put out all the memorabilia [she] could find" with the help of Samford University's Special Collections department in Birmingham. A "just fabulous" vocal performance by Donna Weaver followed lunch and concluded at 4 p.m., Shaw said.

Chuck Weaver is pastor. (Maggie Walsh)

REFLECTIONS

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"THEY WANT VOLUNTEERS FOR MISSION WORK - WHO DO THEY EXPECT TO SIGN UP FOR THAT?"

THAT WOULD BE US!



— Correction —

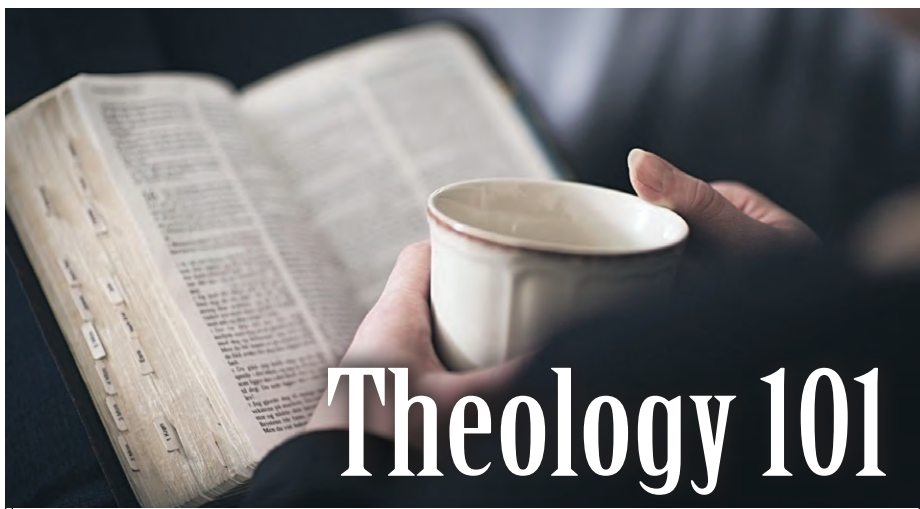
In the Campus News article "Centreville Minister Wins Judson College Golf Tournament" in the June 11 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*, Shannon Allen was listed as the pastor of the wrong church. Allen is pastor of Ashby Baptist Church, Brierfield.

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Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Such a Great Salvation

Salvation Future

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Salvation is great in its past accomplishment. We have viewed this aspect of our salvation as justification, which is God's act of declaring or counting repentant sinners acquitted of sin and accepted into His favor.

This accomplishment is a completed work of God that comes to us on the basis of Christ's death through the means of personal faith in Him. In the confession of faith we are saved from sin's ultimate penalty.

Salvation is great in its present progress. We who are accounted right and good in God's sight have embarked on a life of becoming what God already counts us to be. Last week Theology 101 reminded us this ongoing process in salvation is termed sanctification. Across one's life of faith God is active in us by His Spirit, the Spirit of holiness, enabling victory over sin's power and growth in His likeness, as exemplified in Jesus.

Future completion

This week brings us to see how salvation is great in its future completion. Romans 8:16 declares that as Christians we are children of God. The next verse adds, "And if children, then heirs — heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him" (Rom. 8:17). From such a verse, Christians have come to express the future completion of salvation as glorification.

Our great salvation provides justification, sanctification and glorification. We turn now to look at the completing stage of salvation when Christians enter the eternal state of God's children and begin experiencing their final blessedness. This blessedness includes not only the duration of eternal life but also its quality. While it begins with conversion, it reaches its fullness when believers transition from this world into the one to come.

One important aspect of our glorification is that it will be embodied existence. "For we know that if the tent which is our earthly house is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house

not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1). In our final state of glory, we who have already been saved from the penalty of sin and have begun to be saved from the power and practice of sin while living in a sinful world also will be saved from the very presence of sin. The Bible assures us concerning heaven, "Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable, or false" (Rev. 21:27).

'Sanctify and cleanse'

Salvation's future has both a collective and a personal dimension.

Collectively in that glorified environment Christians will find themselves part of a glorified Church which, according to Ephesians 5:26-27, Christ has been working to "sanctify and cleanse" in order that "He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." This prospect capsules the meaning of glorification.

Likeness to Christ

In its personal dimension, a believer's glorification will mean final and full likeness to Christ. While many details about eternity are not outlined for us, inasmuch as "what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we will be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

That final transformation will be salvation in its glorious and completed manifestation to individual Christians. "As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor. 15:49).

Jerry Batson, retired associate dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University and professor at several schools of religion, is pastor of First Baptist Church, McCalla.



FBC Springville cuts loose big debt to free up missions money

When he came to First Baptist Church, Springville, in 2012, Pastor Chip Thornton saw a church sitting on the edge of taking the gospel to the world.

But there was something tethering them to the spot right where they were — debt.

For six years the congregation had been giving faithfully toward the nearly \$1 million bank note it had taken on to purchase land for a new church facility.

They had made a significant dent, but the debt still weighed them down, Thornton said.

"When the pastor search team told me in 2012 that First Baptist Church was more than \$200,000 in debt, I knew we needed to address that for the sake of the gospel and for the glory of God," he said.

But the church didn't start a big push to get rid of the debt. Instead they started a new disciple-making strategy called "Know, Grow, Go." It "seeks to move people to deeper levels of discipleship in Christ: from knowing Him to growing in Him to going for Him," Thornton said.

