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Quality preaching noted as top factor when selecting a church

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'Food wagon' provides ministry outlet for FBC Trussville Men on Mission

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Making the Bible priority



Unsplash photo

Students read Scripture less during busy seasons; parents' example can help

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

A recent study suggests that teens read the Bible less when they are busy with school and activities, but student leaders say parental example can help reverse that trend.

The Teen State of the Bible 2016 report, commissioned by American Bible Society and conducted by Barna Research in May, found that 69 percent of teens ages 13 to 17 own a Bible, but only 25 percent of teens read the Bible four or more times per week. More than half of the 1,013 teens surveyed, 53 percent, say they wish they read the Bible more.

The No. 1 reason given for the decline was "being too busy with life's responsibilities." It's a con-

cern echoed by many students.

"I am not satisfied with the amount of time I spend reading the Bible, but I feel as if I don't have enough time in the day to even get little things done after going to school and work," said Kaitlyn, 18.

Big change in students

Emma, 17, said she too has trouble prioritizing Bible study during the week.

"I am never home. I get up at 5:30 for school, get home at 7 at night, do two hours of homework, eat dinner with my family and then pass out," she said.

Bill Morrison, senior Baptist campus minister at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, said he has not noticed a big change in college students in terms of Bible reading.

"We deal with students who take their faith pretty seriously and always have," Morrison said.

Morrison has seen more interest in small group Bible study and accountability groups among the student population he serves. Students also have more access to the Bible because they have Scripture available on their phones.

One change Morrison has noted over the past two decades is a decrease in biblical literacy.

No foundation

"We have unchurched people who come to our small group Bible studies, and I can no longer depend on them knowing the stories of the Bible," he said. "There is no biblical foundation, so they don't know about Moses or Noah or David and Goliath."

Barna researchers found that a high percentage of American teens, 86 percent, view the Bible as sacred literature.

'Respect for ... Bible'

Arthur Satterwhite, senior manager of national movements mobilization at American Bible Society, said, "American teens sometimes get a bad rap as being uninterested or even anti-faith. But (the) Teen State of the Bible report shows that a majority of America's teens have respect for and interest in the Bible."

Among the 18 percent of teens who increased their Bible reading, 55 percent said that they did so because they "came to understand [Bible reading] as an important part of [their] faith journey."

(See 'Not enough,' page 3)

"If parents will train themselves to live a godly life and not just a church life, we will see a difference in our kids' spiritual lives."

Scooter Kellum

youth ministry strategist, SBOM office of collegiate & student ministries

COMMENT

Is Religious Liberty for All?

Baptists read with disbelief when an elderly couple in Turkmenistan was arrested and fined the equivalent of three months wages for allowing fellow believers to gather in their home for Bible reading and prayer. We prayed for God's intervention when a shipment of Bibles to Uzbekistan was seized by the government. We wrote letters demanding the release from prison of believers in Iran whose only "crime" was preaching Jesus Christ.

As Christian believers we get irritated, and sometimes irate, when brothers and sisters in the Lord are so grossly mistreated as news stories report.

Do we become as irritated or irate when the mistreatment is applied to someone of a different religion? Are we as concerned when the religious liberty of "the heretic, Turk, Jew or whatsoever" is violated?

'Between God and themselves'

Early Baptists were the first to claim religious liberty as a right not only for themselves but for all people. Thomas Helwys wrote in 1612, "For men's religion to God is between God and themselves. The king shall not answer for it. Neither may the king be judge between God and man. Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews or whatsoever — it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure. This is made evident to our Lord the King by the Scriptures."

For this affront to King James (of the King James Bible), Helwys was imprisoned and later died in London's Newgate Prison.

As a minority religious group early Baptists in England and America believed and died for the fact that religious liberty was a God-given right to all people. That conviction is reflected in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 18 reads, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or



THOUGHTS
By Bob Terry

private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

Unfortunately many would-be champions of religious freedom only speak or act when their rights or the rights of a member of their religion is violated. So Baptists lobby to free a Christian pastor from prison in Iran but say nothing about the execution of numerous Bahá'í leaders. Persecution of that religious group seldom even make our news.

All in jeopardy

We protest fines for Christians engaged in private worship but are silent when Muslims and Jews experience similar persecution.

Somehow we seem to have forgotten the truth that when government is free to pick whose rights it will violate then no one is free and all are in jeopardy.

The controversy in France over the beach attire called "burkinis" is a recent illustration. A widely circulated news photo shows three policemen surrounding a Muslim woman on a beach forcing her to take off some of her clothes in order to remain on the beach. A second photo shows two Roman Catholic nuns wearing traditional long habits wading in ankle-deep ocean water.

Nothing was said to the nuns about taking off clothing to remain on the beach even though their bodies were almost as equally covered as the woman in the burkini.

Not according to popularity

Religious liberty is not supposed to depend on how populous or powerful one's religious group is. Religious liberty is supposed to be recognized as a God-given right to all.

Interestingly the French courts quickly overturned the burkini ban on French beaches. How-

ever, the majority of the beaches continued the ban as a demonstration of the nation's commitment to secularism.

Evidently skimpy swimwear meets the definition of secular but modest swimwear does not. How do you think that definition harmonizes with the apostle Paul's instruction in 1 Timothy 2:9 that women should dress modestly?

Alabama now has its own case of religious liberty and acceptable dress (see "'Devastated' by removing headscarf" on page 10 of the Sept. 8 issue). Yvonne Allen, of Tuskegee, was forced to remove her head covering when she renewed her driver's license. She wears the head covering as a symbol of her submission to God. State law allows head coverings for Muslim women and Seik men but because Allen is a Christian, she was forced to remove her head covering.

A lawsuit has been filed asserting Allen's religious liberty was violated. It will be interesting to see the outcome of that case.

The United States has other ongoing struggles over religious liberty. In some major cities the Salvation Army has lost contracts for social services because it holds certain religiously based beliefs about family. In some states Christian-run child care agencies have been stripped of government contracts because of religious teachings about marriage.

The struggle of some bakers and florists who do not want to use their artistry for

homosexual weddings is well documented. The government has driven some out of business through heavy fines and the threat of jail.

Issue on the edges

How these cases will end is unclear. Courts, like baseball umpires, have little trouble deciding issues that are "right down the middle" of the law. It is the issues on the edges that determine the scope of any law. Where does the religious liberty of an individual end and the general welfare of the public begin?

Still if Baptists claim religious liberty for themselves, we must be willing to enter the fray in behalf of others. That is the teaching of our faith for we believe all are given religious liberty by God. That is the direction of our Christian life for the Bible teaches to do for others what you would have them do for you. That is the way of Christian advocacy where we work with others for truth and justice in the public square.✠

"If Baptists claim religious liberty for themselves,

we must be willing to enter the fray in behalf of others.

That is the teaching of our faith. ... That is the direction of our Christian life. ... That is the way of Christian advocacy."

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✠ **TAB** THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

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

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'Not enough time'



Unsplash photo

Teens notice their parents' Bible reading habits, influence of faith

(continued from page 1)

"Many teens are recognizing that the Bible speaks to the complete human experience — the struggles and trials and triumphs of life," Satterwhite said.

Making reading a priority

The study also found that teens notice their parents' Bible reading habits and the influence of faith at home. Half of teens surveyed said they see their parents reading the Bible "frequently" or "sometimes" and said the Bible has "a lot" of influence on rules at home.

Scooter Kellum, youth ministry strategist in the office of collegiate & student ministries at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, helps Alabama Baptists with ministry to students in grades 7–12. He believes parents remain the top reason teens make Bible reading a priority — or don't.

'No. 1 thing missing'

"Studies continue to show that the No. 1 influence on teens is still their parents. If that is true, the No. 1 thing missing is not seeing the example set by their parents of spending time with the Lord at home," Kellum said.

Teens assume their youth leaders read the

#WhyBible campaign targets millennials

Countless social media posts showcase the conversation taking place around Wycliffe Bible Translators' new #WhyBible campaign.

Value in reading

The reason for the campaign stems from the realization that an increasing number of younger believers are finding less value in Bible teaching, a Wycliffe representative told The Christian Post.

"We know the Bible is relevant to modern life though and needed now more than ever," Scott Everhart, senior director of marketing at Wycliffe, told The Post.

"The goal is to create a forum for testimonies and stories shared about the Bible's incredible impact on individuals, communities and the world," he said.

"For those walking daily in the Scriptures, it's a chance to be part of a community ... celebrating how God is speaking to them through His Word," Everhart told The Post.

**For more information,
visit why.bible.**

Daily Scripture

"For those who may have fallen out of the habit of engaging with

Scripture daily, it's a chance to refocus ... (and maybe) an encouragement for anyone who might be considering spending time in the Word for the first time." (TAB)

Bible. However, if they don't see their parents engaged in reading Scripture or hear them talk about Scripture or Jesus at home, they don't see faith as a priority, Kellum said.

"If parents will train themselves to live a

godly life and not just a church life, we will see a difference in our kids' spiritual lives. I believe we will also see a difference in our homes, in our churches and around the world." ✠

Ministry Tips



REVERSING THE YOUTH TREND

By Andy Waits

Associate pastor of youth, FBC Springville

Three quarters of teenagers leave the church after high school and few ever return. Youth ministers are all too familiar with this horrific statistic. How can this trend be reversed? Here are a few tips that have proven effective.

► **Preach the Word.** This is your job description as a gospel minister.

You are not an entertainer, comedian, event coordinator or overgrown teenager. Second Timothy 4:1–5 is your biblical job description.

► **Give them depth.** Teenagers hunger to go deeper in God's Word. Move them from the milk to the meat (Heb. 6:1).

► **Give laser focus to biblical salvation.** Do they truly grasp what conversion is? How can we expect youth to grow spiritually if they have a shallow understanding of God radically saving their soul for eternity?

► **Don't build your ministry on hype.** If it takes a circus to get them there it will take a circus to keep them there. Shock value and hype give instant results but do not make long-term disciples.

► **Implement multi-generational ministry.** It is biblical and it works. They must learn to build relationships outside of their own age group if they are going to stay involved in the body of Christ. ✠

GOD'S *path*



UA Athletics/Crimson Tide Photos

Two Auburn Tigers defenders try to wrap up A.B. 'Bubba' Sawyer (second from right, No. 27 in white) following the Crimson Tide's 30-yard reception during the 1969 Iron Bowl.

Football player turned minister, missionary reflects on journey to serving God

By Bruce Sims
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Diving into the Ole Miss end zone for a touchdown during what has been called one of the greatest college football games ever was a high point in A.B. "Bubba" Sawyer's life.

Sawyer, who now serves as minister of senior adults at First Baptist Church, Fairhope, said, "Alabama won that game 33-32, but it was during my senior year at Alabama (when) our team experienced a loss in the Orange Bowl to Nebraska that had me crying my eyes out.

