

Six Important Meetings to Mark on Your Calendar

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE: SUPPORTING THE BAPTIST GENERAL CONVENTION OF TEXAS

**April 13, Dallas
 Wilshire Baptist Church
 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.**

- * **George Mason**
 Pastor, Wilshire Baptist Church
- * **Jim Denison**
 Theologian in Residence, BGCT
- * **Albert Reyes**
 President, Buckner Children and Family Services
- * **Gary Cook**
 President, Dallas Baptist University
- * **Steve Vernon**
 Associate Executive Director, BGCT

**April 14, Fort Worth area
 Ash Creek Baptist Church, Azle
 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.**

- * **Wesley Shotwell**
 Pastor, Ash Creek Baptist Church
- * **Jim Denison**
 Theologian in Residence, BGCT
- * **Scott Collins**
 Vice President of External Affairs, Buckner International
- * **Rick Gregory**
 Vice President, Dallas Baptist University
- * A representative of the BGCT, discussing TexasHope 2010

**April 27, Brownwood
 First Baptist Church
 9:30 to 11:00 a.m.**

- * **Jim Denison**
 Theologian in Residence, BGCT
- * **Bill Tillman**
 T. B. Maston Professor of Christian Ethics, Logsdon Seminary
- * **Ron Cook**
 Director, Doctor of Ministry program, Truett Seminary
- * **Lanny Hall**
 President, Howard Payne University
- * **Chris Liebrum**
 Executive Coordinator, BGCT

CURRIE-STRICKLAND DISTINGUISHED LECTURES IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS

**April 27
 1:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
 Howard Payne University
 Brownwood, Texas**

- * **Bill Tillman**
 T. B. Maston Professor of Christian Ethics, Logsdon Seminary
- * **Jim Denison**
 Theologian in Residence, BGCT

COOPERATIVE BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP GENERAL ASSEMBLY

**July 2-3
 George R. Brown Convention Center
 Houston, Texas**

**Theme
 Embrace the world: Welcome to your neighborhood**

NEW BAPTIST COVENANT MEETING, MIDWEST REGION

**August 6-7
 Embassy Suites Hotel and Convention Center
 Norman, Oklahoma**

- * **Jimmy Carter**
 39th President of the United States
- * **Ellis Orozco**
 Pastor, Calvary Baptist Church, McAllen, Texas
- * **Wade Burleson**
 Pastor, Emmanuel Baptist Church, Enid, Oklahoma
- * **Major Jemison**
 Pastor, St. John's Missionary Baptist Church, Oklahoma City

IN FOCUS: Key to success for TexasHope 2010

by Randel Everett

Executive Director, Baptist General Convention of Texas

EDITOR'S NOTE: Randel Everett's IN FOCUS column appears regularly in the Baptist Standard. This column was originally published on December 11, 2008. We are reprinting it with the permission of Randel Everett and the Baptist Standard.

Without a doubt, the key to the success of **TexasHope 2010** is prayer.

One of my early ministry heroes was Claude O'Neal of Gonzales. I was 25 when I became his pastor, and he was 93. He spent much of his life as a banker and a bivocational minister of music and education. When he was 64, he believed God called him to preach. He was called to be pastor of his first church and remained there for 18 years.

During my last year at Gonzales, Bro. O'Neal was practically blind and hardly left his house. He was my prayer partner, and I would go to his house and pray with him. I asked him what had been his most important year of ministry. He said the previous year. I thought he had misunderstood my question. Bro. Claude had been a much-loved pastor and staff member, having performed hundreds of baptisms, weddings and funerals. The last year, he had done almost nothing outside of his house because of his health. Yet he claimed it had been his most productive.

I asked him to explain. Bro. O'Neal said: "I have been busy all of my life doing ministry, and I had little time for prayer. This last year, I have done very little except pray. This has been my most effective year of ministry." When I asked him about his prayers, I began to realize the successes we had experienced as a congregation had been born in his prayers.

The three-fold challenge of TexasHope 2010 is prayer, care and share. Prayer is listed first because it is most important. Only God can bring transformation. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts. God already is working in the hearts of seekers across the state. We must pray for God to open our eyes to those who cross our paths. Through prayer, God will give us a burden for the physically and spiritually hungry. By prayer, we will ask God to provide workers for the harvest.

