

Banner of Truth

February 2004

The Biblical Significance Of The Word Work

It is “a work of God” that we believe on Christ (Jno. 6:29). We are told to “work out” our own salvation “with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). The faith which “is the victory that overcometh the world” (I Jno. 5:4), is not a dead faith without works (Jas. 2:26) but, rather a “faith which worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6). Finally, we shall be judged by our “works” on the day of judgment (Rev. 20:12-13; 22:12). Our time to work is very limited (Jno. 9:4).

Few four-letter words equal in importance the word **WORK**. Physical life and happiness, and well-being in general are dependent upon it. It is enjoyed by some, hated by others, and avoided by many. When it is evil it may cause untold misery, crime and even death. Finally, though not least important, it is a basis of **Approval** or **Rejection** by God with reference to one's eternal destiny.

Webster defines WORK as, “Physical or mental effort to do or make something; purposeful activity; labor; toil.” This is very close to the definition to the Greek word *ergon*, from which we get our word Work. *Ergon* is the Greek word most often translated Work in the New Testament. It is in the above sense that we shall discuss Work from the Biblical standpoint, which includes both in the secular and spiritual realms. Attention to this subject is so very urgently needed, since the well-being of the church in the days ahead depends upon it, and ultimately the salvation of multitudes of souls now living in darkness, or suffering from a weak faith, which leads to spiritual death. We ask our readers to seriously consider the following discussion, which begins with the following:

SECULAR WORK IS COMMANDED BY GOD

God gave His approval of work when He took Adam, “...and put him into the garden of Eden to dress and to keep it” (Gen. 2:15). When Adam followed his wife in eating of the forbidden tree, God cursed the ground and told Adam, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground...” (Gen. 3:19). The Israelites were commanded, “Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work...” (Ex. 20:9).

In the New Testament we find Paul giving great emphasis to the responsibility to work in the secular realm; in some instances to fulfill spiritual responsibilities. To the Ephesians Paul wrote, “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth” (Eph. 4:28). A problem arose among the Thessalonian Christians in that some would not work. Paul responds to the problem by writing and commanding that, “...in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly...” (2 Thess. 3:6). Though Paul had a right to be supported by the Thessalonians, he reminds them of his own “labor and travail night and day” that he might not have to depend upon them, but that he might be an example for them to follow in work. Then he said:

For even when we were with you, this we commanded you that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and

exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread...And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him that he might be ashamed" (2 Thess. 3:10-12, 14).

The Christian's responsibility to work, to provide for his own needs, is seen in the fact that Paul commanded them to Work, and refers to those who would not work as walking "disorderly." The severity of the sin of failing to work is shown by Paul's admonition to "note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed." Paul's command was by "Our Lord Jesus Christ." Christians are not permitted to be lazy with reference to secular work, much less the spiritual work which God commands. Faithful Christians are not lazy.

WORK – AND PESENT DAY PHILOSOPHY

How often have you heard someone say, "It's sure rough to have to work for a living"? Or, when have you heard someone say, "I'm not afraid of work. I can lie down beside it and go right to sleep." It is evident, however, that much of this thinking is no joke. There is so much effort today to **get out of work**. Some have such an aversion to work that, like Manyard of the Dobbie Gillis TV show, that they almost go into shock when they hear the word work. Over the past few years I've heard a number of people say, "Some would starve before they would work for a living." This is most likely true.

Today's work philosophy discourages rather than encourages hard work. The man who has to work hard is often pitied. Technology is working night and day to invent more "work savers." People are demanding shorter work weeks with more pay for less work. Parents are not teaching their children the virtue of hard and honest work. This, without doubt, contributes to the delinquency of many young people, and sadly, some never grow out of it. In the days when most young people (and nearly all adults) had work to do they knew the pleasure of rest, but it is necessary for one to work in order to enjoy rest. When there is no work there is **restlessness!**

Our government doesn't encourage working for a living. Many have been convinced that it is better not to work. A few days ago a man came by asking for food and money. He was a welfare recipient and had "run short" before his next check. When asked if he had a job, he replied: "I could work some, but if they found out they would cut my check." We are often reminded that people have lost their sense of pride. They no longer mind living off the work of others. In fact, they have learned to like it that way and don't hesitate to let it be know that this is what is expected. They feel entitled to it and not ashamed.

The lessening influence of Christian principles has affected our society and its attitude toward work. Growing Humanism and stark Secularism are undermining Christian principles. The idea that it is a virtue to support one's self by honest toil, when there is some other way to get by, is increasingly looked upon by many as foolishness.

Now that we have discussed the present day philosophy concerning work in the secular realm, due to the effect it is having upon the Lord's church, we shall turn our attention to another area of work, which is of even greater importance, and that is the spiritual realm.

SPIRITUAL WORK COMMANDED BY GOD

Since Paul went so far as to command that "if any would not work [physically], neither should he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10), it should give us some idea as to the consequences of failing to work in the realm of spiritual things.

Paul prayed that the Colossians might, "...walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work..." (Col. 1:10). To Titus Paul said, "...to be ready to every good work? (Tit. 3:1). James shows the value of work when he said, "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of lib-

erty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (Jas. 1:25). An important passage some times overlooked from the standpoint of emphasis upon WORK is Hebrews 10:24-25. “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” An important part of the assembly, then, is to **Provoke** one another unto good **Works**. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to be “stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord...” (I Cor. 15:58).

The **Spiritual Work** commanded by God is limited to that which the all-sufficient word authorizes. A purpose which Paul ascribes to “all scripture” is “That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). This would rule out that work which originates from the commandments of men. Such works would be, according to the Lord, “vain” (Matt. 15:9).

