

# 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

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## “MISSION” AND “WORK” OF THE CHURCH: TWO DIFFERENT THINGS

by Jerry C. Brewer

Growing up listening to fine old gospel preachers, I often heard them say, “The mission of the church is three-fold – evangelism, edification, and benevolence.” Having studied these things over the years, I have come to the conclusion that this statement is not quite correct. There is a vast difference between the “mission of the church” and “the work of the church.”

A grocer’s mission is selling groceries to the public for a profit, but his work may encompass several things. It may include pricing the items, sweeping the floor, keeping the books, depositing money in the bank, cleaning the windows, hiring help, paying his bills, and a multitude of other tasks. All of these things are necessary, but do not constitute his mission.

A rancher’s mission is to raise cattle for market, but his work takes many forms. He may build fences, brand his cattle, deliver calves, feed his cattle in the winter, bale hay, raise feed crops, purchase trucks to deliver his cattle, pay his bills, hire ranch hands, vaccinate his cattle, and numerous other kinds of work. But vaccination of cattle, feeding them, or purchasing trucks do not constitute his mission. These are all peripheral things.

### Evangelism

The church’s singular mission is to preach the gospel of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 8:1, 4ff). There is no other mission given to the church in the New Testament and evangelism is the sole “ministry” of it. This is the single “ministry” of which

Paul spoke when he told Timothy, “*And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, putting me into the ministry...*” (1 Timothy 1:12). Paul did not refer to multiple “ministries” by saying Christ “put me into one of the ministries”, but to a single “ministry” or mission. Paul’s singular mission was to take the gospel to the Gentiles where he said, “*For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified*” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

Paul did many works in conjunction with this mission, such as making tents, and raising funds for the poor saints of Judea among the Gentile Christians, but those were not his mission. That mission was his “ministry” – preaching the soul saving gospel of Jesus (Romans 1:14-17).

The mission of the church is not political or social. It is not to entertain folks, to train children, or to be a crutch for people seeking economic betterment. All of these things may be good works, but they are neither the works nor the mission of the church of Christ.

### Benevolence

Benevolence is a good thing, but there was benevolence before Jesus died on the cross and vast numbers of organizations in our country practice benevolence today. In fact, benevolence has just about become one of the biggest industries we have. Most all denominations practice it, along with a myriad of secular organizations – including the federal government. Jesus did not die for benevolence or a soup kitchen. He

died to save men from sin (Matthew 1:21; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

The church should be benevolent and care for those who cannot care for themselves (Galatians 6:10; James 1:27), but one would be hard pressed to find a family in our society today who fits the Biblical description of the “destitute.” The parameters of poverty defined by the federal government today are not those of the Bible. Among churches of Christ, there is a rush to be “benevolent” by providing school supplies, food from well-stocked pantries, clothing from churches’ storehouses, and various other items to anyone in the community who can come and get them. Those churches believe they are fulfilling the “mission” of the church, but they are – in many cases – simply enabling those who have no desire to work. That violates Paul’s injunction “...*that if any would not work, neither should he eat*” (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Through the years, I have heard the argument that, “If we feed and clothe people, we can make them more receptive to the gospel.” That flies in the face of Jesus’ statement that, “Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6). It is not the church’s responsibility or mission to “motivate” people to hear the gospel. It is our responsibility to preach that gospel to those who earnestly desire it. In fact, Jesus rebuked a multitude of people for their “motivation” in following him for loaves and fishes (John 6:26-27). When

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Lee Moses .....EDITOR  
Phone .....(870) 625-3217  
E-Mail .....cocfcgn@centurytel.net  
Website . . .www.fultoncountygospelnews.org  
Brian Dixon .....Webmaster  
E-Mail .....sales@halopages.net

Christians say, "He just preaches the same old thing." "They'd better be preaching the same old thing," he said. "The gospel hasn't changed." Brethren who love the truth are always edified when the plain simple gospel is preached, but the mission of the church is to preach that gospel. Edification is a byproduct of that mission, not the mission itself.

Let the church fulfill its mission of preaching the gospel in all the world. It must not be sidetracked by well meaning folks who want to make other things the mission of the church or simply "one of its ministries." While benevolence and edification are good works, there is only one mission and only one ministry of the church for which Jesus died, and that is preaching the gospel.