We are asking 100,000 Texas Baptists to make a commitment to pray every day at noon for the poor and the lost. We also have provided *A Call to Prayer*, a 30-day prayer guide in Spanish and in English, for individuals and churches to use as we join together in a statewide concert of prayer. Information about these and other prayer resources is available at texashope2010.com. You also can sign up to be part of Prayer 1200 at the same site.

In a recent blog, Rick Davis, pastor of First Baptist Church in Brownwood, wrote: "Five of eight young people who made decisions this week professed their faith publicly yesterday. I heard from another church about a salvation of an older person yesterday as well. I think the praying Texas is doing for lost people at noon each day is resulting in baptisms in our churches."

As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, let's spend time with him in prayer and ask him to bring wildfires of revival across Texas.

IN FOCUS: Sharing the hope of Christ

by Randel Everett

Executive Director, Baptist General Convention of Texas

EDITOR'S NOTE: Randel Everett's IN FOCUS column appears regularly in the Baptist Standard. This column was originally published on January 23, 2009. We are reprinting it with the permission of Randel Everett and the Baptist Standard.

How can we mobilize Christ-followers to share the hope of Christ with everyone in Texas by Resurrection Sunday 2010?

When did you come to know Christ? Did you make a commitment to him in an elevator? Perhaps you came to know Christ when someone shared with you in a hotel lobby. Some tell stories of 30,000-foot conversions in an airplane. After the "miracle on the Hudson," this might happen more frequently now.

We always should seek opportunities to share our faith. I certainly have prayed on planes, especially in storms. I have had meaningful conversations that often relate to faith. Yet most of the stories I hear about individuals coming to Christ are the result of the influence and prayers of a friend or family member. Even those who make decisions in church services or evangelistic rallies typically are brought to faith in Christ through the primary influence of someone they know.

Yet many of our evangelism strategies relate to winning strangers to Christ. This is important, but how do we reach our children, or our parents, or our neighbors, or those who work beside us? How can we share the hope of Christ with a friend?

Concentric Circles of Concern is the best book I have read that provides practical insight for reaching out to those in our circles of influence. Oscar Thompson, one of the most beloved professors of evangelism at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote this book a few decades ago. Even though his life was cut short by cancer before the book was completed, his wife finished the book that continues to guide us in telling others about Christ.

Recently, his book has been put into a workbook format, *Witness to the World*, which is a helpful tool for leading small groups or congregations in training for evangelism. A copy of this book has been sent to all of our pastors and also will be given out at our *Engage* conferences.

The BGCT evangelism department has provided video lessons

For information about how you can participate in TexasHope 2010, go to <http://www.texashope2010.com>. On that page, you will find **PRAYER**, **CARE**, and **SHARE** links to pages that will help you find ways that you can participate in carrying out each of these ministries – which make up what Randel Everett calls "the three-fold challenge of TexasHope 2010."

On the same page, you will find links for the following:

- Ordering TexasHope 2010 merchandise
- Donating to TexasHope 2010
- Accessing TexasHope 2010 downloads
 - Logos
 - Templates
 - Posters
 - Videos
- Joining the TexasHope 2010 Facebook Cause

to assist with teaching this book. They are available at www.texashope2010.com and www.bgct.org/evangelism. The author's wife, Carolyn Thompson Ritzmann, gives a video testimony about the book and ways to use it in effective evangelism. She and her husband, Bud, also will teach the book during the breakout sessions at the *Engage* conference in Grapevine Jan. 25-27. Multiple copies of these books can be ordered by going to the BGCT evangelism website or going directly through LifeWay Christian Resources.

I was staying with the Thompsons in Fort Worth the first time I heard his concept of concentric circles. He said the evangelism in Acts 20:20 was household to household. We will fulfill the Great Commission by being faithful witnesses throughout our circles of influence—from family, to friends, to work associates, to neighbors and even ultimately with strangers.

Most Texans probably live within one of the circles of influence of one of our Texas Baptists. Will you be available for God to use to reach your circles?

Midwest Regional New Baptist Covenant Meeting Norman, Oklahoma

The Midwest Regional Meeting of the New Baptist Covenant will begin at noon on August 6, 2009, and conclude at 9:30 p.m. on August 7 at the new Embassy Suites Hotel and Convention Center in Norman, Oklahoma.

