

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

Established 1953

April 2006

Vol. 40 / No. 4

SHALL YOUR BRETHREN GO TO WAR?

by Randy Robinson

Moses asked this question of the tribes of Reuben and Gad, who wanted to claim the land east of the Jordan in which to settle (Numbers 32:6). The reason that they wanted this land was that they had an enormous amount of livestock and they saw that the land of Jazer and Gilead would be a good place for their animals to graze (verse 1). Their mistake was in asking Moses not to “bring” them over the Jordan (verse 5). Moses took this to mean that they did not want to go to war to conquer the promised land. One could not blame Moses for this assumption, for indeed, it did appear as though they did not want to go across the Jordan and that they were perfectly willing to let the rest of Israel fight the Canaanite nations that dwelt there. Therefore Moses properly questioned their motivation by asking, “*Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here?*” It would have been shameful for Reuben and Gad not to arm themselves in a show of solidarity with their countrymen in order to subdue the heathen nations. Moses then told them that by not crossing the Jordan as a unified nation, it would serve to discourage the rest of the nation from crossing and fighting (verse 7). He then reminded them that it was this very reason why they had remained in the wilderness for forty years—that the ten faithless spies had managed to discourage the nation from seizing the land when they had the opportunity. Moses further reminded them that when their fathers whined and complained they were too feeble to go in and take the

land, God’s anger was aroused and His punishment for them was that they should die in the wilderness and that only Joshua and Caleb should enter in (verses 10-13). Moses then warned that any subsequent signs of wavering would again bring God’s wrath and that He would not hesitate to leave them in the wilderness (verse 15). Moses promised these two tribes (later half of the tribe of Manasseh would also dwell east of the Jordan—verses 33, 39-40) that if they would don their armor and go across with their brethren as a nation united, they would be able to come back across and claim that land for themselves (verse 22). Moses then offered this chilling warning, “*But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out*” (verse 23; emphasis RR). Moses perhaps realized that in a nation of between two and three million people, with over 600,000 men able to fight, that these two tribes could get “lost in the shuffle” and perhaps no one would know whether they were actually there to fight or not. Therefore, in the event these two tribes had any ideas of lagging behind and not following through, Moses wanted them to know for a certainty that God would know whether or not they had joined their brethren; and should they fail to do so, He would bring His wrath upon them. One could certainly make a compelling case that Moses issued these warnings out of love; after all, the New Testament plainly states, “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (Hebrews 10:31).

Moses had demonstrated on numerous occasions his desire for his brethren to escape God’s wrath (Numbers 14:13ff; 16:22, 46; 21:7).

Today in the Lord’s church there are Christians who will allow their brethren to “go to war” while they “sit here.” In the area of evangelism some Christians allow their brethren to approach the lost and attempt to persuade them to obey the Truth while doing nothing themselves. They will allow their brethren to teach Bible classes, serve in worship, clean the building, initiate fellowship activities, all the while “sitting here.”

Several years ago former United States Senator Phil Gramm of Texas was unjustly accused of wanting to eliminate welfare. Senator Gramm defended his position by stating that it was never his intention to eliminate welfare, but he did say that “it’s time for some of the people that have been riding in the wagon to get out and help push the wagon.” Could not a statement like that apply to members of the Lord’s church as well? Unfortunately, many brethren have convinced themselves that *worship attendance* is all that is required from them and that as long as they have a good attendance record—that is all that they need to do. Even more unfortunate are those who do not even have a good attendance record, yet nevertheless have convinced themselves that it is not that important.

In the physical realm going to war costs money. The United States has spent billions in our most recent war—the war on terror. Much more will be spent because this foe is not like other foes that we have fought in the past. In the spiritual realm “going to war” also takes money; we need

FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

USPS Publication #211780

... is a Periodical publication issued monthly by the Church of Christ at Third and Bethel (P.O. Box 251), Mammoth Spring, AR 72554-0251. **POSTMASTER: Please mail all changes of address to the above address.**

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FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

P.O. Box 251

Mammoth Spring, AR 72554

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Hosted by TheBible.net

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money to maintain our facilities, to pay the preacher, and to help support mission works here and abroad. We have a command to give as God has prospered us (1 Corinthians 16:2) and to do so cheerfully and not begrudgingly (2 Corinthians 9:7). In many instances, we find the same thing holds true—some brethren obey this command and others do not, rather letting those who do foot the bill. Suppose God decided to prosper us as we gave, rather than having us give as we have been prospered? For some brethren this would mean a substantial reduction in their lifestyle. Some have contended that this command is an ambiguous one, since there is not an amount or percentage specified as there was under the law of Moses (10% or tithe—Lev. 27:30). Yet, there is nothing ambiguous about this command. In any dispensation, our first and foremost commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37). John records that

keeping God's commandments is how Christians demonstrate their love for Him (1 John 5:2-3). Therefore, keeping the commandment to give as we have been prospered is an ideal opportunity to display our love for God. Anything less demonstrates our *lack* of love for God and our indifference to the success of the local congregation in its effort to do the work of the church—which is to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10).