"As a team we made so many mistakes there was no way we were going to win, and this was for the National Championship as both of us were undefeated," he said. "They were ranked in first place and we were in second."

After returning to the team's Miami hotel following the game, Sawyer began a heartfelt time of reflection. The end result was that he gave his life to Christ.

Football career

"To me, my football career was over," he said. "It began with my days at

Fairhope High and culminated with the loss to Nebraska as a member of the Crimson Tide team.

"As I looked back I remembered how my friends and I were caught up in the tremendous success of Alabama football. I thought that if I could play for Alabama, I would never desire anything else."

Sawyer, despite his diminutive size, did play for the Tide, as well experience the wins that came with playing there.

Shallow excitement

"However, I discovered that the deep and lasting fulfillment that I hungered for just wasn't to be found in football," he said. "My life was exciting in a shallow sort of way, but it was by no means purposeful."

One evening, while having a casual conversation with a teammate, Sawyer listened as his friend explained how his life had become meaningful since he had begun to take Jesus and the Bible seriously.

"That brief conversation began a process of consideration that changed my whole life," he said. "After the Nebraska game I

knew I wanted what my teammate had."

A few months later Sawyer graduated from the University of Alabama, and Coach Paul "Bear" Bryant made him a student assistant coach from 1972 to 1975.

"On June 14, 1975, I married Debbie Leytham, a cheerleader at Theodore High," he said. The couple moved from Tuscaloosa to Montgomery in 1976, where Sawyer served as head football coach at St. James Academy.

"We spent two years there before we returned to Fairhope, where I served as an assistant coach at Fairhope High," Sawyer noted.

And then it was off to the missions field — from 1980 to 1982 the couple served as volunteer missionaries to the Island of Mauritius.

"I was soaking in the tub, reading a copy of *Contempo* magazine," he said, "when I came across a need in Mauritius for a sports coach. I called out to Debbie to get an encyclopedia so we could find Mauritius on the map. We had both been under conviction to go to the missions field, and this sounded like the perfect opportunity."

The couple volunteered for one year, which soon became two when the full-time missionary took his stateside assignment.

Seminary training

"When we came home I was named as minister of youth at Fairhope First Baptist," he said. "The church worked with me

so that I could attend New Orleans Theological Seminary."

Serving overseas

Once he had his master's degree in hand he accepted the call to serve as minister of youth to a Baptist church in Batesville, Mississippi.

Following a three-year stint in Batesville, the couple attended French Language School in Tours, France, with the thought of returning to Mauritius as career missionaries. They served there from 1988 to 1991 before receiving a call to return to the pastoral staff of First, Fairhope, serving there from 1991 until 2001. It was then to Beech Haven Church, Athens, Georgia, from 2001 to 2016, when First, Fairhope, called them

back to serve for the third time.

Sawyer was recruited to Alabama by Coach Jimmy Sharpe, who told Bryant that the kid from Fairhope had great stats, but he wasn't very big.

Bryant replied, "A football doesn't weigh very much and real bigness is in the heart. If he has speed and heart he can play."

Today, Sawyer is in the midst of developing prayer warriors within Fairhope's nursing homes, visiting the sick and learning the names of all the new members of First, Fairhope.

"Just as I was in search of a meaningful relationship with the Lord, I'm doing my best to develop such relationships with our senior adults," he said. ☞



SAWYER

"I discovered that the deep and lasting fulfillment that I hungered for just wasn't to be found in football. My life was exciting in a shallow sort of way, but it was by no means purposeful."

A.B. 'Bubba' Sawyer
minister of senior adults, FBC Fairhope

‘High view of Scripture’

Quality preaching ranks most important factor at church, survey finds

By Grace Thornton
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When it comes to picking a church, 83 percent of adults said the preaching played a big role in where they chose to stay. It was the highest-ranked factor in a recent Pew Research study, beating out “feeling welcomed by leaders” at 79 percent, “style of services” at 74 percent and “location” at 70 percent.

It’s a statistic Doug Wilson isn’t sure how to feel about.

“It’s really no surprise that an overwhelming majority of church attenders choose their place of worship based on the quality of the preaching and teaching,” said Wilson, dean of the School of Christian Studies at the University of Mobile (UM).

But, he said, “two opposing factors account for this trend, I think.” One is encouraging — the other, not so much, he said.

‘Called to equip’

“On the one hand, pastors with a high view of Scripture understand that they are called to equip the saints for the work of ministry. An effective communicator is essential for a spiritually healthy church, and mature believers expect a healthy diet of Bible teaching from their pastors,” Wilson said.

But on the other hand, he said, is the trend toward entertainment and performance.

“Popular speakers amass huge followings through positive-thinking messages

and slick marketing, individuals who lack theological depth and convey moralistic therapeutic deism,” he said.

A split view

Robert Smith Jr., the Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity Christian Preaching at Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, said he shared Wilson’s split view.

Some of the people represented in this number “want someone who can command their attention by giving an authoritative word from Scripture that is relevant and challenges them to move past where they are and into what God wants them to be,” he said.

But others, he said, “want the opposite — they want a snappy sermon or a Happy Meal or a light snack. They don’t want to be challenged or convicted. They want a word from Scripture that’s dressed up, warmed up and presented to them in a way that will tickle their ears.”

So how many people in that 83 percent fall one way, and how many fall the other way? It’s hard to know, but Jay Robertson, assistant professor in Christian studies at UM, said he was optimistic that the stat might have some positive implications, especially for younger Christians.

“According to a recent Barna survey, practicing Christian millennials — persons 18–33 — maintain a high view of Scripture,” Robertson said.

Renewed interest

And in the recent Pew Research study, the numbers for the preaching factor are even higher for the younger respondents than the respondent pool as a whole — 87 percent of young adults said the sermon was important in their church choice.

“This high percentage of Americans searching for a church home who say the quality of the preaching is important is very significant,” Robertson said. “In the not too distant past, many people seemed to be irritated by doctrine and allergic to theology. A renewed interest in theology

is reflected in Christian millennials desiring to be part of a church community that boldly proclaims the whole counsel of God through a Christocentric gospel lens.”

Mike Jackson, director of the office of LeaderCare & church health for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM), said the results of the study have definite implications for how churches and pastors go about their lives.

“I do think this data will assist churches that are looking to fill a vacant pastoral position to place a stronger emphasis on the preaching skills of a potential candidate,” he said.

He said this could also encourage pastors to focus more on preparation for better preaching experiences and highlight the need for more training opportunities to enhance a pastor’s preaching skill set.

“I do feel there is a desire for those attending church today to find quality in the worship experience,

which includes a strong pulpit ministry of solid biblical preaching and proclamation,” Jackson said.

But that’s not the only result from the study that he found significant.

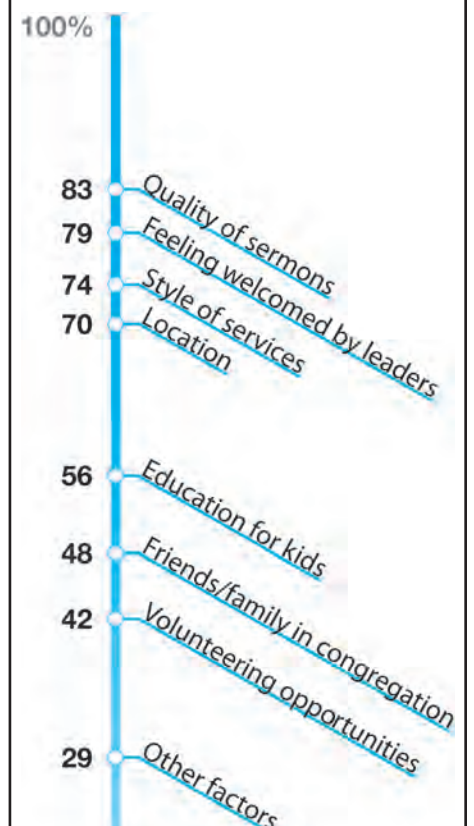
“The other stat regarding feeling welcomed by church leadership is also very telling,” he said. “People are looking for a connection with their leadership. Leaders who have an outgoing personality will excel in this area. For those who are more introverted, it will require being intentional to work to make others feel welcome.”

But this is an area that a pastor might excel in, even if preaching isn’t his best skill, Jackson said, so it might not be entirely positive for a church to look primarily at strong preaching skills.

“There are lots of great pastors whose strength might not be the preaching ministry, but his other gifts — pastoring the people and administering the church,” he said.

Keith Hibbs, director of SBOM’s office of worship leadership and church music, said he sees all the top-ranked factors as being important.

When searching for a new congregation, Americans value quality of sermons and feeling welcomed.



Among U.S. adults who have looked for a new congregation or house of worship, % who say each factor played an important role in their choice.

Source: Pew Research Center

Graphic by Noel Roberts

“Cross-generationally, I would think the importance of the preaching and the quality of the entire worship experience would be highly rated as a factor in the selection of a church home,” he said. “I would also think that relationships made in the process would be a strong factor.”

**For more information, visit
pewresearch.org.**

Although not delineated in the survey it would be good to know the generational breakdown of the data. Millennials, according to James White in ‘The Rise of the Nones,’ choose churches during a visit in the first 90 seconds based on ‘curb appeal.’ This includes friendliness of the parishioners, appearance of the facilities and signage. Their assessment includes authenticity on platform and excellence in the way the worship service is planned and implemented.”

— **Keith Hibbs, director of SBOM’s office of worship leadership and church music**

Across ALABAMA'S Associations

To submit news items, email news@thealabamabaptist.org or call 205-870-4720, ext. 112, at least three weeks prior to the event.

ALABAMA-CRENSHAW

► **First Church, Luverne**, will celebrate its 127th anniversary and homecoming Sept. 25, 10:30 a.m. There will be special music and a celebration video remembering past members and blessings over the past year. Lee Dymond will speak. A fellowship lunch will follow the service. For more information call Pastor Clay Crum at 334-335-5264.

CALHOUN

► **First Church, Oxford**, will hold a celebration service for its 180th anniversary Oct. 2, 10 a.m. Former pastor Buddy Nelson will speak. New Hope Missionary Church, Hobson City, will provide special music. New Hope Missionary Church was founded by First, Oxford, in 1865. Lunch will follow the service. For lunch tickets or more information call the church office at 256-831-1121. Stan Albright is pastor.

COFFEE

► **New Home Church, Enterprise**, will hold a "Back to Church" special service Sept. 25. Sunday School will be at 10 a.m. and morning worship will be at 11. Singers from the Baptist College of Florida in Graceville will perform special music. Lunch will follow the service. The afternoon will be filled with games for all ages. For more information call the church office at 334-347-3646. Cliff Quincey is pastor.