Messages will be given by **Wade Burleson**, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Enid, Oklahoma, and past president of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma; **Major Jemison**, pastor of St. John's Missionary Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, and past president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention; and **Ellis Orozco**, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, McAllen, Texas, who has served on the Administrative Committee and the Board of the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Testimonies will be given by **Wilford Brown**, former national coordinator for Intercultural Ministries for American Baptist Churches, and currently campus minister at Bacone College, Muskogee, Oklahoma; former U.S. President **Jimmy Carter**; Oklahoma Governor **Brad Henry**; former Oklahoma Congressman **J. C. Watts**; and **Sarah Stewart**, a recent graduate of George W. Truett Theological Seminary, and now ministry resident at First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City.

Other participants include **Tim Eaton**, president of Hillsdale Freewill Baptist College; **Javier Elizondo**, executive vice president and provost of Baptist University of the Americas; and **Dwight McKissic**, pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church, Arlington, Texas, and past president of the Southern Baptists of Texas Pastor's Conference.

Workshops and breakout sessions will focus on building bridges across cultures to better minister to the families of the imprisoned and the impoverished.

To make hotel reservations at the Embassy Suites Hotel for \$99/day (+ tax), call 1-405-364-8040. To make reservations at the Guest Inn for \$70/day (+ tax), call 1-405-360-1234. (To obtain these rates, mention that you are with the "New Baptist Covenant Convention.")

For additional information, visit the New Baptist Covenant Midwest Region blog at <http://www.newbaptistcovenant.blogspot.com>.

Been to the TBC Web site lately?

If you haven't checked out the TBC Web site lately, we invite you to go to www.txbc.org today. In recent months, we have made enhancements that we hope will make it more useful to you. On our home page, you will be directed to the latest editions of the *TBC Newsletter*; David R. Currie's *A Rancher's Rumblyings* column; and the *Baptist Reflections* column written by various Baptist leaders; as well as archives for all three of these publications. Our home page also features news about upcoming Baptist events. In the months to come, we will add even more enhancements, including links to up-to-the-moment Baptist news and views. *Stay tuned!*

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A Rancher's Rumblings

**By
David R. Currie
Executive Director**

November 19, 2008

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

I cannot remember a time before I knew and loved the poem by Robert Frost, *The Road Not Taken*. Frost ends the poem with the words, "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I — I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference."

For some reason (probably how Mother raised me; Dad helped also), that poem always touched a deep part of my soul. Very simply, I was raised to think for myself. That manner of living life was modeled for me well, even in a small West Texas town of 230 people. Thinking for oneself means taking "the road less traveled by."

The Baptist General Convention of Texas is now taking "the road less traveled."

After the Fundamentalists took over the Southern Baptist Convention, they turned their attention to imposing their narrow, exclusionary agenda on state conventions as well. A few state conventions tried to stop it in some ways, but it was only in Texas and Virginia that those efforts succeeded.

During those years, I traveled to many states, encouraging Baptists to resist Fundamentalism for the sake of the Kingdom. More often than not, they labeled me a "troublemaker" who didn't understand that their states would be different — unlike others, they could co-exist with Fundamentalists while maintaining their freedom. Such naivete ignores the very essence of Fundamentalism — which is a craving for control. Freedom is foreign to Fundamentalism.

Last week, there came more proof that there is no such thing as "working together" with Fundamentalists.

The Georgia Baptist Convention kicked out First Baptist Church, Decatur, because it called a woman — Julie Pennington-Russell — as pastor. Julie, one of my favorite preachers, did a wonderful job as pastor of Calvary Baptist in Waco before going to Decatur. Georgia Baptists thought they could "work with" Fundamentalists. Now they're controlled by them. And now they're denying affiliation to those — like First Baptist, Decatur — who refuse to knuckle under to their control. Well, so much for the bedrock Baptist principle of *local church autonomy*.

But Georgia isn't alone. The North Carolina Baptist Convention voted to stop allowing churches to give to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship through the state convention, starting in 2010. The motion to deny this basic freedom to North Carolina Baptist churches was made by Eric Page, pastor of Victory Baptist Church in Columbus. In making this motion, Page explained that refusing to take a "strong stand" would promote "tolerance" of a group with which most North Carolina Baptists disagree. He further

stated that it is time to "put an end to tolerance."

Yesirree boy, that is the modern Baptist spirit — "my way or the highway!" It used to be that we could disagree and still work together on the things that unite us — such as our love for Jesus and our passion to share the Good News through cooperative missions. But that's not the way of Fundamentalism.