Jesus told a parable of two sons; both of whom received instructions from their father to work in his vineyard (Matthew 21:28-32). The first refused—yet later repented and went to work. The second promised to go—and then did not. Even the hypocritical chief priests and elders knew and admitted that the first son did the will of his father because, although he was recalcitrant at first, he did eventually go. Far too many Christians are like the second son, who wanted to be counted as obedient, but did not actually want to do what constituted obedience.

Those from Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh crossed the Jordan with their brethren and together they subdued the land that God promised unto them. As a result they were allowed to go back across the Jordan and dwell in the land east of Jordan (Joshua 22:1-9). The modern day Christian must put on the armor of God (Ephesians 6:11) and be willing to stand alongside other soldiers of the cross and do their share. Only then will we be eligible to “cross over Jordan.” Those who allow their brethren to “go to war,” while they “stay here” are at the least trying to get to heaven with the least amount of effort. While they may never be confronted here on earth as to their lack of effort, God will indeed eventually confront them as He renders to all according to their deeds (Romans 2:6) or lack thereof.

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“THE \$20,000,000 QUESTION”

by Chris Perry

For those of us who are members of the church of Christ, it is interesting from time to time to examine how those outside our number view us. In many instances, misconceptions and stereotypes abound, and these misunderstandings often hinder effective evangelism. A statement that perhaps best embodies the skewed view of the world towards the church of Christ is: “You members of the church of Christ believe you are the only ones going to heaven.” Jokes circulate that reinforce this view, as in the following:

A Baptist and Methodist were surveying the crowd that had gathered in heaven. The Baptist man looked around and noticed a group off to itself. “Who are they?” he asked. In a low voice, the Methodist man replied, “Shhh—they’re from the church of Christ, and they think they’re the only ones here.”

So what about it? Do—and should—members of the church of Christ believe that they are the only ones going to heaven? Before this question can be adequately answered, a few considerations are in order.

The church of Christ is not a denomination

Unfortunately, members of the church of Christ contribute—at least partially—to the misconceptions many have. I often hear Gospel preachers referred to as “church-of-Christ-preachers.” As well, when identifying someone with our number, some might say, “He’s church-of-Christ,” in the same way that another might be described as “Baptist” or “Methodist.” Often, this denominational view of the Lord’s body is behind the statement mentioned earlier. The actual thought process of a denominational member might go something like this: *In the diverse buffet that makes up the*

“Christian” landscape, one small segment (denomination) has the arrogance to claim that they are the only ones going to heaven.

Therefore, to erase the misconceptions, we must strive to prove that the church of Christ is not a denomination. To do so, it must first be understood that “church of Christ” is a descriptive phrase, not a denominational title. The church is “of Christ” in that it belongs to Christ. Christ promised to build it (Matthew 16:18—My church), and He purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28; cf. 1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23). Have you ever noticed that in print, the “church” in “church of Christ” is spelled with a lower-case “c”? This is done to emphasize the undenominational nature of Christ’s church, to reinforce the descriptive purpose of the title.

As well, the Bible clearly condemns denominationalism. Paul demands by inspiration:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:10-13)

There is but *one* church for which Christ died (Ephesians 4:4-6; cf. 1:22-23), and this church is not to be divided or *denominated*. When 1st century Christians identified themselves as such, they did not have to further elaborate concerning which denomination they belonged to—“Christian” meant that they were members of Christ’s church.

Finally—and this must not be misunderstood—“church of Christ” can only be applied to congregations that are identical in nature and teaching to the church mentioned in the Bible. As an expedient, “church of Christ” was chosen by our number so that members and congregations could identify one another. It was chosen because it described the group’s goal (to be the church that belongs to Christ) and was a Scriptural title (Romans 16:16). However, the name has been adopted by other groups whose teachings are vastly different from the Bible (International Church of Christ, Church of Christ/Crossroads, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, etc.). As well, there are congregations whose signs designate them as churches of Christ, but whose teachings indicate they have left the New Testament pattern. In order truly to be the church of Christ, a congregation must be made up of members who have entered into Christ’s body, the church (Ephesians 1:10-23; Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:38-47), who live as the New Testament directs (Romans 12:1-2), and who worship according to the New Testament pattern (John 4:24). Jesus made clear in His letters to the seven churches that those who would not follow His precepts were not worthy of His name (Revelation 2-3, especially 2:5).