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD THE SPIRITUAL WORK COMMANDED BY GOD

We’ve been dreadfully affected by today’s general attitude toward work. We are trying to get out of work, rather than going about to do the work which is “on every hand” to do. And, we’ve pretty much succeeded in doing so, but that is not to say that we will stand guiltless at the day of judgment.

It looks as we are trying to invent “work-savers” in the church just like people are doing in the secular realm. While it is not wrong to cut the time it takes to do a job efficiently, it is wrong when we attempt to take a shortcut in teaching the gospel in order to convert people. Teaching the gospel, God’s power to save (Rom. 1:16), as we have the responsibility and opportunity to do (2 Tim. 2:2), involves work, much work. But in some quarters efforts are being made to “feed,” “amuse,” “entertain,” or “compromise” them in, rather than going out into the fields of sin to bring them in with the gospel of Christ.

Some have the attitude toward work that most of it can be done by “hired hands.” This generation may come to be known within the church as the “staff” generation. We might say we have a “staff” infection. There is a hired “staff” to do much of what members in general should be doing. Among the “hired” staff a **Personal Worker** is often found. Though he can’t possibly do the personal work for others, he can, perhaps, salve some consciences. I visited with a congregation in Mississippi several years ago and they didn’t beat around the bush with reference to personal work. They said outrightly that they wanted someone to “do their personal work for them.” There was not way I could have done “their” personal work for them, and I didn’t try it.

Many “staffs” include a “youth director” to serve primarily as an athletic and entertainment director. This is a work that the church was never given to do, but is a work which should be done by the home. But some times, the parent’s in effort to “get out of work” expect the church to do it for them. The current drift of the church in this direction indicates that many “love to have it so.” It pleases men.

People are often “hired” to keep the church building, maintain the grounds, even to prepare the Lord’s supper, as serve as treasurer. This is done when there are many members who have no work at all to do. Attending church services may be about all they do. This amounts to the non-use of potential. Perhaps the greatest benefit derived from people doing things such as those above is that it makes them feel that they are “a part” of the congregation and the Lord’s work.

Do you suppose it will ever get to the point that people are “hired” to attend church services? Do you say “never”? Don’t be too sure! This has already been done to a degree. When people are lured by material motives, that falls under the principle of hiring one to do something. A fellow preacher

told me of an instance where bus riders were being given some sort of coupons, which, without the knowledge of the elders, were being redeemed for cash. For a time there was the old “Five dollars under the seat” practice. A church in Northern Alabama gave bus riders “funny money” which could be spent at the old “Country Store” for goodies. I read of a “Pastor” in Florida who was paying \$7.00 per head for “conversions.” When people are enticed to attend services to enjoy entertainment, that is reward or payment in one sense.

We don’t have nearly enough applicants to do the Lord’s work, yet it is such a rewarding work. And, if we “let George do it,” we are the loser. If George does it, George will be rewarded. We will be a fruitless branch. It has been estimated that as few as 10 percent of many congregations do as much as 90 percent of the work of that congregation. I have no reason to doubt those figures. But what a shame! What if 90 percent of the members were workers? Just think of how much that could be done.

If we truly wanted to work, if we saw it as an opportunity as well as responsibility in serving, there would not be much left for “hired hands” to do, would there? Come to think of it, there is some work that we could not “hire” someone to do for us, even if we had the money of Bill Gates or some other billionaire. Those who have billions cannot hire someone to study God’s word for them, to attend the services of the Lord’s church for them, to obey the gospel for them, or to stand in place for them on the great day of the judgment. As individuals we are responsible to God for actions and manner of living. We will not, in the final analysis, be judged as a group, but as individuals (2 Cor. 5:10).

DO WE TRULY MEAN WHAT WE SING ABOUT WORK?

Our attitude toward the work which God has given us the opportunity and responsibility to do is often shown in a commendable way in our song service. It is appropriate that this be done since we are to “teach and admonish” (Col. 3:16) one another in song. But we are to sing with grace in our hearts “to the Lord” as well. Though our attitude toward work may be right in song, is the same attitude demonstrated in ACTION? For example, we sing: “Each day I’ll do a golden deed, by helping those who are in need,” but do we actually work at doing a “golden deed”? We sing, and rightfully so, “I want to be a soul-winner for Jesus every day, He does so much for me...” but the truth of the matter is that many of us have never really worked toward the winning of one single soul for Jesus. We sing, “To the work! to the work! We are servants of God, let us follow the path that our Master has trod” and then do very little “toiling on, toiling on.” I have heard congregations sing with fervency, “Till Jesus comes, we’ll work,” when it was next to impossible to get more than a small minority involved in the Lord’s work.

Does it ever occur to us that can and may sing a lie? If we worked as we sing we are going to do, the church would be on the move just as the Lord intended. The Lord is looking for laborers in His vineyard and “there is work to do on every hand.” The opportunity is there, and opportunity plus ability equal **responsibility**. Those who sing that they want to work, or that they will work, and do not will have to give an account for failing to do so. But, then, those who do not want to work, and do not, will also have to give an account in judgment.

OUR SALVATION DEPENDS ON WORK

Not upon “works of the law” or works of “wickedness,” nor “our works” in the sense of works of our own devising, but upon the work our Lord has given us to do. When Peter was sent to the house of Cornelius he reached the following conclusion: “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Ac. 10:34-35). John saw the dead, “small and great, stand before God” and they were judged “ac-

ording to their works” (Rev. 20:12). Jesus said, ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (Jno. 15:14). Paul says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith” (Eph. 2:8), but that faith must be a faith which **works** (Jas. 2:24, 26). Paul admonished the Corinthians, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (I Cor. 15:5). We are reminded by the writer of Ecclesiastes that “Fearing God and keeping His commandments is the whole duty of man” and that God shall bring every work into judgment...whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:13-14).