In Texas, however, we are taking the "road less traveled." Last week, I wrote about my genuine excitement over our election of a diverse group of officers for the BGCT.

But let me assure you of this, Texas Baptists — we will be diverse, cooperative, and effective only as long as traditional moderate, mainstream Texas Baptists stand up and keep our convention free. We need to focus on maintaining cooperation with, and respect for, each other, regardless of our disagreements.

Let Fundamentalists take control, and even the most minimal degree of tolerance and, more importantly, FREEDOM will become only a distant memory. Just ask the Baptists of Georgia and North Carolina.

I totally believe that, in the heat of the battle in the 1990s, we Texas Baptists could have voted to disallow any cooperation with the Southern Baptist Convention. But that would have not been the right and Baptist thing to do. So we did the Baptist thing — in a spirit of cooperation, mutual respect, and liberty, we voted to allow all of our churches to give as they choose to give to larger Baptist cooperative mission organizations. We voted to follow "the road less traveled" and try to work together despite our differences. Some did not like this "freedom given to all" and started another state convention. May God bless their work.

What I hope and pray that we now have in Texas Baptist life is a convention of churches who all LOVE the BGCT, and its ministries and institutions...a convention of churches who will work together to further God's Kingdom in every way possible, accepting and loving each other despite our differences regarding mission endeavors outside of Texas.

It is the "road less traveled," but I believe that it is also the road of the future — the road of effectiveness and cooperation and shared leadership and respect. Let others define themselves by what they are against. Let others beat their chests about their refusal to tolerate diversity and disagreement. But let us define ourselves by our visible love for Christ and God-granted liberty, along with a focus on what really matters — showing people that Jesus loves them and giving them an opportunity to respond to His call and accept Him as Lord and Savior.

I seem to remember that Jesus had a few problems with folks who thought they had God all figured out. I think He still has problems with that attitude today. Remember — "For now we see through a glass, darkly." (*1 Corinthians 13:12*) Unfortunately, many prefer control over freedom and cooperation — it's easier to let others tell you how you should think, how you should interpret Scripture, how you should do missions. Control is certainly the road with the heaviest traffic.

But I prefer the "road less traveled." How about you?

December 11, 2008

GIVING: THE GIFT THAT BLESSES THE GIVER

A Day That Will Go Down in Currie History

I begin with a personal note: As I sit down to begin writing this column, it is Tuesday, December 9, 2008, a day that will go down

A Rancher's Rumblings

in my personal history book — for, this very afternoon, I killed my first buck deer with a bow and arrow! From now on, you may refer to me as Crazy Horse (my favorite Native American historical figure).

Where Are Our Priorities?

Last week, I read about a corporate executive who spent \$3 million to give himself a lavish 60th birthday party and later said he was sorry he did it. Sorry? Isn't it a little late for "sorry?" What made him think it was right in the first place?

Such self-indulgence is beyond my comprehension. How could any human being be so self-centered to believe that spending \$3 million on his birthday celebration is appropriate — under ANY circumstances?

I couldn't help but imagine how such money could be used to build up others rather than merely to gratify one's own selfish appetites. Just imagine, for instance, how many churches the BGCT could start with \$3 million; how many of our young people could benefit from \$3 million given to Howard Payne University (my alma mater, on whose board I serve); or how many of our world's malnourished a \$3 million gift could begin to feed if given to the BGCT Christian Life Commission's World Hunger Offering.

But this man apparently thought it was ethical and proper to spend \$3 million on his birthday party! Or else he just didn't care.

Christians' Priorities Should Be Different

I thought of John Baugh, founder of Sysco Corporation, who gave \$10 million to help start Truett Seminary at Baylor. I cannot imagine Mr. Baugh celebrating his birthday in a self-indulgent manner, because Mr. Baugh's priorities were different than that.

Sysco is worth over \$15 billion today, but Mr. Baugh founded it out of the trunk of his car. In Houston, at his corporate office, he never had an assigned parking space. In fact, no one at Sysco had an assigned parking space. All employees — from John Baugh on down — found parking on a first-come, first-served basis.

Mr. Baugh never flew first-class unless he paid the difference out of his own pocket; none of the other Sysco employees did, either. Compare that to the Big Three automakers whose executives first flew to Washington on their private jets to ask for *our* tax money to help them survive their stupid decisions that have put their companies — and the well-being of millions — at risk.

