

EVANGELICAL PROTESTANT
CHURCH (GCEPC)®,
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BREAKING NEWS!

IT IS WELL, WITH MY SOUL!

FILM AT ELEVEN, ED!

The Evangelical Protestant The Magazine of the Lutheran Evangelical Protestant Church

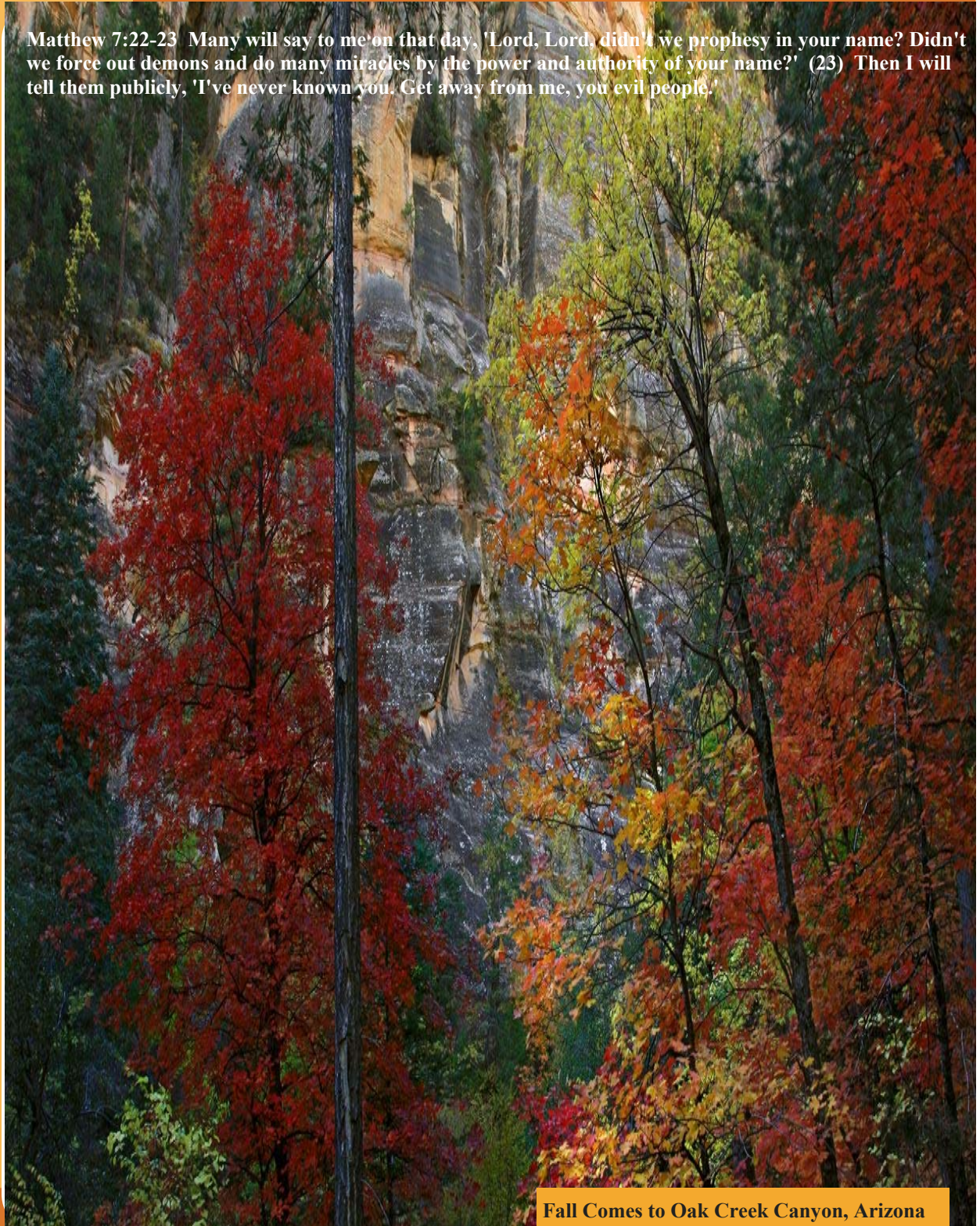
FALL 2015

FIRST ISSUE 1917

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Matthew 7:22-23 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we force out demons and do many miracles by the power and authority of your name?' (23) Then I will tell them publicly, 'I've never known you. Get away from me, you evil people.'



Fall Comes to Oak Creek Canyon, Arizona



Evangelical Protestant
Church (GCEPC)® Inc.,

Lutheran Evangelical
Protestant Church (LEPC)®,

GCEPC "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast." Ephesians 2: 8

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The Evangelical Protestant Journal "Kirchenbote" (Church Messenger) was established in 1885,

Gustav Schmidt became editor. In 1917, the German Evangelical churches in the Pittsburgh area began publication of a monthly entitled The Evangelical Protestant. (Archives Smithfield UCC)

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The Evangelical Protestant is the magazine of the Evangelical Protestant Church, Lutheran Evangelical Protestant Church, General Conference of Evangelical Protestant Churches, GCEPC, Inc.

The full color *Evangelical Protestant* is published quarterly.

Editor Rev. Steve Bacon

We Believe

1. The Holy Scriptures, in the original tongues, is the inspired and inerrant word of God. (Matthew 4:4, 2 Timothy 3:16,17)

2. There is one God, eternal and self-existent, Creator and Ruler of the universe, and manifested through the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (John 1:18, Matthew 3:16-17) We are Trinitarian.

3. Jesus Christ is truly divine and truly human having been conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. (Matt.1: 18)

4. Jesus Christ died on the cross and shed His blood as a Sacrifice

for our sins; He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High. (1 John 2:2)

5. Humankind was created in the image of God, but fell into sin causing separation from God. (Gen. 3:1-24)

6. Salvation has been provided through Jesus Christ for all; and those who repent and believe on Him are born again of the Holy Spirit, receive the gift of eternal life and become the children of God. (John 1:10)

7. Water baptism identifies us with the death and burial of Christ and that we should arise to

walk in newness of life (Matthew 28:19-20)

8. We believe in the ministry of the Holy Spirit to glorify Christ, to convict of sin, to enable the believer to live a godly life, and to empower the Church to carry the gospel into all the world.

(Matthew 12:31, Acts 1:8.)

9. In the personal and visible return of Jesus Christ for His Church. (Matthew 24:30, Rev 1:7)

10. In the bodily resurrection of the just and the unjust, the everlasting blessedness of the saved and everlasting separation from God of all those who reject Jesus Christ. (John 1:10-13, Rev 20:11-15)

The Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

AMEN.

Bishop's Desk



God desires his people the called out ones, the church, to recover the lost art of hearing God

Life is forever changing. We move from one season to the next and every move is necessary to our growth, development and existence. When we pull back to an expanded lens and try to see from God's perspective, we see the continuum of many life cycles in the earth. He is evident in every one of those cycles. From the beginning of time Jesus has watched over His creation. He sees the big picture and the small. He zeros in on each individual life. Each one precious in His sight. Each one garnering His full attention from conception to death. When we are wandering aimlessly He is there. When we fall exhausted at His feet He lifts us up. When we walk with Him daily He enjoys us. When we are sad He cries with us and when we rejoice, He celebrates and the seasons continue on with Him ever faithful. Without Him there would be no light to show us the path. While many push Him aside and do not acknowledge His Presence others are seeking out Jesus to know Him. This issue has an arti-

cle that might interest you about when in the life cycle most people come to know Christ. There are others who though they know about God, they still do not acknowledge Him as God or thank Him as we have seen in the recent Supreme Court ruling on Gay Marriage. We are observing all around us just as the scriptures have said that man becomes futile in his thinking and his heart darkened claiming themselves wise they have become fools when we move away from God and His glory and divine nature. I believe however, that God still sees opportunity for us. He who goes after the single lost sheep looks over civilizations and societies to bring them to Himself. He sees beyond what we see. Where we see failure, He sees opportunity. may we be able to see with His eyes in the seasons we travel through.

God finds us in the holes we dig for ourselves. We see failures; He sees foundations

We have recently experienced death in our family. One expected, the other not. Neither one easy but in the expected we are able to prepare and in the other we are left off balance except for Christ who steadies us while we process

through the sorrow in a different way. He who knows us so well can get us to the other side as we lean our hearts into His heart.