Not all who claim to be members of the church of Christ will be saved

Having noted that “church of Christ” is not a denominational title, but is rather a descriptive term describing those who follow the New Testament, it must now be pointed out that there are some who identify with our number but ultimately will not enter heaven. This is true for a number of reasons. First, there are likely some who were not truly converted (Luke 22:32). As human beings, we can only judge according to fruit (Matthew 7:16, 20), and there might surely be those who “*draweth nigh unto [Christ] with their mouth, and honoureth [Him] with their lips;*

but their heart is far from [Him]” (Matthew 15:8). For those, the perfect judgment of Christ awaits (Matthew 13:47-50).

As well, some who are now faithful members of the body of Christ will not remain “*faithful unto death*” (Revelation 2:10). As with those described as thorny ground in Jesus’ parable of the soils, “*the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful*” (Matthew 13:22). Sadly, those of this group will not have followed Peter’s guidance in 2 Peter 1:10: “*Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.*”

So, again, the \$20,000,000 question asked by many in the world is: “Are members of the church of Christ the only ones going to heaven?” To those who mean the “church of Christ” in some denominational sense, the answer is a resounding “NO!” To those who are asking if a name in a church directory constitutes salvation, the answer is again, “NO!” But if by the “church of Christ” they mean the church called by the right name, entered into in the right way, and directed by God’s word in worship and life, it might be wise to let Christ answer the question once and for all:

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:4-6, emphasis added).

So the *real* \$20,000,000 question is: Are you in Christ?

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“AS LONG AS THEY’RE HAPPY, THAT’S WHAT’S IMPORTANT”

by Lee Moses

While awaiting a connecting flight at Dallas Love Field, this writer observed a number of small children traveling with their mother. They were a fine looking bunch, and all seemed cheerful. A male flight attendant then commented to their mother, “As long as they’re happy, that’s what’s important.” However, while the sight of happy children is wonderful indeed, their happiness is **not** the measuring stick of successful child rearing.

Having a child’s happiness as a parent’s primary goal is not conducive to successful child rearing. Clearly, children are not happy when being disciplined; so a parent seeking his children’s happiness at all costs and all times would not discipline his children. Yet proper discipline is crucial to a child’s upbringing: “*Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell*” (Proverbs 23:14). Parents are warned, “*Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying*” (19:18). But refusing to discipline children and giving them everything they want spoils them, and leaves them never satisfied. Parents who do everything in their power to maintain their children’s happiness usually have miserable children.

A major problem with using happiness as the measuring stick of successful child rearing is that “happiness” can be very ambiguous. *The Oxford American College Dictionary* defines “happy” as “feeling or showing pleasure or contentment.” While it is certainly true that “*he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast*” (Proverbs 15:15) and that “*a merry heart doeth good like a medicine*” (17:22), making happiness the ultimate end has justified many unjustifiable means. Some are able to find pleasure in immorality, such as recreational drug and alcohol use or extramarital sex. However, those who continue therein “*shall not inherit the kingdom of God*” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10), and thus “*shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (Matthew 8:12). Some take their pleasure at the expense of others; yet such shall eventually receive miseries (James 5:1-5). And many of these find themselves

very content in their unjustifiable means of seeking happiness. Others may indeed “**show** pleasure or contentment,” but they are truly neither pleased nor content. After many a teenage suicide, the dead child’s parents have lamented, “But he **seemed** so happy!” As Solomon found long ago, true happiness will never be found unless one determines to “*Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all*” (Ecclesiastes 12:13, New King James Version).

The flight attendant who made the statement “As long as they’re happy, that’s what’s important” likely was not attempting to provide sound advice for child rearing. He probably was expressing his appreciation for the sight of happy children, a sentiment shared by this writer. However, there are far too many parents who do make their children’s “happiness” their nebulous goal. Let each parent instead heed the inspired instruction, “*And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*” (Ephesians 6:4). No, children’s apparent happiness is not what is important—what is important is that they are taught to become faithful Christians for the remainder of their lives.

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GOD’S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God’s commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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Periodical Postage
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Publication #211780