

INSIDE



Half of married adults said sharing beliefs vital to marriage

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Lutherans proclaim salvation by grace through faith, priesthood of all believers

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A Certain Trumpet: In Deborah, a righteous judge of Israel arises

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God's GIFT — OF — LIFE



Sanctity of Human Life Sunday is Jan. 22.

Photo by Lexie Merlino Photography

Alabama Baptist churches encouraged to promote importance of life

By Denise George
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Southern Baptist churches throughout Alabama and the nation will be observing Sanctity of Human Life Sunday on Jan. 22.

It is a time for Christians to deeply reflect upon a wide variety of bioethical issues, including abortion, euthanasia, opposition to practices that violate the intrinsic value of human life and respect for all life as God-created, etc.

In 1984, then-president Ronald Reagan issued Proclamation 5147 designating Jan. 22 as the first National Sanctity of Human Life Day. He stated: "We have been given the precious gift of human life, made more precious still by our births in or pilgrimages to a land of freedom. It is fitting, then, on the anniversary of the Supreme Court decision in Roe

v. Wade that struck down State anti-abortion laws, that we reflect anew on these blessings, and on our corresponding responsibility to guard with care the lives and freedoms of even the weakest of our fellow human beings."

It was more than a decade earlier, on Jan. 22, 1973, that the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion-on-demand through all nine months of pregnancy in all 50 states (Roe v. Wade and Doe v. Bolton). Southern Baptist churches have chosen this time each year to observe and celebrate God's gift of life, to remember the more than 58 million lives lost to abortion since 1973, and to recommit to protecting human life at every stage.

How can Alabama churches use the Sanctity of Human Life Sunday to encourage protection of the un-

born and to promote the importance of all human life?

Here are some suggestions:

► Plan a special worship service to observe the sanctity of human life. Invite someone from a local pregnancy care center, children's home or adoption agency to give a brief testimony.

'Celebrate life'

► Post pictures of church members, children and babies on a bulletin board with a sign that reads: "Celebrate Life, Life Is Precious!" Post Scripture around the pictures that affirm life.

► Preach a pro-life message based on Scripture.

► At the beginning of the worship service, invite the church's children to gather at the front. Teach a children's sermon on the preciousness of life.

► Choose music and hymns that affirm life.

► Have a special time of prayer for the expectant mothers in your congregation. (Please don't recognize them individually.)

(See 'Getting' page 3)

**"You knitted me
together in my
mother's womb. ...
I am fearfully and
wonderfully made."**

Psalm 139:13-14

Ethicist outlines Sanctity of Human Life concept

The concept of the sanctity of life is the belief that all human beings, at any and every stage of life, in any and every state of consciousness or self-awareness, of any and every race, color, ethnicity, level of intelligence, religion, language, gender, character, behavior, physical ability/disability, potential, class, social status, etc., of any and every particular quality of relationship to the viewing subject, are to be perceived as persons of equal and immeasurable worth and of inviolable dignity and therefore must be treated in a manner commensurate with this moral status."

David P. Gushee, Ph.D.
Director of the Center for Theology and Public Life,
Mercer University

Check out our new website at
www.thealabamabaptist.org



COMMENT

Change Is in the Air

The beginning of a new year is often associated with change. Just a few days ago many people talked about their New Year's resolutions. The beginning of a new year seemed to offer a clean slate, a fresh start. Like the ancient Romans, people concluded they could resolve to make their future better than their past in some specific ways.

The Romans made their resolutions as an act of worship to the mythical two-faced god, Janus. The Romans believed Janus looked into the past with one face and into the future with the other. On Dec. 31 it was common for Romans to seek forgiveness and reconciliation for past deeds from Janus and strength for the future — which he could see.

Today Dec. 31 marks the closing of a year — a chapter of time. Many people choose to set goals and make resolutions to make the new chapter better than old.

In and of itself, that is a good thing. One study found about 46 percent of those who resolved to reach a specific goal actually reached it while only 4 percent of people achieved a goal they never made a personal commitment to achieve.

Variety of changes

The new year brings other changes. Many businesses begin new budget years. Sales people face new goals. Students start new classes.

This year the approaching inauguration of a new president of the United States signals change for the nation and the world. New leaders will step forward on the national stage and a new administration outlines new initiatives and priorities destined to impact the U.S. and beyond.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Colossian Christians about a time of change and goals they should set as followers of Jesus Christ. Unlike resolutions or budgets or national policies, the changes the apostle advocated were not tied to the past. They were about something entirely new.

In Colossians 3:3, Paul reminded the Colossians that they “died” to their former lives, a ref-



THOUGHTS
By Bob Terry

erence to living without faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. In a reference to baptism, he writes, “You have been raised with Christ.”

In the following verses Paul urges readers to “put to death” whatever belonged to the time they were without Christ. The life the Colossian Christians share as followers of Jesus was “new life.” It was not an extension of the old. It was entirely new.

Paul lists some of the actions of their past lives — sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed. The last of the five — greed — seems out of place with the sexual sins. One definition of greed is an inordinate desire for something. Such an attitude warps life. When one places too high a value on something then the value of everything else is lessened.

Greed prevents the proper use of all things. It creates unnecessary fear of possible loss.

Sexual sins can be like greed.

They can become all encompassing and cause the person to become warped and selfish. The person also can lose the proper sense of value and balance in life, allowing sexual sins to become idolatrous.

From actions of a life without Christ, the apostle turns his attention to attitudes typical of those without Jesus. Again he lists five — anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language. Obviously such attitudes have no place among Christians.

‘Rid yourselves’

Paul tells the Colossians in Chapter 3 to “rid yourselves of these” (v. 8) because “you have taken off the old self with its practices” (v. 9).

It does not matter if the anger is smoldering over a long period of time or white-hot with passion, it has no place in the new life. Nor does it matter if the slander is against a person or against God, it has no place. Lewd language

and expletives that come from a polluted mind are all things believers have “taken off,” Paul writes.

To stop doing evil is a good first step but it is not enough. To use Paul’s analogy of clothes, if one simply takes off clothes, one is left naked. That is why in verse 12 the apostle urges the Colossians to clothe themselves with new garments. For the third time in the chapter he offers a list of five characteristics — this time five Christian graces for believers to wear.

The Christian life is to be marked by compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

New life

No one should miss the clothes of the new life. They are the exact opposite of the old life. Instead of anger, compassion; instead of rage, kindness; instead of malice, humility; instead of slander, gentleness; instead of filthy language, patience.

To all of this the apostle adds, “Over all these virtues put on love” (v. 14). Agape-type love — love that seeks the welfare of the other — is the glue that binds all together in the new life in Christ. And again when one is directed by love for God and love for others then the selfish acts of verse 5 fade into the background.

Just as it takes time and work to achieve a New Year’s resolution goal or reach a budget or sales goal, Paul recognized putting on the “new clothes” of a Christian takes time and work.

In verse 10 he wrote the new self “is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

Time and work

Renewal is a process — like strengthening a weakened muscle. It takes both time and work. But spend the time and put in the work and one becomes stronger and stronger. The Christian is a new creation because of faith in Jesus Christ and now that new creation must be renewed.

Perhaps that is what the apostle meant when he wrote to the Philippians to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” Spend the time. Do the work and watch the changes as the new clothes fit better and better each day.

Americans are good at making New Year’s resolutions. Keeping them is another matter. But when one becomes a “new creature” through faith in Jesus Christ change is in the air. It is inevitable. Old things must pass away and all things must become new. ✠

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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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Getting involved

Encourage church members to support, volunteer in pro-life efforts

(continued from page 1)

► Host a movie night at church and show "October Baby," a great film that celebrates life. For more information on acquiring a site license for your church to show the film, visit www.lifeway.com/n/Product-Family/October-Baby.

► Study and reflect on Psalm 139 in Sunday School classes and Bible study groups.

► Encourage your congregation to get involved in local community pro-life awareness projects. Ideas for projects include organizing a diaper drive for crisis pregnancy centers in your community and assisting families who are faced with an untimely pregnancy by offering financial or merchandise help.

► Order and/or download bulletin inserts and pro-life materials to give to your congregation. For free resources, visit savalife.org/Events/SanctityofHumanLifeSunday.aspx.

Special offering

► Take up a special offering to donate to organizations that seek to protect unborn life.

► Encourage church members to consider serving in organizations like Sav-A-Life (savalife.org).

► Teach your congregation about the stages of fetal development.

► Pray for and support local churches and ministries that provide counseling and emotional support for women and parents who have suffered the loss of a child — through abortion, miscarriage, stillbirth or Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

Alabama Supreme Court rules unborn baby protected by law

In a turning-tables kind of ruling at the end of 2016, the Alabama Supreme Court began to reverse some of the impact of the famous 40-plus-year-old, pro-abortion case *Roe v. Wade*.

Supreme Court Justice Tom Parker ruled Dec. 30 in favor of Kimberly Stinnet, who lost her baby in 2012 when OB-GYN Karla Kennedy administered abortion-inducing drugs to eliminate a thought-to-be ectopic pregnancy.

Earlier in 2016 a county court ruled against Stinnet, claiming she had no standing under the state's Wrongful Death Act to sue Kennedy for malpractice.

Wrongful Death Act

But the state's Supreme Court ruling reversed the lower court's decision stating the unborn are protected by the Wrongful Death Act because life begins at conception, Parker wrote in his ruling.

Alabama is now the seventh state to al-



123rf.com

In all ways possible use Sanctity of Human Life Sunday to encourage protection of the unborn and to promote the preciousness and inviolability of all God-created human life.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Denise George is author of 30 books including "Our Dear Child: Letters to Your Baby On the Way." She is married to Timothy George, founding dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham. ¶

low wrongful-death actions for a preborn (or unborn) child, joining Illinois, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Dakota and West Virginia.

Equal protection

Parker wrote in his ruling, "Members of the judicial branch of Alabama should do all within their power to dutifully ensure that the laws of Alabama are applied equally to protect the most vulnerable members of our society, both born and unborn."

Although the ruling did not address abortion directly, it did once again reject the viability standard, which was highlighted by *Roe v. Wade* in 1973.

The viability standard — which is meant to prevent states from putting the interest of a fetus above the interest of a pregnant woman until a fetus is "viable" (thus legalizing abortion) — was repudiated as an "incoherent standard" with the state's Supreme Court ruling. (TAB)

Fetal development by the numbers

Did you know conception takes place on day one and in just seven days a tiny human implants in his/her mother's uterus?

After 18 days the baby's heart begins to beat, and after 21 days, he/she pumps his/her own blood through the circulatory system.

After 28 days the child's eyes, ears and respiratory system begin to form. Brain waves have been recorded after only 42 days and by this time the skeleton is complete.

At eight weeks all the baby's body systems are present, and at nine weeks he/she can squint his/her eyes, swallow and make a fist.

All body systems are working at 11 weeks, and one week later, the baby weighs one ounce. (Source: savalife.org/Issues/FetalDevelopment.aspx.)

VOICE YOUR OPINION



**SPEAK UP on
issues in the Baptist
world by writing a
letter to the editor of
The Alabama Baptist.**

Remember to:
• Include your name
and address
• Focus on issues,
not people
• Be as concise as
possible

*Among Americans:***In America today, who is in the best position to generate a healthy conversation on the challenges facing our society?**

LifeWayResearch.com

LifeWay study asks where do Americans look today to solve nation's woes?