IN THE KINGDOM IS THE PLACE TO WORK

Jesus came to earth to build His church, the kingdom (Matt. 16:18-19). He did so at an awful price; the shedding of His blood (Ac. 20:28). Consequently, His church is of the utmost importance. So important, in fact, that salvation is to be found only in it and not outside it. Christ is not only the “head” of “the body, the church” (Col. 1:18), He is also the “Savior of the body” (Eph. 5:23). How then, can men say the church is not important, yea, even non-essential to salvation? But men say so by multitudes.

Since salvation is “in Christ” (2 Tim. 2:10), and since to be “in Christ” is to be in “the church, which is his body” (Eph. 1:22-23), it is then necessary to **work** in the church. Paul said our labor is “not in vain in the Lord.” Paul says of Christ that He “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit. 2:14).

Millions of people in the denominational world engage in work of a religious nature, thinking it will be rewarded. But such work is “vain” because it is not being done “in Christ” or in His body, the church. Perhaps one of the most deadly misunderstandings of people who claim to be Christians is that they do not understand that “in Christ” is the only place where serving in the spiritual real will be rewarded by our Lord.

It is most interesting to search the New Testament and note the many blessings which are to be had in that relationship which is described as “in Christ.” To put it in a nutshell, Paul speaks of “the salvation which is in Christ Jesus...” (2 Tim. 2:10). Just think, this is what serving Christ is all about. In Ephesians 1:3, Paul tells us that God has blessed us “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places [things] in Christ.” In the first 13 verses in Ephesians 1, Paul refers to at least ten benefits available “in Christ.” These include an “inheritance,” and “redemption,” and several others.

Since all these benefits are available “in Christ,” shouldn’t it be of great interest as to **how** people get “in Christ”? Notwithstanding the great lack of understanding relative to this question, it is clearly revealed in God’s word. Salvation involves faith in God (Heb. 11:6); Repentance of sin (Ac. 17:30); Confession of faith in Christ (Rom. 10:10), and baptism (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38), and others. It is **only** by the act of baptism that one gets into Christ. This is clearly shown. Paul said, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death?” (Rom. 6:3). That people are “baptized into Christ” is also made equally clear in Paul’s statement to the Galatians. “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27). God’s word tells of no other way to get into Christ. Why do people refuse?

A LIMITED TIME IN WHICH TO WORK

Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Lk. 19:10) but he had a limited time in which to work. He said, “I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work” (Jno. 9:4). This should serve as a reminder to us that our “night” is coming when we will no longer have an opportunity to work. Our time is so limited, even if we should live to a hundred. To be realistic about the matter, our “night” could be only hours away. Some day, that will be true! We don’t have a lease on life for any period in the future. When we think of this, Paul’s statement to the

Corinthians, “behold, now is the accepted time; behold; now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2), should become much more meaningful to us.

What a sad day it will be at the judgment for those who have had a great opportunity to work for the Lord in his vineyard but chose not to do so!

- Walter W. Pigg

HOLDING UP THE PREACHER’S HANDS

When Amalek fought with Israel in Rephidim, Moses told Joshua to choose men to fight with Amalek. Moses said he would stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in his hand. While Joshua carried out his orders and fought with Amalek, Moses, Aaron, and Hur went to the top of the hill. During the battle when Moses held up his hand Israel prevailed, but when he let down his hand Amalek prevailed. “But Moses’ hands were heavy; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were until the going down of the sun” (Ex. 17:12). Moses’ hands being **held up** resulted in victory. “And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword” (Ex. 17:13).

The expression, to “hold up one’s hands” has come to mean support, encouragement, and cooperation in a particular endeavor. It is in this sense that we set forth the following relative to Holding Up The Preacher’s Hands.

There is no question but that there is no more important work than that of a gospel preacher, as he proclaims the “unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8), which is the gospel, God’s power unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). Paul shows the essentiality of preaching when he asks: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard; and how shall they hear without a preacher” (Rom. 10:14). Paul quotes Isaiah to emphasize the preacher’s noble work, “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things” (Rom. 10:15).

If the faithful and true gospel preacher is to accomplish the greatest good through his divine calling **His hands must be held up**, yea, even “steaded” until the “going down of the sun” when his work is ended. When the preacher’s hands are not help up his work is hindered; individual Christians are affected, and congregations as a whole fail to serve in the greatest way by being edified and seeking the lost. The harm that is done cannot be measured in terms of material things, since even one soul is worth more than all the world (Matt. 16:26). The work of the church cannot be carried out to the fullest without the preacher.

Before we consider some ways by which the preacher’s hands may be held up, we wish to emphasize the fact that not every preacher’s hands should be held up. And some preacher’s hands cannot be held up because of the unwillingness of the preacher. We certainly do not wish to minimize the preacher’s responsibility in this respect.

Only preachers who are so dedicated that they are “set for defense of the gospel” (Phil. 1:17), and willing to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3) are worthy of having their hands held up by way of support and encouragement. Those who “transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ...” (2 Jno. 9) do not lead people to God and the salvation which is “in Christ.” “Many false prophets are gone out into the world” (I Jno. 4:1) and none of these should have his hands help up.

Some preacher’s hands cannot be held up because their heart is not in preaching God’s word.