And as church members grew, the debt shrunk — something God helped with in a big way, as no large donations paved the way for the payoff, said Scott Corbin, the church's worship pastor.

Thornton said the whole group of committed Jesus-followers at First, Springville, gave from the heart as Scripture prompted them to do.

The church knew that "eliminating our debt for the glory of God would allow us to expand His kingdom both locally and globally," Thornton said. "We felt like if we could remove the bank note, it would

free up more resources to make His name famous in other places."

And it has, he said.

The St. Clair Baptist Association church sent three missions teams in 2014 and two more this year to help plant a church in Gonzol, Ecuador, a village of 1,000 people in the Andes Mountains.

Twelve Christians currently meet as a church in Gonzol.

"Freeing ourselves from one master allowed us to pursue our greatest

passion — spreading God's glory to all people in order to teach all people to know Christ, grow in Christ and go for Christ," Thornton said.

First, Springville, is celebrating the debt payoff with a noteburning service June 28. They're thrilled, he said, and they know exactly who gets the glory.

"No man can take the credit," Thornton said. "God did it, and to God be all the glory." (Grace Thornton)

"Freeing ourselves from one master allowed us to pursue our greatest passion."

**Pastor Chip Thornton
FBC Springville**

Bethel, Choctaw associations, others build together



Missions in Kentucky

Photo courtesy of Bobby Hopper

Bethel Baptist Association's annual missions trip June 13-19 involved 135 volunteers from 10 churches in the association working on the interior of a fellowship hall for East Barbourville Baptist Church, Barbourville, Kentucky. Volunteers also came from Morgan Chapel Baptist Church, Toxey, in Choctaw Baptist Association where Joey Karr is pastor. Retired director of missions (DOM) for Choctaw Association Franklin McLelland said, "God is using ordinary people in our county to do Kingdom work and I'm excited about it." Churches in Baldwin, Chilton, Hale, Selma, Washington and Clarke associations also were represented, as were churches in Kentucky, Oklahoma and South Carolina. In the 25 years of the annual missions trip, 34 churches have been constructed, seven of which are in Alabama. Bobby Hopper is DOM for Bethel Association.

ALABAMA

UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

Bullock-Centennial Assoc. ministers to Hispanic children, families

In 2012, Team Kids reached about 10 families and 23 children. Now the outreach ministry to Hispanic families that Earl Hinson leads at Eastside Baptist Church, Union Springs, is reaching 36 families and about 100 children.

Every Wednesday, Hinson makes three to four trips in the church's 15-passenger van to pick up around 60 children. Once at Eastside Baptist the children get to play, have a snack and learn about the Bible.

Although Hinson is the director of Team Kids, he describes the ministry as a "community effort." While Eastside is the regular base of operations for the ministry, it also is sponsored by Bullock-Centennial Baptist Association and receives assistance from other churches, such as First Baptist Church, Montgomery.

For Christmas 2014, for example, First, Montgomery, bought and delivered presents and food for the Hispanic families. Held in the gym of Conecuh Springs Christian School in Union Springs, this outreach was especially effective because it brought in the children's parents.

"The adults speak very little English, so it's hard to get them involved sometimes," Hinson said. "I use the kids as translators a lot."

Now that summer is in full swing, Hinson and other volunteers are taking children to summer reading programs at libraries and to parks and pools in addition to the Wednesday night services at Eastside.

Hinson said that although the growth of Team Kids is great, the ministry is continuing to seek ways to do more for God by bringing entire families to Him. (Maggie Walsh)

Blount Association radio program still valuable ministry

For Pine Bluff Baptist Church, Locust Fork, the Baptist Fellowship Hour is something that ministers to several of its members who are in nursing homes or who cannot attend Sunday services.

Started in the 1960s, the Blount Baptist Association radio program airs every Sunday morning at 7:30 a.m. on 95.3 WCRL in Oneonta.

Associational churches rotate through the year to lead the program, which always opens with a singing of "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" and follows with other songs, a gospel message, community announcements and, for Pine Bluff Baptist, a rendition of "Amazing Grace."

Pastor Daryl Holt, who has served Pine Bluff for nine years, said he first preached during the Baptist Fellowship Hour in 1987 right after he'd felt called to preach. Holt said it's been a valuable ministry throughout the years.

"I think it's a great ministry for the homebound and ... an encouragement to those that are unable to go to church," he said.

The last time the church participated in the radio program, about 40 church members participated in the live recording at the associational building on Champion Road in Oneonta.

Holt's wife, Janet, said anyone can participate in the recording and sing during the program, even if they are not a member of Pine Bluff. (Neisha Roberts)

Gordo's Big Hill Baptist reaches out to nursing home

It's a ministry that started with the previous pastor, but members of Big Hill Missionary Baptist Church, Gordo, continue to go to Fayette Medical Center Nursing Home to minister to its residents.

Every third Sunday of the month more than 30 residents gather at the nursing home to hear Pastor Trey Kelley preach a sermon. Church members Halie Hudson and Colen Dyer lead music and other members of the Sipsey Baptist Association church go to support the residents and fellowship with them.

The ministry began with former pastor Ralph Smith more than 17 years ago, but Kelley, who has been pastor for nearly two years, continues to lead the outreach.

"It's a multiracial outreach and it crosses ministry lines, making it a broad ministry," Kelley said. "And it's a blessing for us to go in and see the smiles on their faces and the joy and comfort that we can bring to them."