Elk City, OK

**"WE DOUBT THE VERACITY OF YOUR INFORMATION"**

by Lee Moses

By mid-1939, war and the threat of war had spread throughout the entirety of Europe and beyond. On August 23 of that year, the Adolf Hitler-led Nazis and the Joseph Stalin-led Soviets signed a non-aggression pact – a pact that the Nazis clearly intended merely as a postponement of hostilities.

In September 1940, talks fell apart between the two sides, and Hitler made plans to invade the Soviet Union.

Stalin was warned by his spies of Hitler's impending attack, but Stalin refused to believe these warnings. He permitted limited fortification of his western border, but otherwise determined not to do anything that might provoke the Germans. Stalin's spies kept warning him, but he refused to believe that the Nazis would attack. Richard Sorge, a German spy with Communist leanings, microfilmed detailed reports of Hitler's planned invasion, including troop numbers and even the date—June 22, 1941. But Stalin brusquely dismissed Sorge's efforts, responding, "We doubt the veracity of your information."

The Americans and British both tried warning Stalin of an impending attack, to no avail. Stalin would not even listen to British prime minister Winston Churchill's warnings, as Stalin believed Churchill particularly was trying to provoke Hitler's attention to the east and away from Britain.

On the very eve of invasion, a German deserter crossed the border into the Soviet Union and informed the Red Army of the Nazis plans. Instead of first thanking him for the warning and then making the necessary preparations, Stalin instead ordered the German shot for spreading misinformation. Stalin continued to send food and metal exports to the Germans, as agreed in their pact, and forbade evacuating civilians living near the German border or setting up defenses.

So on June 22, 1941, when Nazi forces crossed into the Soviet Union, they found bridges unguarded, aircraft

*continued from page one*

Jesus fed those 5,000, He did not do so to "make them receptive" to His teaching. He did it out of compassion for them, but they desired only "the meat which perisheth." No, "Benevolence" is not the mission of the church, but simply a work of Christians.

**Edification**

The third thing which is often touted as the church's "mission" is "edification." To "edify" simply means "to build up." The church needs to be constantly edified in the Lord's cause and Paul said that comes through the word of God (Acts 20:32). That is an excellent work of the church, but not its mission, and edification has also been corrupted.

One often hears the criticism that, "He preaches the same old fundamental doctrine, when we need sermons for Christians." Peter said that "sermons for Christians" consisted of "the same old thing" (1 Peter 1:12-15). One of the grandest elders under whom I ever served was Raymond Bailey in Chillicothe, Texas. Brother Bailey once told me that he got tired of hearing

**FCGN TO GO FROM QUARTERLY TO BI-MONTHLY!**

If the reader will note this issue's date, he will see that it is not January-March, as was the case a year ago. This issue's date is January-February, reflecting an increase in mailing frequency from once every three months to once every two months. It was not too long ago that, because of rising postage costs, the *Fulton County Gospel News* was forced to go from a monthly publication to a quarterly. However, thanks to our financial supporters stepping up and the providence of God, we are able to increase our frequency even in the face of another increase in postage costs. From the bottom of our hearts, we thank our financial supporters as well as those of you who have been praying for this work, and, above all, we give God the glory. May the *Fulton County Gospel News* be fruitful to this end.

not dispatched, and defensive positions unmanned. Nearly 60 percent of the Soviet front-line armor was in Kiev, hundreds of miles from the front line of battle. Why? Stalin simply refused to pay any attention to the warnings they were given.

Stalin's stubborn denial of the truth almost gave the Nazis the easy quick-strike victory they sought.<sup>1</sup>

People continue to make the mistake of refusing to heed legitimate and vital warnings. At this very minute, men and women all over the world face momentous impending danger. Every man and woman has within him a spirit that will exist forever (Zechariah 12:1; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Genesis 35:18). If that spirit is found in any way tinged by sin when one's physical life is over, that spirit cannot go into the eternal fellowship of the One who made it and in whose image it was made, as God is "*of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity*" (Habakkuk 1:13). The only alternative to eternal life with God is eternal destruction in hell fire (Matthew 25:31-46).

So is it not appropriate and beneficial that God warns us in His word of dangers regarding our spirits and our eternal destinies? Is it not appropriate that faithful Christians warn their brethren and the world of these dangers? "*[Christ] we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus*" (Colossians 1:28, emphasis LM).