Some years ago one preacher of considerable ability, quit preaching to cut wood for a living. One time a preacher of several years came by my office — not to discuss spiritual things or the work of a preacher, but to sell insurance. He had left the pulpit for secular work. Other preachers whom I have known threw in the towel because they faced some obstacles; so much unlike the apostle Paul who endured so much without giving up. Some are simply not characterized by devotion like Paul's, of which he spoke. "For necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe us unto me, if I preach not the gospel" (I Cor. 9:16).

Now that I have been preaching fifty years, I can see some ways in which a preacher's work can be encouraged, and more accomplished in the Lord's cause. At the same time, I can see some ways by which the preacher's work is hindered, which are not his own fault. Personally, I believe there should be more discussion of the preacher's work, just as there should be more discussion of the work of elders, deacons, and Bible class teachers. Some times a beginning preacher becomes discouraged, even to the point of giving up, due to the fact that the work of the preacher was not understood as it should have been. This may some times occur because the preacher was not properly taught by those of many years of experience.

SOME WAYS BY WHICH THE PREACHER'S HANDS MAY BE HELD UP

This is not intended to be an exhaustive study of the subject. Therefore, not everything one might think of on the subject will be mentioned. But the following we believe to be worth discussing.

1. **RESPECT HIM FOR HIS WORK.** No preacher should be exalted as is done by wearing religious titles such as "Reverend," "Most Reverend," "Father," etc. Neither should a preacher manifest an ostentatious disposition of proudness and haughtiness. But the faithful gospel preacher of the gospel should be esteemed for his work. There is no one, regardless of his wealth, education, notoriety, or political influence that is doing a more important work than that of the preacher. Yet, some times the preacher of the gospel is looked down upon by the haughty and proud with evident disrespect. Most preachers of many years can testify to this. A number of preachers make sacrifices in preaching that many others would not make. They may not have a place to live of their own, and their work may end virtually without notice. Those who go to foreign countries may miss family and friends, as well as the many conveniences we enjoy at home.

2. **STAND BY HIM IN THE PREACHING OF THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD.** When the whole truth is preached, without fear or favor, there will be some opposition. It is most encouraging to a preacher to know that others love the truth and are willing to uphold and defend it, and stand by the preacher as a proclaimer of the truth. What an opportunity Godly elders have to hold up the hands of the preacher when he preaches the truth. Disgruntled, cantankerous, and compromising members should never be allowed to interfere with the preacher's work by allowing them to have their way simply because brethren do not have the fortitude to stand up to such people. I've never been told not to preach on certain subjects, but I've known preachers who were. I have been fired for what I preached, and what I preached wasn't error. It was just things the people did not like.

3. **GIVE EVERY POSSIBLE OPPORTUNITY TO PREACH THE WORD.** The primary work of a preacher is to "preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). When there is such a great need for the truth (sound doctrine) to be preached, it is discouraging to the faithful preacher to be kept "at home" virtually all the time, when he has the opportunity to preach in other places as well. Of course, there must be some limit as to how much a preacher can be away from his own work and do justice. But a soul won or strengthened in the faith at another place is also doing the Lord's work. We shouldn't be selfish with the truth.

4. **EXTEND TO HIM HOSPITALITY.** It is not all that unusual for a preacher not to be invited into the homes of the members where he preaches. Preachers may be expected to be hospitable by those who are inhospitable. Some years ago I attended a personal work study at another congregation conducted by a visiting preacher. The visiting preacher had his eight year old son with him. As I talked with the preacher (nearly all the members had gone home) his son asked: "Daddy, where are we going to stay tonight?" His dad answered, "We may sleep in the station wagon." The preacher and his son were invited to our house to spend the night, and we enjoyed the company greatly. No provisions of any kind had been made for the preacher and his son, by the congregation which had him come and conduct the personal work study. When a congregation's hospitality stops at the church grounds, the preacher's hands are not being held up!

5. **SUPPORT HIM FINANCIALLY IN A REASONABLE WAY.** There is too much truth to the old statement that, "A preacher only has to worry about being humble, the brethren will keep him poor." Though the faithful preacher cannot put his trust in "treasures upon earth," as members often do, he is entitled to "live of the gospel" (I Cor. 9:14). Not only do preachers have living expenses like everyone else, it is often the case that their expenses are greater than the average member. Preachers often live with a sense of insecurity since they do not own a house, and may have to move without much notice. I know about this since Naomi and I have experienced it. Few preachers have "side benefits" such as health insurance, retirement, overtime pay, or long paid vacations, that many workers have in our time. I remember being asked to work with a congregation in Missouri, and the financial support offered would not have in any sense of the term provided my wife and I with decent living. When I suggested that we could not possibly live on the amount of support, I was told: "Oh, it will be a work of faith." But "faith" doesn't pay the bills.

With respect to the preacher's financial support, a growing number of preachers are not worthy of any support. Instead of being an asset they are a detriment to the cause of Christ. Some preachers seem to be out for the money, and for a price they will give the people what they want, when what they want is not the whole truth. Some of our higher paid preachers are paid more for preaching error than some faithful brethren are paid when preaching only the truth, and nothing but the truth.

6. **CONSIDER HIM A WORKER "WITH YOU" AND NOT "FOR YOU."** The preacher and the congregation should be "laborers together" as they go about doing the Lord's will. No preacher is encouraged when he is looked upon simply as a "hired hand" to do the congregation's work. In some cases he may have several "bosses" to whom, they feel, he should be accountable. I grew up on a little "two horse farm" in southern, middle Tennessee. When plowing with a mule, I had two "plow-lines" with which to guide the mule. I've known of situations where it seemed that a number of brethren had in their hands "plow-lines" with which to guide the mule, or preacher. This in no way has reference to true elders who are to act as overseers of the flock. No one preacher can do the work a congregation has to do, and even if he could, the members would lose their reward for having failed to serve. I recall one incident when I asked for volunteers to address the church bulletins. One of the elders (?) said, "Let the preacher do it. That's what he is paid for."