MADISON

► **First Church, Hazel Green**, will celebrate its 50th anniversary Sept. 25. A meet and greet will be at 9:15 a.m. and morning worship will begin at 10:30 a.m. There will be special music and former pastor Bobby

Eads will speak. A potluck lunch will follow the service. Mike Patterson is pastor.

MARSHALL

► **Honeycomb Church, Grant**, will celebrate its 25th homecoming Oct. 2, 10 a.m. Lunch will follow the service and then more worship in song. For more information call Tim Aultman at 256-558-6309. Patrick Hammett is pastor.

MONTGOMERY

► **Dean Finch** is the new minister of missions and senior adults for **Taylor Road Church, Montgomery**. He previously served as minister of education at Taylor Road. He holds a bachelor's degree from Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee and a master's degree from Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He and his wife, Diane, have five children and nine grandchildren. Also at Taylor Road, **Seth Dunnington** is the new pastor of worship and discipleship. He previously served as minister of media, education and music at Farley Community Church, Huntsville. He also served at Memphis Church, Dothan. He holds a bachelor's and master's degree from the Baptist College of Florida in Graceville. He and his wife, Holly, have one child. Daniel Atkins is pastor.

MOBILE

► **Kevin Castleberry** is the new director of education and young adult ministries for **Woodridge Church, Mobile**. He previously served as minister of youth and education at Mexia Church. He also served at Celebration Church, Mobile. He and his wife, Janiece, have two chil-

dren. Mack Morris is pastor.

PLEASANT GROVE

► **Hepzibah Church, McCalla**, will host the Pleasant Grove Association revival services Oct. 2-5. Danny Lovett, pastor of The Church at Chelsea Westover, will speak Sunday at 6 p.m. Dan Lanier, pastor of Northcrest Church, Meridian, Mississippi, will speak Monday at 7 p.m. Ron Delgado, founding pastor of Vibrant Church, Columbus, Mississippi, will speak Tuesday at 7 p.m. Phil Winingham, pastor of Boones Chapel Church, Prattville, and state missionary for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, will speak Wednesday at 7 p.m. Dan Wiggins is director of missions.

RANDOLPH

► **Jerry Carter** is the new interim pastor of **First Church, Roanoke**. He holds degrees from Macedonia Baptist College in Midland, North Carolina, and Clarksville Seminary in Clayton, North Carolina. He and his wife, Claudine, have three children.

RUSSELL

► **Crawford Church, Phenix City**, will hold the Russell Association Disaster Relief (DR) training Oct. 14, 3 p.m.-9 p.m. and Oct. 15, 6:30 a.m.-2 p.m. The training will include prerequisite training, cleanup, recovery, mud-out and chainsaw. You must be 18 years or older and in good health to participate. For more information call Joycelyn Carrell, Russell Association DR coordinator, at 334-298-3581. To register visit www.alsbom-gm.org by Oct. 12. Steve Williamson is pastor. Tommy Poole is director of missions. #

CP giving 4.8% over year-to-date projection

Year-to-date contributions to Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) national and international missions and ministries received by the SBC Executive Committee (EC) through 11 months of the current fiscal year are 4.8 percent above the year-to-date SBC Cooperative Program (CP) Allocation Budget projection, and are 2.8 percent above contributions received during the same timeframe in 2015, according to a news release from EC President and CEO Frank S. Page.

As of Aug. 31, gifts received for distribution through the CP Allocation Budget through the first nine months of the convention's fiscal year (October to September) totaled \$179,161,017.35. This total is \$8,202,684.02 above

the \$170,958,333.33 year-to-date budgeted projection to support Southern Baptist ministries globally and across North America, and is \$4,884,282.36 more than the \$174,276,734.99 received through the end of August 2015.



Designated giving of \$199,989,817.92 for the same year-to-date period is 4.62 percent above the \$191,161,942.22 received at this point in 2015. This total includes only those gifts received and distributed by the EC and does not reflect designated gifts contributed directly to SBC entities.

August's CP allocation receipts for SBC work totaled \$15,543,752.16. Designated gifts received amounted to \$4,934,575.04. (BP)

RELIGION

in America

Compiled from Wire Services

Christian-run funeral home legally fires transgender worker

LANSING, Mich. — U.S. District Court Judge Sean F. Cox recently ruled that a Christian-run funeral home in Michigan has the right to fire a transgender employee for refusing to adhere to company dress code, according to The Christian Post.

R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes of Detroit claimed protection under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and the court found "that the funeral home has met its initial burden of showing that enforcement of Title VII, and the body of sex-stereotyping case law that has developed under it, would impose a substantial burden on its ability to conduct business in accordance with its sincerely held religious beliefs," according to Cox.

Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) represented the funeral home in the case against the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

"The feds shouldn't strong-arm private business owners into violating their religious beliefs, and the court has affirmed that here," said ADF Legal Counsel Doug Wardlow.

"The government must respect the freedom of those who are seeking to serve the grieving and vulnerable. They shouldn't be forced into violating their deepest convictions."

EEOC filed their second-ever case in September 2014 on behalf of Amiee Stephens, who had been employed as a funeral director/embalmer since October 2007. In 2013, Stephens gave the funeral home a letter explaining she was undergoing a gender transition from male to female and would begin dressing as such.

Harris Funeral Homes later fired Stephens because what she was "proposing to do was unacceptable." (TAB)



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REFLECTIONS

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Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

The Person of Christ

Faithful and True

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

The correspondence between the Incarnate Living Word, Jesus, and the inspired written Word, the Bible, is noteworthy. Both are faithful and true. Toward the conclusion of Revelation a voice from heaven was heard to instruct John to write down what he saw and heard, saying to the beloved disciple, “For these words are true and faithful” (Rev. 21:5). Likewise, as the Bible ends it bears witness twice to Christ as a person who is faithful and true.

In Revelation 3, Christ’s self-introduction in the letter to the Laodicean Church began with the words, “These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness” (v. 14). Later in Chapter 19, the testimony given concerning the glorified Christ is, “Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True” (v. 11).

Christ demonstrated Himself to be a faithful witness to His Father’s word and will, as well as being faithful to His own mission for coming in human flesh. In declaring divine judgment upon religious unbelievers, Christ explained His authority for such a proclamation, saying, “For I have not spoken on My own authority, but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak” (John 12:49).

God’s words

Later He spoke to the disciples concerning the Father’s word, assuring them with the claim, “The word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me” (John 14:24). In His notable prayer in John 17, Jesus confessed to the Father concerning His disciples, “I have given to them the words which You have given Me” (v. 8).

Christ was not only faithful to the Father’s words but also to His will. He declared, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38). With accuracy, He testified in John 8:29, “He who sent Me is with Me. The

Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.”

In application to Christ, Hebrews 10:5–7 quotes from Psalm 40: “Behold, I have come — in the volume of the book it is written of Me — to do Your will, O God.”

Undeterred mission

He also remained true to the purpose for which He came. No person or power turned Him aside from fulfilling His mission. Christ put that mission in the simplest of terms, saying, “The Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

Hebrews 2:17 casts His faithfulness to His purpose in more theological terms, saying, “In all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”

In one of His most noteworthy claims, Christ declared, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6). Not only did He speak the truth when He was faithful to the Father’s words, Christ was the very embodiment of truth. As He was the Way to the Father and the Life of the Father having come in flesh, He was in His very person the Truth about the Father. From His nature as truth, Christ both lived the truth and spoke the truth. A perfect correspondence existed between His life and His words.

As Christ’s followers, we are at our best in faithfulness and truth when our lives and our words correspond. ✠

Jerry Batson is a retired Alabama Baptist pastor who also has served as associate dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University and professor of several schools of religion during his career.



Hard for whites to understand black experience, Young says

The president of a major African-American denomination who earlier this summer participated in a groundbreaking discussion about improving race relations with leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) said Sept. 8 that nonblacks often lack empathy for the plight facing black America.

“I have a lot of friends who are not African-Americans,” Jerry Young, president of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., said in a morning session of the group’s annual gathering in early September in Kansas City, Missouri. “They are from the broader community.”

“Love them to death,” the pastor of New Hope Baptist Church, Jackson, Mississippi, said of his nonblack friends, but they have never had to protest in order to gain the right to enter a building, eat at a lunch counter, sleep in a hotel or “the right to just vote.”



YOUNG

‘Insensitive’ to others

“If you haven’t had to protest to do that, sometimes you can be insensitive to those who had to do it,” Young said. “If you are born already wealthy, and you have all you need, it’s hard to understand a little boy from Mississippi born on the plantation. I just think there needs to be some sensitivity to the plight of the folk who have been the oppressed.”

Young said he did not want his comments to be interpreted as a blanket en-

dorsement of everything associated with the Black Lives Matter movement, viewed by some white Americans as encouraging violence against police.

Need for justice

“We want folks to understand that we do believe that black lives matter also, and that we need justice in this country, and we need for justice to be colorblind in this country, yet we cannot decide that we’re going to indiscriminately go around just killing people,” he said. “You can’t be just shooting police officers. You can’t do it that way.”

In June, Young participated with then-SBC President Ronnie Floyd and others in a panel discussion on racial unity and the Church in St. Louis, Missouri, at the SBC annual meeting.

“Those who would like to suggest that racism is not indeed a problem for the Church but rather it is a sociological problem, I would argue it is without question a sin problem,” Young told SBC messengers gathered not far from Ferguson, Missouri, the St. Louis suburb where the 2014 shooting death of a young black man by a white police officer sparked a national conversation about racial profiling, police brutality and racial inequality in the U.S. justice system.

“Since the Church is the only salt and light in town, if there is darkness and decay in America, it appears to me that the Church must be guilty.” (BNG)

The Alabama Baptist preparing to launch new website, expand reader engagement

You want to read what you want to read. And you want it to be easy to use, easy on the eyes and simple to interact with. Right?

The good news is *The Alabama Baptist*’s upcoming new website will be just that, said Jennifer Davis Rash, executive editor.

“We are excited about the look and user friendliness of our new site and the potential for how it will build an expanded community with our readers,” she said.

Paul Brandon — principal of Vehicle Media, the web designer for the upcoming site for thealabamabaptist.org — said, “It’s a much more fresh and updated feel. It’s got neat features in terms of navigating around, so it’s easier to read and digest and get to the things you want to read. It’s a more tightly knit user experience.”

And the site will be mobile responsive, so it’s much simpler to access from handheld devices, he said. “It’s cleaner and easier to use.”

Rash said it’s the product of more than a year of hard work.

“Finding a way to migrate tens of thousands of articles from a website custom built in 2007 to a new mobile-responsive



TAB website screenshots



site that fits the needs of today’s phones, tablets, laptops and computers has been an intense undertaking to say the least, but we are almost there,” she said. “We can’t wait to unveil the new site and all its new functions.”

So be watching for the big reveal for *The Alabama Baptist*’s new website. It is coming soon. (TAB)

Most Americans say church services not for political endorsements, survey finds

Since the 1950s, the IRS has banned preachers from endorsing candidates during church services.