John Baugh's faith was not in his money; it was in Jesus. Faith in Jesus means — or *should* mean — that you think differently and act differently, not just on the hot-button issues on which many preachers today spend so much time preaching, but also regarding one's personal financial behavior. John Baugh knew the Bible, and he knew that Jesus was constantly challenging people to use what they have to help those in need.

Faith in Jesus means that you think about your money in terms of what you can give — not in terms of how much of it you can keep for yourself. John Baugh lived this principle beautifully and faithfully.

Giving – Regardless of Your Circumstances

It's not easy for most of us right now. This economic downturn is causing us to tighten our belts. Some of us find ourselves uncomfortably in debt. I'm no different than the rest of you — I

have let my "love of dirt," as my wife calls it, cause me to go into debt buying ranchland. This economic downturn has left me feeling a little unsettled.

But then I thought of what brought real joy to Mr. Baugh's life — *giving*. You know, I really believe, that if you stop giving, you stop living. To a Christian, giving should be like breathing — a necessary part of life, a life-giving force.

So I will tithe this Sunday as usual. I'll give to CBF Global Missions (better than any cause I know of); make a year-end contribution to TBC, because I love what God has called me to do and I believe in the importance of what we're doing here; and make year-end contributions to several other causes that are important to me, because to stop that would be to stop being who I am — regardless of any financial difficulties. I will also give to the mutual fund account of each of my seven stepgrandchildren — accounts I set up several years ago — as I do every Christmas, in hopes that they will start saving earlier than I did.

I am grateful that John Baugh set an example of giving for me and others.

Now let me ask something of you. If you enjoy receiving these *Rumblings* but have not yet given to TBC this year, please do so. Our financial situation is always very tight, and we have had far fewer contributions this year than in years past. So please give to support the work of Texas Baptists Committed. As was said in the 19th-century fight against slavery, "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance." So it is with the fight for Baptist freedom today. Threats to that freedom are all around us. Texas Baptists Committed is your vigilant watchdog. Please be a part of us by contributing today.

If you have already given this year, I thank you and ask you to please consider adding an extra year-end contribution to what you have already given.

And remember — giving is the best gift you can receive. Don't take my word for it. In his farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus, Paul quotes Jesus as saying "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (*Acts 20:35*) (*NIV*) This Christmas, celebrate God's greatest gift to you — Jesus — by following His example and giving to others.

John Bayless

This past Sunday, I preached at Fairlanes Baptist Church, Borger, Texas. After the service, John and Mary Lee Bayless — long-time TBC supporters — took Loretta and me to lunch, along with two other delightful couples. Mrs. Bayless gave us a CD recording containing music performed by their son, John Bayless. The album is titled *Christmas Rhapsody*.

Loretta and I listened to it twice on the way home. Believe me, it is beautiful piano music that moved us to tears. When we got home, I did an Internet search for "John Bayless, piano." I discovered that John Bayless is considered one of the leading pianists in this country. I urge you to buy this CD and let your heart be moved. I do not begin to understand this kind of talent, but I pray to be able to appreciate it. Best wishes for a Merry Christmas — from your friend, Crazy Horse.

...continued on page 6

February 3, 2009

IS OUR LOYALTY TO CHRIST . . . OR CREED?

Last week, TBC published, in our *Baptist Reflections* column, a courageous blog post by Johnny Pierce, executive editor of *Baptists Today*, concerning the Georgia Baptist Convention's hateful and patronizing treatment of First Baptist Church, Decatur, Georgia, and its wonderful pastor, my friend, Julie Pennington-Russell. It is important that people know the truth of how mean and bullying people can be who are afflicted with the disease of Fundamentalism.

As I have written and said many times, the main difference between Texas Baptists Committed and the Fundamentalists is that Fundamentalists wanted to **control** the SBC and state conventions so they could **control** missions, seminaries, the press, and other institutions. On the other hand, our goal was to keep BGCT leadership in the hands of those who would keep our institutions and ministries free to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. It was never about theology — it was always about control vs. freedom.

I continue to hear well-meaning people say that we must be more inclusive as a state convention or risk losing more churches. I listen to these folks respectfully, but I really cannot figure out how we could be more inclusive as a state convention than we already are. We recognize the freedom of any church to give as it chooses, to call whomever it chooses as pastor, and on and on. We invite all to partner with us — provided that they don't seek to control the rest of us.