America has its problems and needs to talk. But according to a new study, few Americans agree on who can best lead a conversation about the nation's woes.

Less than one-quarter (23 percent) would turn to the office of the U.S. president. About 1 in 10 would turn to the nation's preachers (11 percent) or to college professors (10 percent), a survey by LifeWay Research shows.

Public conversations

"Almost no one would ask a musician or pro athlete," said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research, "even though they often try to start public conversations."

"Musicians or athletes get a great deal of attention for their public statements about the issues," McConnell said. "But few Americans seem to look to them as thought leaders."

Before the recent presidential election, LifeWay Research asked a representative sample of 1,000 Americans this question: "In America today, who is in the best position to generate a healthy conversation on challenges facing our society?" Among possible responses were "our elected president," preachers and even pro athletes.

Healthy insight

About one-quarter of those surveyed said the office of the president has the best chance of fostering healthy public conversations (23 percent).

Members of the media (8 percent) fared slightly better than business leaders (7 percent) or members of Congress (6 percent). Few Americans look to professional athletes (1 percent) or musicians (less than 1 percent) to lead healthy conversations about the na-

tion's challenges. The most common response: "None of these" (33 percent).

Among other findings:

► Southerners are more likely to look to the president (25 percent) than those in the Midwest (18 percent).

► Those in the Northeast choose the media (11 percent) more than those in the South (5 percent).

► Younger Americans — those 18 to 34 — look to the media (12 percent) more than those 65 and older (3 percent).

► African-Americans are the most likely ethnic group to choose local pastors (21 percent) and the president (37 percent).

Looking to pastors

► Hispanic Americans are the least likely ethnic group to choose the media (3 percent).

► Christians are more likely to look to pastors (16 percent) than those from other faiths (1 percent) or nones — those with no religious preference — (2 percent).

► Christians (7 percent) are less likely to look to professors than those from other faiths (18 percent) or nones (15 percent).

► Americans with evangelical beliefs have faith in pastors (36 percent) but little faith in the media (3 percent) or professors (3 percent) to guide such conversations.

Overall the survey reflects the reality that Americans are fractured and divided, McConnell said. Few leaders can draw a wide, diverse audience.

"There's a vacuum of public leadership in America," McConnell said. "We know we have problems and that we should talk about them. But there's no one who can bring us all together." (BP)

Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

Former SBC Annuity Board president dies

TYLER, Texas — Paul Powell, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) Annuity Board, died Dec. 28, 2016. He was 83.

In addition to leading the Annuity Board (now GuideStone Financial Resources) from 1990 to 1997, Powell served as pastor of Green Acres Baptist Church, Tyler, Texas, for 17 years; president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) in the mid-1980s; chair of Baylor University's board of regents; and dean of Baylor's Truett Theological Seminary in 2001.

Prior to his Annuity Board presidency, Powell led Green Acres Baptist to grow from approximately 700 in Sunday School to 3,000. The congregation baptized 202 people during his final full year as pastor and was active in international missions, particularly in Belize.

Powell was a Baylor trustee in 1990 when the board voted to become self-perpetuating rather than continue the traditional trustee selection process through BGCT. The next year he was elected chairman of Baylor's newly created board of regents and helped secure a compromise that allowed BGCT to name 25 percent of trustees. As dean of Truett Seminary from 2001 to 2007, Powell saw enrollment double to nearly 400 students and the endowment increase by more than \$38 million.

Powell received a bachelor's degree from Baylor, a master's degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and honorary doctorates from four Baptist institutions.

The author of more than 50 books, Powell wrote in his 1998 book "The Life Beyond" that if he knew the date of his last night on earth, he would spend it saying goodbye to his "personal treasures," loved ones and earthly body and "then ... spend some time looking forward in anticipation to the adventure of eternity."

He is survived by his wife of 62 years, Cathy, two children, and three grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his son Kent. (BP)



POWELL

CP contributions under budget for year

NASHVILLE — Year-to-date contributions through the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) portion of the Cooperative Program (CP) are .04 percent ahead of the same time frame at the end of 2015 and 3.11 percent under the SBC CP Allocation Budget projection for the year, according to a news release from SBC Executive Committee (EC) President and CEO Frank S. Page.

The \$45,782,192.42 received by the EC from Oct. 1 through Dec. 31, 2016, for distribution through the CP Allocation Budget represents 96.89 percent of the \$47,250,000 year-to-date budgeted amount to support Southern Baptist ministries globally and across North America. The total is \$20,159.89, or 0.04 percent, above last year's first quarter total of \$45,762,032.53.

Designated giving of \$10,885,792.56 for the same year-to-date period is 0.81 percent, or \$88,673.62, below gifts of \$10,974,466.18 received at this point last year. This amount includes only those designated gifts received by the EC and does not reflect contributions made directly to SBC entities.

Designated contributions include the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions, the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions, Southern Baptist Global Hunger Relief and other special gifts.

December's CP allocation receipts for SBC work totaled \$15,582,638.17. Designated gifts received in December amounted to \$3,947,191.49.

CP allocation budget receipts received by the EC are reported monthly to the executives of the entities of the convention, to the state convention offices, to the state Baptist papers and are posted online at www.cpmiissions.net/CPReports. (BP)



SHARING religious beliefs IN MARRIAGE

Unsplash.com

Nearly half of all married adults said sharing religious beliefs is 'very important' for successful marriage

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Shared religious beliefs in marriage are still important to Americans according to a recent report by Pew Research Center, but emphasis on other factors may obscure the biblical significance of marriage.

Nearly half of all married adults (47 percent) said sharing religious beliefs with one's spouse is "very important" for a successful marriage, according to the report released Oct. 27, 2016, by Pew's Religious Landscape Study. Respondents who are married to someone from the same religious tradition were more than twice as likely to say that shared religious beliefs are important. Those married to someone of a different religious affiliation or in marriages where one spouse is unaffiliated with a religious tradition were much less likely to say shared religious beliefs are important.

Overall, Americans were more likely to rank factors like shared interests, a satisfying sexual relationship and sharing household chores as the most successful characteristics of a successful marriage, according to report author David Masci.

Rod Campbell, a licensed professional counselor for Pathways Professional Counseling, a ministry of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries, is not surprised by the report's findings.

"The typical wisdom seems to indicate that a successful marriage is one in which both people feel safe and are getting their needs met. Given that most people evaluate their marriage this way, it's easy to see why there would be such a wide range of answers about the importance of 'faith' or 'shared religious beliefs' among respondents," Campbell said.

'Important to God'

From a biblical standpoint, marriage is much more than simply sharing common interests, said Jeffrey B. Riley, chairman of the division of theological and historical Studies and professor of ethics at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

"For those who are informed by the Bible, we realize that sharing belief is not only important to us, it is important to God," Riley said. "In the Old Testament, God's people were instructed not to take

wives or husbands that were outside the faith community. In the New

Testament, Paul warns about being 'unequally yoked.' Those passages don't tell us specifically why that's important for marriages, only that it is important to the nature of what marriage is — a public acknowledgement of a new allegiance, a new loyalty between a man and a woman and God who joins them together."

Priorities usually dictate actions, so an individual with a deeply held, strong need to share faith with his or her spouse probably makes that a priority before marriage and chooses a spouse accordingly, Campbell said. One who marries someone of a different faith or no faith affiliation is making the conscious decision that shared faith is not high on the list of priorities at the time of marriage, he added.

Priorities often change after marriage, but people often do not, which is why differences in faith can cause stress in the marriage over time. If the couple has children, the differences will have an impact on them especially, said David Eanes, minister of children and families at Meadow Brook Baptist Church, Birmingham, in North Shelby Baptist Association.

From a child's perspective

"If mom and dad have very different faiths, or if one has faith and one does not, it sends a message to the kids that faith is a decision on the same level as, 'What's your favorite restaurant?' or 'What kind of movies do you like?' In other words kids may see their individual parent's faith reduced to only a matter of personal preference rather than something of life-changing and life-directing significance as it should be," Eanes said.

Conflict also may arise as children seek to please their parents but are forced to choose which parent to emulate.

"As with so many things in life, kids are much more likely to follow their parents'

lead on something when they see that mom and dad not only present a united front on the matter but that they also lead by example," Eanes said. "It certainly helps when mom and dad not only share deep religious beliefs on the inside but also are consistent and on the same page as to how they live those beliefs out on the outside."

Bringing glory to God

Children are not the only ones who benefit when a married couple seeks to live a united, Christ-honoring life together, Campbell said.

"Biblically, the purpose of marriage is not meeting the needs of the two marriage partners. We were given marriage primarily to bring glory to God," Campbell said.

Through marriage a man and woman reflect the nature of God in a way that is special, Campbell said.

"As individuals we are called to reflect Christ in living lives of surrender, sacrifice and service to those around us. In marriage we are called to do those things as well, but we also are called to live together as a representation of Christ and His Church, reflected in the roles of bride and bridegroom. Meeting needs of each other and being 'happy' are good, natural, positive consequences that constitute a blessing from God for His people when they successfully fulfill that call," Campbell said.

Intuitively, agreement creates a stronger sense of purpose in any relationship, and that is certainly true in marriage, Riley said.

"When people grow in the same direction, they go in the same direction," Riley said. "When spouses are following Jesus Christ together, the marriage itself will be stronger because both husband and wife are living toward the same goal, to reflect the character of Jesus Christ and to please God in the way they live, love and serve one another and others." ✝



123rf.com

Disaster relief volunteers help out in Houston County after storms

Storms made themselves known at the start of the new year, causing significant damage in Houston County on Jan. 2.

And Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief (DR) volunteers immediately stepped into action to assist Alabamians.

Columbia Baptist Association DR volunteers began working in the Rehobeth, Malver and Taylor areas doing chainsaw, skid-steer and cleanup work (as pictured here). The work took about two days.

Other teams did preliminary assessments in Geneva County and were ready to "assist as the opportunity is available," according to Mark Wakefield, Disaster Relief and chaplaincy ministries strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM).

For anyone interested in being trained in disaster relief, the SBOM will hold the following training in March and April:

- ▶ Chaplaincy training to help counsel storm victims April 6-8
- ▶ Disaster relief admin training March 11
- ▶ Child care and communications training March 25.

(Neisha Roberts)



Photo by Pam Brammer



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.

BIBB

▶ **Four Points Church, Centreville**, will hold "We Believe" Bible conference Jan. 27-29. Jim Parker, professor of biblical interpretation at New Orleans Seminary; Steve Headrick, pastor of Faith Church, Loretta, Tennessee; and Brad Lowery, pastor of New Prospect Church, Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, will speak. To view the schedule and to register, visit fourpointsbaptistchurch.com or email 4pointsbaptistchurch@gmail.com. Stan Huguley is pastor.

COLUMBIA

▶ **Malvern Church** will hold a gospel sing Jan. 14, 6 p.m. Walter Wilson from Dothan, the Byrd Family from Newville and Sharon Wagner from Slocomb will perform special music. Refreshments will follow. Hosea Parker is pastor.