Some of the nursing home residents also get involved in leading worship, Kelley said, noting how one woman sings and plays harmonica during some of the services. (Neisha Roberts)

Bigbee Association hosts annual leadership conference

Bigbee Baptist Association held its annual deacon/pastor/spouse conference May 19 at Siloam Baptist Church, York, with more than 40 participants.

Guest speaker Mike Jackson, director of the office of leadership and church health for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, shared encouragement for continued Kingdom work. Jackson emphasized that each person is made uniquely by God and is useful for His service, according to Brad Campbell, Bigbee Association director of missions and pastor of Siloam Baptist.

"Mike has visited ... on several occasions and is always welcomed with open arms and great fellowship," Campbell said. "In today's challenging world it is great to know that our local leaders have the added support from our state missionaries."

A luncheon, provided by associational deacon coordinator Allen Rickles, followed the conference session. (TAB)

Mentone's Mount Calvary kids give to Children's Homes

Inside the children's Sunday School class at Mount Calvary Baptist Church, Mentone, sits the "Sunshine Box."

Every Sunday, children who participate in the class bring a dollar bill with them and put it in the box in memory of Ellen Pruitt, who taught the class for many years. At the end of each year, children from the Lookout Mountain Baptist Association church donate the money to Alabama Baptist Children's Homes

& Family Ministries' Friendship House in Oxford in honor of Pruitt.

In its last donation, the Sunday School class gave \$700 to Friendship House, according to Tammy Johnson, current Sunday School teacher and church treasurer.

And now it's become more of a church-wide ministry, she said.

"Every Sunday, adults will come by the classroom and give a dollar or two to put in the Sunshine Box, so we all kind of participate in the ministry."

The church also supports ministries through the Cooperative Program, North American Mission Board, Baptist International Missions Inc. and gives funds to Hope Rebirth Homeless Shelter in Summerville, Georgia. Jack Green is pastor. (Neisha Roberts)

Chapel Hill's monthly outreach ministers, unifies

In April, Chapel Hill Baptist Church, Florala, hosted a barbecue dinner and a concert by southern gospel group Robert and James as a way to reach into the community and minister to those who may not be comfortable in a traditional church setting. This event went so well that the Sardis Baptist Association church is making it a monthly affair.

"It was a hit," Pastor Dennis Sims said. "We're just trying to do something different and really reach out in a rural community."

Chapel Hill Baptist's outreach in May followed the same formula, this time with a fish fry and The Dyess Family in concert. Each event reached 60-80 people.

The outreach efforts also are impacting the church family.

"They have really improved our fellowship and helped [unify] the church," Sims said.

Although Chapel Hill is taking a break from the outreach events during the hot summer months, it plans to pick back up with the ministry in September. (Maggie Walsh)

Washington Assoc. food ministry reaches 320 families

In the eight years that Washington Baptist Association (WBA) has operated a food distribution ministry in Washington County, it has grown from helping 30 families a month to helping 320 families a month, seeking to "make relationships" with those they help, said WBA Director of Missions Michael Olewski.

Olewski and Mildred Butler, WBA ministry assistant, lead a group of about seven volunteers to distribute food every Tuesday and Thursday morning. The ministry recently moved into its new space, an addition built onto the existing WBA office.

While the majority of the food distributed is provided monthly by the Bay Area Food Bank in Theodore, churches and individuals also contribute.

Connie Bryan, a member of Chatom Baptist Church who has been volunteering for "quite a few years," said she and her husband, Walter, volunteer because "we get the joy of knowing that we're helping someone." (Maggie Walsh)

Want to know GOD?

Pastor Jeff Noblit
Grace Life Church of the Shoals,
Muscle Shoals

The most logical and natural response of humans to their Creator/God should be to "love the Lord your God with all your heart ... soul ... mind ... strength" (Mark 12:30). Tragically, man has miserably failed. Man is not God-centered in his thoughts and deeds but is self-centered. Second Timothy 3:2 and 4 says "For man will be lovers of self ... rather than lovers of God." Instead of following after God with total love and devotion "each of us has turned to his own way" (Isa. 53:6). Envy, jealousy, anger, lust, hatred, selfishness, lying, stealing, gossiping, cheating, fornication and adultery are some common ways man has proven that he hasn't lived up to God's expected behavior of him.

All presently stand as guilty and condemned before Him. John 3:18 says man is "judged already." Revelation 15:3 declares God is "righteous and true" in His punishment of men. And Hebrews 9:27 says, "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." Yet there is hope.

In order to glorify Himself, God has chosen that "judgment" would not be the final word but "love and grace." God's amazing love is demonstrated in His work of saving man from the wrath to come.

Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." And Isaiah 53:10 says, "But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering." In effect God took the crushing blow of judgment man deserves and placed it on His Son, Jesus.

If today you feel your desperate need for God's forgiveness and believe He has judged and punished Jesus in your place, you can be forgiven and restored to a right standing before God. Cry out to Him confessing your sin and tell Him you believe Jesus took your sin and punishment. The Scriptures promise, "He who believes in Him will not be disappointed" (Rom. 9:33). ☩



Rashional thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Executive editor • jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

Holding the ropes

Mallory recently stood before our church in central Alabama as we had a special time of prayer before she headed to Ecuador for the summer. The Sunday prior, Bryce stood before his church in northwest Alabama as he prepared to leave for his summer missions work in Uganda.

Countless congregations across the state held similar prayer moments in May and June as they sent out their young adults for a summer missions experience.

It is not only prayer for the summer missionary and the work he or she will do, but it also is prayer for his or her family. It is a prayer for peace as they release their child into the hands of missions and ministry teams in faraway places. Even a location across the state can seem far away for parents sending their young adult child out for the first time.