7. **DON'T BURDEN HIM WITH TRIVIAL MATTERS.** Many a preacher has been hindered in his work because he has been saddled with all sorts of jobs which should be done by the members, who often do little more than attend church services. The preacher should not be asked to "leave the word of God and serve tables" (Ac. 6:2), but he is some times made a "handy man" to take care of a variety of things, including seeing after a number of things at the church building. Visiting the sick is not a trivial matter, and the preacher should certainly engage in this as opportunity permits, but he is not a "hired visitor" to do the visiting that others should do for themselves. It is unfortunate, but some feel the preacher should do their visiting for them. But if the Bible authorizes the use of a

proxy to do our personal duties, I don't know of it.

8. DON'T OVERLY PRAISE THE PREACHER. When preachers, or others, deserve to be commended, they should be. By the same token, when commendation is not deserved it should not be offered. And, at no time should flattery be used as true commendation. It seems that when preachers are overly praised, it can cause them to have "the bighead." This can cause one to make an obnoxious fool of himself, and thereby greatly damage his work. This seems to have happened to some I've known. At our very best, there is still room for improvement. When one thinks he knows it all, he has another though coming, sooner or later.

The preacher's work is not easy, but it is very much worthwhile. Few are they who are willing to give themselves to the work of preaching. But the preacher's work can be made more enjoyable and effective, when his hands are held up by the members of the church. Preachers often become discouraged in their work, some to such an extent that they cannot bear it, when it ought not to be so. Hard times have fallen upon the Lord's church for several years now, and the outcome over the next several years will be largely determined by the extent to which the hands of faithful, loyal and true preachers of the gospel are held up.

Younger and older brethren who have the potential of proclaiming God's word, have you given serious thought to the God-approved use of your talents? We've never seen a time when the need for faithful brethren to "Preach the word" was greater than now. Even men who have retired could in many cases preach. There is a very special need for preachers to preach for small congregations which are not able to fully support someone to work with them on a full-time basis. I do not know of a greater way by which a man could show his true love for the Lord than by preaching. Do you?
- Editor

Fourth Annual Banner of Truth Lectures Murray, KY, June 14-17, 2004

Theme: *God's Inspired Word* — A Discussion of Scriptural Passages

Sponsored by: Dexter & Hickory Grove Churches of Christ

Location: *Curriss Center, M.S.U. Campus, Third Floor Theater*

Monday, June 14

- 10:00 a.m. Alan Adams — God's Inspired Word — 2 Tim. 3:16-17
- 11:00 a.m. Gilbert Gough — He That Is Greatest — Matt. 23:8-12
- 1:30 p.m. Lindon Ferguson — Taking Up The Cross of Christ — Matt. 26:24-27
- 2:30 p.m. Michael Willey — Sin, A Transgression Of God's Law — 1 John 3:4
- 3:30 p.m. Gilbert Gough — Leave Father & Mother and Cleave to His Wife — Matt. 19:4-6
- 7:00 p.m. Roger Campbell — The Same Commit To Faithful Men — 2 Tim. 2:2
- 8:00 p.m. Ken Burleson — The Doctrine of Christ — 2 John 9-11

Tuesday, June 15

- 10:00 a.m. Harold Irvan — Continuing Daily With One Accord — Acts 2:46-47
- 11:00 a.m. Jeff Bates — Showing Ourselves Approved Unto God — 2 Tim. 2:15
- 1:30 p.m. Roger Campbell — Example Of Believers On Mission Field — I Tim. 4:12-13
- 2:30 p.m. Leon Cole — Fellowship And Works Of Darkness — Eph. 5:11

- 3:30 p.m. Jimmy Bates — Departing From The Faith — I Tim. 4:1-3
 7:00 p.m. Richard Guill — God's Role For Women — I Tim. 2:11-14; I Cor. 14:34
 8:00 p.m. Paul Curless — Watching For Our Souls — Heb. 13:17

Wednesday, June 16

- 10:00 a.m. Tim Hester — Always Abounding In The Work Of The Lord — I Cor. 15:58
 11:00 a.m. Richard Guill — The Spirit Of Truth Is Come — John 16:13
 1:30 p.m. Ken Burleson — Working Out Your Own Salvation — Phil. 2:12-16
 2:30 p.m. Richard Adams — The Church, The Pillar And Ground Of Truth — I Tim. 3:15
 3:30 p.m. David Lemmons — Go Into All The World — Mark 16:15-16
 7:00 p.m. Alan Adams — Laborers Together With God — I Cor. 3:6-10
 8:00 p.m. Roger Scully — Fields White Already To Harvest — John 4:34-36

Thursday, June 17

- 10:00 a.m. Walter W. Pigg — Enemies Of The Cross Of Christ — Phil. 3:18
 11:00 a.m. Roger Scully — Doing That Which Is Our Duty To Do — Luke 17:7-10
 1:30 p.m. Don Greene — Christ, The Author Of Eternal Salvation — Heb. 5:8-9
 2:30 p.m. Rick Knoll — The Love Of God – Keeping His Commandments — I John 5:3
 3:30 p.m. Joe Spangler — Converting Erring Brethren — James 5:19-20
 7:00 p.m. Lenard Hogan — When The Elements Melt With Fervent Heat — 2 Peter 3:10-14
 8:00 p.m. Graland Robinson — A Crown Laid Up For Me — 2 Tim. 4:6-8

Note: This is a tentative schedule. Some changes may have to be made. Speakers will not be limited to the passages noted, but may enlarge upon the subjects assigned. – Editor

Mel Gibson and “*The Passion of Christ*”

For several days now (it's now Feb. 26) a great part of the national news has included reports about the movie, *The Passion of Christ*, produced by Mel Gibson. The response to the movie has been both very positive and very negative, but more positive.