ETOWAH

▶ **Seth Stanton** is the new minister of music at **Twelfth Street**

Church, Gadsden, in Rainbow City. He previously served as minister of music at Gilliam Springs Church, Rainbow City. He also served at Pintala Church, Rainbow City. Stanton holds a bachelor's degree from Samford University in Birmingham. He and his wife, Brandi, have two children. Craig Carlisle is pastor.

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN

▶ **Trey Kincer** is the new pastor of **New Bethel Church, Collinsville**. He previously served as pastor of Concord Church, Geraldine. He is married to Allison. ▶ **Thann Owens** is the new interim pastor of **Southeast Church, Fort Payne**. He previously served as a minister on staff at Mount Olive Church, Fort Payne.

MADISON

▶ **Sherry Christy** will retire from her role as associate minister of music and organist at **First Church, Huntsville**, on Jan. 23.

She began serving in July 2012. She also served churches in Louisiana and Texas. She is married to John. Travis Collins is pastor.

MORGAN

▶ **Walnut Grove Church, Decatur**, will host Jason Runnels in concert Jan. 15, 6 p.m. John Bain is pastor.

RUSSELL

▶ **Marty Holley** is the new director of missions for **Russell Association**. He previously served as church development director for Covington Association. He also served at Living Water Church, Andalusia. He and his wife, Shari, have three children and three grandchildren.

ST. CLAIR

▶ **McEntyre Church, Ashville**, will hold a fifth Sunday singing Jan. 29, 2 p.m. The Willing Vessels will perform special music. Bobby Winningham is pastor. ☼

in Loving Memory

of Alabama Baptist leaders, friends

Roger Britt Stone

FBC Chalkville pastor Stone dies at 55

Roger Britt Stone, pastor of First Baptist Church, Chalkville, died Jan. 1. He was 55.

Stone recently celebrated two years of ministry at First,



STONE

Chalkville. Prior to that, he served at First Baptist Church, Gurley; Pinckard Baptist Church; Southside Baptist Church, Ozark; and Neptune Road Baptist Church, Kissimmee, Florida.

Stone also served as a chaplain, bereavement coordinator and volunteer coordinator with Gentiva Hospice and Community Hospice for more than seven years and also as a discipleship-training director for Dale Baptist Association.

He held a bachelor's degree from the Baptist College of Florida in Graceville.

Stone is survived by his wife, Francine, two children and one grandchild. (Hannah Muñoz)

Ron C. Sumners

Retired Meadow Brook pastor dies at 67

Ron C. Sumners, retired pastor of Meadow Brook Baptist Church, Birmingham, died Dec. 29, 2016. He was 67.

Sumners served as pastor of Meadow Brook Baptist Church for nearly 20 years before retiring in 2012. He also served at Vestavia Hills Baptist Church; Valley Park Baptist Church, Montgomery; First Baptist Church, Landrum, South Carolina; and Trinity Baptist Church, Whiteville, North Carolina. He also served as moderator and hospice chaplain for Shelby Baptist Association and as the Baptist campus minister at Auburn University.

He earned his bachelor's degree from Samford University in Birmingham, a master's degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and a doctorate from Southwest Bible College and Seminary in Gainesville, Georgia.

Sumners is survived by his wife of 45 years, Karen "Prissy," and two children. (Hannah Muñoz)



SUMNERS

William Thomas "Tom" Carter

Spring Hill's Carter dies at 81

William Thomas "Tom" Carter, minister on staff at Spring Hill Baptist Church, Mobile, for more than 40 years, died Dec. 21, 2016. He was 81.

Carter earned his bachelor's degree from Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham. He held two master's degrees from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

He began his ministry at Spring Hill Baptist as minister of education and was serving as minister of senior adults at the time of his

death. He also taught church administration at the University of Mobile. He was preceded in death by his wife, Patsy. He is survived by two children and one grandchild. (Hannah Muñoz)



CARTER



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Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Angelology

Angels Today

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

Even a casual reader of the Bible would notice the frequency with which angels are mentioned. For several weeks Theology 101 has been exploring aspects of some of the many occasions in biblical times when angels were involved. We have noted references to angels from Genesis to Revelation, from before the creation of the world all the way to the end time with the final defeat of evil and the dawning of new heavens and a new earth.

Now we might ask: What about angels in our day and time? Are they real and are they active?

Living in a modern scientific age, our risk is to confess faith in the total truthfulness and trustworthiness of the Bible on the one hand, but then on the other hand commit the error of the Sadducees who rejected the reality of angels — “For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection — and no angel or spirit” (Acts 23:8).

The fact is that most all of us likely have never seen an angel or heard an angel speak a message from God, such as we read about happening in biblical times. Such an acknowledgement may serve at best to make us skeptical about angels being active today or at worst cause us to doubt that they even exist. But then we remember that in other areas we accept the reality of things we cannot see, such as radio waves or electricity. We enjoy the benefits that both realities bring to our lives. In principle, we might do well to agree with Psalm 91:11–12 that angels could be God’s providential agents or invisible protectors behind experiences we might otherwise label as chance or coincidence.

Although unseen by human eyes, angels not only may relate to us as unseen protectors but also relate to us as joint worshippers that engage in perfect praise. They are presented in the Bible as are our unseen companions in praising God. What we do on earth, they do in heaven and they do it perfectly.

Congregations often sing “The Doxology,” in which we call for this joint praise with the words, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below. Praise Him above, ye heavenly hosts. Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.” When we attend to praising God here below, angels attend to praising Him above. While standing in a congregation of believers lifting our voices in praise to God, have you ever imagined that simultaneously angels are offering heavenly praise?

Angels rejoice

Angels also are said to be looking upon what is happening on earth. We read that angels rejoice whenever a sinner repents and turns to Christ as Savior. Jesus put it like this: “There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10). Angels are not only looking for people who respond to the gospel invitation, but also are beholding the worship of God’s people.

The message to the Corinthian Church through the apostle Paul was that the women were to wear clothing appropriate to their gender and commensurate with their Christian commitment “because of the angels” (1 Cor. 11:10). Furthermore angels look upon how we conduct ourselves in church affairs, hence, God’s instructions through Paul to Timothy included: “I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality” (1 Tim. 5:21).✠

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.



Makeup of 115th Congress overwhelmingly Christian

The United States Congress is about as Christian today as it was in the early 1960s, according to a new analysis by Pew Research Center.

Nearly 91 percent of members of the 115th Congress that convened Jan. 3 describe themselves as Christian, compared to 95 percent of Congress members serving from 1961 to 1962, according to congressional data compiled by CQ Roll Call and analyzed by Pew. Of those self-describing as Christian, 72 (13.5 percent) are Baptist.

That comes even as the share of Americans who describe themselves as Christian (now at 71 percent) has dropped in that time, Pew researchers noted.

And, as a whole, Congress is far more religiously affiliated than the general public.

“Why have the ‘nones’ grown in the public, but not among Congress?” asked Greg Smith, associate director for research at Pew, referring to people who check “none” on surveys asking their religion.

“One possible explanation is people tell us they would rather vote for an elected representative who is religious than for one who is not religious.”

Smith pointed to past Pew polls, including one in January 2016 that asked whether voters were more or less likely to vote for a presidential candidate who does not believe in God.

More than half said they’d be less likely to vote for a nonbelieving candidate, 10 times the number who said they’d be more likely to vote for such a candidate.

And in 2014, Smith said, 60 percent of adults in the U.S. told Pew it was important to them that members of Congress have strong religious beliefs.

Mimicking general public

While the new 115th Congress mostly looks like the last (and the 87th that convened in 1961), the new Congress does include seven fewer Protestants, four more Catholics and six fewer Christians.

That mimics a shift in the general public, according to Aleksandra Sandstrom, copy editor and lead author of the Pew report: Like the rest of the country, Congress has become less Protestant. The share of Protestants in Congress has dropped from 75 percent to 56 percent since the 1960s, while the share of Catholics has jumped from 19 percent to 31 percent.

And 13 percent of its new members affiliate with non-Christian faiths, nearly double the share of non-Christian incumbent members, according to Pew. More than half of those non-Christian freshmen are Jewish (8 percent), the largest share of Jews in any freshman class, researchers noted, though Sandstrom said data was only available back to 2011–2012.

Christians, both Protestant and Catholic, aren’t the only demographic to outstrip the general population in Congress. There also is a larger share of Jewish members of

Congress (9 percent) than there is of Jewish Americans in the country as a whole (2 percent).

Representation by Buddhists, Mormons, Muslims and Orthodox Christians in Congress is roughly proportional to their population size.

Underrepresented

But the growing number of religiously unaffiliated Americans, including atheists and agnostics, remain underrepresented.

The nones make up 23 percent of all Americans but just 0.2 percent of Congress. Only Rep. Kyrsten Sinema, a Democrat from Arizona, describes herself as religiously unaffiliated.

Sinema does not identify as a nontheist, atheist or nonbeliever, which means there are no openly atheist members of Congress and haven’t been since Rep. Pete Stark, a

Democrat from California, was voted out of office in 2012, according to the Friendly Atheist blog.

According to Casey Brescia, communications associate for Secular Coalition for America, “There is a price for running as an openly nonreligious candidate, but it’s not nearly as significant as it was in the past.”

Religious affiliation differs in the House of Representatives and the Senate, and by political party.

Sandstrom said, “Of the non-Christian members of Congress, most of them are in the House and most of them are Democrats. There are only two non-Christian Republicans in Congress, and one of them is a new member of Congress, so the non-Christian contingent doubled between the last Congress and this Congress.”

All but 2 of the 293 Republicans in the new Congress are Christians.

The 242 Democrats in Congress also overwhelmingly are Christian (80 percent). But Democrats also include 28 Jews; three Buddhists; three Hindus; two Muslims; one Unitarian Universalist; Sinema, the one religiously unaffiliated member of Congress; and 10 members who declined to state their religious affiliation, according to Pew.

Jewish in Congress

“It’s also of note that the majority of the non-Christians in Congress are Jewish,” Sandstrom said. “In all the years we’ve analyzed, all of the Republicans in Congress who have not been Christian have been Jewish.”

Both the House (91 percent) and Senate (88 percent) are majority Christian — specifically, Protestant (55 and 58 percent, respectively). One-third of the House is Catholic, compared with one-quarter of the Senate, and all five Orthodox Christians in Congress are members of the House.

The Senate includes just nine members of non-Christian faiths: Eight are Jewish and Sen. Mazie Hirono, a Democrat from Hawaii, is Buddhist. (RNS)

**Nearly 91 percent
of members of the
115th Congress that
convened Jan. 3
describe themselves
as Christian.**

Lutherans

Proclaim salvation by grace through faith, priesthood of all believers

By **Kenneth B.E. Roxburgh**
Special to The Alabama Baptist

The first Protestant denomination, which divided from the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century, was Lutheranism. It is simply impossible to speak of the Reformation at that period of time without reference to the life and theological impact of Martin Luther. He is the key figure, protagonist and spokesperson.

Without Luther it is difficult to believe the Reformation would have been deeply rooted in the life of Germany as it was — he often risked his life to make sure the early gains would not be lost. His time and culture were well matched by his personality, his vigour and commitment to a cause that was part and parcel of his own spiritual pilgrimage. Although many people over a period of time had called for reform, no one had emerged to be the person to give it such enormous impetus.