Fall is ahead of us. The heat of summer has burned some of us to a crisp and we are longing for the cool days and the longer shadows that signal change each year. They faithfully come because Jesus set the seasons in motion, the sun and the moon giving their light and the evening and the morning bringing each day as we move forward. He knew that we would need this particular regularity as human beings made in His image.



I hope you enjoy this issue of the Evangelical Protestant. Blessings and may you be ever aware of Christ in you, with you and around you. He is the Hope of Glory.

Bishop Nancy Drew

My greatest desire for all of our ministers is that they would have a close walk with Our Lord, learning His ways, hearing His voice, knowing Him.

What is Your Assignment?

By Bishop Jessica Johnston, Spirit Soul and Body Ministries



My prayer and blessing for you is that you will discover and uncover the mysteries of God in His ways and His word. I pray for you a revelation of His grace in your life and that all lessons imparted to you through your message will become revelatory teaching for the flock of God.

Usually when we think of assignments we think of school. We all grew up with homework assignments that we had to complete which included research and preparation, doing the assignment and then having it graded. The assignments were all a part of the overall teaching and lesson plans to help us learn and become accomplished as well as more prepared for life.

As servants of the Lord we also have assignments. When I was young I was so concerned about my career. How to define it, explain it. However, the older I have gotten I have realized that it is not so much about a career but a ministry in the marketplace with various assignments. I am on assignment like a journalist – getting the story, interviewing, finding out what the issues are, but then I am a soldier at times involved in rescue, battle and creating order in the camp. At all times I am a leader who wears all of these hats and is there to serve a people and help them create and see the vision, to fulfill it and enjoy the fruits of their labor.

Recently I switched jobs. I have worked at the University of SC for 3 and a half years and out of the blue I was contacted by my old employer about a job opening in the same department I left from to work for USC. This was a “suddenly” to me and caused me great consternation for a while. I left that department under great stress and in complete burn out. So you can see how returning to the same department would cause me some concern. However, the Lord began to speak to me that this was my next assignment. A short term assignment. He had healed me in my time at USC and wanted to use this healing to bring this same healing to my former workplace. I also recalled that years ago He spoke to me that in the years to come I would not stay in one place for very long in my vocation for He was building my tool belt and stacking me with experience over experience to become more. This came after I had been in one place for 16 years – BlueCross BlueShield. Oh how important it is to hear the voice of the Lord so that when these moments come we are assured of our direction in Him.

“As I prayed regarding this new assignment the Lord reminded me of the following scripture: I Corinthians 3:5-9: ⁵ what, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe, and to each as the Lord gave an assignment. ⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. ⁷ So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸ The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. ⁹ For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.”

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What is Your Assignment?

By Bishop Jessica Johnston, Spirit Soul and Body Ministries

(Continued from page 4)

This is the first time I had ever noticed a version of the Word using the word assignment. How timely and confirming this was to what the Lord was speaking to me. We are on assignment!!

Assignments can be a people, a place, a person, a situation and on and on. It is whatever the Lord defines for you. This gives a whole new perspective and can be a paradigm shift in thinking for many. As a matter of fact the Lord used this within a week or two of my new job. I met with one of the supervisors within my department to find out her view of the health of the department. We ended up discussing her discouragement in being there when she really wanted to be in nursing again. She had a vision and was attempting to understand where she was currently in terms of "career". Well, the door opened, so I walked through and encouraged her to see it as an assignment and a step in the process to where she ultimately felt lead to serve. What was she there for, had she completed her assignment? By the end of our hour her countenance had completely changed. I prayed for her behind my Director's door and asked the Lord to make this clear to her. Two weeks later she came by to tell me that she was leaving to pursue her nursing dream again. The Lord had opened a door. Rather than discouraging her from leaving as we are trained to do in corporate America, I blessed her to go and released her from her assignment from where I sat and congratulated her for finishing her assignment. He loved her so much He wanted her to feel her time there had not been wasted but a part of His purpose. She later gave testimony to this lesson to the whole department, not mentioning our discussion, which I loved because God received the glory as she was a Christian and everyone knew this. It was His word to her.

So, in sharing all of this I ask you what is your assignment. Who or what are you assigned to? Have you completed your assignment and need to move on? Or have you just begun or are you looking for your next assignment? The point is to know, to understand and then to be faithful trusting the outcome to Him because He gave it to you and will provide the portion of all you need to complete it. And by the way, the assignment is not just for them it's for you – don't forget that. Your healing, blessing, growth and promotion is all wrapped up in that assignment as well. There are blessings meant for you not just those you are assigned to. See, YOU are always HIS assignment. He is relentless in His pursuit of your transformation and wholeness. What a great God we serve and love.

Blessings to you as you walk in your assignment today!



IN CHRIST, OR NOT?

Bishop Dr. David A. Church



Bishop Dr.
David A.
Church
Director of
Missions

To reach the lost and bring them into the Kingdom of God requires that we return to *God's way* of building the Church, discarding man's methods with those given us by Jesus Christ who said "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." 2 Corinthians 5:17

As we walk through life, many times we wish we had a second chance to do something right, a "do over" similar to restarting a computer game. We did something wrong or just plain stupid without consideration of the consequences involved. We almost never realize at the time that we still will be required to "pay the Piper." We reap what we sow, no exceptions. A loosely lived life has consequences, all causes have an effect, and all actions have a reaction in life. Plant corn, reap corn. Sow wheat, you reap wheat. Plant weeds, we get weeds.

This is a Law of all Creation. The things that most concern me are our actions, or our inactions, that have an eternal consequence upon our souls. It is about the choices we make as we walk through this short life that we will stand before God one day and have to give an account. Those that know Him will receive recompense for what they did while in the body and hear from Jesus *"Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."* (Matthew 25:21) Those not knowing Him will instead hear the dreaded words *"I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"* Matthew 7:23

You ask "What does it even mean to "know Him", and more importantly to be known by Him? As the Son of God doesn't Jesus *know* everything? Then how can He say to someone "I never knew you?" What does He mean?"

Jesus is speaking of having an intimate relationship with individuals. Not just knowing the facts about a person, but a relational interchange where each party seeks to know and understand the character of the other person, how they look at the world and treat the people around them, and how they deal with situations and circumstances that happen in life. How did Jesus answer His critics? How did he interact with the infirmed and diseased? How did He confront our sin and dullness towards spiritual things? He showed compassion, love, and patience. To know Christ is to understand His love for us although we can never completely fathom it. It is understanding what He expects from us as His disciples. Loving Him entails obeying His commandments. Knowing Him means we have first believed the Gospel and have been born again, and have received Him as our Lord and Savior. We study the Word of God because from it He speaks to us, instructs us in righteousness, and reveals more of Himself. We pray in order to speak to Him, revealing ourselves intimately and confessing how we fall so very short of His will for our lives as He reveals more of His love and patience to us. We trust Him and bring our needs to Him, and also intercede on behalf of others in need.

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IN CHRIST, OR NOT?

Bishop Dr. David A. Church

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But what of the bad things I did in the past? What about the evil deeds committed out of selfishness, or lust, or hatred? What about our covetousness which led to theft or our pride which may have led to violence towards others without regard of consequences? How can we justify the sins from our past with our claim of following the Lord Jesus Christ today? From the natural and worldly viewpoint a drunk is still a drunk even if he is sober. A murderer is still a murderer, a thief is still a thief. They just are not practicing their sin. But what the world looking through non-spiritual eyes doesn't see or understand is that which is seen in what I consider the key verse of 2 Corinthians 5:17.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

If we are in Christ we are new creations! Anyone who is born again from above is not the same person because if we are in Christ we are, not will be, new creations. We are indwelt by the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit who brings conviction upon the world and regenerates us unto new life in Christ. It says anyone, not just some special class of people. Anyone who lives by faith in Christ is a new creation. Period. Our sins were removed, washed away by the blood of Christ and never again to be remembered by God or used against us in judgment. Our chains were broken that bound us to a life of sin without any hope of escape other than death. We were freed from the curse of sin which leads to eternal separation from God and His goodness, and delivered from eternal torment in the Lake of Fire which God created for the Devil and his angels that followed him in their rebellion against the Most High. It is our own rebellion and refusal of God's gracious pardon in Christ that condemns us into the place of outer darkness with no hope whatsoever of ever leaving it. Our unbelief is what brings the judgment of God upon our head, the refusal of God's gracious offer of salvation in Christ as the only acceptable way to enter the Kingdom of God. If you are not found "in Christ" you are lost forevermore without hope or reversal of your sentence. You made up your mind to reject Him in life, so He makes up His mind for your eternity. His holiness and justice absolutely demands it. To do otherwise would be to bring Christ's sacrifice to naught, as well as breaking God's Word.