Most Americans seem to like it that way.

Eight in 10 (79 percent) say it is inappropriate for pastors to endorse a candidate in church. Three-quarters say churches should steer clear of endorsements.

Yet fewer than half want churches to be punished if they do endorse candidates.

Those are among the findings in a new report on religion and politics from Nashville-based LifeWay Research.

Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research, says there's little enthusiasm for political endorsement by pastors or churches.

"Americans already argue about politics enough outside the church," he said. "They don't want pastors bringing those arguments into worship."

The ban on endorsements, known as the Johnson Amendment, dates back to a conflict between then-U.S. Sen. Lyndon Johnson and a Texas nonprofit, which opposed his re-election bid. Approved in 1954, the IRS rule bans all 501(c)(3) nonprofits, including churches, from active involvement in political campaigns.

Strong disapproval

Since 2008 a group of mostly Protestant pastors has challenged the ban each year by endorsing candidates in an event called "Pulpit Freedom Sunday." Recent polling shows few churchgoers have heard their pastor endorse a candidate. The Johnson Amendment has been a point of contention this election season.

The new LifeWay report compares results from telephone surveys of 1,000 Americans about religion and politics in 2008 and 2015. Researchers found disapproval of endorsements remains strong.

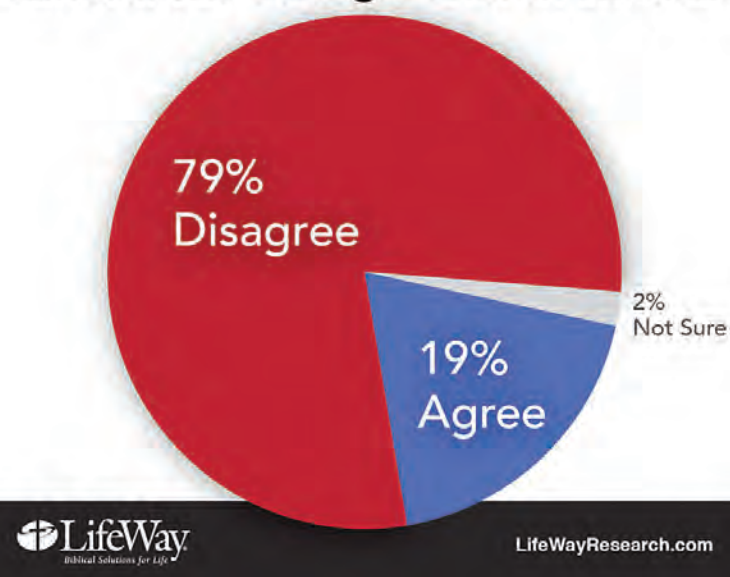
In both surveys, LifeWay Research asked Americans to respond to the following statement: "I believe it is appropriate for pastors to publicly endorse candidates for public office during a church service."

In 2008, 86 percent of Americans disagreed while 13 percent agreed. One percent were not sure. In 2015, 79 percent disagreed, while 19 percent agreed. Two percent were unsure.

Few Protestants (20 percent) or Catholics (13 percent) see endorsements as appropriate. A

Among Americans

It is appropriate for pastors to publicly endorse political candidates during a church service.



quarter of those with evangelical beliefs (25 percent) agreed, while 16 percent of other Americans agreed.

Support for endorsements outside of church declined slightly. In 2008, about half of Americans (53 percent) said it was appropriate for pastors to endorse candidates outside of their role at church. In 2015 less than half (43 percent) agreed.

Those who support endorsements remain in a minority across faith traditions. Three in 10 (29 percent) of those with evangelical beliefs said endorsements by churches are appropriate. Twenty-seven percent of Protestants agreed, as did only 18 percent of Catholics. Weekly churchgoers (29 percent) were skeptical as well as those who rarely or never go to church (18 percent).

Political campaigns

Most Americans also want churches to steer clear of any involvement with political campaigns. Eighty-one percent disagreed with the statement, "I believe it is appropriate for churches to use their resources to campaign for candidates for public office." Seventeen percent agreed. Two percent were not sure.

Fewer Americans think churches should be punished for their involvement in campaigns.

In 2015 less than half (42 percent) said churches should lose their tax exemption for publicly endorsing candidates. Fifty-two percent disagreed. Five percent were not sure.

In 2008 more than half (52

percent) of Americans said churches should lose their tax exemption for publicly endorsing candidates. Forty-two percent disagreed. Six percent were not sure.

"Endorsements from the pulpit are unpopular and most Americans say they are inappropriate," McConnell said. "But they don't want churches to be punished for something a pastor said." (LifeWay)



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Children's of Alabama



Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

Catholic reformer, theologian Erasmus born 550 years ago

Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) was a Catholic reformer, a theologian and one of Europe's most influential scholars.

This year is the 550th anniversary of his birth. It also is the 500th anniversary of his Greek-Latin New Testament.

Born in Rotterdam, Netherlands, on Oct. 27, 1466, he was the son of Roger Gerard, a Catholic priest, and Margaret, a physician's daughter. He was named for Saint Erasmus of Formiae, a favorite of his father's. His parents never married but they cared for him until their deaths from the plague in 1483.

Latin grammar school

He began his education at the age of four at a school in Gouda, a town near Rotterdam. When he was nine years old, he attended a prestigious Latin grammar school in Deventer, Netherlands, where he studied Greek. At that time he had a personal conversion experience with God.

In 1492 he was ordained a Catholic priest but he never actively worked as a cleric.

He moved to Paris and studied and taught at the College of Montaigu. He became known as an excellent scholar and teacher. One of his students, Lord Montjoy, established a pension for him. It allowed him to become an independent scholar moving from city to city tutoring, lecturing and corresponding with many of the most brilliant thinkers of Europe.

He was one of the most prolific writers of the 16th century. His first published book was "Adagia," a collection of classical Greek and Latin proverbs. Other influential books were "The Praise of Folly," a satirical examination of society and the abuses of the Catholic Church; "Enchiridion," a guide to Christian living; and "Colloquia," often called his masterpiece, an attack on abuses of the Catholic Church. He also

wrote nine folio volumes about St. Jerome and other biographical books.

Erasmus published the first Greek New Testament in 1516. He would issue four more editions in 1519, 1522, 1527 and 1536. His translation was a turning point in theology and the interpretation of Scripture because it exposed the inaccuracies of the Latin Vulgate, and it demonstrated how important it is to use the Bible's original languages to ensure accuracy.

The Greek translation had a tremendous impact on the Protestant Reformation. It was the foundation of Luther's German Bible. William Tyndale used the second and third editions as the basis for his English New Testament.

When Luther published his Ninety-five Theses in 1517, Erasmus counseled the Catholic Church to heed Luther. But Luther's criticisms against the Church

became harsher and he began criticizing Erasmus. Finally Erasmus rejected Luther's ideas in his "Discourse on Free Will." Despite this criticism, Erasmus kept a moderate stance. He would not support the Catholic Church nor join Luther. He argued that to choose one side would endanger his leadership in the movement for pure scholarship, which he thought was his life's purpose.

Tireless

Because of his tireless work ethic, he grew weaker over the years. He continued to write, penning his own paraphrases of several New Testament books.

Erasmus died from dysentery on July 12, 1536, in Basel, Switzerland. His last words were "Dear God." Although he remained loyal to the Catholic Church, he didn't ask for a priest to administer last rites. He died with a devout trust in God. He was buried in the cathedral at Basel.



By Joanne Sloan

Joanne Sloan, a member of First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, has been a published writer of articles and books for 30 years. She has a bachelor's degree double majoring in history and English from East Texas State University (now Texas A&M–Commerce) and a master's degree specializing in English from the University of Arkansas (1978).



ERASMUS

'Porn is for losers,' says former Playboy model Pamela Anderson in Wall Street Journal op-ed

The pornography industry has never garnered the applause of faith leaders, so when Rabbi Shmuley Boteach spoke out against the multibillion dollar business in an Aug. 31 op-ed, no one flinched.

But when readers saw former Playboy model and actress Pamela Anderson's name alongside Boteach's in *The Wall Street Journal*

byline, news outlets across the nation took notice.

"Porn is for losers," Boteach and Anderson said in the op-ed. "[It] is a boring, wasteful and dead-end outlet for people too lazy to reap the ample rewards of healthy sexuality."

Quoting statistics from the

American Psychological Association, Boteach and Anderson noted that between 50 and 99 percent of men consume porn while between 30 and 86 percent of women do.

An Alabama Baptist pastor said in an unrelated interview with *The Alabama Baptist* that a fair question to ask a male candidate for a ministry position is "When was the last time you viewed porn?" not "Have you ever viewed porn?"

Boteach and Anderson believe the porn problem will only get worse. "The incidence of porn addiction will only spiral as the children now being raised in an environment of wall-to-wall, digitized sexual images become adults inured to intimacy and in need of even greater graphic stimulation," they wrote. "They are the crack babies of porn."

"What is required is an honest dialogue about what we are witnessing ... and an honor code to tamp it down in the collective interests of our well-being as individuals, as families and as communities." (TAB)

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Baptist-supported Native American children's home stands firm on faith values amid criticism

American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) has established a GoFundMe campaign to show solidarity with a children's home in Oklahoma widely criticized after declining a donation from an atheist organization in August.

The Murrow Indian Children's Home in Muskogee, Oklahoma, returned a \$100 gift from Matt Wilbourn, because he requested on a pledge form it be designated in honor of the Muskogee Atheist Community, which he co-founded. Murrow officials expressed thanks for the generosity but declined the gift because they wanted the home's printed materials to honor only Christianity.

Pressure to reconsider

Members of the atheist community responded by creating a crowd-funding appeal without the Murrow home's authorization or knowledge, reasoning if the amount could be raised to \$1,000 it would put pressure on administrators to reconsider the offer. The action captured the attention of mass media, subjecting the min-

istry to intense criticism that officials were putting religious belief ahead of children's welfare.

The Muskogee Atheist Community GoFundMe appeal raised \$28,280 before it was shut down. Most of the money will now be given to Camp Quest Oklahoma, a residential summer camp for the children of "freethinking" parents.

ABHMS said in a news release Sept. 6 that publicity about Murrow's "quiet, respectful decline" of the original gift resulted "in abusive calls from across the United States to Murrow staff and board members, along with posts on Murrow's Facebook page filled with such vitriol that the children's home deactivated its page."

"Murrow Indian Children's Home has been caring for Native American children with support from American Baptist Home Mission Societies ... for decades," according to the release. "Now ABHMS seeks to show Murrow that American Baptists stand with this historic ministry."

The Murrow Indian Children's

Home GoFundMe page was created Sept. 3 with a goal of raising \$25,000. At press time, 10 people had pledged \$1,125 in three days.