German Lutheran theologian Paul Althaus described Luther as an ocean. Such an image applies — not only to his enormous literary output with more than 100 folio volumes — but also to Luther's powerful originality and unnerving profundity. He wrote a treatise every two weeks for 25 years. Luther himself felt a deep embarrassment about people calling themselves Lutherans and once wrote, "What is Luther? The teaching is not mine. Nor was I crucified for anyone." He said of his own role in the Reformation, "I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing."

Luther lived during a period of political and religious upheaval in Germany. He himself living in an Augustinian Monastery grew increasingly dissatisfied with the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church concerning the way of salvation. He was a professor of biblical theology at Wittenberg University and his studies led him to reflect on his own anguished search for peace. He was a man with an inordinately sensitive conscience. He was obsessed with sin and with the fear that while he confessed his sin, he might not have confessed all of his sins.

Sacraments

The understanding of the Church at this time was that divine grace was dispensed by the Church through a variety of different means, chief among these being the sacraments, seven in number, but the most important being baptism, Eucharist and penance. Grace was not seen to be unmerited but only granted to those who were truly penitent in heart. A perpetual effort was needed for a person to acquire merit before God and entry into heaven. At this time of doubt Luther's spiritual mentor, Jo-

hann von Staupitz, sought to encourage him to continue to use the sacraments, speaking of the mercy of God and directing Luther to the "wounds of the most sweet Savior as a means out of his despair."

Concept of grace

Luther eventually came to an understanding as he read and studied the Scriptures, that in the Book of Romans the apostle Paul argued salvation was not based on what a person had achieved by human works. Rather, God accepted sinful human beings solely on the basis of the grace of God, received by faith. Faith for Luther came to mean a trust, reliance and grasping or taking hold of Christ. He came to find assurance of salvation in the righteousness of his Savior Jesus Christ which was credited to his account, making him acceptable to God and finding hope of eternal life in the atoning sacrifice of his Savior on the cross of Calvary. Contrary to popular belief, Luther did not believe in faith without works and said, "If faith is not without all, even the smallest works, it does not justify; indeed it is not even faith." Yet he also avoided the view that faith itself was a meritorious work: faith does not justify, it is merely the act, which receives the gift of justification.

Luther's spiritual experience in the early years of the 16th century eventually led him to break with Roman Catholic theology and bureaucracy. His first act of defiance against the theology and practice of the Roman Catholic Church took place in 1517, an event that will be commemorated throughout Germany on the 500th anniversary of its occurrence. Luther's initial concern centered on the selling of indulgences — payments to the Catholic Church that purchased an exemption from punishment for some types of sins — to go toward the rebuilding of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Subscribers to the indulgence would receive a plenary and perfect remission of all sins. They would participate in the merit of the

saints and they would relieve the poor suffering souls in purgatory. In the city of Wittenberg, the sale of indulgences was headed up by Johann Tetzel, a Dominican monk who used a catchy and heart-rendering appeal to people to buy an indulgence on behalf of the dead. He told people, "The dead cry, 'Pity us. Pity us. We are in dire torment from which you can redeem us for a pittance. Will you let us lie here in the flames? Will you delay our promised glory?'" He went on to assure his hearers, "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs."

For Luther the selling of indulgences suggested salvation could be purchased and Paul's doctrine of justification by grace through faith would be undermined. Luther became convinced that justification was

the article by which the Church stands or falls, the acid test of what is truly Christian. It was not only the foundation of his own personal assurance of salvation, but became one of the central articles of the creed of the church he founded.

Like every other Protestant Reformer, Luther was committed to the motto "Sola Scriptura." He recalled that "when I was 20 years old I had not yet seen a Bible. ... Finally I found a Bible in the library and forthwith I took it with me into the monastery. I began to read, to reread and to read it over again." Later in his life he argued that "what is asserted without the Scriptures or proven revelation may be held as an opinion but need not be believed" because Scripture is a "proper touchstone" that would test each and every doctrine of the Church. They must all sit under the judgement of the "sure rule of God's Word." Luther himself contributed to the use of the Bible in translating the New Testament into the German language by 1522 and the Old Testament by 1534, using the original languages of Hebrew and Greek as the basis of his translation. It was a modern translation, cast in racy idiom for "were the housewife in her home, the children at their games, the merchants in the city squares; I tried to learn from them how to express and explain myself." His movement of reform within the Church and society of the 16th century was intended to change the lives of everyone within the country.

Life of discipleship

One emphasis that has had a long-lasting effect on Christian discipleship is his teaching on the priesthood of all believers. Luther had been ordained as a Roman Catholic priest but he came to believe that each and every single believer was baptized into the life of the Church and received the gift of the Spirit to live a life of discipleship in his or her everyday occupation. He did not believe there was a higher spiritual level for those called to pastoral ministry because any discrimination between believers in terms of vocation or office was unbiblical. He argued that every Christian has a calling in life, wherever and whatever it may be, within which a believer finds him- or herself charged to fulfill the will of God.

Luther was genuinely concerned to encourage ordinary people to view their daily lives as important in the service of God as each person worked for the common good of society. Luther believed every type of work, no matter how oppressive or demoralizing its impact may be on a person's hu-

manity, should be viewed as a vocation.

Luther accepted that baptism and the Lord's Supper were sacraments, which became a means of grace for those who experienced them. He continued to believe in infant baptism. Faith, he believed, is unconsciously present in the child brought to baptism by virtue of the proclamation of the Word made there along with the conscious faith of the parents. In baptism, Luther maintained God announces His gracious acceptance of the sinner and he or she is bathed and cleansed in "the beautiful, rosy-red blood of Christ." He argued that although the New Testament does not command infants to be baptized, it does not forbid it either. Infant baptism was seen to be analogous to Old Testament act of circumcision but under the new covenant this sacrament was given to girls as well as boys.

The Protestant Reformers held many doctrinal truths in common but they divided from each other over their understanding of

the Lord's Supper. Luther continued to believe, along with the Presbyterian Reformer John Calvin, that communion signified the bestowal of sustaining grace in the lives of believers who came to receive the bread and wine. He rejected any view of the mass as a meritorious work

that achieves grace for those who participate. However, he continued to maintain the bread and the wine were not merely symbols of the body and blood of Christ but that in the bread and wine through consecration Christ is really and substantially present. For Luther the Eucharist was the place where Christ was present because God's Word had promised this would be so. Luther thus held a considerable measure of medieval reverence toward the consecrated elements and would kneel to receive communion.

Luther was one of the magisterial Reformers, a term coined by G.H. Williams to refer to the mainstream Reformers who carried out their work in alliance with and undergirded by the coercive power of the state, whether it be a magistrate, prince, town council or even a monarch. He maintained the state should support the life and work of the Church and the Church should be a critic of the State in preaching and teaching the Word of God. Any idea of a separation of Church and State was anathema to him.

The year 2017 will witness many commemorations of the life and ministry of Luther. His impact on the life of the Church, not only in 16th century Germany but also in 21st century North America, is real. We see this not only in Lutheran churches but also in all denominations who hold to an understanding of the vital importance of the Bible — in awareness that the grace of God brings justification to sinners on the basis of grace, received by faith.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Kenneth B.E. Roxburgh is professor of religion at Samford University in Birmingham and serves as pastor for preaching and teaching at Southside Baptist Church, Birmingham. ☛

WHO
are the
evangelicals?
Part 2 of 8



LUTHER



Rashional THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

SNAPSHOTS OF LIFE WHEN LIFE HAPPENS

Is the team better with or without you?

I've always been taught to leave a place better than I found it. While this well-known saying most often refers to a physical location, it also can play out in relationships and team experiences.

Am I pulling my weight on the team? Is the team better because I'm a part of it? Am I willing to help others when they need extra assistance?

Do I make a positive difference in another person's day? Or are my attitude, actions and apathy bringing others down?

Consider Person A who preceded me in an internship role when I was in my early 20s.

I was confused why she had not made any progress on our assigned project. I even wondered if she had actually worked at all when the supervisor told me after my second day on the job that I had accomplished more in two days than she had done in weeks.

A few years later I met Person B who was super speedy and ran circles around the rest of us on the team but 9 out of 10 things she did had to be redone. She was fast but she had poor results when it came to quality of work. She ended up costing the rest of us time having to go behind her to correct her mistakes.

And then there was Person C who spent more energy trying to avoid doing the job he was hired to do than it would have taken to just do the job. I'm still perplexed how he slept at night knowing the extra weight he caused us to carry because he wasn't doing his part. And it wasn't only during the time he was on the team but his dishonest and sloppy job affected various parts of the work for years to come.

You might have guessed that my patience wears a bit thin when it comes to purposeful dishonesty, sloppiness and slacking — in any situation.

But I've also learned that while some people know ex-

actly what they are doing and purposefully mistreat the team or relationship, it is not the case with everyone. Sometimes there is a deeper concern at play. It might be a health issue or an emotional problem. The person could be overwhelmed with a personal crisis.

It could be as simple as lack of training, poor communication or negligence on the part of the team leader in establishing clear expectations. And sometimes people merely are promoted beyond their strengths — the Peter Principle, a concept made famous by the late Canadian researcher Laurence J. Peter who wrote a book about it in 1969.

If we discover that any of the above scenarios have occurred, then we make the place better than we found it immediately by owning up to what is happening.

Team leaders, slow down long enough to know your team members and understand their struggles, their situations and their needs. Your job is to empower them to do their jobs. You are responsible to provide the training and resources they need. Create an environment that allows for achievement, confidence and security.

If you recruited them for your team, then protect them while also pushing them.

Team members, take responsibility for yourselves. Be willing to ask for help, seek proper medical or psychological attention and figure out what you need to do to be a cooperative and contributing team member.

Everyone on the team can be part of the solution. Along with determining to be the best you God has created you to be, encourage and challenge those around you to do the same.

Why waste your time — and that of everyone around you — being part of something if you aren't willing to contribute toward making it the best it can be? 🌱

RASHIONAL Extras ...



The 'what ifs' of life

By Michael J. Brooks

I'm convinced many of us are tormented with "what ifs" in our lives.

"What if I'd gone to the doctor sooner?" or "What if I'd not driven that route that day?" or "What if I'd been morally stronger?"

Alas the "what ifs" plague us but there's nothing we can do to alter the course of the past.

No one of us, no matter how strong, is strong enough to pull back the hands of a clock.

This is why Paul's word in Philippians 3 has always been one of my favorite texts in the season of New Year. "Forgetting those things which are before, I press toward the mark of the high calling of Christ," he wrote (Phil. 3: 13-14).

We do learn from the past, to be sure, but Paul's word is to forget the failings that discourage us and to infuse our lives with a new and greater purpose.

The message of the Christian gospel is that there need not be any "has-beens" in God's kingdom.

He is a God of mercy who specializes in restoring His wayward people from their failures and dashed hopes.

And He promises to be our partner in building a meaningful life of service to God and others.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Excerpt from *Reflections*, a weekly column by Michael J. Brooks, pastor of the Siluria Baptist Church, Alabaster.

Thoughts about being a pastor

By Pastor Scott Slayton
Chelsea Village Baptist Church

Scattered thoughts about pastoral ministry and being a pastor:

► Walk with Jesus every day. The Father called you to be His child before He called you to be a pastor.