"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." John 3:18

Believing in Him means much more than merely believing cold facts about the Lord. Believing in Him means to trust unswervingly in the Lord for your salvation. For we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, by Christ alone.

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IN CHRIST, OR NOT?



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To reach the lost and bring them into the Kingdom of God requires that we return to *God's way* of building the Church, discarding man's methods with those given us by Jesus Christ who said "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."
Ephesians 2:8-10

We were newly created in Christ for good works and we ourselves had nothing to do with it. All we had to do was believe (as in "trust") in the atoning death of Christ, the vicarious sacrifice made for us on the Cross. He created us. We are His workmanship, His handiwork. And He created us for a purpose, for good works which God prepared beforehand. This is God's will for our lives, and He demands obedience if we are to fulfill the purpose He created us for in Christ.

In Luke 6:46 Jesus asks *"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?"* If He is recognized as Lord why isn't He obeyed? The definition of Lord is "someone or something having power, authority, or influence; a master or ruler." If one is the Master, as is Jesus, all others are servants from whom He requires obedience to his lawful commands. As we are subject to Him any disobedience is but further rebellion to His rule. Why would God allow a non-repentant rebel to enter into His Kingdom? Refusing to obey God stems from pride, deciding our will should supplant God's desire to direct us through the maze of life. We do not even see the whole picture as does the Lord, so we are walking blindly into perdition when we refuse to accept the grace and knowledge of the One who has already tasted death for us and came back to show us the way through the minefields laid by Satan to destroy us and our souls. A Christian who is truly born again will have fruit showing in his life as well as a transformation in his character and demeanor. The love of Christ will show through, proving the man or woman is a new creation in Christ and that all things indeed have become new. Look closely at the tenses of the verbs in the lead passage:

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

In the first part of the verse we see "is in Christ" and "is a new creation." This means now, in the present, God sees us in Christ as one of His, and as a brand new creation which is His workmanship. If born again we have been already placed in Christ by the Holy Spirit, and live presently in Christ as a new creation. We don't have to wait for it. We just need to learn to believe it and to walk in it.

The second part tells us the old things already have passed away, our "old man" or sin nature. It is already dead and buried with Christ, and now all things have become new as born again believers. Again, we don't have to wait for it. We just need to learn to believe it and to walk in it. When we believe in our position in Christ we will "Walk by the Spirit," and we will not be drawn back in disobedience to the "works of the flesh." What really amuses me about

IN CHRIST, OR NOT?

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people is that it takes much more effort to defy God and to work against His will than it does to simply obey His will and to do what He asks from us. To rebel against God is foolish anyway, but that is puffed up fallen man for you. How many times have we said "I know what's best for me." That was Satan's downfall, full of pride and desiring to be like the Most High. We are repeating the same folly every time we go our own way instead of following the path previously marked out for us by the Holy Spirit in Scripture. If we continuously stray from the path chosen we increase the possibility of eventually losing our way back. If we stray all the way to again practicing "the works of the flesh" without repentance we have stepped out of Christ's hand and may no longer be found "in Christ" by the Lord we previously professed to follow as a disciple. Paul states emphatically in Galatians 5:21 "*that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*" He put no other condition or requirement on this statement that negates the consequences. We can either take it literally at face value, or we can try to soften its meaning at the peril of our soul by redefining the meaning of the verse. It does not say "might not inherit" or "will lose their rewards." It says "*will not inherit the kingdom of God.*" There is only one other kingdom we can possibly belong to, and that kingdom is destined for the Lake of Fire, along with its ruler Satan, all of his angels, and all his human followers. Which kingdom are you serving? The battle lines are in the process of being well defined in this day of increasing evil, and those in the Church must wake up to the reality that we are in a war to the death with the Kingdom of Darkness and the god of this world: Satan, the Adversary, Lucifer, the Devil, the old serpent or whatever other name by which he is recognized. He is very real and it is mandatory for us to wake up to that reality! Choose and stand fast!

"And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Joshua 25:15

A VOLUNTEER'S DAY AT HOSPICE HOUSE AND BEYOND



Rev. Dr. Thomas
Peavy Board Certified
Crisis Chaplain

It was a routine day for me as I headed from home to go to Hospice House for a visit with a recently assigned patient. My work there is in the veteran-to-veteran and vigil program, and usually my patients are actively dying when I visit them. After a short six minute drive I arrived at Hospice House, clipped on my ID badge and stopped by Volunteer Resources to inform that I am visiting my patient. As I approached the area where my patient was located, I stopped by the Nurses Station to disinfect my hands and chat with the nurses about my patient's condition. I learned that my patient was getting nursing care and would not be available to visit for half an hour. I returned to Volunteer Resources to wait and chat with staff. While waiting I was asked if I minded visiting another patient who enjoyed company. I agreed to visit and was given a room number for the patient. I went to the room, knocked, entered and introduced myself and asked if the patient would like a few moments of company and conversation. The patient agreed and we had a nice twenty minute visit. The patient and I agreed that our visits would continue while he was in Hospice care. I was pleased since not every visit is a good match for the patient or volunteer.

With the visit completed, I was returning to Volunteer Resources when a gentleman in a red shirt came down the hallway. As we passed he looked toward me and called my name, "Thom." I was surprised since I did not recognize this gentleman but then I realized he had seen my ID badge. I stopped and greeted him and he said, "my name is Tom; do you know the story of Tom?" I had not heard the story so I invited him to tell me the story. He smiled and said that when the world was first formed all the men were named Tom but as they began to sin and depart from good behavior they had to take another name. So you see Tom is a special name. We had a laugh together and talked some about our work and I shared that I was ordained in the Lutheran Denomination. He said that we may not see eye to eye on some things. I offered that I understood and I had an expression I often used when I found someone who was of a different denomination and asked if I could share it with him. He was interested and asked "what is it that you say?" I offered "it is not what you call yourself, it is what He has called you to do." He paused for a moment and then said, "You know my dad died at one o'clock." I offered my condolences and he expressed concern about not being present when his dad died. We talked further and I reassured him that his presence was likely felt even though he may not have been present, that it was not always possible to know when a loved one may die but that his presence before and his love were surely known. I asked if I might include him, his family and his father in my evening prayers. He smiled and said of course. We exchanged business cards, and at that point his Pastor arrived and I said my farewell. I thought how interesting that I have had these two visits and neither were intended when I arrived.

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A VOLUNTEER'S DAY AT HOSPICE HOUSE AND BEYOND

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I returned to Volunteer Resources, made my chart notes and then checked in with the patient I had originally come to see. This is a wonderful man who has lived such a full life. He is a World War II Army Air Corps pilot who finished service, returned home and used his GI Bill to attend school. He eventually became a Medical Doctor and was a General Surgeon. Our visit was rewarding for so many reasons. We talked about his undergraduate schooling, his mother and her work ethic, his recall to duty in the Air Force during the Korean Conflict and his daughters. We agreed I would continue my visits at his daughter's home since he would be returning there after this respite stay at Hospice House.

I was tired at this point. I had three interactions and now I needed to make another chart note on this last visit. I checked in with Volunteer Resources, made my note and let them know I was leaving. What a day this has been.

As I passed through the entrance to Hospice House I noticed a young woman and older lady coming toward me. They appeared hurried and I thought, oh my, they must have someone they need to see quickly. The younger woman passed by me quickly heading for the entrance door. The older lady was slightly behind and looked toward me. As I approached her she saw the US Navy Ceremonial Guard Cap I was wearing. She came toward me and asked if I had been in the Navy. I told her I was retired from the Navy. Her response was that her husband was in the Navy and retired as a Senior Chief Petty Officer. I asked if he were active duty or a Navy Reservist and she confirmed he was a reservist who drilled at the local Navy Reserve Center.