I have not seen the movie and, therefore, cannot speak from the standpoint of first hand knowledge with regard to its contents. But I have noted some of the attitudes evidenced by both sides of the controversy. A number of religious films have been produced in the past, but none seem to have gotten the attention of this one. Religious films of the past have in many cases been far from realistic and have included things which were in no sense according to the biblical account. From the many reports I have heard, *The Passion of Christ* is far different. It is said to be one of the most realistic films about The Passion, or suffering of Christ, ever produced.

It is interesting to note the tenor of the criticism offered by different groups. 1) The Jews are up in arms because they say it depicts the Jews as being guilty in Christ's crucifixion. 2) Some Catholics are critics, evidently because they want to compromise the facts in the case. A few decades ago the Catholic hierarchy made a pronouncement that the Jews were not guilty in the crucifixion. Since Catholics are taught not to question anything they are told, we can see why some would believe the Jews weren't guilty. 3) The growing number of secularists oppose the movie simply because it acknowledges the existence of God and Christ, and the sacrifice made by Christ to make the salvation of man possible. The secularists, who are bent on removing every vestige of God's influence from our society, are haters of God. It is frightening at the influence being exerted in political circles to do away with God, and allow a purely secular state to take control of our society.

Those who call themselves Christians are for the most part heralding the film as a great means of calling to the attention of people what Christ has done for man, and the terrible suffering He endured to make this great blessing possible.

One of the most bold and daring and lack-of-the-facts-criticism is that the Jews were not guilty in the crucifixion of Christ. This is to completely deny God's inspired record of what took place. While the Romans carried out the actual crucifixion, the question of "Who was responsible for the deed?" must be answered. That question is answered as clearly as could be in God's word. Note some of what is said.

The words spoken by Peter, as recorded in Acts 2, were spoken as the Spirit directed. Note what Peter said relative to the crucifixion of Christ: "Ye men of Israel [Jews], ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (v. 23). Again, Peter said to the Jews, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ" (v. 36).

Why would it be said that the Jews crucified Christ when the Romans did the actual deed? They were behind it and, therefore, guilty. Judas, [a Jew] betrayed Christ with a kiss (Matt. 26-47-49). The "great multitude" which came with "swords and staves" included the "chief priests and elders." The chief priests and elders, and all the council sought false witnesses against Jesus, to put him to death (Matt. 26:59). "The chief priests and elders [Jews] persuaded the multitude that they should ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus" (Matt. 27:20).

Pilate, the Roman Governor, asks the Jews, "What evil hath he [Jesus] done?" "But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified" (v. 23). It was only that the Roman governor wanted to pacify the Jews that he allowed Jesus to be crucified.

Any person who believes God's word to be true, and who has even a half-way knowledge of the New Testament, will acknowledge that the Jews "crucified Christ" in the sense of being responsible for the action. The Jews, not the Romans, were the ones who would not stop until they accomplished their objective of crucifying our Lord.

Should Christians see the movie? I have not, but I likely will. I am thankful that such a movie was made. It is an attempt to draw the attention of people to Jesus and the spiritual realm. This is needed in the face of all the efforts to completely do away with God and His influence. I do not agree with Mel Gibson's religion, a Catholic, but he has had the conviction to stand up for belief in God when the number of critics of God's existence is growing. - Editor

SUBJECTING THE SHEEP TO WOLVES

Victor M. Eskew

Wolves to the Jews who lived in Palestine were a very real enemy. As the day closed and the dusk turned to darkness, the wolf would begin to circle the flock of sheep. His eyes roamed on the flock., looking for the weak and wayward. When the time was right, he would strike with a deadly blow. Within seconds, the innocent sheep could be brought to a bloody and violent death.

The shepherds of Israel were well aware of the threat to the flock. When the night drew nigh, they sought out an overlook. Their eyes constantly combed the sheep. At the first hint of the presence of the wolf, they readied themselves. They were willing to risk all to keep the wolves out of the sheepfold.

This physical reality was used to describe the church, her leaders, and her enemies in God's

Word. John 10 contains Jesus' marvelous use of these figures. He refers to Himself as "the good shepherd" (Jno. 10:11, 14). The disciples are called "the sheep" and "the sheepfold." (Jno. 10:1-3). In John 10:12, He mentions the wolf, "and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep."

In the twenty-first century, we do not have an appreciation for those figures like those who lived in the first century. We do not go out into the fields and see bloody, mangled bodies of sheep, and the death caused by wolves. Those people did. They got Jesus' simple message. Division, destruction, and death would be the result of a wolf's entering to the spiritual flock of God. Her leaders, the shepherds of the flock, must be on constant vigil. When the wolf is posed to strike, they must strike first. The shepherd must do all in his power to keep the sheep safe. The shepherd's motto should be: "No wolf will enter in, not on my watch!"

Because of our lack of appreciation for these vivid Bible figures, some churches are allowing the innocent sheep of their fold to be subject to wolves. Jesus said the wolves are false teachers. He also warned: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matt. 7:15). If such teachers are allowed into congregations, they will ultimately devour the sheep. To deny this is to deny a very basic spiritual teaching.