► Be a good neighbor to the people who physically live around you. Know their names, talk to them when you see them and help out any way you can. Don't awkwardly try to get them to come to church the first time you meet them. If you are a good neighbor they might just invite themselves.

► Get up early on Sunday

mornings to look over your message. This way if there are crises to deal with when you get to church you won't be freaking out about your sermon.

► You will not magically find time for anything. What needs to be done will only be done by making time.

► Stop looking for a magic bullet to make your church "succeed." Pray, preach, disciple, care for people and love your neighbors. This bears much fruit in the long run.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Excerpt from *One Degree to Another* blog at scottslayton.net.

"As Christians it's important that we have discernment, but it's also important to stretch ourselves. We should dialogue with those we disagree with — to better understand their perspective and better understand why we believe what we believe.

"Growth can happen in a lot of ways, and one is learning from those who don't see the world the way we do. ... We should be humble enough to realize we don't know everything and aren't always right. ... Let's have discernment but remain teachable.

"Imagine how things would be different if we weren't afraid of people who might believe differently from us."

Cameron Strang,
founder and publisher
of *Relevant*
"First Word: A letter
from the editor"
May/June 2016 issue

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind; and love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27).

"The themes themselves in the book and movie are universal. Themes of redemption, of forgiveness, of love. We are human, we are flawed and it's coming to terms with those flaws. How do we drop our baggage and look into the future rather than looking into the past?"

Jack Huston, lead actor in 2016 version of the movie "Ben-Hur,"
comments from *Relevant* magazine article "Jack Huston is taking his place in history"

"Haven't I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Joshua 1:9

Follow me on Twitter
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email me at jrash@thealabamabaptist.org.

Former Alabama governor Albert Brewer dies

Former Alabama governor and Alabama Baptist Albert Preston Brewer, a man who was said to have “lived his life an example of integrity and professionalism,” died Jan. 2. He was 88.

A native of Tennessee, Brewer spent most of his life in Decatur.

He served as the state’s 47th governor from 1968 to 1971.

Brewer became a professor of law and government at Samford University in Birmingham in 1987.

Samford President Andrew Westmoreland said Brewer was “the epitome of a Christian gentleman. He served the university with distinction, as he did everything in life.”

Brewer — a member of Mountain Brook Baptist Church, Birmingham — was preceded in death by his wife, Martha and daughter Becky. He is survived by daughter Alison, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. (Neisha Roberts)



BREWER

Gary Fenton joins Samford

Retired Alabama Baptist pastor Gary D. Fenton has been named senior advancement officer at Samford University in Birmingham, effective Jan. 3. He will work with a select group of major donors and organizations to help meet the goals of the university’s recently launched \$300 million “Forever Samford” campaign.



FENTON

Fenton retired in August 2016 after 25 years as pastor of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham. He had been serving on Samford’s board of trustees prior to his appointment to the development staff. Earlier he served as an adjunct instructor and field supervisor for Samford’s Beeson Divinity School.

Fenton’s wife, Alta Faye, is a former president of the Samford Legacy League auxiliary organization. They have three adult daughters. (Samford)

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Chinese woman sentenced to prison for Bible study

URUMQI, China — A woman in China’s western Xinjiang region has been given a three-year prison term for having a Bible study, with the court ruling that she was “gathering a crowd to disturb public order.”

Ma Huichao and four other Christians were arrested together for meeting to study the Bible without government approval. Her prison term began Dec. 30, 2016.

China has been cracking down on Bible studies and Christian gatherings, arresting hundreds of pastors and laypeople in recent years on similar charges, according to The Christian Post.

The Revised Draft of Regulations on Religious Affairs, which officials began enforcing in October 2016, further clamped down on “organizing citizens to attend religious training, conferences and activities abroad ... preaching, organizing religious activities, and establishing religious institutions or religious sites at schools” and “providing religious services through the Internet.”

The government also has destroyed many rooftop crosses on churches, saying they violate building codes, according to the Post. (TAB)

Christian man receives blasphemy charge in Pakistan

LAHORE, Pakistan — Muslims in Pakistan have filed a blasphemy charge against

a Christian in retaliation for refusing their demand that he and others cede church land to them, sources said.

In a First Information Report at Nishtar Police Station in Lahore, Haji Nadeem on Dec. 30, 2016, accused Babu Shahbaz of desecrating the pages of the Koran to “hurt the religious sentiments of the Islamic world.” Shahbaz was taken into custody that day.

Shahbaz, 41, was arrested along with his wife and daughter after the police report was filed.

Nadeem stated he and other Muslims were going to a mosque to offer early morning prayers when they saw Koranic pages strewn on the road.

Shahbaz’s brother, George Masih, said the allegations were baseless and aimed at “teaching a lesson” to the local Christian community for refusing to allow a water treatment plant on church land some months ago.

According to the England-based Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS-UK), Pakistan’s blasphemy laws are often used by Muslims to settle scores with non-Muslims. In a CLAAS-UK press release, the human rights organization stated that the accuser was a rival shopkeeper envious of the successful store owned by Shahbaz’s brother. That shopkeeper said he and his friends found at least 100 pages ripped from a Quran with Shahbaz’s name written on them, the Post reported.

“That [allegation] is made up,” said Nasir

Saeed, director of CLAAS-UK. “This is not the first case of this kind.”

He added that Christians know that writing your own name on Koranic pages and throwing them into the street is a “suicide mission,” he added. (TAB, MS)

Gangs beat Christians trying to defend their church property

SHIJIAZHUANG, China — Gangs hired by China’s Communist regime beat Christians in the northern Hebei province after they attempted to keep their church property from being destroyed, The Christian Post reported.

The attack occurred in late December 2016 after Communist Party officials tried to force the congregation to sign a land transfer that would make them move to a new location. But the price they offered was low, and elders at Fuxing Church refused, according to China Aid, an international nonprofit Christian human rights organization committed to promoting religious freedom and rule of law in China.

This reportedly angered the developers and they hired gang members to destroy the church’s circuit breaker.

When church members inside the building went out to try to stop them, they were severely beaten, the Post reported.

According to one church elder, the police sided with gang members when the incident was reported. (TAB)

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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Bayside Baptist Church in Lillian, Ala., is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to: Pastor Search Committee, PO Box 533, Lillian, AL 36549 or email tbobharris@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL/FULL-TIME PASTOR

Providence Baptist Church, Rockford, Alabama, is searching for a pastor. Please send resumé to: John Harris at 8973 US-HWY 231, Rockford, AL 35136 or email laurah2465@charter.net.

BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH MINISTER

Actively growing church in Meridian, MS, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational youth minister to en-

gage and be passionate about our youth. Please email resumé to: newhopebcyouthministersearch@gmail.com.

BUSINESS

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RELIGION *in America*

Compiled from Wire Services

School district bans prayer gathering posting

WAYNE CITY, Ill. — After opposition from an atheist legal organization, an Illinois school district has banned its local high school students from posting on their school's Facebook page about prayer gatherings.

The Wisconsin-based Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) complained to the Wayne City Community Unit School District 100 after a student posted an announcement on Wayne City High School's Facebook page about a prayer gathering in October 2016, according to The Christian Post.

The post noted that all students were welcome to participate in "Bring Your Bible to School Day" and meet in the school library at 7:50 a.m. "to pray over the day."

At least one local resident informed FFRF, and the organization's attorney sent a letter to the school district's superintendent.

"This Facebook posting violates the basic constitutional prohibition by creating the appearance that the school and, by extension, the district prefer religion to nonreligion and Christianity to all other religions," the letter states.

It demanded the school district's social media accounts not be used for such purposes in the future and the school district complied, the Post reported. (TAB)

UMC has 'focused prayer' on LGBT stance

NASHVILLE — The United Methodist Church (UMC) has called for 75 weeks of "focused prayer" for the future of the denomination as it determines its view on homosexuality.

As part of the second phase of the "Praying Our Way Forward" initiative, which started New Year's Day, each annual conference will adopt 1 of the 75 weeks to pray for UMC, according to The Christian Post.

During the first phase, 84 bishops spent 15 minutes a day for four months in prayer for the selection and initial work of the Commission on a Way Forward, which will analyze the Church's position on LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) issues.

Historically UMC's Book of Discipline has stated that homosexuality is a sin, that marriage is between one man and one woman only and that clergy are banned from being in same-sex relationships, according to the Post.

According to UMC, the 75-week period started in the North Carolina Annual Conference on Jan. 1 and will end in 2018. (TAB)

Illinois judge grants break for pro-life clinics

ROCKFORD, Ill. — In response to a new state law forcing health providers to refer or inform pregnant women to abortion clinics, an Illinois judge has granted a group of pro-life clinics a break.

Winnebago County Circuit Court Judge Eugene Doherty ruled Dec. 20, 2016, that the clinics "have raised a fair question as to whether their right to be free from government compelled speech is violated," according to The Christian Post.

The Alliance Defending Freedom filed the lawsuit on behalf of the clinics after Republican Gov. Bruce Rauner signed the new law in July 2016 that would require pro-life doctors and clinics to violate their convictions about abortion. The law took effect Jan. 1. The preliminary injunction applies only to the clinics included in the lawsuit. (TAB)

Majority of US still agree with Roe v. Wade

WASHINGTON — Nearly 70 percent of Americans say the Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision, which legalized abortion more than four decades ago, should not be completely overturned, according to a new Pew Research study.

That figure (69 percent) is slightly up from 2013, when 63 percent reported they felt that way, similar to findings from the previous two decades.

Public opinion varied by religious affiliation, according to Pew. Among all Protestants, 63 percent say the decision should be overturned, but among white evangelicals, that number drops to 49 percent. (TAB)

Fake news

Verify news items before sharing, reposting

Fake news is big news these days and many want to know how not to be duped by it.

On one level the solutions are a matter of common sense.

"First, you look for verification," said James Black, assistant director of the Center for Collaborative Journalism and professor of writing in the media at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia.

Christianity Today published more tips, including not posting items whose authenticity is disproven or that cannot be verified.

"If it is true and helpful, post it," the magazine advised.

But fighting the surging wave of fake news is going to take a lot more than smarts. Often anonymously created and easily spread throughout social media — and beyond when traditional media picks it up — it is likely here to stay.

Impossible to eradicate

And its very nature makes it nearly impossible to eradicate.

Fake news originates mainly from websites that publish misinformation, hoaxes and propaganda. Their false information is initially disseminated through social media. Eventually some of it becomes the stuff of news reports and personal conversation.

Even those originating websites can be confusing and misleading, Black said. Some are named after major news networks — requiring readers to carefully examine the URLs.

The profit motive also assures the continuation of fake news, he said. While sometimes politically motivated, many of its creators generate memes and articles designed to drive web traffic to their sites, thus earning them revenue from advertisers.

Keeps growing

"Fake news is an Internet phenomenon where people make money by spreading information," he said.

That keeps it going and growing. But so do deeply ingrained human habits.

"We are always more prone to believe things we agree with," he said.

An individual who supports a certain cause will be more likely to believe, and then read and

share, a post that affirms their stance. They in turn will be more skeptical of information contradicting their viewpoints.

"Everyone has their predisposed idea of what reality is," he said.

"We are always drawn to information that reinforces that."

The confusion increases when factual information is viewed, and denounced, as phony by some.

Rumor-busting website Snopes and traditional media outlets are portrayed as false news creators, Black said.