I asked his name and she gave me his last name. I recognized it as a Chief with whom I had served. I told her that I served with her husband for many years. In her moment of distress she took my arm and said, "I want you to come with me." So back into Hospice House I went and was escorted to the room where my fellow Senior Chief lay actively dying. The nurse told the wife who was still holding my arm that she could not say when death may occur but it looked to be soon. I let the nurse know the reason for my presence and went into the room with my fellow Senior

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A VOLUNTEER'S DAY AT HOSPICE HOUSE AND BEYOND



Rev. Dr. Thomas
Peavy Board Certified
Crisis Chaplain

(Continued from page 11)

Chief's wife. She looked at him, cried and hugged me tightly. I comforted her and she asked if I would talk with him. Of course I would. He is my Brother Chief and I needed to offer him my presence. A granddaughter stepped aside for me to stand at the bedside. I touched his brow and told him, "Brother Chief, Doc Peavy is here with you. Your wife asked me to stop by and visit for a moment. I am pleased to be here and I want you to know you stood your watch well. You did your duty and now I wish you a Fair Wind and Following Sea. Rest well Messmate. I will care for your wife as I can in the days ahead." With that I returned to his wife. She again hugged me, cried and said, "I want you to be at his funeral." I assured her I would be there and in Navy uniform. With that I excused myself so the family could have their time with him. He died about ten minutes later.

True to my commitment, a few days later I attended the visitation for my Brother Senior Chief. Once again his wife found me, took my arm and walked me to his casket. She asked me to look over his uniform and see if everything was in order. I did and reassured her his military dress was as it should be. She again asked me if I would be at the funeral and I assured her I would. I visited with other members of the family, met their pastor and talked with Navy personnel who would be participating in the funeral. With my effort concluded I returned home and prepared my uniform for the funeral.

The following day I arrived at the Funeral Home and met with the Patriot Guard Riders who would escort the procession as well as Navy personnel who would provide the military honors ceremony. I asked if there were any particular duties I needed to perform. During this time my Brother Senior Chief's wife came in, walked over to me and said, "I want you to be with me during this time."

I accepted her request and informed the Funeral Home staff I would be her military escort during the service. I escorted her into the Chapel, sat with her during the funeral service and offered comfort as I could. At the gravesite I was her escort and sat with her during the rendering of military honors and then escorted her back to her car. As we departed she thanked me for being with her and said she knew her husband would have been pleased. I offered words of encouragement and told her she would be added to my prayer list in the days ahead, and I departed.

So what do these stories about my day at Hospice House and following days have to say about our calling? I am a Hospice Volunteer. I am not a Hospice Chaplain. I made that choice for a variety of reasons, however, I know God will use my calling as He

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A VOLUNTEER'S DAY AT HOSPICE HOUSE AND BEYOND

sees the need. I believe Isaiah 40:1 states the essence of my ministry with Hospice. God's word says in Isaiah, "Comfort, Yes Comfort my people says your God."

In the interactions and activities I have shared, none of them were known to me prior to the events. My mission on the day I went to Hospice House was to visit an assigned patient. I had no idea that my Brother Senior Chief was even in Hospice and had not seen him in many years. His wife and I had never met yet my Navy Cap, the timing of events, activity and timing of my leaving had me in the time and place where God would use my Ministry. In Matthew 6:8 we read, "For your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." And in Philippians 4:19, it states, "And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

When I think over those days I am amazed at the series of events and how God's plan for my Ministry was evidenced. My Shipmate's wife was provided comforting presence through the Holy Spirit and the presence of His servant. She did not have to ask for comfort. He knew before she asked.

Perhaps the Hospice nurse summed up these days better than I could. After my bedside visit with my Brother Senior Chief and when I was leaving, I told the nurse the story of how I had been brought to his room. She looked at me with tears in her eyes and said "Isn't God good." What more could be said.

40 QUESTIONS FOR CHRISTIANS NOW WAVING RAINBOW FLAGS



Kevin DeYoung is senior pastor of University Reformed Church in East Lansing, Michigan, near Michigan State University. He and his wife Trisha have six young children. You can [follow him on Twitter](#)

For evangelicals who lament last Friday's Supreme Court decision, it's been a hard few days. We aren't asking for emotional pity, nor do I suspect many people are eager to give us any. Our pain is not sacred. Making legal and theological decisions based on what makes people feel better is part of what got us into this mess in the first place. Nevertheless, it still hurts.

There are many reasons for our lamentation, from fear that religious liberties will be taken away to worries about social ostracism and cultural marginalization. But of all the things that grieve us, perhaps what's been most difficult is seeing some of our friends, some of our family members, and some of the folks we've sat next to in church giving their hearty "Amen" to a practice we still think is a sin and a decision we think is bad for our country. It's one thing for the whole nation to throw a party we can't in good conscience attend. It's quite another to look around for friendly faces to remind us we're not alone and then find that they are out there jamming on the dance floor. We thought the rainbow was God's sign (Gen. 9:8-17).

If you consider yourself a Bible-believing Christian, a follower of Jesus whose chief aim is to glorify God and enjoy him forever, there are important questions I hope you will consider before picking up your flag and cheering on the sexual revolution. These questions aren't meant to be snarky or merely rhetorical. They are sincere, if pointed, questions that I hope will cause my brothers and sisters with the new rainbow themed avatars to slow down and think about the flag you're flying.

1. How long have you believed that gay marriage is something to be celebrated?
2. What Bible verses led you to change your mind?
3. How would you make a positive case from Scripture that sexual activity between two persons of the same sex is a blessing to be celebrated?
4. What verses would you use to show that a marriage between two persons of the same sex can adequately depict Christ and the church?
5. Do you think Jesus would have been okay with homosexual behavior between consenting adults in a committed relationship?
6. If so, why did he reassert the Genesis definition of marriage as being one man and one

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40 QUESTIONS FOR CHRISTIANS NOW WAVING RAINBOW FLAGS



(Continued from page 14)

woman?

7. When Jesus spoke against porneia what sins do you think he was forbidding?
8. If some homosexual behavior is acceptable, how do you understand the sinful “exchange” Paul highlights in Romans 1?
9. Do you believe that passages like 1 Corinthians 6:9 and Revelation 21:8 teach that sexual immorality can keep you out of heaven?
10. What sexual sins do you think they were referring to?
11. As you think about the long history of the church and the near universal disapproval of same-sex sexual activity, what do you think you understand about the Bible that Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, and Luther failed to grasp?
12. What arguments would you use to explain to Christians in Africa, Asia, and South America that their understanding of homosexuality is biblically incorrect and your new understanding of homosexuality is not culturally conditioned?
13. Do you think Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama were motivated by personal animus and bigotry when they, for almost all of their lives, defined marriage as a covenant relationship between one man and one woman?
14. Do you think children do best with a mother and a father?
15. If not, what research would you point to in support of that conclusion?
16. If yes, does the church or the state have any role to play in promoting or privileging the arrangement that puts children with a mom and a dad?
17. Does the end and purpose of marriage point to something more than an adult’s emotional and sexual fulfillment?
18. How would you define marriage?
19. Do you think close family members should be allowed to get married?

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40 QUESTIONS FOR CHRISTIANS NOW WAVING RAINBOW FLAGS



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20. Should marriage be limited to only two people?
21. On what basis, if any, would you prevent consenting adults of any relation and of any number from getting married?
22. Should there be an age requirement in this country for obtaining a marriage license?
23. Does equality entail that anyone wanting to be married should be able to have any meaningful relationship defined as marriage?
24. If not, why not?
25. Should your brothers and sisters in Christ who disagree with homosexual practice be allowed to exercise their religious beliefs without fear of punishment, retribution, or coercion?
26. Will you speak up for your fellow Christians when their jobs, their accreditation, their reputation, and their freedoms are threatened because of this issue?
27. Will you speak out against shaming and bullying of all kinds, whether against gays and lesbians or against Evangelicals and Catholics?
28. Since the evangelical church has often failed to take unbiblical divorces and other sexual sins seriously, what steps will you take to ensure that gay marriages are healthy and accord with Scriptural principles?
29. Should gay couples in open relationships be subject to church discipline?
30. Is it a sin for LGBT persons to engage in sexual activity outside of marriage?
31. What will open and affirming churches do to speak prophetically against divorce, fornication, pornography, and adultery wherever they are found?
32. If “love wins,” how would you define love?
33. What verses would you use to establish that definition?

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40 QUESTIONS FOR CHRISTIANS NOW WAVING RAINBOW FLAGS



(Continued from page 16)

34. How should obedience to God's commands shape our understanding of love?

35. Do you believe it is possible to love someone and disagree with important decisions they make?

36. If supporting gay marriage is a change for you, has anything else changed in your understanding of faith?

37. As an evangelical, how has your support for gay marriage helped you become more passionate about traditional evangelical distinctives like a focus on being born again, the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ on the cross, the total trustworthiness of the Bible, and the urgent need to evangelize the lost?