One wolf that has been unleashed on many churches today is a man named Rick Warren. Mr. Warren is the "pastor" of the Saddleback Community Church in Orange County, California. He is also a very popular author. His book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, has become a blueprint for "church growth" in churches of all flavors. His most recent book is entitled, *The Purpose Driven Life*. In this book, Mr. Warren notes that each person has been created by God for a purpose. Most, however, do not know what this purpose really is. His 40-day spiritual journey is supposed to help his readers answer the question: "What on earth am I here for?" This 40-day challenge has intrigued many congregations. These congregations have used the book among both the young and old alike. The Southwest Church of Christ is the most recent church in our area to announce its use. They piloted the book among the teens. At the present time, they are studying the book as a congregation.

As we stated in the above paragraph, Mr. Warren is a wolf, a wolf in sheep's clothing. The sheep's clothing fools many: 1) He calls himself a Christian. 2) He is a preacher for a large, growing church in California. 3) He uses a lot of Bible quotations in his teachings. 4) He is a moral man. 5) He is very gifted as a writer. 6) He appears to be very successful. His books are touching thousands of lives. The façade has caused some to overlook the fact that he is a wolf. Such a statement will anger some, but let's explain what we mean.

First, Mr. Warren is not a Christian. He professes a belief in Christ, but he has not submitted himself to the gospel plan of salvation. He does not believe that baptism is essential to salvation. Therefore, he has not been immersed into Christ for the forgiveness of his sins. If he has not been baptized properly, he is not saved (Mk. 16:16). If he is not saved, he is not in the church (Acts 2:47). If he is not among "the called out ones," he is still in the world. Those who are in the world are the enemies of God (James 4:4).

Second, Mr. Warren proclaims many doctrines which are contrary to the Scriptures. Let's list a few of his erroneous views found in the book, *The Purpose Driven Life*:

1. "God won't ask about your religious background or doctrinal views. The only thing that will matter is, did you accept what Jesus did for you and did you learn to love and trust him?" p. 34. (See 2 John 9-11).

2. "Wherever you are reading this, I invite you to bow your head and quietly whisper the prayer that will change your eternity: 'Jesus, I believe in you and I receive you.' Go ahead. If you sincerely mean that prayer, congratulations! Welcome to the family of God..." p. 58. (See Acts 22:26).

3. Christians often disagree over the style of music used in worship, passionately defending their preferred style as the most biblical or God-honoring. But there is no biblical style." (p. 5). (See Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19).

4. "To 'worship in truth' means to worship God as he is truly revealed in the Bible." P. 101. (See John 4:24; 17:17).

5. "Baptism doesn't *make* you a member of God's family; only faith in Christ does that. Baptism *shows* you are part of God's family." p. 120. (See John 3:3-5; I Corinthians 12:13).

There are several other aspects of Mr. Warren's book that are false: 1) All one does in life is worship. 2) A direct working of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian. 3) The constant use of the word "community" to describe the church. 4) Lessons on how to give testimonials.

The book is very reader friendly. It also has some good material in it. Again, this is part of the sheep's clothing. The errors in the book are the teeth of the wolf. Subjecting the sheep to such things will only cause them to be torn to pieces. Sadly, some have allowed the wolf into the fold of God. Damages will be, and are, being felt. Perverted minds and lost souls will be part of the fallout. The shepherds who allow the wolf into their flock will give an account. The Chief Shepherd will not be well-pleased.

- - 9664 Highway 49B, Brookland, AR 72417

Editor's Note: It's sad that even brethren are opting for man-made religion as they deny our LORD!

Baptist and Baptism

Generally, those of the Baptist Church do not believe that baptism is essential to salvation. They do believe, however, that baptism (immersion) is necessary for one to be a member of the Baptist Church. Some times people remark that, "More is required to become a member of the Baptist Church that is required to be saved." This is not just an idle remark, there is truth in that conclusion.

Although Baptist generally do not believe that baptism is essential to salvation in the first place, they often try to show that those who do are wrong in their belief. Rather than base their conclusion on the teaching of the New Testament, they may resort to the old standby of an emotional appeal.

Note the following typical effort to appeal to the emotions rather than Bible teaching. It goes something like the following: "Now just suppose a person believes in Christ and has repented of sins. But on the way to be baptized, there is an automobile wreck and the person is killed before being baptized. Do you mean to say that that person would not be saved?" I remember a member of the church who said he believed the person would have been saved.

In response to that emotion question, it is not a matter of what one "believes," but rather a matter of what God's word teaches. Those who make their case on subjectivism or feeling, rather than the teaching of God's objective word, will never come up with the right answer. We shall be judged by the words of Christ (Jno. 12:48), not by our "feeling."

Brother Marshal Keeble had a most excellent response to the Baptist appeal to emotions. Brother Keeble put it this way: "Here is a young couple who are in love, so much so that they plan to get married. All things are made ready and they proceed to the courthouse where the marriage will take place. But on their way, there is an automobile accident, and the young couple are killed. WERE THEY MARRIED?"

Even Baptist are in many cases becoming much more far-out than they used to be. Controversy is an ongoing matter within the Baptist Church. It involves conservatism and liberalism. Some time ago former President Carter aligned himself with the more liberal side among Baptist. As society becomes more liberal, many want to be on that wagon. – Editor

Sound Full-Time Preacher Wanted Now

The Duluth church of Christ, a congregation of about 18 members is in need of a full-time preacher. The congregation owns the building, and also a three bedroom home, located near the church building. References will be furnished if required. Resumes and/or information requests may be sent to: Duluth church of Christ, Preacher Search Committee, 2344 Nanticoke St. Duluth, MN 55811. E-mail to: Ellis Thompson, at the following address: githompson@charter.net

Purpose of the BOT Lectures

The Banner of Truth Lectures, June 14-17, 2004, do have an important purpose. Below we have noted some of the things involved in that purpose, trusting that some will be encouraged to attend and avail themselves of those most valuable benefits to be offered.