A real difference

A church “holding the ropes” for those serving in short-term and long-term missions experiences truly can make a difference for the missionary and his or her family.

No matter how strong your call to serve, there will be moments of loneliness and discouragement. And even the most excited of young adults are sometimes shocked to discover the difficulties and frustrations that come with adapting to a new culture, adjusting to the new area and feeling overwhelmed when they see the enormity of the work.

But knowing their church family is back home praying for them truly makes a difference when those weak moments surface.

FaceTime and Skype had not been invented when I served a two-and-a-half-year term with the International Mission Board back in the mid-1990s, but a phone call here and there, an email on occasion and definitely cards in the mail became welcomed touches from home that kept my spirits lifted. I also remember the banner Pastor

Sammy Taylor hung at Mountain View Baptist Church, Phil Campbell, that said “Mountain View holding the ropes for Jennifer.” I knew their prayers continued throughout my term and weren’t only spoken that Sunday I stood before the congregation to be sent out.

As special as the prayers prayed over you as you leave are, the ones that are consistently being lifted during your missions service are the ones that sustain you.

Alabama Baptist students and young adults are serving in a variety of ways in Alabama, through ministries in many states across the nation and on missions fields around the world. They may not send back regular reports of their work while they are away, and it is easy to skip days and even weeks of praying for them without a consistent reminder.

Prayer cards, email notes and social media posts are good ways to keep the need in front of church members and others who would like to pray for those participating in summer missions. Posters, banners or other types of visuals in the church also are good reminders.

The Alabama Baptist regularly reports on students and young adults doing missions. When those stories appear, it is another good reminder to pray.

The prayers really do make a difference. I remember many times feeling a sense of strength, peace and focus I knew came from the prayers of those holding the ropes for me. I also remember the confidence and courage I felt with the love and support of family, friends and an amazing church. If someone actually inquired deeper about the experience, then my enthusiasm grew as I shared my story.

The privilege of praying daily for Mallory and Bryce this summer provides an opportunity for me to give back to the next generation of young adults following God’s call. Who will be your Mallory and Bryce? 🙏

Alabama Baptist churches collect OCC shoebox items year-round

By Maggie Walsh
The Alabama Baptist

While collection calls for Operation Christmas Child (OCC) shoeboxes are usually found in church bulletins every fall, many churches keep the collecting going year-round. OCC is an outreach ministry of Samaritan’s Purse, an international relief and Christian evangelism organization that collects and delivers shoeboxes filled with gifts to children in more than 150 countries.

First Baptist Church, Monroeville; Mount Carmel Baptist Church, West Blocton; and Pisgah Baptist Church, Selma, are each examples of year-long collectors. Each church found it could do more together than as individuals.

Shirley Horton, director of OCC collections for First, Monroeville, in Bethlehem Baptist Association, led the church to begin collecting as a group effort in 2013.

“It is just something that I have fallen in love with,” she said.

By assigning what items to bring each month, church members are able to get into the habit of picking up one or two items whenever they do their normal shopping. In June, members are collecting shoes and girls’ dresses, for instance.

‘A lot more’ shoeboxes

“Before that everyone did it individually and we always had less than 100 (shoeboxes). Then we started collecting ... through the church and we’ve been able to collect a lot more.”

Mount Carmel Baptist, in Bibb Baptist Association, also pairs different items with each month, but in October it’s time to take inventory, said Phyllis Smith, wife of Pastor Robert Smith. After taking inventory Mount Carmel announces in the bulletin how many of which items are still needed.

In the three years of collecting in this way, church members have always come through with the needed items, Phyllis Smith said.

Making a schedule of items to collect is just one strategy for collecting as a church.

Sandra Reed, OCC coordinator for Pisgah Baptist, in Cahaba Baptist Association, said, “I hit the sales and I will buy whatever will go in a shoebox.”

Pisgah is a small church that averages about 15 people on Sunday mornings, but by shopping the sales and buying in bulk the members were able to collect 400 shoeboxes in 2014.

Before utilizing this “deal-shopping” mentality in 2013, Reed said, the congregation was only able to fill 20–30 shoeboxes each Christmas.

So what was the catalyst for the change in Reed’s strategy? In 2012 she went to the Atlanta OCC processing center where



Photo courtesy of Samaritan’s Purse

all the shoeboxes from the Southeast region are sorted and processed.

“It’s just that when you see the ministry (in Atlanta), you just want to do it,” she said with emotion.

Now Reed and six other women in the church embark on “a dedicated shopping venture” for shoebox items year-round. Reed even uses Facebook to notify her fellow shoppers of big sales.

This method “just works better for our church,” she said. “It’s just dedication, prayer and everything on sale.” 🙏

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Historical HIGHLIGHTS

FROM PREVIOUS ISSUES OF THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



50 Years Ago June 1965

Superb Presidents: Dallas and Texas Baptists rolled out the red carpet for about 15,000 messengers, plus visitors, who converged on the city for the SBC annual meeting. President Wayne Dehoney was re-elected for the second time and Helen Fling was re-elected president of the south-wide Woman's Missionary Union. Both did superb jobs of directing the two large bodies.

40 Years Ago June 1975

Alabama Participants: The 50th Anniversary Celebration of the founding of the Cooperative Program was observed at the 118th SBC meeting in Miami Beach.