38. What open and affirming churches would you point to where people are being converted to orthodox Christianity, sinners are being warned of judgment and called to repentance, and missionaries are being sent out to plant churches among unreached peoples?

39. Do you hope to be more committed to the church, more committed to Christ, and more committed to the Scriptures in the years ahead?

40. When Paul at the end of Romans 1 rebukes "those who practice such things" and those who "give approval to those who practice them," what sins do you think he has in mind?

Food for thought, I hope. At the very least, something to chew on before swallowing everything the world and Facebook put on our plate.

Note: An earlier version of this post had the questions in paragraph format rather than enumerated. The content is still the same. Readers interested in studying what the Bible teaches about homosexuality may be interested in checking out my new book on that theme.



<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evindeyoung/2015/07/01/40-questions-for-christians-now-waving-rainbow-flags/>

HAVE YOU BEEN DEFILED?

by Bishop Nancy Drew



Bishop
Nancy Drew

Have you been defiled? Have you defiled others? Are there people who have been telling you things "for your own good" about people that you work with, minister with? Causing you to "reassess" your opinion of them. Or, have you been the one doing the talking to those who will listen. Defilement and gossip are rampant in the body of Christ because we fail to heed the words of our Lord.

Think about this for a minute: Have you taken on the opinion and ideas of someone else about a person or people close to you or that you may hardly know. If so, you may have been defiled. Remember Jesus said, "Hear and understand: "It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person." It is not what goes into a person's mouth that defiles them, it is not what they eat or whether they wash their hands before they eat that defiles. They might get sick depending on what was on their hands when they ate but they are not defiled. It is what comes out of the mouth (meaning speech) that defiles because what comes out of our mouths reveals our hearts. What comes out of our mouths can defile us and make us unclean, impure; meaning in need of forgiveness but it also exiles and makes others unclean if they accept the words spoken. Then they also will be in need of repentance and forgiveness to be made clean in their relationship with the Lord according to I John 1:9. Words spoken about someone else that defile can tarnish the one spoken about and can take away from their good name and make them to seem impure. This defilement takes time to repair because it is not their fault but they suffer because of it. It is up to the defiler to remove the mud that has been slung by repenting and making amends for what they said. The repenter does the washing/ healing for the harmed.



I have been in ministry for 45 years. I have seen many people mistreated and misjudged on the basis of what others say about them, myself included. Many times things are said without having the whole picture, without even having the ability to access the whole picture. Christians need to learn to be quiet and not speak as Jesus did, except when he heard the Father speak. This is a difficult discipline for most followers of Christ. But it is possible and we are to use self control and wisdom. Because we love Jesus and love His word it can be done but one must decide to make the change from blabber mouth to sober in spirit, glutton to lean. That's right people can get drunk on their words and fat on "dainty morsels" in the power of their words.

Here are the options: Refuse to listen to the words of others regarding someone unless you can absolutely prove that what has been said is true otherwise what you have heard is gossip. Gossip dies when it hits a wise person's ears because they refuse to hear it, listen to it or pass it on. If what you have been told could have a negative effect on you or causes you to have alt against that person then scripture is clear that you must go to that person one on one, not shared with a crowd and find out what is going on (Matt. 18:15). Repent if needed and make amends to show that your repentance is sincere and fruitful to anyone directly involved or harmed.(Matt.3:8)

In His Own Words: Billy Graham on Encouragement

From time to time we all struggle with situations around us. After a long week; after a bad day; after an illness; through financial turmoil; after the loss of a loved one – the circumstances are entirely different but words of encouragement help us through each hardship to see and feel the love of Christ in our lives.

Below are 10 quotes from Billy Graham. We hope that they will lift you up today and that you can share them with others who will find encouragement through their message.

1. "Humanity wants comfort in its sorrow, light in its darkness, peace in its turmoil, rest in its weariness, and healing in its sickness and diseases: The Gospel gives all of this to us." (*from The Secret of Happiness*)
2. "Don't be bound by the past and its failures. But don't forget its lessons either." (*from Wisdom for Each Day*)
3. "Many of the mysteries of God – the heartaches, trials, disappointment, tragedies, and the silence of God in the midst of suffering – will be revealed in heaven." (*from Day by Day*)
4. "Disappointment and failure are not signs that God has forsaken you or stopped loving you. The devil wants you to believe God no longer loves you, but it isn't true. God's love for us never fails." (*The Journey*)
5. "Happy is the person who has learned the secret of being content with whatever life brings him, and has learned to rejoice in the simple and beautiful things around him." (*from The Secret of Happiness*)
6. "Without dark clouds in our lives we would never know the joy of sunshine. We can become callous and unteachable if we do not learn from pain." (*from Hope for the Troubled Heart*)
7. "I firmly believe God continues to answer the prayers of His people even after He has taken them to heaven. Never forget that God isn't bound by time the way we are. We see only the present moment; God sees everything. We see only part of what He is doing; He sees it all." (*from My Daily Prayer Journal*)
8. "This should be the motto of every follower of Jesus Christ. Never stop praying no matter how dark and helpless it may seem." (*from Decision*)
9. "The Bible teaches that we are to be patient in suffering. Tears become telescopes to heaven, bringing eternity a little closer." (*from Alone with the Savior*)
10. "God doesn't comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters." (*Facing Death and the Life After*)

"The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all." (Psalm 34:19)



William Franklin "Billy" Graham, Jr., KBE (born November 7, 1918) is an American evangelical Christian evangelist, ordained as a Southern Baptist minister, who rose to celebrity status in 1949 reaching a core constituency of middle-class, moderately conservative Protestants. [2] He held large indoor and outdoor rallies; sermons were broadcast on radio and television, some still being re-broadcast today.

by BGLIBRARY on Jun 21, 2013 • 12:30 pm

Can hipster Christianity save churches from decline?

By Brett McCracken



The Washington Post

This opinion piece is by Brett McCracken, author of “Hipster Christianity: When Church and Cool Collide” (2010) and “Gray Matters: Navigating the Space Between Legalism and Liberty” (2013).

Do people want Christianity to be cool? What happens when churches become too driven by the desire to be trend-savvy and culturally relevant? Can a church balance hipster credibility within an orthodox tradition?

These were questions at the heart of my book “Hipster Christianity: When Church and Cool Collide,” which released five years ago. The book seemed to fascinate reporters, with outlets like *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic* and NPR covering what they saw as a deliciously paradoxical story.

“If the evangelical Christian leadership thinks that ‘cool Christianity’ is a sustainable path forward, they are severely mistaken,” I wrote in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, *The Perils of ‘Wannabe Cool’ Christianity*. “As a twentysomething, I can say with confidence that when it comes to church, we don’t want cool as much as we want real.”

Five years later, has the cool-church movement done anything to reverse trends of declining church attendance, particularly among young people?

Most evidence suggests the answer is no. Recent Pew Research data showed across-the-board declines in Americans who identify as Christian and dramatic increases in those who are “unaffiliated” with religion, particularly among younger adults.

Research also indicates that millennials do prefer “real” churches over “cool” ones. Contrary to the belief that churches must downplay their churchiness and meet in breweries or warehouses in order to appeal to millennials, a 2014 Barna study showed that millennials actually prefer church spaces that are straightforward and overtly Christian. The same study reported that when millennials described their “ideal church,” they preferred “classic” (67 percent) over “trendy” (33 percent).

More evidence for the unsustainability of hipster Christianity comes by reflecting on what happened to some of the key figureheads and churches I profiled for the book.

Rob Bell was one of seven “Hip Christian Figureheads” featured in the book, and I also wrote about his then-church Mars Hill Bible Church in Grand Rapids, Mich. In the early 2000s, Bell was an evangelical luminary and the poster boy for cool Christianity (“he puts the hip in discipleship,” wrote Andy Crouch).

Since then, Bell has quit pastoring, moved to California, palled around with Oprah Winfrey and become anathematized by many evangelicals on account of his evolving views on hell, gay marriage and “zimzum” theology. In the last five years, Bell went from megachurch pastor to no longer attending organized church at all.

Then there is Mark Driscoll, who was also once a pastor of a hip megachurch named Mars Hill (Seattle). Driscoll was the shock jock of the cool-church pastors and his brazen penchant for controversy eventually (perhaps unsurprisingly) led to his undoing.