No judgment

"Murrow does not stand in judgment of the Muskogee Atheist Community," says the funding appeal. "The children's home simply seeks respect for the man-

ner in which it seeks to follow its Christian faith.

"While we have always demonstrated respect of other faiths and perspectives and continue to do so, often joining interfaith collaborations, we demand respect in return for the way we worship our God and will not tolerate abuse for following the faith principles we choose to embrace." (BNG)

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Pisgah Baptist Church, Pisgah, Alabama, is seeking God's will for a full-time pastor. Please send resumé to: Pastor's Search Committee, P.O. Box 10, Pisgah, AL 35765.

PASTOR

Bethel Baptist Church, Fort Deposit, Alabama. We are seeking a full-time pastor. Resumés are being accepted. Email: cnolan@fcbi.com or bethelbap.rd@cameliacom.com or by mail to: Bethel Baptist Church, c/o Clay Nolan, 1552 Bates Road, Fort Deposit, AL 36032.

MINISTER OF WORSHIP

Chapel Hill Baptist Church, Northport, Alabama, is accepting resumés for a full-time minister of worship. Email: search@chapelhillbc.org or mail to: Chapel Hill Baptist Church, 8790 Highway 43 N., Northport, AL 35473 ATTN: Search Committee.

WORSHIP PASTOR

Worship is priority. Bellview Baptist in McCalla is continuing to grow in worship. Desiring a dedicated follower of Christ, called to ministry by God as full-time wor-

ship pastor; leading, organizing and administering all aspects of worship ministry. Submit resumé: office@bellviewbc.org.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Springdale Baptist Church, Tarrant, Alabama, is searching for bivocational pastor. Send resumé to: Pastor Search Committee, 101 Springdale Road, Tarrant, AL 35217.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Hopewell Baptist Church, Hanceville, Alabama, accepting resumés for bivocational pastor. Mail to: 1827 1st Avenue N., Apt. 704, Birmingham, AL 35203. Email to: HopewellPSC@gmail.com. Deadline: September 30, 2016.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC

Turnerville Baptist Church — Mobile County. Contact Bro. Jason Meaux at jmeaux@turnervillebaptist.org.

BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH MINISTER

Grant Street Baptist Church in Bessemer, Alabama, is searching for a part-time or bivocational youth minister. Primary responsibility is to shepherd grades 6-12. Email

resumé to Pastor Jeff Hughes at jhughes42295@gmail.com or to Personnel Committee at personnel@grantsstreetbaptist-church.org.

BIVOCATIONAL CHILDREN'S DIRECTOR

The First Baptist Church of Saks, Anniston, Alabama, is searching for a bivocational children's director. Send resumé to: Personnel Committee, First Baptist Church of Saks, 4723 Saks Road, Anniston, AL 36206. Or email to CathyBain@cableone.net.

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

The Columbia Baptist Association, Dothan, Alabama, is accepting resumés for the position of director of missions. Resumés may be submitted to search team chairman Allen Singley at braelen@gbcdothan.org or mail to 2400 Forrester Road, Dothan, AL 36301.

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4 You will see pulsating dots, which indicate the app is searching for a target. Once it finds a target the dots will turn to a bull's-eye. The bull's-eye will remain until the augmented reality image loads.

5 Hold your device over a page or image in *The Alabama Baptist* (TAB) marked as augmented reality and watch the paper come to life.

6 If the image is slow to load at any point, then it may be your data speed or Wi-Fi strength. Change locations and try again.

7 Each week when TAB arrives, open the app and hold your device over the augmented reality articles.

Someone You Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett, Correspondent, *The Alabama Baptist*

Chris Peoples

Pine Forest Baptist Church, Ashville
St. Clair Baptist Association

FAVORITE VERSE: 2 Timothy 1:5

FAVORITE HYMN: "Just a Little Talk with Jesus"

HOBBIES: Golf

FAMILY STATUS: Married 34 years to wife, Janet; son, Jared; parents, Ottis and Marie



PEOPLES

As a teen nearly 37 years ago, Chris Peoples took to heart a challenge about attending church every Sunday. Since then, the Odenville man has not missed a Sunday in church. No matter where he is on Sunday — New York, France, Ireland, etc. — he is in church. "If Jesus went to church, we sure need to go to church," said Peoples, who is 54. An Alfa Insurance agent in Springville, Peoples also is a deacon and has been minister of music at his church 34 years.

Q: What influences in your life pointed you to Christ at the beginning of your faith journey?

A: It would have to be my mother and father. When I went to bed on Saturday night, there was no question where you would be on Sunday morning and that was church. That's the way it was my whole life. I accepted Christ when I was 8 years old on April 21, 1969.

Q: When and how were you led into your ministry work?

A: I'd always been involved in music. When Pine Forest's music minister left 34 years ago one of my old schoolteachers, Mrs. Mitchell, mentioned my name to the church to fill in until they found somebody. I've been filling in for 34 years.

Q: What does your ministry work demand?

A: As any other type of ministry you've got to love and serve God first. You've got to love and serve the church family. You've got to love music.

Q: What do you get from your ministry work?

A: I've thought about that many times. I could work every hour of every day at my church and I could never repay the blessings. That's just how much love there is (in the church).

Q: How do family members support you?

A: They're always the main support. When Jan and I got married on Saturday night, the next Sunday morning she was right there beside me in church. And that's the way it has always been. It has always been our goal — Jared's too — to be in church on Sunday morning. My parents have always supported me.

Q: How do you see yourself involved in this in the future?

A: I'll be singing as long as my voice allows. I'll strive to be at church every time the doors are open as long as my health allows. Every day is a work in progress.

Q: What difference will this ministry work make for you in the future?

A: Music has always played an important part in my life. I started singing in church when I was 8 years old. I would like to show young and old alike that singing praise to God is a wonderful way to worship.

Q: What difference has Jesus Christ made in your life?

A: Jesus is my Everything; I'll be honest with you. There's a line in the old Andraé Crouch song "My Tribute" that says, "All that I am and ever hope to be, I owe it all to Thee." ♪

If you know of a person who should be featured as "Someone You Should Know," send his or her name, a contact number and the reason you think he or she should be featured to: Someone You Should Know, c/o The Alabama Baptist, 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209 or news@thealabamabaptist.org.



Photo courtesy of FBC Trussville

Portable cooking trailer provides ministry outlet for FBC Trussville men's group

It is intended to quench people's physical hunger, but volunteers hope to quench a different kind of hunger as well.

The mobile cooking trailer — or food wagon, as volunteers call it — is something God led ministry leaders at First Baptist Church, Trussville, toward. And through His direction it has become an addition to the church's Men on Mission ministry.

Both types of hunger, eternal and physical, are necessary for life, said Pastor Buddy Champion. And the food wagon will be instrumental in filling that hunger.

Cecil Medders, who helped head up the design and acquisition team, said, "We see [the food wagon] being used for neighborhood events, community festivals, feeding the homeless, disaster relief efforts and feeding EMT personnel during search and rescue operations as well as our own Men on Mission projects."

First, Trussville, also purchased a supply trailer that will maximize the effectiveness of the food wagon, which has the capacity to feed hundreds of people a day. At press time, the food wagon was on standby to assist in the disaster relief efforts in Louisiana, where historic flooding has affected more than 13 parishes.

'No limit'

Chris Chambers, minister of missions for First, Trussville, said the church is looking forward to the opportunities to share the gospel through the food wagon.

"This will enable us to share the gospel by first feeding the physical hunger then feeding the spiritual hunger. We will be able to get into places we could not go before," he said.

"There is really no limit on the things that can be done." (TAB)

Short-term fix for Medicaid shortfall found in BP settlement; not solution, senator says

The day before the special session ended Sept. 7, lawmakers passed a plan to buoy Medicaid with BP oil settlement money.

After two proposed lottery bills failed to offer a solution, lawmakers came together Sept. 6 to focus on BP oil settlement money, using most of the \$1 billion that BP is set to pay over 18 years for the 2010 oil spill in the Gulf Coast.

In 2018 the bill (HB 36) will split the settlement between Medicaid, debt repayment and road projects in Mobile and Baldwin counties.

Immediate need

For the immediate \$85 million need of the 2017 Medicaid budget, Gov. Robert Bentley has allocated \$70 million — \$50 million from the first BP payment and \$20 million from the General Fund. The

additional \$15 million will be given directly to Medicaid from the BP settlement, according to *Birmingham Business Journal*.

The bill issues bonds and then uses the BP payments to pay off the bonds. It also creates the Alabama Economic Settlement Authority to issue the bonds estimated at \$640 million. The money will be divided as follows:

▶ \$120 million to Medicaid, which is split \$15 million in 2017 and \$105 million in 2018.

▶ \$162 million to repay the General Fund Rainy Day Account. That money was used seven years ago to support the budget and must be repaid by 2020.

▶ \$238 million to the Alabama Trust Fund, also to replenish funds transferred a few years ago to support the budget.

▶ Remaining \$120 million would go to Mobile and Baldwin counties for specific road projects.

Awaiting signature

The bill also includes an amendment from Sen. Rodger Smitherman, D-Birmingham, which earmarks at least \$4 million in Medicaid funds for outpatient dialysis and reinstates Medicaid reimbursements to doctors back to what they were before Aug. 1.

Lawmakers approved the bill 22-8 in the Senate and 87-9 in the House. Bentley signed the bill into law Sept. 8.

The bill's sponsor, Sen. Steve Clouse, R-Ozark, said, "We have not solved the problem on Medicaid. ... This is just something we've got to continue to work on." (Maggie Walsh)

TAKE UP

the cause of the fatherless . . .
Isaiah 1:17

ON NOVEMBER 13, *join Christians around the globe on Orphan Sunday, as we rally together to defend the cause of the fatherless.*

We are excited to join this movement by helping our partner churches leverage this day for the children we serve. Here are some ideas you may want to consider for your church this November.

HOST A NEEDS LIST DRIVE | We have a variety of specific needs at our locations across the state, including household items, cleaning supplies, pantry items, and more. Encourage your church to host a drive based on the needs of the location closest to you: alabamachild.org/needslist

INVITE A SPEAKER | If you want a clear picture concerning our ministry to hurting children, the men and women who serve in our ministry on a daily basis can paint that picture perhaps better than anyone and would love to come and share with your church: alabamachild.org/speakers

REQUEST SPECIAL MATERIALS | By request, full-color bulletin inserts are available at no charge to you. This year, we are celebrating our 125-year history of caring for children and families in need, and these inserts illustrate that message while encouraging another 125 years of ministry! alabamachild.org/churchresources

SHARE A VIDEO | All year, we've been sharing stories of our foster parents and ABCH alumni, and sharing one of these stories with your congregation on Orphan Sunday could help inspire greater involvement in your church's ministry of caring for children in need. Visit alabamachild.org/videos to view or download files.

More details and resources for Orphan Sunday are available at alabamachild.org/OrphanSunday.