1. To teach and uphold the truth which makes men free (Jno. 8:32).
2. To warn and speak out against enemies of the truth, as was often done in New Testament times.
3. To help keep people informed as to the present state of the church, and some of the problems to expect. The church is changing rapidly!
4. The lectures are not only for preachers and their wives. In addition to preachers, others can benefit greatly. Elders, deacons, Bible class teachers, and all who want to grow in the one faith.
5. People who would not want to attend the lectures: We realize that some will have no desire to attend. That would include those who:
 - a. Don't want to be built up in the faith by the excellent, scriptural lessons to be delivered.
 - b. Don't believe false teachers should be withstood, as they were in New Testament times.
 - c. Don't want their conscience to be disturbed by encouragement to serve God faithfully.

READERS' RESPONSE

“Just a note to let you know my address has changed and also, to say how much I enjoy receiving BOT. I appreciate your love for the Lord, his truth, and the souls of men. Keep up the good work. Take care and God bless – **Jeff Grimes.**” – **AL.** (*Thanks for address change- Ed.*)

“Please send us your newsletter – Banner of Truth, please send it to:...God bless you. – **David and Christina Ariellesen.**” – **Denmark.** (*We've added your name to our mailing list. If you know of others who would like to receive Banner of Truth, just let us know. – Editor.*)

“I really enjoy Banner of Truth so much, but I'm so flabbergasted at some of the things those who call themselves God's people come up with! And some of these taught by 'learned brethren in one of our schools.' Seems to be if he were ever learned he has become unlearned. I will enclose a small check to help with expenses. I wish all Christians could read the paper and know how serious the problems have become as more and more congregations espouse false doctrines and far out practices. I'm sending the name and address of good friends who will enjoy your Banner of Truth – **Dorothy H. Stratis.**” – **TN.**

(Some of our schools used to be of great benefit in teaching God's word and encouraging students to put it into practice. But things have changed drastically. It is so sad that 'our schools' have become centers of error of various kinds. Those in control must know better. That being the case, it must be that they just don't care! This must be true of those who are members of the boards that control the schools. There is one way by which we could change the schools — Stop supporting them financially! As long as they get our money, they seemingly could care less about any criticisms, regardless of how justified they may be. Thanks for your help with expenses. We are so thankful for those who make our work possible. – Editor.)

“My name is Daniel Seidelman. I enjoy reading Banner of Truth. It is wonderful that someone is

not afraid to stand for the truth. The reason that I e-mailing you is that I have moved and would like to inform you of my new mailing address. I do not want to miss one of your publications. Thanks again for the truth you spread through your publication – **Daniel Seidelman.**” – **IN.** *(Thank you so much for sending you change of address. We have had as much as \$12 - \$15 in one month for returned mail. – Ed.*

“Just finished reading your December, 2003 article ‘Urgent Questions Which Elders Should Consider.’ You are dead center on target; we appreciate your work and the ‘Banner of Truth.’ As a former elder (currently), son of an elder and grandson of an elder in the Lord’s church I might add one more question to your list. ‘Why do elders, some by their choice and some by their weakness abdicate their role and responsibility to the local evangelist?’ (p. 16)

Even if he is a good man, sound in the faith, it is a failure on their part. But frequently this is the underlying source of many of the problems addressed by the questions you posed – **Bill Schwegler.**” – **LA.** *(You sure hit a nail on its head! There was a case of that very thing in a response I received from a preacher. The questions were addressed to the elders by way of two letters. But no response from the elders! My answer to your question relative to the abdicating of their role and responsibility would be – a weakness in choice and a weakness in responsibility. –Ed.)*

“Greetings. As a former Catholic Altar boy I certainly appreciate your response to this Catholic. Your observations are absolutely correct. Gratefully, we all have freedom of choice. Sadly many ignorant people want choice but how dare you challenge my choice or so far as to point out obvious error. As you stated so well, this man pointed out absolutely no error. Perhaps the only other addition to your letter could have been the words of Jesus, ‘And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not’ (Jno. 8:45). I fear this attitude may be in the church as well — I believe what I believe, but don’t question me about it. It certainly is a rejection of “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (I Pet. 3:15). May god help you stay your course! – **Dean M. Roach.**” – **KY.** *(Your response is especially appreciated since you know what Catholicism is all about. I feel for all the people who will not launch out on their own to learn God’s truth, but rather leave it up to someone else to tell them what to believe. The human mind is hard for me to understand. For example, people often think very sensibly with regard to secular things, but when it comes to religion their whole way of thinking seems to change. It seems rather strange that people will get so stirred up when they are faced with the truth, and they are completely unable justify their criticism other than that it is something they have not been told to believe. Since the judgment is an individual matter, it is to the best interest of an individual not to rely on what someone tells them to believe, and that without evidence. Ed.).*

“Thank you for sending BOT each time. The church here really enjoys reading your sound relevant messages....I would like 30 sent to my home address from now on. Our congregation has grown in recent months, and the 20 copies now seems insufficient. Thank you and may God continue to bless your work! – **Maurice Brown.**” – **IL.** *(It’s good to know the congregation is*

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Visit BOT at David Lemmons’ web at:

<http://www.hcis.net/users/dlemmons/BOTlist.htm>

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