After scandals mounted — plagiarism, manipulating book bestseller lists, vulgar online rants — Driscoll eventually resigned from his church in 2014. His resignation was quickly followed by the disbanding of the 15 campuses of Mars Hill Church, a church that in the span of two years went from being the third-fastest growing large church in the country to being dissolved.

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Can hipster Christianity save churches from decline?

By Brett McCracken

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Of course, for all the stories of the flameouts of fashionable churches and hip pastors, there are counterexamples that suggest a staying power for some forms of cool Christianity.

The Hillsong movement is perhaps the best example. Founded in Australia in 1983, Hillsong Church now has congregations in most of the world's hippest cities, including London, Paris, Stockholm, Barcelona, Cape Town and Buenos Aires.

Hillsong also spawned a chart-topping music enterprise and a soon-to-be-released film. The church's popular New York City location, and particularly its tattooed, adored-by-Bieber pastor Carl Lentz, have become the media's new face of hipster Christianity.

A profile in *Details* described Hillsong NYC as "a destination for the in crowd," and said Lentz "conveys a hip, iconoclastic image: religion in a designer wrapper." *Vice* described the church as "the BuzzFeed of Christianity," noting Lentz's "PR-friendly" message and avoidance of the parts of the Bible that might offend people.

But is avoidance of potentially offensive topics (refusing to publicly comment on the church's stance on same-sex marriage, for example) really a sustainable path forward for churches like Hillsong? Putting on a fashionable face may bring in energetic crowds in the short term, but in my experience a church's honesty about the cost of discipleship is what grows people in the long term. I'm convinced that as culture changes and the values of Christianity become more marginalized, the church's relevance becomes even more prominent as she provides a refreshing alternative to, rather than uncritical affirmation of, society's prevailing values.

Christianity's true relevance lies not in the gospel's comfortable trendiness but in its uncomfortable transcendence, as a truth with the power to rebuff, renew and restore wayward humanity as every epoch in history.

"If we are interested in Christianity in any sort of serious way, it is not because it's easy or trendy or popular," I previously wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*. "It's because Jesus himself is appealing, and what he says rings true. It's because the world we inhabit is utterly phony, ephemeral, narcissistic, image-obsessed and sex-drenched—and we want an alternative. It's not because we want more of the same."

An e-mail I received a few weeks ago from a reader — a self-described "lapsed, lazy, backsliding and confused" Christian — reinforces the idea that we don't want church to mirror our messy lives. He described his desire for a community that challenges rather than "cosily affirms" him and provides a refuge from rather than a mirror to the world.

"I may be someone who cusses from time to time myself, who gets drunk, who has done lots of things I shouldn't have done (and still do), but that doesn't mean I want to be seeing those things where I (very occasionally) worship," he wrote. "The point of church and faith is that they are sanctuaries from ourselves, they are places where we can lay it all down and know that God hears us, that he forgives us, and that we are only saved by his grace."

Further time will tell whether the legacy of the "hipster Christianity" phenomenon will be one of decline or revival for churches. It could be that in certain parts of the world, and particularly in cities, cool churches are exactly what is needed to inject life into stagnant tradition.

But my guess is that sooner rather than later it will become clear that what people want from church is something different than what is offered on the pages of *Vogue* or the streets of Brooklyn.

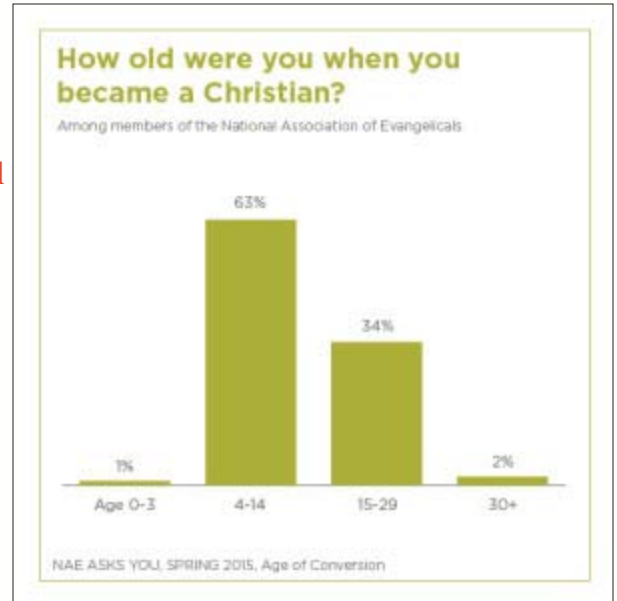
When Americans Become Christians

Thirteen is the average age that members of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) became Christians, according to the NAE's spring poll. The median age when NAE members became Christians is 11.

Evangelicals believe that salvation is made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. Each person is invited to accept God's forgiveness, which is freely offered to all who believe.

The majority of the respondents (63 percent) accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord while they were 4-14 years old, in what is known as the 4/14 Window.

The 4/14 Window describes the opportunity for evangelization within the 4-14 age range, suggesting that most people who become Christians do so during those ages. A 2004 Barna Group study indicated that nearly half of all Americans who accept Jesus Christ as their Savior do so before reaching the age of 13 (43 percent), and that two out of three born again Christians (64 percent) made that commitment to Christ before their 18th birthday.



Responses of the NAE Asks You poll ranged from six weeks old to 50 years old. The NAE member with the six-week old conversion noted that his tradition holds to baptismal regeneration, which links salvation to the rite of baptism. The person who came to Christ at 50 was also baptized as an infant, but said that he fell away for many years, became a Christian later in life, and now serves as a pastor.

One member said, "I made my personal public profession of faith upon my baptism at age 19; however, as the great theologian, T.F. Torrance put it: 'I was saved about 2,000 years ago in the death and resurrection of Jesus.'"

Another survey participant, who became a Christian at age 9, described his decision as "clear, heartfelt, beyond cerebral assent, life-defining."

While the poll revealed a few denominational distinctives regarding salvation, comments provided by NAE members demonstrated the unique ways in which individuals come to saving faith.

Some became Christians through the ministry of the Good News Club, InterVarsity, Vacation Bible Schools and revivals. Several people identified the specific place of their conversion from the kitchen table or grandmother's home to the campfire of a Christian camp or altar of a local church. Many noted the family member, pastor or friend who led them to the Lord. And there are some who can not recall a specific date or place, echoing one respondent: "I can't remember a time in my life where I did not identify as a Christian."

7 Encouraging Bible Verses About God's Strength

by Richard Thompson

When we face insurmountable challenges, we can turn to the all-powerful Creator God. His strength and renewal can help us face our fears and do the impossible.

7 Encouraging Bible Verses About God's Strength Psalm 27:1
 "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

Read more about this verse.

Psalm 37:39
 "But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in time of trouble."

Psalm 138:3
 "In the day when I cried out, You answered me, and made me bold with strength in my soul."

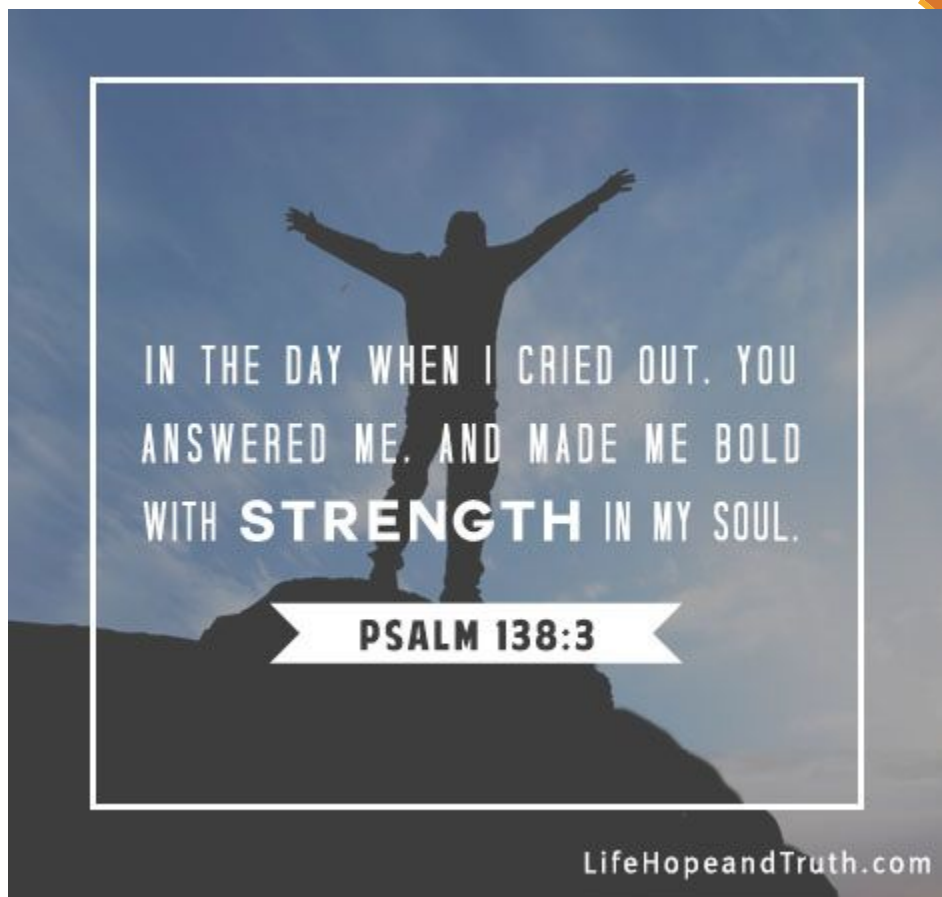
Matthew 19:26
 "But Jesus looked at them and said to them, 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'"