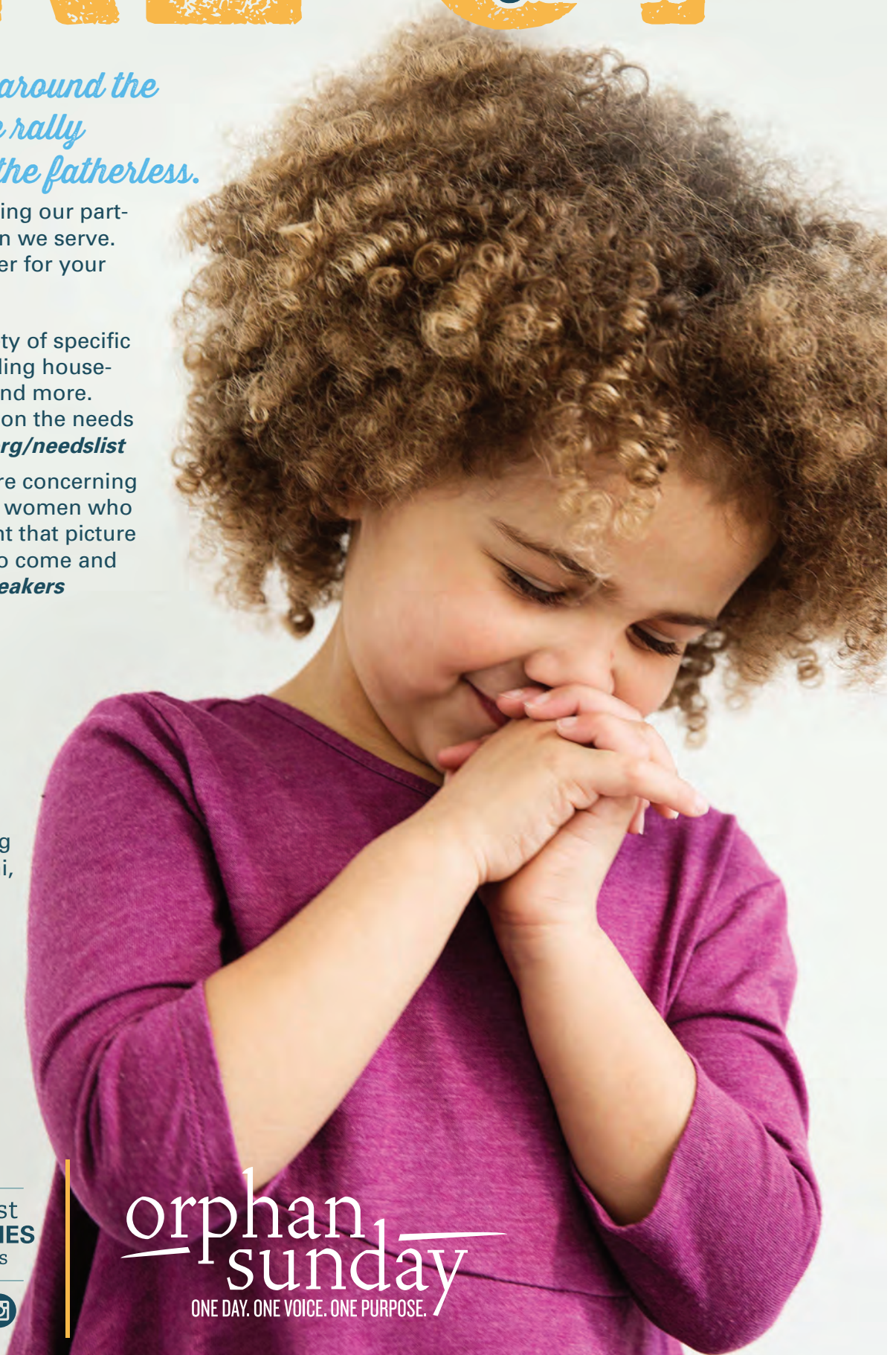


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Baptist peacemaker Palacios to be ambassador in Canada

WASHINGTON — A Baptist peacemaker in El Salvador's 1980–1992 civil war, who for the past 18 years has ministered to fellow expatriates in the United States, is entering a new chapter as ambassador of El Salvador in Canada.

Edgar Palacios, associate pastor of Christian education at Calvary Baptist Church, Washington, said his goodbyes to the congregation at a reception at the church Aug. 28. According to MetroLatinoUSA, his appointment awaits approval by the government of Canada.

Winner of the Baptist World Alliance Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award in 2012, Palacios served in the 1980s as executive director of the Permanent Committee of the National Debate for Peace in El Salvador, a nongovernmental organization that worked to stop fighting between the nation's right-wing military government and a coalition of left-wing groups.

During the conflict, Palacios' life was at constant risk. In 1989 he took refuge in the German Embassy and a United Nations safe house in San Salvador after being informed that he and several other clergy members and social leaders were on a government hit list.

He came to Washington in 1998 with his wife, Amparo Lopez Palacios, who died in 2008. In addition to his Christian education duties, Palacios has served as missionary pastor for the Latino fellowship at Calvary Baptist as well as in the greater Washington area. Church leaders recently renamed the church chapel the Edgar and Amparo Palacios Chapel in recognition of their years of service. (BNG)

Chile takes step toward legalizing abortion

SANTIAGO, Chile — Despite the opposition from approximately 100,000 Christian citizens, Chile's Senate Health Commission voted in favor of legalizing abortion Sept. 6.

Three of the 5 senators voted to approve a bill that decriminalizes abortion in cases of rape, when the mother's life is at risk during a medical emergency or if the baby is deemed to have "serious defects," according to The Christian Post.

Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, a supporter of the pro-abortion bill, represents the Christian Democratic Party. Both Bachelet and the party have received much criticism for pushing for abortion in the socially conservative country.

Carmen Croxatto of Chile's Pro-Life Pro-Family Network said, "It is a mockery that members of a party that calls itself 'Christian' dare to legalize the killing of the innocent."

Nearly 100,000 Christians participated in a pro-life rally in Santiago just days before the bill was passed. The protestors' banners said "Chile no matas," which means "Chile don't kill."

The legislation is expected to pass the full Senate before local elections in October. (TAB)

Australian toddler begins sex change before kindergarten

SYDNEY — A four-year-old who identifies as transgender has begun transitioning genders for eventual gender reassignment with the help of the New South Wales Department of Education, The Christian Post reported.

The child, who hasn't started kindergarten, is reported to be the youngest person in Australia to be in the process of transitioning genders. The school district and education department have received much criticism for supporting such a serious decision by a child that young.

The department's Safe Schools program is funding the child's transition, which some sources say should be complete by 2017.

Even some who are pro-LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) have expressed their concern.

Australian transgender rights advocate Catherine McGregor said, "I would have thought four is pretty young for any official policy support," adding that checks should be in place to ensure no premature decisions are made that would affect a child for a lifetime. (TAB)

'Come see' opportunities available in prison ministry volunteer roles

By Grace Thornton
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When James Smoker met Bruce, Bruce was serving out the last part of a 25-year sentence in one of Alabama's prisons.

It was a cold, dark, unloving environment, Smoker said.

And it was there that Bruce met Christ.

"In prison it's hard to find people you trust, and we want to be there for those guys with the hope that God loves them. Bruce said chaplains made an impact on him by bringing that hope to him right where he was," said Smoker, chaplain and recruitment director for the We Care Program.

The program, based in Atmore, places missionary chaplains in the prisons to serve as assistants to the state chaplain.

"We disciple, we walk alongside these guys," Smoker said. "We are blessed with an open door from the Department of Corrections and currently have 20 full-time and part-time chaplains throughout the state."

'Need is great'

And they need more help, he said.

"The need is great," Smoker said. "There are state chaplains in the Montgomery, Birmingham and

Troy areas asking for assistance."

The prison culture, he said, is like a foreign missions field "where you have certain boundaries or procedures you have to go through to get inside."

It takes training. It takes approval. But once you get inside, the door is wide open and the opportunities are vast, Smoker said.

"We're always looking for volunteers, and there's not enough. There's so much to be done," he said.

"It's always great to see how God calls and inspires an individual to be a part."

Assistant chaplain

Smoker himself is inside the prison walls five days a week in his role as a part-time assistant chaplain.

"We're there on a daily basis and try to be consistent with that," he said. "We get to share with them and be their spiritual counselors."

And chaplains get to be there at times when the inmates most need love and hope, Smoker said.

"We can be there for them when they've had a death in the family or when they themselves are going through health problems," he said.

Smoker got to sit by the deathbed of one inmate recently as he lost his battle with cancer and "let him know he was not alone."

Connecting with church

But he's also gotten to help inmates like Bruce connect with churches and get set up to start over once they're released from prison.

"There's such a huge need for churches to step up and help them transition," Smoker said.

Another opportunity for churches to get involved is through the next ReNew Hope event, set for Jan. 22–25, 2017. Volunteers meet for a day of orientation and a missions rally in Montgomery before spreading out into the Montgomery, Troy, Birmingham and Atmore areas for four days of ministry in prison.

Volunteer event

More than 20,000 inmates are touched by this event.

"We invite volunteers to come in for that week and place them in groups of 5 to 10 to go into the prison and build relationships," he said. "It's a great way to come see what prison ministry is like."

If anyone is thinking about becoming involved in prison ministry, Smoker said he would challenge him to "just go in, see the need and give it a try."

The need for Light is great, he said.

"We are about investing in lives and planting seeds," Smoker said. "And we have a God who is in the business of saving souls."

LETTERS

The article "Four Kinds of Church Members Your Church Will Always Lose" by Thom Rainier (thomrainier.com) is a must-read for young pastors. When I was licensed 20 years ago, the average for a 200-member church was seven families leaving with a pastor transition.

First-time pastors need the information expounded by Life-Way Christian Resources. They can counter these number losses by applying the principles by Dr. Wayne Oates' book, "The Care of Troublesome People." His website (www.oates.org) also offers a variety of resources.

Chaplain Emeritus Chris Berry Bremen, Ala. ✝



Retired Pastor Max Youngblood recommends

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For September 18

Explore the Bible

By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile

BUILDING OUR FAITH

1 Peter 2:1-10

Spiritual Milk (1-3)

Because they have been begotten by God by means of His Word, they are exhorted to lay aside all in their lives that quenches love for one another. Jesus followers need to put away every evil work. These sins tear the social fabric of the Church. Ill will toward one another destroys the Christ-honoring fellowship of the saints. For there to be sweet fellowship believers must put away their sins daily.

Not only must Jesus followers put away every evil work, they also must pursue the life-transforming Word. In comparing believers to newborn infants, Peter is not saying that they are immature in their faith but that all Christians are to be like infants who long for the pure spiritual milk, a reference to Scripture. Just as milk is the very substance of physical life, the Word of God is the very substance of spiritual life.