I'm afraid, however, that what some are actually saying is this: "If the BGCT does not embrace the SBC and Fundamentalism, we will leave." But folks, that's not an option — embracing the SBC and Fundamentalism. Those are the people who destroyed the SBC that we once knew and have created a competing state convention — the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention — for the purpose of exercising the same control as the SBC and for enticing churches to leave the BGCT.

No, we have no business embracing the SBC and Fundamentalism. But please note — no one in the BGCT is going to tell you that you can't be a part of the BGCT if you support the SBC and its missions financially. The BGCT lives by Baptist principles, including local church autonomy. We recognize each church's right to choose where it gives its money, and we pray that each church recognizes each member's right to choose as well. I hope that is enough — I simply do not know what more we can do.

If you missed reading Johnny Pierce's *Baptist Reflections* column, you'll find it (*on page 14 of this Newsletter*). Please be sure to read it. In it, Johnny tells that Bob White, executive director of the Georgia Baptist Convention, warned Julie that some in the GBC are planning to move to withdraw fellowship from the Decatur church later this year — simply because it chose to call a woman as pastor. White went on to tell Julie that, if the convention disfellowships the church, "the church could not receive materials or services from the GBC, such as training in Vacation Bible School, Sunday School, or evangelism. ...however, Bob White said he would be willing to help 'personally' in such a situation, but not as an official representative of the GBC."

This, friends, is the result of institutionalizing controlling attitudes and creedal convictions. Even when people feel a compulsion to act in the spirit of Christ, they feel duty-bound to give their first loyalty to the institution, not to Christ. Freedom flies out the window, and the soul is trapped within the confining walls of institutionalized creedalism.

But the Jesus I know is all about loving people. Go read *Matthew 25*. Christ didn't make ideology the test of discipleship. No, the test of discipleship is your service to people. That's the spirit of Christ — loving people, in all their differences, and seeking to meet them where they are and to give them whatever they need. It means seeing Jesus in every face...knowing that we serve Jesus when we love those in need.

But ideology turns people into objects to be bent and shaped into acceptable forms, and it sets out to destroy any who refuse to yield to its control...any who refuse to conform...any who refuse to put the institution first. So Bob White is inclined personally to help Julie and the church that she serves, but he is such a slave to the institution that he will not stand against its control.

Julie Pennington-Russell and FBC, Decatur are free — because they have put Christ first. It is Bob White and the Georgia Baptist Convention who are enslaved — because they have enthroned ideology and the institution. For them, *Matthew 25* isn't sufficient as a test of true Christian discipleship. They apparently believe that they know better than Jesus does.

But Julie Pennington-Russell and FBC, Decatur, Georgia will just keep on being the presence of Jesus to their community, because that is what Julie is all about — and that is apparently what her church is all about, too. I would hope that Baptists would figure out by now that God uses all types of people and churches to do His work, and that doing missions is too important to let arguments over interpreting Scripture get in the way. However, after doing this job for 21 years, I have learned to never be surprised by some people's commitment to worrying over the speck in someone else's eye while ignoring the log in their own.

When all's said and done, I'm glad to be a Texas Baptist. Aren't you?

March 5, 2009

TBC PARTNERING WITH THE BGCT IN UPCOMING MEETINGS

I usually write these *Rumbblings* columns to either express a devotional thought or to get across my concerns and thoughts about a specific Baptist issue. This week, however, I have quite a bit of important information that I need to share with you.

TBC's Unique Role

In recent years, TBC has focused on building support for the BGCT. The disturbing news is that January 2009 receipts to the BGCT were just 78.9 percent of budget requirements and 88.2 percent of January 2008 receipts.

This decline is partly a result of our uncertain economy, but a significant part of it is a result of the behind-the-scenes attacks being carried out by the Fundamentalist Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC). Here is an example of the types of attacks they are making on the BGCT.

I recently received a copy of materials that the SBTC is distributing to persuade churches to leave the BGCT. Among other things, they make the following claims about the BGCT:

- Endorses Biblical Inerrancy in statement, but allows for variance in teaching and practice
- Permits denial of Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch
- Permits teaching that *Genesis* is allegory or fiction
- Permits teaching at its institutions that miracles are not true
- Affiliates with entities whose stated beliefs are in opposition to the BGCT's own stated beliefs.
 - Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF)
 - Baptist World Alliance (BWA)
 - Texas Baptists Committed (TBC)

These organizations' practices, stated beliefs, and teachings include the following:

- Jesus is the goddess Sophia (Greek and Egyptian influence)
- Abortion might not be wrong
- Homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle, including for a family
- Participation with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

As TBC and Mainstream Baptist supporters, you should recognize a number of lies — as well as distortions and innuendos — contained in these statements. Folks, Fundamentalists have not changed their stripes. They have not abandoned the attitudes and practices that have always characterized them. These materials are typical of Fundamentalism, trying to scare people and churches into joining them through out-and-out lies, character assassination, and guilt by association.