2 Corinthians 4:16
 "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day."

Philippians 4:13
 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

2 Timothy 1:7
 "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

<http://lifehopeandtruth.com/bible/bible-study/encouraging-bible-verses/encouraging-bible-verses-about-gods-strength/>



Six Things To Do after the Supreme Court Decision on Gay Marriage...Now is not the time to sulk.



Mark Galli
JUNE 26, 2015

*Mark Galli is editor
of
Christianity Today.*

*Article image by
Mark Fischer.*



We lost this one. We and many others made the case to our culture that traditional marriage is God's good design, that this institution, embodied by a man and a woman joining together, leads to social flourishing. But our culture is not convinced. Much to our disappointment, it is now the law of the land to permit other forms of "marriage."

The temptation is to go off and sulk in our holy corner. Or to dig in our heels and fight harder. Or to lash out in anger. Or to despair. We can do better. Like taking to heart especially the Beatitudes:

The temptation is to go off and sulk in our holy corner. Or to dig in our heels and fight harder. Or to lash out in anger. Or to despair. We can do better.

Rejoice. Not in the decision, of course, but "Rejoice in the Lord always," says Paul, "again I say rejoice." And elsewhere, "Give thanks to God in all circumstances." And this paraphrase: "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, or prevail against you in the public square because of me. Rejoice and be glad..." (Matt. 5:11).

Rejoice in what exactly? Let's just note the big things: That God has not gone anywhere. That Christ's death and resurrection remain the power of salvation for all. That the gospel still goes forth. That the gates of the Supreme Court or Congress cannot prevail against Christ's church. That there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. That the kingdom will come—and that there remains a great deal of vital work for us to do in the church and in society until that day.

Repent. Another temptation now is to point the finger at the forces—political, social, philosophical, spiritual—arrayed against the church and its moral teaching. Without denying the reality of "principalities and powers" (Eph. 6:12), we do well to ponder this: What actions and attitudes have we imbibed that contribute to our culture's dismissing our ethics? Our homophobia has revealed our fear and prejudice. Biblical inconsistency—our passion to root out sexual sins while relatively indifferent to racism, glut-

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Six Things To Do after the Supreme Court Decision on Gay Marriage...Now is not the time to sulk.

(Continued from page 24)

tony, and other sins—opens us to the charge of hypocrisy. Before we spend too much more time trying to straighten out the American neighborhood, we might get our own house in order. Blessed are the poor in spirit who mourn their sins (Matt. 5:3-4).

Before we spend too much more time trying to straighten out the American neighborhood, we might get our own house in order.

Rethink. This certainly means thinking afresh about what we will and will not do when, for example, a gay married couple, seeking to draw closer to God, shows up in church and wants to get involved. It nearly goes without saying that we will welcome them unconditionally as we would anyone who walks in the door. But what does love look like in this particular instance? How much participation do we encourage before we ask them to adopt the Christian sexual ethic? Much of this depends on a church's tradition and its beliefs about baptism, church membership, eldership, and so forth. But many evangelical churches do not have a denominational tradition to lean on and will need to think through these matters with fresh urgency.

One issue that demands special attention is divorce and remarriage. The Bible has a fair amount to say about marriage (as much or more than it does on homosexuality), and yet the evangelical church has become lax about honoring the marriage vow. We use the word grace in a cheap way to avoid the awkward tough love of church discipline. Such inconsistency has been a major stumbling block for those outside the church. This does not mean we forbid all divorce, nor all remarriage. It does mean we evangelicals need to come to consensus about what constitutes legitimate biblical grounds for divorce and for remarriage, and maybe even create a covenant amongst ourselves that will help us to abide by our convictions on this matter.

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No matter the specific issue, we do well to remember that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness in such matters are blessed and will be filled (Matt. 5:6).

Re-engage. There is much talk today that the American church has been removed from a privileged place in society. We are said to now live "in exile" and "at the margins." To some degree, yes, but then there is this:

A young Burmese man came into our offices a couple of weeks ago. He's been in the U.S. only five months. He said where he lived in Burma, Christians were restricted from building churches and schools. The social and political hostility his faith became so oppressive, he fled his homeland for Indonesia. There he was jailed for seven months because he didn't have legal papers. Thanks to the work of World Relief, he is now in the US, grappling with a new language and culture, while trying to support his family on a near-minimum wage job.

We may find that we have a greater opportunity than ever to build fruitful relationships with those in the LGBT community who have been hostile to all things Christian.

We may find that we have a greater opportunity than ever to build fruitful relationships with those in the LGBT community who have been hostile to all things Christian.

(Continued on page 26)

Six Things To Do after the Supreme Court Decision on Gay Marriage...Now is not the time to sulk.



Mark Galli
JUNE 26, 2015

Mark Galli is editor of Christianity Today.

Article image by Mark Fischer.

(Continued from page 25)

That's exile. We in the US are far from living at the margins. We still live in a society that protects free speech and free assembly, that supports religious freedom, that permits all its citizens to participate in governing at all levels. To be sure, we see serious challenges to these rights and liberties, challenges that require vigilance and hard work in the days ahead. But as it stands, these rights and liberties prevail here as nearly nowhere else in the world. Let's make use of them for the common good—becoming peacemakers (Matt. 5:9) as best we can as we re-engage at all levels of politics.

Reach out. Now that the issue of gay marriage is decided, we may find that we have a greater opportunity than ever to build fruitful relationships with those in the LGBT community who have been hostile to all things Christian. Up to this point, we've been seen as a threat to their political agenda. Now that we have lost on the issue of gay marriage, that threat is removed and it may not be long before we see more willingness to engage us as fellow human beings. We should welcome and even initiate those moments as opportunities to share—in mercy (Matt. 5:7)—the good and beautiful news of the gospel like never before.

Rejoice. Again with Paul we say, rejoice. In particular, we rejoice because of God's call for us at this critical juncture of history. Just as the 4th-century church was given the responsibility to think through the nature of Christ, and the 16th-century church had the task of pondering afresh the relationship of faith and works, so we in our time are called to think through and respond to a host of issues surrounding human sexuality. What we teach and what we do in our time will shape the church's thought and life for generations to come.

This is not just the call of national or church leaders, but of every Christian household. Whether we're lobbying in the halls of Congress to check the spread of sexual trafficking or teaching our children about the precious gift of sex, we are reinforcing and shaping the church's teaching on sexuality. With great responsibility comes great gratitude for being entrusted with so crucial a work.

And so, we step into this uncharted future not with furrowed brow or nervous heart but with humility ("Blessed are the meek...") and confidence ("... for they shall inherit the earth" Matt. 5:5). Christ remains Lord and is leading his church. Blessed are those who know this, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Mark Galli is editor of Christianity Today.

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/june-web-only/6-things-to-do-after-supreme-court-gay-marriage-decision.html?start=2>

Is American Christianity Committing Suicide?



Pete Heck is a speaker, author and teacher who hosts a weekly radio broadcast on WIBC. Follow him @peterheck or email peter@peterheck.com.

Tear down that cross and toss it in the wood chipper because the American church is toast. So goes conventional wisdom after recent revelations from the Pew Research Center, which found that in just 7 years, the percentage of Christians in the United States dropped nearly 8 points.