Spiritual growth is not primarily mystical. It is rational in the sense that it is informed and sustained by the Word. The evidence that a person has been born again by the Father through the Word is that the believer continues to long for the Word and desires to grow and mature spiritually.

Spiritual House (4-8)

“As you come to Him” indicates a personal relationship with Christ that began at conversion but continues presently. Salvation commences at conversion but deepens with discipleship. There is a core reality that will transform how you understand the Christian life. This reality is crucial. Everything that I am by position in Christ, God is working out in my life practically. As believers continue to fellowship daily with Christ they “are being built up as a spiritual house.”

Believers are “living stones” in God’s

new temple, the spiritual house. As Jesus saves a person, another stone is quarried out of the pit of sin and cemented by grace into the spiritual house. Peter understands that the Old Testament temple anticipated the new temple where God dwells (in His people). Not only are believers God’s temple, they also are a “holy priesthood,” which offers “holy sacrifices” by the power of the Holy Spirit. As a part of the “holy priesthood” we get to offer spiritual sacrifices. These sacrifices include our bodies (Rom. 12:1), generous sacrificial offerings (Phil. 4:18), compassion for the ignorant and the lost (Heb. 5:1-2), praise to God (Heb. 13:15) and prayer (Rev. 8:3).

To support the idea that Jesus is the Cornerstone of God’s temple, Peter cites Isaiah 28:16. Jesus is the elect Messiah whom God has honored by raising Him from the dead. Whoever trusts in Jesus will not be put to shame on the last day at the judgment. But unbelievers will fulfill the prophecies from Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14. Their stumbling is their own fault because they are tripped up due to their refusal to obey the “word” of the gospel.

Spiritual People (9-10)

Peter writes to encourage the suffering believers. He begins by declaring that while the world may be against them, God has chosen them and made them to be a member of His family. Peter views the Church as the new Israel, for he picks up what is said of Israel in Exodus 19:5-6 and applies it to the Church. The Church is “a royal priesthood” and “a holy nation.”

As God’s chosen ones, Christians are to “proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” God has called us out of the world to call us into His family. God has called us out of the spiritual darkness so that we might declare the gracious gospel of Jesus Christ.✠

Bible Studies for Life

By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Religion, Samford University

ONE GREAT PROBLEM

Romans 3:9-12, 19-20, 23

Two of the great rallying cries of the Protestant reformers were the words “sola gratia” and “sola fide” — “by grace alone” and “by faith alone.” No other book offers as detailed an explanation of the idea that we are saved by grace through faith than does Paul’s epistle to the Romans. To understand Paul’s argument clearly, though, we have to first get our heads around a key phrase for Paul: “works of the Law.”

Read in isolation, this phrase lends itself to an easy definition of “good deeds.” While this is true enough — no one could ever be declared righteous before God through good deeds — it does raise a question: Who exactly is Paul arguing against? Who exactly believed this?

One answer might be first century Jews. This was certainly Luther’s understanding, as he equated the Judaism of Jesus’ day with the Medieval Catholicism of his own.

The problem, though, is that a careful study of first century Judaism shows Jews didn’t really believe this. Much like Christians, first century Jews believed God had entered into a covenant with them by grace and following the law (doing good deeds) was just the right response of a grateful heart to a gracious God.

So what is Paul arguing about in Romans?

Key here is the idea that “works of the Law” is a technical phrase for Paul. It doesn’t mean good deeds in general — Paul would support that wholeheartedly (see Eph. 2:10). Instead, it refers to specific practices like circumcision, Sabbath and keeping Kosher that separated Jews from Gentiles. The “works of the Law” were practices that marked Jews off as separate from the Gentile nations who surrounded them.

We are all sinners. (9-12)

Paul’s argument in Romans 3 hinges on this one basic truth: Just being called by the right name (“Jew” or “Christian”) isn’t what is important. Truly placing one’s trust in God is what is important.

And why is this necessary? Because we are all sinners. Whether circumcised or uncircumcised, Sabbath observers or not, we are all sinners. It might be tempting to say, “I’m part of the chosen people; Gentiles are the ones who are sinners,” but the truth is we all sin against God.

We are all under God’s judgment. (19-20)

Next, Paul goes on to say that if we are sinners, those of us who are in the “in” group are worse off than those who are in the “out” group. After all, he says, “Whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law” (v. 19).

Judgment is much tougher on those who know the truth and ignore it than on those who never knew what to do at all. The Law wasn’t meant to be a harsh word to Gentiles but a corrective word to Jews and Christians.

We all fall short of God’s glory. (23)

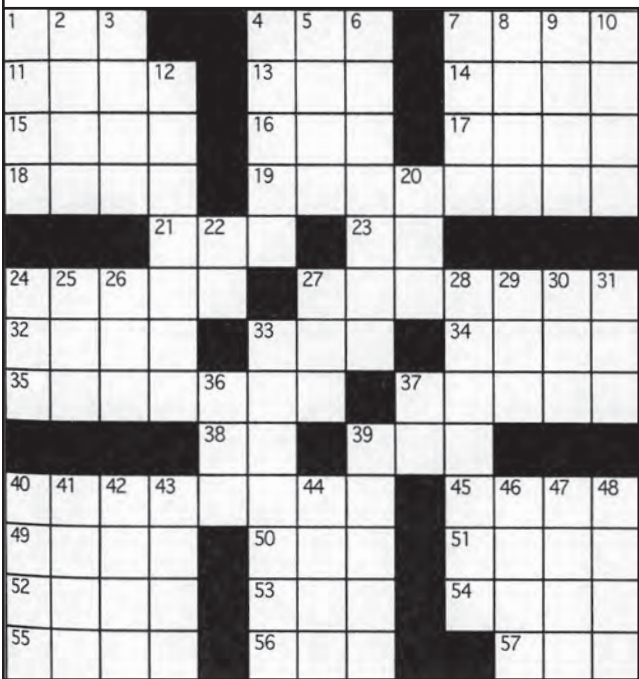
The first step to getting back into a right relationship with God is recognizing that whether we are part of the right group or not, we all “fall short of the glory of God.” This is a challenging verse for those of us who take pride in the fact that we are at church just about every time the doors open.

It is especially tempting for us to think that church membership, baptism or the name “Christian” is just the same as actually living out a righteous life.

Paul’s argument applies to us as much as it did to his audience in the first century. We are all sinners and the righteousness we seek can only come from the gracious God who gives it to us.✠

Christian Crossword

By Pamela Jensen Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



- Across
1. QEI milieu.

4. Noun case. (abbr.)

7. Hot ____.

11. Pull behind.

13. Gold. (Sp.)

14. Feminine pronoun. (Fr.)

15. Emanation.

16. Comparative suffix.

17. “He burned the bones of the king of Edom into ____.” (Amos 2:1)

18. “Go, ____ an altar unto the Lord.” (2 Sam. 24:18)

19. Another name for Jesus.

21. “We receive the ____ reward of our deeds.” (Luke 23:41)

23. Preposition.

24. “Ye that labor and are heavy ____.” (Matt. 11:28)

27. Registered.

32. ____-a-dale. (var.)

33. Scold.

34. Raised. (Fr., masc.)

35. The sun.

37. “Then the ____ taketh
- him up into the holy city.” (Matt. 4:5)

38. Pronoun.

39. “A ____ for a burnt offering.” (Lev. 9:2)

40. “His understanding is ____.” (Ps. 147:5)

45. Son of Seth.

49. Inescapable ruin.

50. Pray. (prefix)

51. Captain of the Nautilus.

52. ____ of students.

53. “Cain ... dwelt in the land of ____.” (Gen. 4:16)

54. Edible root.

55. Cooking pot.

56. Caleb was one.

57. ____-Tin-Tin.

Down

1. Sixth month of Jewish calendar.

2. “We know that thou art ____.” (Matt. 22:16)

3. Heroine of Dr. Zhivago.

4. “Let us make a joyful ____.” (Ps. 95:1)

5. Classic cookie.

6. “Joy cometh in the ____.” (Ps. 30:5)

7. “I can of mine own ____ do nothing.” (John 5:30)

8. “And they came to ____, where were twelve wells.” (Ex. 15:27)

9. Feminine name.

10. High school student.

12. “I made me ____ and orchards.” (Eccles. 2:5)

20. Can. prov.

22. Not. (prefix)

24. Boy.

25. In the manner of.

26. “So that ____ come upon you unawares.” (Luke 21:34)

27. “Incline thine ____ unto me.” (Ps. 17:6)

28. Constituent.

29. The apocalypse. (abbr.)

30. A prince of Midian. (Josh. 13)

31. “The First State.” (abbr.)

33. “By these were the ____ divided in the earth after the flood.” (Gen. 10:32)

36. Jack Haley portrayed this man.

37. Lawyer for the state. (abbr.)

39. “Be ____ always to give an answer.” (1 Pet. 3:15)

40. The seer against Jeroboam. (2 Chron. 9)

41. Christmas. (Fr.)

42. Young horse.

43. A son of Helem. (1 Chron. 7)

44. Cancer is one. (abbr.)

46. “My salvation is ____ to come.” (Isa. 56:1)

47. He defeated Zimri. (1 Kings 16)

48. Not later.

TOP 10

downloaded songs from iTunes

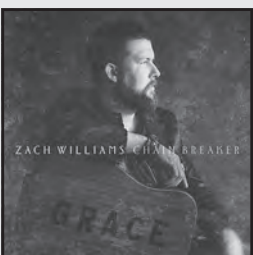
CHRISTIAN & GOSPEL



- 1. Eye of the Storm**
By Ryan Stevenson
(Fresh Start)



- 2. Good Good Father**
By Chris Tomlin
(The Ultimate Playlist)



- 3. Chain Breaker**
By Zach Williams
(Chain Breaker)



- 4. Trust in You**
By Lauren Daigle
(How Can It Be)



- 5. Priceless**
By for KING & COUNTRY
(Run Wild. Live Free. Love Strong.)