Among Alabama leaders participating were Hudson Baggett, editor of *The Alabama Baptist*, and George E. Bagley, executive secretary of the Alabama Baptist State Executive Board.

30 Years Ago June 1985

Peace Committee: Winfred Moore, of Amarillo, Texas, former pastor of Central Park Baptist Church, Birmingham, and Alabama native Bill Hull, pastor of First Baptist Church, Shreveport, Louisiana, were named to the SBC Peace Committee during the annual meeting in Dallas. The meeting marked a historical moment for the conservative resurgence and attracted a record 45,519 registered messengers.

The 22-member committee was formed to study the current controversy within the convention and recommend possible solutions.

20 Years Ago June 1995

"Covenant for a New Century": By a vote of almost 2-to-1, SBC messengers adopted the Program and Structure Study

Committee's "Covenant for a New Century" restructuring of the SBC.

The report was adopted after the adding of two amendments — one affirming the contributions of the WMU and changing wording related to home missions.

WMU Executive Director Del-lanna O'Brien, of Birmingham, said she was "very satisfied with the amendment, noting it affirmed WMU's presence and partnership in the denomination."

10 Years Ago June 2005

IMB Trustees Set New Guidelines, Elect Alabamian to Post: Bill Hudgins, pastor of Cross Creek Community Church, Hokes Bluff, was elected second vice chairman of the International Mission Board (IMB) during the IMB's May 19-21 meeting in Texas. His term will last one year. Trustees also adopted guidelines for cooperating with other Great Commission Christian partners overseas, received reports on the board's finances and missionary personnel and appointed the second-largest group of new missionaries in IMB history — 116.

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Reaching Romania

Photo courtesy of Ron Horton

Winston Association church takes 13th annual missions trip to Romania

Twelve members of New Prospect Baptist Church, Haleyville, traveled to Romania for the church's 13th annual missions trip May 28–June 8. The team hosted a Vacation Bible School (pictured above) with church member Lawanna McCamy (left) sharing a Bible story through crafts. Team members also shared testimonies in churches, helped a crisis pregnancy center and visited two prisons to share the gospel. The teams worked in Timisoara and Cluj during this year's trip. Ron Horton is pastor of the Winston Baptist Association church.



Ronald 'Ronnie' F. Euler

Retired Alabama Baptist pastor dies at 77

Ronald "Ronnie" F. Euler, who served as pastor of several Alabama Baptist churches, died June 13. He was 77.

Euler graduated from Glenn Vocational High School in Birmingham in 1955 and was called to ministry after graduation. He earned his bachelor's and master's degree from



EULER

Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham.

He also served in the Alabama National Guard for six years.

Euler served as pastor of Lomax First Baptist Church, Clanton, and then earned his master of divinity degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

He served as associate pastor of First Baptist Church, Albertville, and pastor of First Baptist Church, Pelham, and Second Baptist Church, Bessemer.

Euler served in three interim pastorates while teaching at public schools in central Alabama before retiring in 1999.

He was a member of First Baptist Church, Pleasant Grove, at the time of his death, where he served as a deacon, taught discipleship training classes and served as director of the chapel Sunday School class for 12 years.

Euler was preceded in death by one daughter. He is survived by his wife, Jeanine; three children; and four grandchildren. (Neisha Roberts)



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| 3. Lawnmower | C) 110 dB |
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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For June 28

Explore the Bible By Miguel Echevarria, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

IS THIS OF GOD? John 4:1-6

Be Discerning (1)

John begins this section with another command: "Do not believe every spirit." Not every so-called "spiritual" teaching is from God. John has already said that some believe Jesus is not the Christ (1 John 2:22).

The Holy Spirit does not lead anyone to impart heresy. Too often false teachers use the words, "The Spirit told me" or "God said" to justify their heterodox statements.

Christians should not be fooled. Since the days of John, believers have rejected the deceitful instruction of false teachers who enter churches to cause division and lead people astray.

Test the Message (2-3)

Some are crafty in disguising their heretical views of Jesus, couching their beliefs in phrases like "Jesus is our moral example," and "Jesus rose in our hearts." On the surface such language seems pious.

So how can one know the theology concealed in such statements? John provides the litmus test: "Every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God" (v. 2).

This cuts to the heart of the matter — either one believes Jesus became a man or they don't. If the latter, then Jesus did not suffer for sins and humans are without hope.

Believers also must be aware of early letters and false gospels that teach Christ's humanity was either an illusion or altogether absent (Docetism). Among such are the gospel of Judas, gospel of Peter and the Acts of John.

One of the reasons these books are not in the canon is because they deny the full humanity of Jesus.

Neither the words of noncanonical books nor persons who deny the incarna-

tion of Jesus are inspired by the Holy Spirit — for Scripture, and centuries of Christian tradition, testifies that Jesus is both fully man and fully God (John 1:1, 14).

The Nicene Creed affirms the Bible's view of Jesus and confesses what Christians are to believe: "We believe in ... one Lord Jesus Christ ... God of God, light of light, true God of true God ... for us and for our salvation He came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man."

Observe the Audience (4-6)

False teachers attract followers who love the world's value system (1 John 4:4-5) and care nothing for the Jesus of the Bible, so "they accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions" (2 Tim. 4:3).

Being the fruit of false teachers, they are an ominous sign warning believers to keep away.

Rightly does Jesus say, "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16).

Though false teachers may try to disguise their language and blend with Christians, their worldly followers bear witness to their heterodoxy.

Genuine believers do not follow false teachers (1 John 4:6). Instead they listen to people like John, who believe Jesus came in the flesh.