The news was met with uncontrolled fits of glee from liberal publications like *Salon*, where author Patricia Miller gloated that the benefits from the decline of Christianity would be, “huge.” No doubt the scores of natural disaster victims around the globe who have profited from all the atheist relief trucks rolling in would agree.

But far more annoying than the juvenile taunts of clueless journalists were the myriad of suggestions that poured in from “Christian” thinkers as to how to right the ship, or Ark if you prefer.

The most common refrain echoed repeatedly in both religious and mainstream media was that the church desperately needed to become culturally “relevant” to survive. For some, that term merely implies ministers in jeans and fog machines. I have my own preferences in that regard, but they are just that preferences. My serious objection is reserved for those who intend the cry for “relevance” in a substantive rather than superficial manner. These are the voices calling to deliberately neuter the confrontational truth of Christianity to compromise with the spirit of the age.

Take the recent *Washington Post* oped by Rachel Held Evans. Evans pinpoints what she sees as the real problem when she chastises Christianity for being too “judgmental” and “exclusive.” In other words, she yearns for a church more openminded and inclusive of alternative ideas, beliefs and lifestyles.

I suppose there is some merit to what she is saying if the sole purpose of the church is to fill seats on Sunday mornings. If the mission of the church is nothing more than a relentless ambition to “affirm” everyone from all walks of life, then her counsel is spot on.

After all, speaking the exclusivity of Christ that whole “no man comes to the Father except by me” thing or preaching repentance is not going to make anyone feel affirmed. Everyone can see how painfully unhip such a message is in contemporary American society.

In fact, churches committed to that outdated way of thinking might be accused of acting like some prudish carpenter of antiquity whose obsessive devotion to unpopular notions of right and wrong, good and evil, consigned him to the outskirts of society rather than the mainstream, to preaching from hillsides rather than from behind gold crusted lecterns.

It’s curious, isn’t it? Somehow American Christians convinced themselves that becoming

Is American Christianity Committing Suicide?

(Continued from page 27)

more like Jesus of Nazareth would make them more attractive to the world; but the exact opposite is true. After all, why would they treat us any different than they treated Him? Confusing that reality has the American church all kinds of backwards. If the world adores us for the words we speak, it is not because those words are loving and good. It is because they are cowardly and compromising. And that's the real problem we face in our churches.

I readily admit I don't boast the credentials of so many weighing in on the unfolding collapse of American Christianity. But I humbly submit that if the church wants to stop the bleeding, it should stop worrying about the praise of men and instead seek the applause of heaven. How is that done?

In a recent seminar I was giving to Christian high school seniors about to head to college, I asked them to name 5 figures from Scripture that God used in a powerful way. Their list included Noah, Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, and Jesus. Question for the American church: how relevant to their respective cultures were those guys?

Noah was a laughingstock, Moses was exiled and hated, Elijah had a bounty on his head, John the Baptist lost his head, and Jesus lost a popularity contest with a despised murderer named Barabbas all because they were each committed to speaking a truth that no one in their time wanted to hear.

True Christianity is confrontational. It is an open and courageous rebellion being conducted deep within enemy occupied territory. It is countercultural, not culturally relevant. It alone recognizes that there is no love without truth.

If Christ's church dies in the United States, it's only because it committed suicide on the altar of relevance.

Pete Heck is a speaker, author and teacher who hosts a weekly radio broadcast on WIBC. Follow him @peterheck or email peter@peterheck.com.

"Hearts, Hands and Voices"

August 22, 2015

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Colossians 3:15-17

Europe's Thirty Years' War was fought from 1618 to 1648.

Martin Rinkart was a pastor from 1611 to 1649. During a single year, 1636, Martin Rinkart buried 5,000 people from his community. That's almost 100 every week. Day after day, Rinkart tasted the worst that war could dish up.

The year the plague came to Rinkart's town of Eilenburg, there were four pastors serving the community. One ran away, and Rinkart ended up burying the other two.

Now, if you take a look in a Christian hymnal -- just about any Christian hymnal -- you will find that in the year 1636, Martin Rinkart wrote a prayer for his children. That poem is a hymn now.

It reads,

"Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done, in whom His world rejoices;
Who from our mother's arms hath blessed us on our way,
With countless gifts of love and still is ours today."

To continue to sing songs of thanksgiving when faced with the insecurity of an unknown tomorrow is a most unusual gift. Not everyone has that gift -- not back then, not *now*, especially not now.

Today, our country has many problems. It is the same in our nation's homes. No sooner does one threat pass by that two more are identified. There seems to be no end to the trouble that seems ever ready and eager to insert itself into our days.

If you agree, and if you find yourself being pressed on every side, then maybe it's time to take a page from Rinkart's poem book. Maybe it's time to thank our God. And if you can think of nothing for which to express your appreciation, here is a starter list:

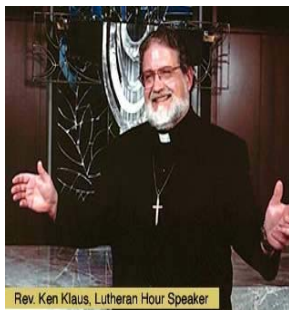
1. Your town doesn't have the plague.
2. You haven't had to bury a few thousand people.
3. You have the Lord by your side at all times.

Now you may not *feel like* thanking the Lord for those gifts. If so, remember, we can still show our appreciation for, as Rinkart put it, the "wondrous things He hath done." Yes, we can thank Him for His Son, for forgiveness and peace, which is given to those who believe. Indeed we can show our appreciation that God's justice and grace have come together in the Person of His Son, our Savior.

THE PRAYER: Dear Lord Jesus, create a new and thankful heart within me. Grant me the grace to acknowledge and appreciate the wondrous things You have done. This I ask in Your Name. Amen.



Pastor Ken Klaus
Speaker Emeritus of [The Lutheran Hour](#)®
Lutheran Hour Ministries



The "Back Page"

It Is Well, With My Soul

It Is Well With My Soul

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

Refrain:

*It is well, (it is well),
With my soul, (with my soul)
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials
should come, Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.*

*My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

*For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life,
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.*

*But Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul.*

*And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall
be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall
descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul!*

This hymn was written after two major traumas in Spafford's life. The first was the great Chicago Fire of October 1871, which ruined him financially (he had been a wealthy businessman). Shortly after, while crossing the Atlantic, all four of Spafford's daughters died in

a collision with another ship. Spafford's wife Anna survived and sent him the now famous telegram, "Saved alone." Several weeks later, as Spafford's own ship passed near the spot where his daughters died, the Holy Spirit inspired these words. They speak to the eternal hope that all believers have, no matter what pain and grief befall them on earth.

The world would have us think that anything we do is all right. If it makes you happy, then do it. If you disagree then you are judgmental, if you speak against, it is hate speech.

Satan would have us believe that the word of God is too judgmental, that it is hate speech. You should expect that from someone who will not submit to the authority of God.

As sinners we must confess our sins and submit ourselves to God's authority to be forgiven and freed. We must do this on a daily basis because we sin on a daily basis. We do so in thought, word and deed.

To think that we can live any way we choose, do anything that makes us feel good and not submit to the authority of God is living in a fantasy.

For Christians, not to say this is wrong, and to not urge these people to turn from

their sinful ways is heresy.

On the judgment day those who feel that they can choose how to live and still enter the gates of heaven will be disappointed. Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the person who does what my Father in heaven wants. (22) Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we force out demons and do many miracles by the power and authority of your name?' (23) Then I will tell them publicly, 'I've never known you. Get away from me, you evil people.'



Steve & Teddy 9/28/1951

Now is the time to stand firm in the faith and now is time to continue to preach the Good News of Jesus the Christ. We must do this with love, not animus.

As public opinion continues to strike against the tenants of our faith, as denominations continue to give in to public opinion, as those around you ridicule and deride you, remember this. Philippians 3:14-15 I run straight toward the goal to win the prize that God's heavenly call offers in Christ Jesus. (15) Whoever has a mature faith should think this way. And if you think differently, God will show you how to think.

We are under attack but we are not alone, if God is for us, who can be against us?

It is well, with my soul

Pastor Steve

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From the Editor

Thanks for all of your contributions. Remember, for this magazine to be a success you must be the reporters and the photographers. I will try and put it together in the best light and we will all praise God in the process.



Is he done yet?