"They'll say, 'If you agree with Snopes, you must be liberal leaning,'" he said. "We have such distrust for the media right now."

In his *Christianity Today* article about fake news, Karl Vaters said Christians should be the last people falling for, and spreading, mis-

information online — intentionally or unintentionally.

"We need to be rigorous about our fact-checking," Vaters writes. That goes for sermons and conversations.

"This is not a game we're playing," he said. "When the integrity of the Church gets undermined, the reliability of the gospel message gets called into question."

However, Black said even a strong desire to stay away from false news is often not enough.

"We are all gullible. All of us," he said. "Some of us are more gullible than others."

That, too, has always been the case and is unlikely to change.

"There has always been false information within the marketplace of ideas," he said. "There always will be." (BNG)

"We need to be rigorous about our fact-checking."

**Karl Vaters
pastor, Cornerstone
Christian Fellowship,
Fountain Valley, California,
and writer for
*Christianity Today***

REFLECTIONS



Multiplying disciples

NorthPark's discipleship lifestyle makes, multiplies disciples like Jesus did

By Grace Thornton
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Bill Wilks said there will never be a time in his life that he's not meeting regularly with a group of men, sending them out and then starting over.

And he prays he can get pastors and lay people all over the state, nation and world to commit to the same thing.

"In most churches, the big dilemma is not being able to create an atmosphere of something that would really truly multiply,"

said Wilks, pastor of NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville.

That's why he started D-Life a few years ago. It's not a program or a method — it's a lifestyle, he said. It's simple. It's profound. And it's the way Jesus did it.

How does it work?

Small groups meet once a week somewhere out in the community. When they meet, one person facilitates. Another leads a prayer. A third retells the story that's assigned for the week, a story they will have all read in their personal time in the Word. A fourth person will read it from the Bible to see if anything was left out.

And once they reach eight or so group members, it's time to divide the group and multiply, Wilks said.

"A lot of small churches that

have been doing business as usual for years and kind of get stuck — they don't know what to do from there. D-Life is a very simple thing that they can do and have some really powerful fruit," Wilks said. "It's a very simple way to train your people how to make and multiply disciples as a way of life."

It's something he and his wife, Rondie, have been teaching to others, as fast as they can. They regularly lead D-Life Boot Camps to teach other churches

how to implement the same strategy.

"We've got about 100 churches

and ministries across the nation that are doing D-Life," Wilks said. Nearly 40 of those are in Alabama, but groups are spread across a number of states, plus a few in Korea and Canada.

They've been able to get D-Life started at Jacksonville State University in the fall of 2016, and Gary Brittain, Baptist campus minister there, said it's going great so far.

"We had started in small group discipleship in a very intentional way two years ago, but this semester we started doing D-Life, and the students really seem to be enjoying it," he said. "It's been a good method. We are seeing some real progress with this."

Nearly 75 students signed up for groups, including sophomore Zach Youngstrom, who said his D-Life group is "my favorite thing about Jacksonville State."

"My group has five people,



Pastor Bill Wilks (second from left) meets with his D-Life group early on Friday mornings at Cracker Barrel.

Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

and we're going through Luke in the D-Life program right now. My guys are really growing," he said. "Prayer requests have gone from superficial stuff at the beginning to really digging in. I'm loving it. It's helping to make this a period of intense spiritual growth for me."

'Very exciting'

And when groups multiply next time, the number of students meeting in groups will be larger than the Baptist Campus

For more information, visit www.livethedlife.com.

Ministries' weekly worship attendance, Brittain said.

"That's a very exciting thing," he said. "Because we're not looking to build a large group — we're looking to reach a large campus. And this is a good way to do it."

Want to know GOD?

By Jenni Ingram
Member, First Baptist Church, Gantt

Do you want to know one of the things that excites me most about my relationship with God? The fact that He meets me right where I am, when I need Him the most, in the way I can best understand Him.

A perfect example of this is my Bible. To some, I've been told, they believe it's just a "great story" written by men. A fable if you wish to call it that. Some of that statement is factual. It was written by men. Some men who actually walked with Jesus, taught with Jesus and witnessed His ministry.

We are told that "all of Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). When I was living a sinful life, God pursued me, but I didn't recognize Him because of the curtain of sin I was living behind. Sure I read the Bible, but I had no idea what He meant.

I didn't understand until I gave it all to Him — my sins, my hopes, my dreams, my everything — and asked Him to do with it what He wished to. Then and only then did the passages in this holy "story" begin to make sense to me.

Since that day in October 2002 so much has been revealed to me. I have worn out several Bibles since then and every time the journey is different. More is revealed to me in the same passages I may have read a dozen or more times.

I make this offer to you: give up your sinful ways. Repent (turn away from sin and ask Jesus for forgiveness). Then offer God your heart and your life and go read your Bible. Your journey is just beginning.

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Biblical character series

Deborah — A Righteous Judge of Israel Arises

Couples have named their daughters after her. She is recounted as the only female judge of Israel, but what do we really know about the woman Deborah? What do we know about her background? Her lineage? While we know more about judges like Samson and Gideon, what we know of Deborah is derived from one chapter of narrative (Judg. 4), and one chapter of Deborah's song (Judg. 5:2–21).

Who are the judges?

After the conquest of the Promised Land, the "nation" of Israel lived as a loose confederation of tribes with no central authority, no central government, no capital city and no central administrative structure. The elders of each tribe adjudicated matters according to their traditions. Only in times of danger did Yahweh raise up a judge, someone upon whom "the Spirit of Yahweh rushed" who would call out the tribes to repel the foe, since there was no standing army. And while there was no mechanism to compel the tribes to participate, they usually did so and were roundly cursed if they did not.

Old Testament scholar John Bright reminds us in "A History of Israel" that though "the judge enjoyed great prestige, he was in no sense a king," and the authority was "neither absolute nor permanent." We also recognize that the authority and the position was not hereditary and no human basis determined the selection of the judge by Yahweh, but it "rested solely in the personal qualities" that gave evidence of the presence of the Spirit of Yahweh.

Who is Deborah?

Here is what we are told in the Scriptures. Deborah begins her era of judging Israel after the death of Ehud. "The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord ... the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin, the king of Canaan" and his commander, Sisera. This period of oppression lasted for 20 years (Judg. 4:1–2).

The people cried out to the Lord for help. Without introduction Deborah is presented as the one who was "judging Israel at that time." That simple statement is what we are given. She is described as

By Ken May

Ken May is director of missions-emeritus for Montgomery Baptist Association and chairman of the Baptist Student Union Alumni National Network. He and his wife, Helen, have two children and three grandchildren.



the wife of Lappidoth. No more information is given, not even the name of her parents (Judg. 4:4).

Deborah's place of judging was under a palm between Ramah and Bethel, two towns in a north-south line in the southern part of hill country of Ephraim due north of Jerusalem, not yet a prominent place in the country's history. We remember Bethel as the place of Jacob's initial vision of Yahweh, recorded in Genesis 28.

Deborah summons Barak

So we come to the story of Deborah. Yahweh has raised her up to judge and to provide relief from Jabin and the Canaanites. Upon inspiration and guidance from God, she summons Barak to raise up an army of 10,000 from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun to win the victory over Sisera and Jabin's army. She outlines God's plan but Barak refuses to obey unless Deborah accompanies him.

Because of his lack of trust, Barak will receive no glory from God's victory and the enemy's leader will be handled by another woman, Jael.

What can we say about Deborah?

Deborah was a prophetess and judge selected by God. We do not have information from Scripture as to how this God-given authority was recognized or validated; we simply know the judge served. It was evident in each of the judges that God was guiding their words and actions.

Deborah spoke the truth of God, declaring that God had promised deliverance from Jabin, Sisera and the Canaanites. Such declaration in the day would not, nor could

it have come from anything other than Yahweh. The situation was desperate and called for divine intervention. Similarly, in our land today it will take the extraordinary movement of God in the lives of His children to bring about the revival we need. Man cannot contrive it or construct it. It must be the movement of God.

Deborah recognized Barak's lack of faith and pronounced judgment upon it. You and I do not know what caused Barak's lack of faith or trust in the words Deborah spoke. While Barak was able to lead the army to victory, God did not allow Barak to complete the task, just as Moses did not get to lead the people into the Promised Land because of his disobedience and David did not get to build the temple because of the murder of Uriah. God is clear that you and I must trust Him completely and be obedient.

Deborah and Jael, rather than Barak, are seen in Deborah's song in Chapter 5 as the real leaders who brought the victory God had promised. While Barak's role is recognized and the participating tribes are commended, Deborah and Jael receive praise. "The peasantry ceased in Israel, they ceased until you arose, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel" (Judg. 5:7). Of Jael it is said, "Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, of tent-dwelling women most blessed" (Judg. 5:24). Yet who is the real hero in Deborah's song? It is Yahweh. "The mountains quaked before the Lord" (Nah. 1:5). "So perish all thine enemies, O Lord" (Judg. 5:31).

When you and I speak God's truth into our world, we must recognize that it will not always be received warmly. God's truth is not comprised of "feel-good" sayings, but words of conviction and challenge. Pronouncing judgment on sin is not a heartwarming experience. It is challenging and runs the risk of rejection of the person pronouncing it. It takes conviction and obedience.

What is it about a great leader that makes us take notice? Is it not their willingness to rise up and lead out when no one else steps forward? Is it not their humility in leading that allows God to have the glory? Is it not their forthrightness in declaring God's truth even if it may not be popular? Oh, that we would be those who speak God's truth clearly in love. 🌈

Religious devotion, feelings of reward linked, study shows

Feelings of religious devotion evoked by prayer, Scripture reading and other spiritual practices may be connected directly to parts of the brain that process feelings of reward, according to a new study.

The authors suggest the possibility of "a mechanism whereby doctrinal concepts may come to be intrinsically rewarding and motivate behavior in religious individuals," according to the study published in November 2016 in *Social Neuroscience*.

Those findings are hardly new to pastors and other ministers who guide the spiritual development of others.

"I would not be surprised ... if feelings of devotion were associated with some kind of reward in the brain," said Angela Reed, assistant professor of practical theology and director of spiritual formation at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

"People often identify experiences of joy and peace — the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians — as being associated with the time and commitment they make for devotional practices, being alone in prayer, in small groups and in worship," she said.

During those activities, people are generally more open to the presence and movement of the Spirit, Reed said.

"That gives them a sense of reward that God is in it."

Linked but not guaranteed

The University of Utah team that produced the paper studied 19 devout Mormon men and women. The subjects were placed in a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machine, as they prayed, read from the Book of Mormon and other practices.

It found that these activities were connected to the nucleus accumbens, ventromedial prefrontal cortex and frontal attentional regions, according to the study.

But even if science one day concludes that a link exists in the brain between religious action and reward, it doesn't mean every believer will experience those emotions, Reed said. "It's not a given."

In fact it's common for people who do their devotions, say their prayers and engage in worship not to experience positive emotions as a result, she said.

Mother Teresa and Catholic mystic St. John of the Cross, author of the poem "Dark Night of the Soul," are high profile examples of Christians who at times felt an absence of positive emotions — or reward — during their ministries.

Reed said she's concerned the research could mislead some into thinking they will reap intense and consistent emotional rewards by engaging in certain spiritual practices.