Christians should not expect this will make them popular with the world. They should instead expect hostility from a world that hates what God loves (1 John 2:15-17).

In short Christians are to avoid false teachers and hold fast to an orthodox view of Jesus.

Though the world cares little for Jesus, the Spirit will use faithful teaching to bring many to the faith "once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3). ☞

Bible Studies for Life By Noel Forlini, Ph.D. Adjunct Professor of Biblical Perspectives, Samford University

MOVE BEYOND FAILURE Joshua 7:13-15, 19-21, 25-26; 8:1

Children's book heroine Anne Shirley declared, "That's the good thing about me — I never make the same mistake twice." I wish I shared her plucky self-confidence. Unfortunately I find myself learning the same lesson over and over again, and I don't think I'm alone. It's been said that every writer only has one book in her, and she keeps writing to try and find her way to her elusive subject. I sometimes wonder whether that's true of our own lives — there's one lesson we keep trying to learn all our lives. A good friend once told me, "Being honest with ourselves is a lifelong process." Much of life is about that — failing, owning up to it and moving beyond it. The familiar story of Achan's sin reflects a similar reality.

Identify the reason for failure. (13-15)

God gave specific instructions about the way in which the Israelites were to conquer Canaan. They were to destroy everything in the land (Josh. 6:17-19). Nothing was to be spared, lest the Israelites' hearts turn away from God. When Achan kept some of the devoted things for himself, he violated God's command (Josh. 7:1). If the book of Joshua teaches anything about sin, it is this — the sin of the one impacts the many. Among the Israelites, there was no such thing as individual sin affecting only the individual. Moreover the book of Joshua depicts God not in a disinterested, casual way. Rather, Yahweh, the personal deity of the Israelites, functions as a national patron. He is interested in this nation and called them long ago through their ancestor Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). It is through this particular nation that all other nations will be blessed. The Israelites are to be a "light" to the nations (Isa. 42:6; 49:6). In the face of an invisible deity, they were to be the face of God to the nations. Any act of disobedience on their

part marred that image. Therefore Achan's sin was to be dealt with in a serious way.

Admit and confess any sins and mistakes that led to the failure. (19-21)

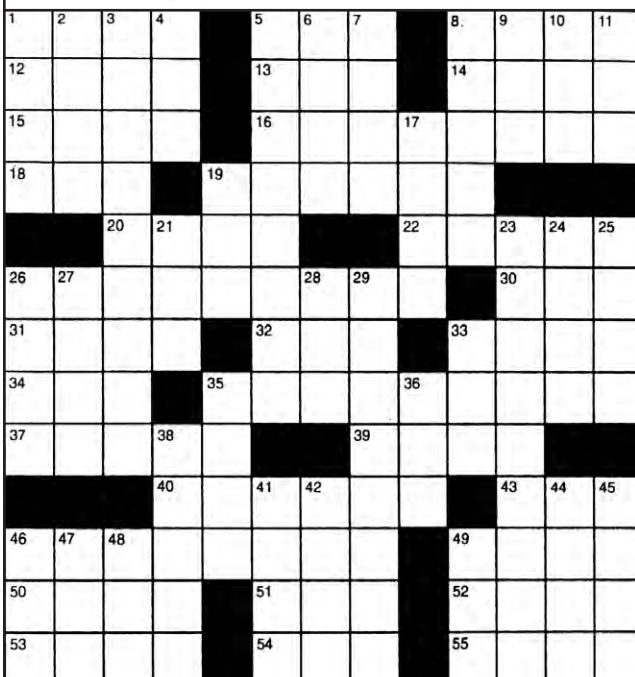
The Hebrew term for "sin" refers to something that "misses the mark." It implies a specific target and anything that does not exactly hit that target falls short of God's standard. When Achan sinned (Josh. 7:20), he missed the mark of God's command. Joshua told him not to "hide" what he did (Josh. 7:19). How tempting it is to cover up our mistakes. The Bible is replete with examples of hiding sin from God. Typically attempting to do so leads to even greater sin and even more grievous consequences (2 Sam. 11-12). Hiding from God began in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:9-10), and humankind has been hiding ever since. "Being honest with ourselves is a lifelong process," and while it is painful to admit our mistakes, ultimately that honesty sets us free. It enables us to live fully and freely before the face of Christ.

Deal appropriately with the cause of failure and refocus on God's plan. (25-26; 8:1)

Even though Achan confesses, his sin is still dealt with in a serious way. He reaps the consequences for his actions. God cleanses the Israelite camp so they can refocus on God's plan. In the life of the believer, it's important not to allow fear of failure to prevent us from moving forward with God's plan. Fear can provoke paralysis in a believer's life. And while it is wise to move forward cautiously after a failure, we are still called to move forward and to trust that God is bigger than our mistakes. Confession and repentance means a change of direction. It begins in the mind and heart and comes to fruition in the will. And it involves moving back into a relationship with God built on love, not fear. More than anything else, the love of God allows us to refocus on God's plan. (1 John 4:18). ☞

Christian Crossword

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Across

- Mount _____. Moses died here. (Deut. 34:1)
- He hath spread a _____ for my feet. (Lam. 1:13)
- Mine entrance.
- Above the top.
- Boat paddle.
- He _____ witness unto the truth. (John 5:33)
- Gentle.
- First one.
- Samuel's mentor. (1 Sam. 3:1)
- Still on the market.
- We have seen His star in the _____. (Matt. 2:2)
- Ancient Greek storyteller.
- Returned to.
- Time period.
- Affirm.
- Optimum. (for short)
- There shall come a _____ out of Jacob. (Num. 24:17)
- Company top dog. (abbr.)
- Arguable.
- _____ Oakley.