- 6. Dear Younger Me**
By MercyMe
(Welcome to the New)

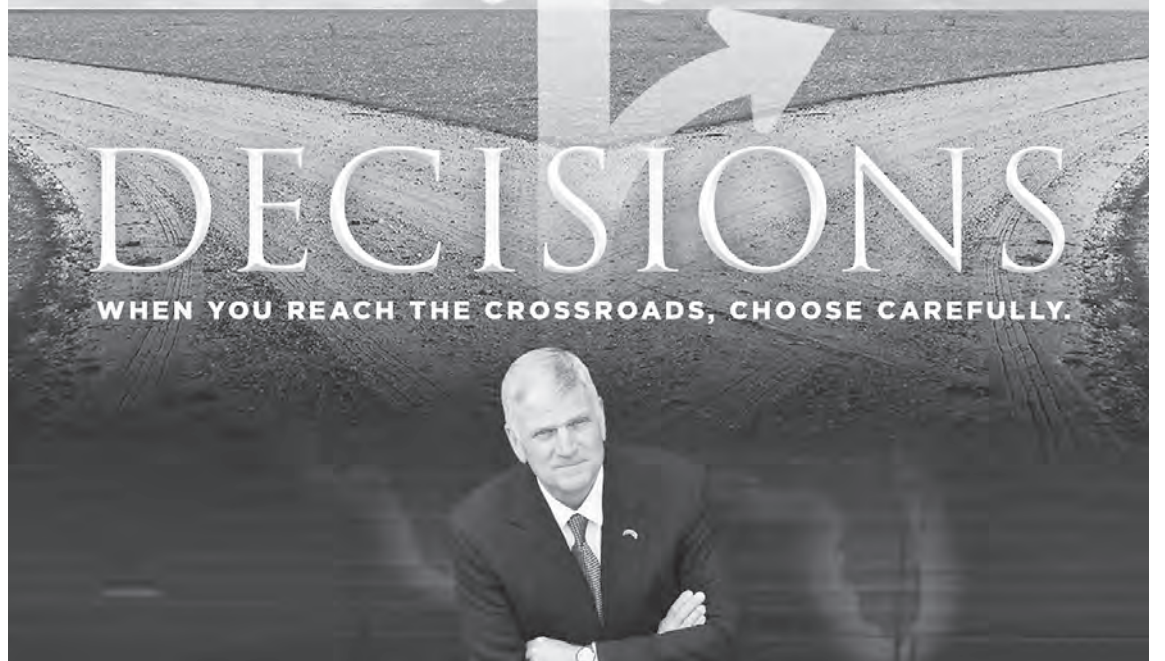
- 7. Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)**
By Hillsong UNITED
(Zion)

- 8. The God I Know**
By Love & The Outcome
(These Are The Days)

- 9. One Step Away**
By Casting Crowns
(The Very Next Thing)

- 10. Oh My Soul**
By Casting Crowns
(The Very Next Thing)

Source: iTunes at press time



Graphic courtesy of Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

Billy Graham Association releases new film in My Hope outreach; will hit TV in October

As evangelist Billy Graham approaches his 98th birthday, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) has released a new video in the My Hope outreach that has reportedly led more than 10 million to Christ internationally.

Billy Graham's son, Franklin Graham, delivers the gospel in the new evangelistic film "Decisions," a 28-minute free resource featuring diverse Americans who accepted Christ as Savior during Franklin Graham's 50-state Decision America Tour still in progress.

"I've been talking to people about the importance of decisions. I see thousands of people faced with a choice ... and I want [them] to know the truth," Franklin Graham said of the outreach. "Any time you have a crowd of people, I can guarantee there will be somebody in that crowd that doesn't know Jesus Christ. So every time I'm at the microphone I'm going to give the gospel."

In his tour, the younger Graham is hosting prayer rallies in every state capital, urging Americans to pray, vote and engage in politics to uphold biblical principles. The tour has attracted crowds of thousands since it began Jan. 5. It is set to end Oct. 13.

Steve Rhoads, BGEA vice president, said, "We are very happy to offer this resource to the Church which will powerfully present the gospel of Jesus Christ."

"The Church in the United States has a unique opportunity at this moment to proclaim Jesus, who offers hope and redemption to a lost world. We pray

that the good news will be preached and that God will bring a revival to His people."

Billy Graham, who turns 98 on Nov. 7, is not featured in the film, although he has spoken in earlier My Hope offerings. Franklin Graham said his father, who led millions to Christ during a 60-year international evangelistic ministry, now ministers mostly through prayer.

"He lives with limitations typical of old age — his eyesight is very poor, his hearing is not good and he uses a wheelchair," he said of his father in a July letter to friends and supporters.

"His ministry now is praying and he looks forward to reports of what God is doing around the world. He always responds by saying 'Praise the Lord' as he points upward."

Launched internationally in 2002, My Hope has presented the gospel in 60 countries in Af-

rica, Asia, Europe and the Middle East, and debuted in the U.S. in 2013 with My Hope America. More than 350,000 churches and 4 million individuals have participated in the evangelistic outreach, according to BGEA, and more than 10 million individuals have made decisions to receive Christ, including 160,000 in the U.S.

"Decisions" follows My Hope America films "Value of a Soul" (2015), "Heaven" (2014) and "The Cross" (2013). A new film called "The Worth of a Soul" will release this fall in the United Kingdom in conjunction with My Hope U.K.

For more information about the My Hope outreach, visit MyHopewithBillyGraham.org. (BP)

To download 'Decisions,' visit MyHopewithBillyGraham.org. The film will be broadcast on some television networks beginning Oct. 10.

"The Church in the United States has a unique opportunity at this moment to proclaim Jesus."

Steve Rhoads
BGEA vice president



NAMB photo by Carmen K. Sisson

John Whitehead (left) and Jacob Whitehead (right) help their mother, Zanie Whitehead (center), carry a potted plant Sept. 4 at their Denham Springs, Louisiana, home.

‘Coming together’

More than 450 Baptist students unite to aid flood survivors

John Whitehead woke to an unfamiliar sight in mid-August — water had breached his house and was rising fast. The Louisiana State University (LSU) student panicked for a few minutes, facing tough decisions.

What should he save and what should he leave behind?

In the end, the answer was simple. Muddy water lapped against his waist as he struggled to heave his black Labrador Retriever, Rascal, into his kayak. Then he paddled away from everything he and his family owned in Denham Springs, Louisiana, near Baton Rouge, knowing they would never see most of it again.

His parents, Darrell and Zanie Whitehead, were in Tuscaloosa, trying to get home. They talked by phone several times as the situation worsened.

Darrell Whitehead said, “I called the fourth time, and he said, ‘Quit calling me, I’m trying to save people.’”

By the end of the day, John Whitehead and his kayak had carried a number of people to safety, including two elderly women who were clinging to a chain link fence, water up to their chins.

Wave of help

On Labor Day weekend, flood survivors like the Whiteheads in south Louisiana were on the receiving end of an even larger wave of help. LSU’s Baptist Collegiate Ministry (BCM) spearheaded a massive cleanup event, drawing more than 450 students from collegiate ministries in Alabama (see story in the Sept. 8 issue), Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia and Tennessee. As the LSU Tigers played

their first game of the season Sept. 3, students pried up waterlogged wood flooring, tore out Sheetrock and tried to salvage homeowners’ keepsakes from encroaching mold.

At the Whitehead home, not much is left. The few possessions they now own are stored in a 5-by-8-foot shed — with room to spare. But Darrell Whitehead, a former children’s minister, is still grateful.

He estimates the students saved him approximately \$10,000–\$12,000 for professional gutting, and they finished so far ahead of schedule that they were able to help neighbors with their cleanup efforts.

Arkansas State University student Kristen Scarlett, who attends First Baptist Church, Jonesboro, Arkansas, said, “I thought, ‘If the Lord made

me an able-bodied person, why am I not there?’ I need to live out that calling. If you’re in good health, why wouldn’t you?”

Students sometimes worry that they won’t have the skills to tackle the work, but LSU student Cullen McDaniel, of Jefferson Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, dismissed that excuse.

“All it takes is people coming together over one goal,” McDaniel said. “This has taught me to trust the Lord in everything [to] provide the healing, the comfort and the guidance you need to get through the trying times of life.”

The Baton Rouge community has become more united since enduring the fatal incidents between residents and local police recently, said Sarah Farley, BCM associate director at LSU. She believes the flood has washed away some of the anger and pain.

“The way God has used the flood to unite us is amazing. ... I think there’s a lot of hope.” (BP, TAB)

To give an offering to help Louisiana flood survivors, visit www.sbdr.org/louisianafloodrelief.

To become trained in disaster relief or learn more about opportunities to serve, visit www.alsbom-gm.org.

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Christian women forced to convert, marry

HAJIPUR, Pakistan — Forced conversions and abduction of Christian girls in Pakistan has risen at an alarming rate, said Nasir Saeed, director of the Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance & Settlement–U.K.

“Since the government has failed to investigate Muslim clerics who are suspected of being involved in forced conversions and issuing of false certificates of conversion and marriages, such crimes will continue happening, and I see no end to the miseries of girls belonging to the Christian and other minority faiths,” he said. “Instead, I fear that it will worsen.”

A recent incident left a 27-year-old Christian woman raped and her father shot.

Ghulam Hussain and three other Muslims kidnapped Asma Gulzar at gunpoint in May and repeatedly raped and tortured her, the woman informed her family after fleeing her captors in August when they forgot to lock the door of their hideout, the family attorney said. She had gone missing from her aunt’s home in Sialkot’s Hajipur area in Punjab Province.

Her father, Gulzar Masih, took the assailants to court over their claim that Asma Gulzar had voluntarily converted from Catholicism to Islam and married Hussain. After hearing the woman’s testimony of abduction and rape, a judge ordered police Aug. 24 to immediately arrest the accused, an attorney said.

The police refused to comply with the court order and three days later Hussain and one of his accomplices attacked Masih, shooting him several times, but he survived. (MS)

Security guards help prevent mass killing in Pakistan

PESHAWAR, Pakistan — Swift action by security forces prevented a major tragedy in northwestern Pakistan after four Taliban suicide attackers armed with bombs and assault rifles targeted a Christian community early Sept. 2.

One Christian security guard was killed and five others — two Christians and three security personnel — were injured in the attack on the gated community near Peshawar, capital city of Pakistan’s northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. Suicide bombers with notorious terror group Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Jamaat-ul-Ahrar faction, launched an attack on the area when the security guard opened the main gate.

The TTP group also had carried out the Easter attack aimed at Christians in Lahore on March 27, killing more than 70 people, including women and children, and injuring more than 300 others.

Church of Pakistan Bishop of Peshawar Humphrey Peters said, “This was yet another attempt to terrorize the Christian community, but we are thankful to God that He has saved us from an attack that could have caused massive deaths,” adding that timely intervention of security forces had thwarted the terrorists’ plan to inflict maximum casualties. (MS)

Baptists fined; Kazakhs to face harsher law

KALBATAU, Kazakhstan — Seven Baptists who met for worship in East Kazakhstan Region were recently fined for meeting without state permission. The verdict was passed Aug. 29 by Judge Aigul Saduakasova.

The small church has adopted a policy of civil disobedience and has refused to pay the fines for exercising its right to freedom of religion or belief.

Meanwhile the government is expected to sign off on an anti-“extremism” law that would amend six codes and 18 individual laws currently in place — some of which would increase state-imposed pre-publication censorship of all religious literature. Other restrictions, according to Forum 18 News, would be imposed on the distribution of religious literature, including literature that is brought into the country. The draft of the amendments was published online July 7.

However, some believe the content currently posted will become more harsh once the amendments are finalized. (TAB)