The solution for all of those who don't get feelings of reward from religious activities is to forge on, anyway, Reed said. "Don't give up."

"When we have that time when we can no longer depend on the good feelings, that's actually a sign of maturity," she said. "At least that's my hope." (BNG)

"And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?" 1 Cor. 14:8

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For January 15

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.
Dean, School of Christian Studies, University of Mobile

VALUE PEOPLE

Proverbs 24:10–12; Mark 10:46–49

God created humanity with identity, in community and for responsibility. Our identity is to be image bearers of the one true God. As those who bear His image, man and woman were the crowning achievement of His creation. We were made for community, which is why it was not good for man to be alone. Our God-given responsibility is to watch over His creation, including each other, the animal kingdom, the plants and the earth upon which we live. The psalmist wrote that we were made a little lower than Elohim “and crowned with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:5).

Since the fall of man, the value of life has decreased as humanity moves further away from God and His authority. Cain killed his brother, Abel. Pharaoh ordered the drowning of countless babies. Herod’s soldiers murdered all the boys two years and younger to rid Bethlehem of a political threat.

A Call to Protect Life (Prov. 24:11)

As we look at Proverbs, one might argue that King Solomon is not a good source, since he ruled that a living child should be cut in half and given to two women who claimed to be his mother (1 Kings 3:25). This was to test the women, not an actual policy of the king. Both women claimed to be the mother of a living child, though one had accidentally smothered her own child as she slept. Solomon knew that the live baby’s mother would protect his life, even if it meant giving him away.

“Rescue those being taken off to death and save those stumbling toward slaughter” (v. 11). Here Solomon calls upon his readers to protect those who are wrongly condemned to death. Unlike soldiers who die in war or criminals found guilty of

capital offenses, those who have no standing must have an advocate to save them from being wrongly put to death.

Francis Schaeffer warned of the devaluation of human life and its consequences after the landmark Supreme Court ruling to legalize abortion on demand. He had the forethought to see that cheapening the life of the unborn would lead to legalized euthanasia, infanticide and eugenics.

A Warning Against Inaction (Prov. 24:10, 12)

“If you say, ‘But we didn’t know about this,’ won’t He who weighs hearts consider it? Won’t He who protects your life know?” (v. 12). What can we do as Christians, as families and as churches?

Our churches and our families need to pray for those who feel like abortion is the answer or even an option. We can give generously to crisis centers and serve as volunteers. We can be trained to serve as foster parents or adopt. We can become advocates for those who have no voice. We can bear witness to the grace of God who set us free from a destination of certain death and adopted us as His own.

An Example Set (Mark 10:46–49)

We also must acknowledge the image of God in those who are physically, developmentally or emotionally challenged. The example we read about is the blind man, Bartimaeus, in Jericho. Actually we find him outside the city, marginalized by his handicap. We also hear his voice being drowned out by those who would silence him. Jesus heard and Jesus healed.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus showed compassion to the marginalized: an adulteress, prostitutes, tax-collectors, lepers, the lame, the poor, the blind. May God grant us compassion to hear those who cry out for mercy and the wisdom to meet their needs. ✚

Bible Studies for Life

By Jim Barnette, Ph.D.
Samford University and Brookwood Baptist Church, Mountain Brook

CREATED FOR A PURPOSE

Jeremiah 1:4–10

God has a purpose for every life. (4–5)

Jeremiah’s call can be described as a confrontation and conversation with the Lord that proceeds through four stages: commissioning, objection, reassurance and a sign. Since this is the same general pattern one finds in reports of the commissioning of Moses in Exodus 3, Gideon in Judges 6 and Isaiah in Isaiah 6, the account links Jeremiah with these great figures from Israel’s past.

God’s selection of Jeremiah is no divine afterthought, no sudden action deriving from the need to speak a word to the nation in the present crisis. Jeremiah is rather a divine forethought, long planned as God’s man for this very time. Before conception and between conception and birth, divine intimate awareness and divine consecration have led up to this moment of appointment. Indeed, this is a genuine example of predestination but not in the sense of a predestination to salvation or damnation. The destiny that matters in Jeremiah’s case was his calling. Jeremiah was predestined to be the bearer of God’s Word. And in Jeremiah’s case, there was no escaping this calling. Jeremiah was brought into the world to be a prophet of the Lord.

God is with us to carry out His purpose. (6–8)

Jeremiah’s initial response to the divine call, “Ah, Lord God,” is language that traditionally belongs to prayer and complaint to God (see also Jer. 4:10; 32:17). The prophet Ezekiel uses this expression in specific complaints against God’s assignment (see Ezek. 4:14; 20:49). Jeremiah’s first words then have the tone of lament and complaint to God, thus anticipating the later and more extensive complaints against the prophetic assignment and its effects on his life.

Shrinking from the task, Jeremiah is the

most self-questioning of all the prophets in the biblical record. He protests, saying, “I am only a youth,” meaning he was not qualified by training or experience. But his objection is overruled on the grounds that authority does not reside in the person of the messenger but in the sovereignty of God’s will. In addition to exerting His divine authority, the Lord assures the prophet of His continuing and sustaining presence. Indeed, Jeremiah’s name means “Jehovah establishes,” and God did establish His servant and his ministry and cared for him to the very end.

God equips us with what we need to carry out His purpose. (9–10)

When the coal from the heavenly altar touched Isaiah’s lips, it purified him of his sins (Isa. 6:5–7); when the Lord’s hand touched Jeremiah’s mouth, it gave him power and authority. Touching this prophet’s lips guaranteed that the words spoken by Jeremiah would be the living Word of God. The word Jeremiah preached would be both destructive and constructive. His preaching would make clear that catastrophe was the inevitable consequence of disloyalty and lack of faith among God’s people. Yet even when the worst would happen, Jeremiah knew judgment would be God’s prelude to a new and brighter day. Most scholars suggest Jeremiah’s task “to build and to plant” was referring to his voicing the promise of Israel’s restoration after the long period of Babylonian dominance (see 24:6; 31:27–28; 42:10). Even as Jeremiah prophesied of imminent doom and destruction, in the long run a better day would emerge. In the long run Jeremiah’s word to his people was one of hope. In like manner we are called to preach against evil and indifference in the world, knowing our Sovereign Victor is working in and through all things for His good. ✚

Christian Crossword

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Across

1. Spending limit.
4. Drilled.
9. Scottish topper.
12. Eskimo knife.
13. Speak pompously.
14. Stream.
15. Cyrus, king of ____ (2 Chron. 36).
17. “We are of the truth, and shall ____ our hearts before him.” (1 John 3:19)
19. Becomes boring.
21. Small. (suffix, pl.)
22. Passageways.
24. Stolen.
28. Dill herb.
29. C. Bronte heroine.
30. Steamer. (abbr.)
31. British ‘bye.
32. “And he said in the sight of Israel, ____, stand thou still.” (Josh. 10:12)
34. Of vegetable origin. (suffix)
36. Pronoun.
37. Alphonso’s queen.
39. No coins are needed to operate its meter.
41. Grad. degrees.
43. “Their laws are ____ from

- all people; neither keep they the king’s laws.” (Esther 3:8)
45. “And though ____ destroy this body.” (Job 19:26)
46. Some vowels.
47. To be stationary with the head of the wind, as a ship.
49. Carries.
52. Explorer.
55. Assist.
56. “Thou shall not oppress an ____ servant.” (Deut. 24:14)
58. Historical period.
59. Affirmative answer.
60. “The enemy ____ sowed ____ among the wheat.” (Matt. 13:25)
61. “He is a ____ creature.” (2 Cor. 5:17)
- Down
1. “Let this ____ pass.” (Luke 22:42)
2. Ginger ____.
3. Lydia’s color.
4. “Job was covered with ____.” (Job 2:7)
5. Spoken.
6. Egyptian sun god.
7. Greek letter.
8. “He shall give thee the ____ of thine heart.” (Ps. 37:4)
9. Has faith.
10. ____ mail.
11. First name of life preserver vest.
16. Seasons.
18. “Siddim, which is the salt ____.” (Gen. 14:3)
20. Case out, clandestinely.
22. “The Lord saw that Leah was ____.” (Gen. 29:31)
23. Seventh son of Elieonai. (1 Chron. 3:24)
25. One of the dukes of Edom. (Gen. 36:43)
26. City just across the Red Sea. (Ex. 13)
27. Attire.
29. Son of Seth.
33. “Stand ____ on thy feet.” (Acts 14:10)
35. Describe dramatically.
38. Eludes.

NEW	TAKES	YES
ERA	HIRE	AID
SEEK	BRINGS	SEEK
LET	BOIL	LET
WORMS	DIVERSE	WORMS
MBAS	ENVA	POEM
ASE	TA	SUN
STR	ANET	EYRE
STR	HALLS	PIRATED
IES	PALLS	IES
ASSURE	PERSIA	ASSURE
RIA	ULU	ORATE
TAM	CAP	BORED



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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.

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WORSHIP & THEOLOGY



BP photo

'Biblical worship' topics debated at recent theological meeting

A biblical argument for congregational singing, insights for planning worship and a case for multigenerational worship services are among the music-related topics being discussed by Southern Baptist theologians today.

Such topics were featured in at least eight presentations on biblical worship at the most recent meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society. At least five of those presentations were given by scholars affiliated with Southern Baptist-related institutions.

In all, the fall 2016 meeting in San Antonio, Texas, featured approximately 600 presentations, including some 175 by scholars with ties to Southern Baptist churches, Southern Baptist Convention seminaries and colleges that partner with Baptist state conventions.

Jonathan Welch, pastor of worship development at The Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, presented a "theological case for congregational singing," arguing Scripture demonstrates at least 10 functions of corporate singing among God's people.

Scriptural functions

"Those entrusted with song selection" in churches should "choose songs that facilitate the full breadth of theological functionality represented by the 10 points in this paper," Welch wrote.

Among the Scriptural functions of congregational singing noted by Welch:

- ▶ It praises God.
- ▶ It expresses worship "in particular cultural forms associated with" the singers.

▶ It "can connect present worshippers with the historical past."

▶ It "orient[s] the people of God toward an eternity of worship in Christ."

▶ It allows believers to proclaim God's Word to one another.

▶ It "is an expression of unity and solidarity in the ... body of Christ."

▶ It teaches doctrine.

Congregational singing

"The Gospel of grace frees the Christ-follower from the works-righteousness of singing to please God," Welch wrote, "but Christians who abstain from singing practically disavow the 10 theological functions of congregational song."

David Toledo, assistant professor of music ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, drew insights for planning and conducting worship services from 1 Corinthians 14. That passage, he argued, "provides the rationale and Scriptural basis for the balance of form and freedom that is cherished by those in [the] Free Church tradition" of Southern Baptists.

Among Toledo's insights, he argued for "the radical participatory nature of corporate worship," noting Paul's teaching that "each one" in the congregation has a spiritual gift to be exercised in corporate gatherings.

Rather than focusing worship services exclusively on "obviously gifted leadership" through a concert-like setting, Toledo wrote in a paper he presented, "congregations must recover the appreciation of the giftedness of the entire assembly."

Toledo drew on Paul's teaching

about the use of tongues in worship — though he did not advocate speaking in tongues — to offer insight on corporate prayer. Such prayer should be characterized by "Spirit-led expression" and "tempered by an understanding that the other members of the congregation must be able to offer their affirmation and endorsement of the spoken prayer."