- Why beholdest thou the _____ that is in thy brother's eye? (Matt. 7:3)
- _____ yourselves therefore to God. (James 4:7)
- When thou wast under the _____ tree, I saw thee. (John 1:48)
- From the beginning of the _____ God made them male and female. (Mark 10:6)
- I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a _____. (John 1:32)
- Gasoline.
- Digit.
- To stuff.
- Jail unit.
- For Christ is the _____ of the law. (Rom. 10:4)
- Part of the eye.

Down

- Alaska city.
- Why, what _____ hath he done? (Matt. 27:23)
- _____ the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt

- be saved. (Acts 16:31)
- Fort _____; California army base.
- Midday.
- He that hath _____ to hear, let him hear. (Matt. 11:15)
- Three.
- _____ in Me, and I in you. (John 15:4)
- One of the 12 tribes of Israel.
- Private old age fund. (abbr.)
- Far. (prefix)
- I will be _____ in the Lord. (Ps. 104:34)
- Navy sailing vessel initials.
- Atmosphere.
- I have _____ thee an open door. (Rev. 3:8)
- Spoken.
- Peel.
- A term of contempt. (Matt. 5:22)
- Level.
- Bill or check.
- Tested.

- I _____ daily with you teaching in the temple. (Matt. 26:55)
- Written by Moses. (abbr.)
- Little fellow.
- But Christ _____, and in all. (Col. 3:11)
- Mouthful.
- Night-light.
- _____ the Terrible.
- Precious stones.
- Cholorfluorocarbon. (abbr.)
- Feel regret.
- Slippery fish.
650. (Roman numeral)



MUSIC REVIEW

UNSPOKEN

Unplugged
Centricity Music

Unspoken released its new album, "Unplugged," on April 28. The album features five new songs co-written by Unspoken including, "Broken Man," "Green Light," "Born With A Broken Heart" and "Solid Rock." The project by Centricity Music's pop/rock band also contains acoustic versions of several of the band's hits including the Top 5 song "Who You Are," the latest single "Good Fight" and "Start a Fire," which became the group's first No. 1 single at AC radio.

Chad Mattson, the group's lead singer, had this to say about the new album and the recording process: "This Unplugged project was a very gratifying record for us to create. Putting new faces on some familiar songs and recording a few of those 'gems' that didn't quite find a spot on our previous records ... [and] stripping songs back to their organic state is something we have always loved and recording together in one big room couldn't have been more spiritual, intimate and flat-out fun. Enjoy."

As a musician, I appreciate the vast differences between "normal" multitrack recording these days and the recording process described by Mattson. The finished result may not possess the technical flawless characteristic of modern multitrack recording, but it gains much more in feel and emotion than it gives up. If you've heard Unspoken live, you'll understand. 🎸



Shane Everett (left) & Shane Barnard

Photo courtesy of Fair Trade Services

Serving the Church

Shane & Shane launch online worship resource

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

With a passion for music and ministry, recording artists Shane Barnard and Shane Everett of Shane & Shane have launched "The Worship Initiative," an online resource where worship leaders, praise teams and songwriters can receive both musical training and spiritual teaching.

"The Worship Initiative has been a few years in the making," Barnard said. "The more we talked and prayed about what this project might look like, it seemed like God was bringing together a team and this season.

"Through the years, we've had the privilege by God's grace to pour into people's lives. Over the last eight years or so, we've held a songwriting and worship theology class with college students at our recording studio once a week. We discuss with them the importance of what worship leaders should be doing biblically as musicians and ambassadors of Christ."

With the goal of empowering musicians to lead, The Worship Initiative website (www.theworshipinitiative.com) provides hundreds of in-depth training resources including chord charts for songs, instruc-

tional videos and Bible study devotionals.

"With the resources that God has given us and the doors that have been opened through the years, we really wanted to see how we could best serve the Church," Barnard said.

"We wanted to provide practical resources and tools for musicians to easily access, and we've had a great response from worship leaders around the

country. It's been incredible to hear from worship teams going through these devotionals together in preparation for Sunday morning services and hear how God is moving in their churches. It's really cool to study the Word of God through a worship song."

In addition to the online community, the musical duo is releasing a series of worship albums that includes both traditional hymns and contemporary worship songs.

"All these songs point back to the Word of God and share who Christ is," Barnard said. "Our biggest goal in doing this is to see people fall in love with Jesus more than music. With every song, we have written a Bible study devotional to go along with it. We want to push worship leaders and teams deeper into the Word so when they're leading worship they have something on their heart to encourage, equip and engage worshippers." 🎸



Meet the reviewer

Rick Sharp writes music reviews for The Alabama Baptist. He is a writer and musician and a member of Central Baptist Church, Decatur, where he plays guitar in the praise band.



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"Our biggest goal in doing this is to see people fall in love with Jesus more than music."

Shane Barnard
singer/songwriter



O'Koyea Dickson

Photo courtesy of OKC Dodgers

Playing for **HIM**

OKC Dodgers' Dickson lives each day with greater purpose

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Each day awakens a purpose in O'Koyea Dickson. "God has me here for a reason. I want to be that light [so] that people can come to know how great and mighty He is. When I wake up in the morning, I pray that everything that I do revolves around Him so that He can be glorified and get all the praise," said Dickson, a first baseman and outfielder for the Oklahoma City Dodgers.