At this very moment, numerous and dire spiritual threats face individual brethren, entire congregations, and the brotherhood at large. There is the threat of denominationalism and compromise with denominationalism (Matt. 16:18; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:23, 25; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 1:10). There are the threats of unscriptural divorces and unscriptural "marriages" (Matthew 19:3-12). There is the threat of worldliness infiltrating the church in the form of "social" drinking, immodest dress, dancing, and covetousness (Romans 12:2; James 4:4; 1 Peter 1:13-16; 1 John 2:15). There is the threat of fellowship with and endorsement of false teachers (2 John 10-11). Unfortunately, this is far

from a comprehensive list of present spiritual threats to the precious bride of Christ, but these threats are certainly among those of which brethren absolutely must be warned.

Yet when faithful Christians attempt to warn others of these dangers, all too often people respond as did Stalin: "We doubt the veracity of your information." Sadly, the day has come in which spiritual Israel has become like rebellious fleshly Israel of old: "*To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it*" (Jeremiah 6:10). As the late brother Ira Y. Rice, Jr. used to say, "You just can't warn some brethren."

We would agree that one is well served to confirm allegations he hears about another brother or sister before accepting them as true (Proverbs 14:15; 20:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:21). But one should not reject another's warning outright and refuse to consider it further simply because he does not want to believe it is true. "*Some shall depart from the faith*" has always been the reality to some extent or another, and presently it is reality to a far larger extent than we wish were the case or than **was** the case a few decades ago.

"Few nations have been better warned of impending invasion than the Soviet Union in June 1941, yet despite this, and despite the fact that the Soviet Union had spent more than two decades trying to insure herself against surprise attack, the Soviet Union was totally surprised by the German invasion on 22 June 1941."<sup>2</sup> Why did Stalin refuse to heed the warnings he was given? He simply did not want to believe that he faced a serious threat. As a result, numerous lives, and almost the nation, were lost to Hitler.

If we insist on refusing accurate spiritual warnings, whether given directly by God's word or by human agency, we give Satan the easy quick-strike victory he seeks.

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIVE AND DEAD CHURCHES

by Andrew Connally (1931-1992)

There is no doubt that most of us want to be members of a live, growing and involved church. Most of us can easily tell the difference, and so can the Lord! In Revelation 3:1-6 the Lord speaks:

*And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard and hold fast and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*

Live churches have all kinds of problems—parking problems, lack of classroom teachers, etc. They always have more work, programs, mission opportunities, and other things that they can take advantage of—dead ones don't! Live churches make constant demands on time, talents, abilities and monies. They have services, classes, gospel meetings, VBS, and other events to attend. They have people to visit, delinquent members to reclaim, drifters

1 The aforementioned information is taken from H.P. Willmott, *The Great Crusade* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008), pp. 156-158; Rupert Colley, "Stalin's Breakdown," <<http://www.historyinthehour.com/2011/07/01/stalins-breakdown/>>; John Lukacs, *Churchill: Visionary, Statesman, Historian*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 28; Rupert Colley, *World War Two* (London: Harper Press, 2011 edition), pp. 23-26.

2 Willmott, p. 157.

who need encouragement and admonition—dead ones don't! Live churches are filled with those who are weak, neglectful, forgetful, and who need attention, but they are growing, they are concerned, prayerful and giving—dead ones aren't! Live churches have preachers who are Book- and people-oriented. They have preachers who preach hard, exhort often, who aren't scared to preach on hell. They know what's going on in the world, in the church and in the lives of many brethren—dead ones don't! Live churches have elders who stretch the budget yearly to help the congregation grow, they have sermons, write articles, teach classes, have mission plans and works to take every member to greater heights of service, sacrifice, and finally heaven—dead ones don't! Live churches

have members that respond to challenge: the challenge of new programs, budgets, missions, and always the word! They have people who evangelize rather than fossilize – dead ones don't! Live churches fight error and know where it is found. They are compassionate and kind. They are not only gentle and loving but also bold and brave and afraid of nothing! They love God and hate sin – dead ones don't.

Still, attending a "live" church does not guarantee one a home in heaven; there must be individual responsibility, obedience to God (1 John 1:6-10). Individually, much fruit must be produced (John 15:1-8); this is how our Father is glorified! Are you the part that makes the church alive?

**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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