Scott Aniol, assistant professor of church music at Southwestern, argued the hymn writer Isaac Watts expressed his views on the Trinity "in questionable ways" at times in sermons and writings despite his legacy of hymns with strong Trinitarian lyrics.

"Charges [that Watts] was less than orthodox in his doctrine of the Trinity" stem largely from works he published in the mid-1720s, Aniol wrote in a paper he presented. Though Watts seemed to affirm orthodox Trinitarian doctrine earlier and later, he argued between 1724 and 1727 that Jesus possesses "two distinct persons" — God and man. Traditional Christian doctrine asserts Christ possesses one indivisible person and two natures.

By the end of his life in 1748, "it does appear that Watts reverse[d] some of his more questionable views from earlier works" though he continued to argue "belief in a particular explanation of the Trinity is not necessary for salvation," Aniol wrote.

'Lasting impact'

In the end, "whether or not he rejected [traditional] Trinitarianism" in some works is far less significant than "his lasting impact," Aniol wrote. "Many of his hymns are strongly Trinitarian" and "have

inarguably had a more lasting influence upon Christians and their worship than his treatises."

Robert Pendergraft, assistant professor of church music at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Belton, Texas, argued the work of developmental psychologist Erik Erikson suggests all generations within a church would benefit from participating in corporate worship together.

"Age segregation in worship stunts maturation and growth of the congregants by not embracing the needs of those at varying developmental stages," Pendergraft wrote in a paper he presented.

Multigenerational

Pendergraft's paper traced the eight life stages proposed by Erickson — a 20th-century psychologist who drew from "Judeo-Christian monotheism" — and argued aspects of corporate worship benefit individuals at each stage.

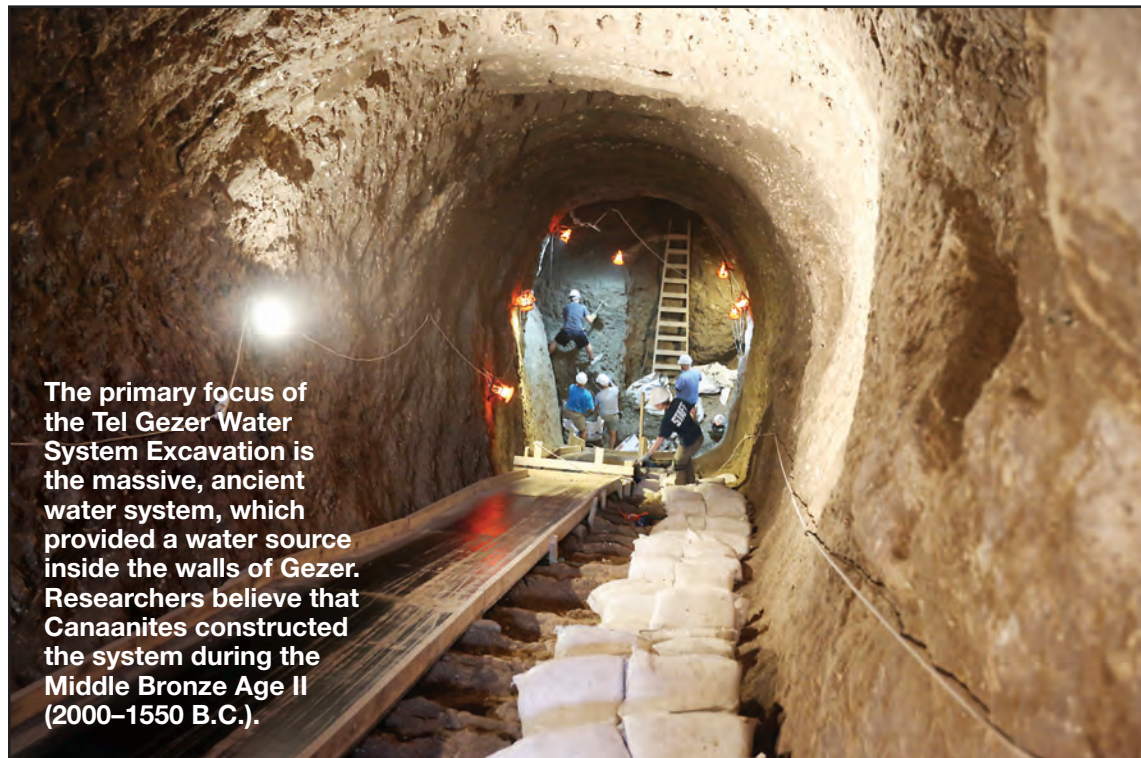
For example:

▶ "The presence of children with their parents in worship allows the infant to develop ... trust [in parents] ... and allows the congregation to be constantly reminded of" its need to trust God "in the same manner."

▶ Intergenerational worship allows children "to begin mimicking the actions of those in the congregation."

▶ "Older adults" can observe "a new generation of worshippers."

Pendergraft said "logistical considerations" of intergenerational worship "were beyond the scope of the paper" but "all congregants should have parts of the service in which they can cognitively and physically participate." (BP)



The primary focus of the Tel Gezer Water System Excavation is the massive, ancient water system, which provided a water source inside the walls of Gezer. Researchers believe that Canaanites constructed the system during the Middle Bronze Age II (2000–1550 B.C.).

Photo by Dan Warner

Silver & gold

NOBTS team uncovers items during Gezer dig

Before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, God warned His people through Moses to avoid the idols of the Canaanites. Joshua reiterated this strict warning against the Canaanite gods after the people crossed the Jordan.

But the Israelites did not heed these warnings. The idols and false gods of the Canaanites proved to be a snare to the people from the time of the Conquest until the Exile.

In Summer 2016 the Tel Gezer Water System Excavation team from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS) encountered the remnants of rampant Canaanite idolatry first-hand. The team uncovered a silver pendant devoted to Canaanite and Mesopotamian deities and part of a mold used to fashion clay goddess plaques. Both items appear to provide strong evidence of Canaanite fertility cult activity at Gezer, Israel.

The Gezer water system excavation is a joint project of the Moskau Institute for Archaeology at NOBTS and the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) along with Liberty University School of Divinity, a dig consortium member. The excavation is directed by Dennis Cole, Jim Parker and Dan Warner of NOBTS along with INPA chief archaeologist Tsivka Tsuk and Eli Yannai.

Ancient water system

The primary focus of the excavation is the massive, ancient water system, which provided a water source inside the walls of Gezer. For the past seven years, a team of archaeologists and volunteers have been investigating the site.

The team also excavated in the Canaanite gate and a complex of rooms associated with the city wall in order to understand how the gate and wall interacted with the water system. The silver pendant was discovered, along with a cache of other items, in the complex of rooms associated with the wall. The cache of items had been wrapped in a linen cloth and placed in

a clay “container” made of two bowls. The container was then hidden in the foundation of one of the rooms.

In the cache along with the pendant, the team found a stone scarab set in a gold frame which served as a fitting for a ring or a necklace. A scarab is a beetle-shaped Egyptian amulet engraved with a name or symbol and used to make impressions in clay — the ancient equivalent of a rubber stamp. Another scarab was found in the same complex of rooms, though the second one did not include a gold frame.

Hyksos period in Egypt

Daphna Ben-Tor, the curator of Egyptian Archaeology at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem and an expert on scarabs, analyzed both scarabs after the dig. Based on the design and engraving, Ben-Tor attributed the scarabs to the Hyksos period — a time when foreign leaders ruled Egypt.

One of the most important finds in the cache was the linen cloth. According to organic material specialists Naama Sukenik and Orit Shamir from Israel Antiquities Authority, only two other samples of Middle Bronze Age II (MB II, 2000–1550 B.C.) linen have been found in Israel to date. The researchers were able to discern the type of raw material used as well as techniques the weaver used to splice the fibers into longer threads.

During previous dig seasons the team discovered multiple broken clay goddess plaques in the water system. In 2016 the team discovered part of a mold used to make these figures. The clay goddess mold, likely representing the Canaanite goddess Astarte or the Egyptian goddess Hathor, was discovered deep in the water system.

The cache of objects and the mold represent the most important finds to date for the water system excavation team.

The 2017 dig at Gezer will run from May 20 to June 9 and is open to volunteers. For details regarding participation in the 2017 dig, email Parker (jparker@nobts.edu) or Cole (rdcole@nobts.edu). (BP)



Web companies determine what is ‘fake news’

LAKEWOOD, Colo. — As web companies like Google and Facebook are taking steps to limit “fake news” websites, some Christians are urging those companies to use caution in instituting new policies that may have a negative impact on religious news, according to The Christian Post.

Jeff Hunt, the director of the Centennial Institute at Colorado Christian University and founder of one of Colorado’s largest conservative advertising agencies, Avinova Media Group, said Google’s approval process for its ad network has in the past limited pornographic and violent content.

But adding “fake news” as a criteria for censorship brings up the challenge of determining what is truth, Hunt said.

“If we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, therefore is God Himself, and Google does not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, are Christian blogs now fake news?” he asked. “They don’t really get into how they are going to determine what is fake news. We would look at other religions as having information that doesn’t line up with our definition of truth. As they kind of embark on this effort to eliminate fake news, they have to be very careful about what they determine within religious communities would fall under categories of fake news.”

There is religious news within all faith groups — Catholics, Jews, Muslims and others, Hunt said. “They have got to be careful that they don’t deem religion that they disagree with as fake news and therefore penalize the vast majority of the populations of the world.” (TAB)

Graham again named in top 10 most admired men

WASHINGTON — Evangelist Billy Graham has been named 1 of Gallup’s 10 most admired men in the world for the 60th time.

Graham, 98, was in the No. 5 spot, according to information from Gallup released Dec. 28, 2016. President Barack Obama topped the list, followed by President-elect Donald Trump, Pope Francis and former Democratic presidential hopeful Sen. Bernie Sanders.

This year marks the 60th time Graham has finished in the top 10 — a Gallup record.

“That includes making it into the top 10 every year since 1955, with the exception of the 1962 survey and in 1976, when the question was not asked,” Gallup noted.

Graham, born in Charlotte, North Carolina, and raised on a dairy farm, traveled around for decades preaching the gospel to about 200 million people in more than 180 countries.

The results are based on a survey conducted Dec. 7–11, 2016, in which Americans were asked to name the man anywhere in the world whom they admire most, according to The Christian Post. (TAB)

Austrian woman stabbed for reading Bible

TIMELKAM, Austria — An Afghan asylum seeker stabbed a 50-year-old Austrian woman for reading her Bible at an asylum center in Austria, according to The Christian Post.

The woman, who was wearing a thick winter coat when she was stabbed, survived. Her ear was injured from falling backwards from the force of the 22-year-old Afghan man’s attack, the Post reported.

The stabbing happened in the kitchen, where the woman had just started to read the Bible to Christians in the asylum center. She and her husband had been invited by Christians there to discuss their faith, according to the U.K.’s *Daily Express* newspaper.

The Afghan man, who was arrested, admitted to police that he had overreacted.

Austria took in 90,000 asylum seekers in 2015 and placed a cap on asylum claims at 37,500 in 2016, according to the Post. The nation cut that number to 35,000 for 2017. (TAB)