Growing up in Neighborhood Baptist Church, San Francisco, California, Dickson was 12 when he became a believer. His parents, Alice and Richard Dickson, led him to Christ, he said.

After battling injuries while a senior at George Washington High School in San Francisco he became stronger in his faith.

Reaching out to God

"I needed God more. I reached out to Him and said, 'You know the years of my life. Whatever the case may be I just want to give You the praise and glory because You deserve it for dying on the cross.'"

In college, Dickson led the Sonoma State Seawolves in runs scored, hits, home runs, total bases and slugging percentage. He was first-team All-California Collegiate Athletic Association (CCAA), CCAA Newcomer of the Year and All-West Region.

As a junior, Dickson was drafted by the Los Angeles Dodgers in 2011 in the 12th round, 374th overall. He has been promoted every season and in 2014 played for the Chattanooga Lookouts (AA) before joining Oklahoma City, the Dodgers' affiliate (AAA), this year.

His spiritual strength comes through Bible study.

"I know we can do all things through Christ. He strengthens us," said Dickson, 25. "I like reading the Bible and [continuing] to grow as I study His Word."

He also grows through prayer, devotionals, keeping a journal and attending baseball chapel.

"God is definitely controlling everything that I do on the field. Without Him, none of this would be possible. I do my best to play hard for Him. Every pitch, every at-bat, I call out to Him and I ask that 'Your will be done,'" Dickson said.

Former teammate Jeremy Hazelbaker, now with the Springfield Cardinals, roomed with Dickson and saw "how he is on a daily basis."

"All of us baseball players go through the trials and tribulations of the season. His faith in God [helps him] know that everything is going to be OK," Hazelbaker said. "That is one thing a lot of people struggle to understand about baseball. It is a game of failure. You have to put everything in God's hands and it is going to play out how it is supposed to. You have to trust that He has a plan, whether you understand it or not."

Dickson's positive thoughts and actions are evident, Hazelbaker said.

"He is a guy that is relying on his faith and that shows in his actions, his words and how he carries himself. ... That is how he goes about it every single day and everybody knows it."

Dickson makes an effort to encourage and "just love on people," he said.

"That is what Jesus Christ is all about; loving people and giving back and doing the right thing. Whatever I have, I will give it in a heartbeat. I know God is going to supply it. God will make a way out of no way."

"God doesn't have to give us anything. God doesn't owe us anything. We are to bow down before Him every day. I want to continue to reach out to Him and to seek His face," Dickson said.

"I am not afraid to share the gospel. I know that my faith is constantly tested every day and I am not afraid to let everybody know that with God none of this [professional baseball] is even possible." ❧

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Riot police raid, ban Belarusian church

GOMEL, Belarus — On May 31, Belarusian riot police raided the Reformed Orthodox Transfiguration Church's Sunday worship meeting, held in rented premises in Gomel.

On June 11 officials banned the church from renting premises, therefore banning it from meeting, church members said. Police asked, "Why do you attend this church and not a normal one?"

Officials warned congregation leader Pastor Sergei Nikolaenko — who is already facing trial on administrative code charges — that he would be investigated on possible criminal code charges.

Dmitry Chumakov, the official in charge of religious affairs at Gomel Regional Executive Committee, said, "You can watch a football match or discuss [the poet Aleksandr] Pushkin without permission, but for a religious meeting you need permission."

In mid-May there was a similar armed police raid on the Soligorsk congregation of Council of Churches Baptists. "Eleven more armed police arrived and broke up the service, as if they were coming after bandits," one witness said. Two congregation members were fined in early June for meeting for worship without state permission. (F18)

Baptists fined for holding religious meeting

MARYANOVK, Crimea — Seven of nine Baptists who conducted an outdoor religious meeting in Maryanovk, a village in central Crimea, were fined in May. An eighth Baptist was due in court June 15.

The fined Christians rejected police and court insistence that their event required prior notification under Russia's Demonstrations Law.

"This event did not disturb public order and did not threaten the safety of the participants themselves or of other citizens," church members insisted.

The chair of the village council who halted the event, Aleksei Rusanov, and the head of the District Police, Col. Aleksandr Venikov, both refused to discuss their actions.

Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014, some religious communities have complained of state restrictions on public activities they had previously conducted when the peninsula was under Ukrainian rule. The fines came as proposed new punishments for "religious agitation in public places" passed a first reading in the State Council of Crimea. (F18)

Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

LMCO reaches 2nd highest total in history

RICHMOND, Va. — While it fell \$1 million short of 2013's all-time record offering of \$154 million, the 2014 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (LMCO) totaled \$153,002,394.13 — the second-highest total in the 126-year history of the offering.

"We have so much grace from God to celebrate in this offering," International Mission Board (IMB) President David Platt said. "(This offering) will supply more than half of our total IMB budget. ... Because [churches and individuals] love God more than the pleasures, possessions and pursuits of this world, and because they want to glorify His name among all nations, we'll be able to partner with them and missionaries sent from Southern Baptist churches around the world to take the gospel to people who have never heard it."

Platt wants to expand pathways for congregations, professionals, students, retirees and individuals to join "limitless teams," many led by full-time missionaries, to reach unreached people groups. These full-time missionaries will continue to be the key strategic workers in some of the toughest areas on earth. More than 4,700 IMB missionaries depend on LMCO to pay day-to-day expenses and fund their efforts to spread the gospel. (BP)