If we learned one lesson from the Fundamentalist takeover of the SBC, it is that their tactics — unChristian though they are — are nevertheless effective unless committed traditional Baptists stand up and take them on, combating their lies with the truth.

And what is the point organization helping churches deal with these lies? ***Texas Baptists Committed!***

Hope for the Future: Supporting the BGCT

In response to these challenges, we at TBC are launching a prolonged effort of support for the BGCT by holding a series of meetings around Texas under the theme, *Hope for the Future: Supporting the Baptist General Convention of Texas*.

We have already scheduled the first three of these meetings and the speakers for them.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: For details about these meetings, please see the front page of this Newsletter.)

We plan for these meetings to be just the beginning of a series of meetings across the state for many years to come.

Will they be successful? That depends on you. We need you — as laypersons and pastors — to attend. If you are a layperson, we need you to bring your pastor and church leaders with you. If you are a pastor, we need you to bring your church's leaders with you. You — faithful TBC and Mainstream supporters — must take the initiative to be the key persons in your church, standing up for support of the BGCT and its ministries and institutions. When

others say, "Let's cut this Cooperative Program thing and pave more parking lot," you need to stand up and explain why the church should increase — not reduce — its support of the BGCT and its ministries.

We need you to stand up in your church's business meeting and point out that the BGCT supports nine universities, three seminaries, numerous child care ministries, retirement ministries, and hospitals, as well as the River Ministry and university ministries on over 200 college campuses. Then you need to make the point that the SBTC supports *none* of these things in Texas.

My motto all these years has been simple: "*Leadership solves everything.*" Texas Baptists need you to be the leaders in your churches to create a future of which we can all be excited to be a part. We have to move on beyond the SBC, but we cannot do that as a state convention unless our churches understand that. You know that, but you are the key to making it happen in your church. I urge, plead, beg you to show more leadership and push to tell your church's people the truth.

Please give us names to add to our mailing list and our email list. *A Rancher's Rumblings*, *Baptist Reflections*, and other materials go to only 2,000 people. If you are not yet receiving our materials by email, PLEASE send your email address to carolscott@txbc.org. Friends, we have some important things to communicate here at TBC, and all of you need to get these weekly writings.

Save the Dates for Three Other Exciting Meetings

- April 27 — ***Currie-Strickland Distinguished Lectures in Christian Ethics***, Howard Payne University, Brownwood, Texas
- July 2-3 — ***Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly***, Houston, Texas
- August 6-7 — ***New Baptist Covenant Midwest Regional Meeting***, Norman, Oklahoma

We will have a TBC breakfast as a part of this meeting. President Carter will be speaking at the meeting. We are planning for a strong Texas attendance.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: For details about these meetings, please see the front page of this Newsletter.)

Please attend these meetings, and bring others if you possibly can. Thank you.

March 13, 2009

MAKING FOOLISHNESS REAL

This coming Sunday, I get to do something I love to do — preach! The good folks at Second Baptist Church in Lubbock are having me back to preach once again while they are without a pastor. I am honored.

It is interesting how sermons "happen" for a preacher. I tend to preach out of my experiences or those of persons I know... sometimes, even world events that make for a timely sermon. This sermon that's taking shape in my mind right now...I'd like to share with you the story of how I got started on it.

This past Sunday night, I couldn't sleep. Around 12:30, I got

...continued on page 8

up to get a glass of orange juice and do some reading. I don't read as many books as I used to read, but I still find time to do some reading.

Chad, my youngest son, is experiencing some very deep spiritual growth right now, and I am very proud. For my birthday, December 3, he gave me a copy of a book by Donald Miller, entitled *Blue Like Jazz*. I had laid it aside...until Sunday, when I started reading it and read for 90 minutes. I was amazed and touched and thrilled. What thrilled me the most was an incredible story about how Penny, a friend of Miller, became a Christian.

She said that she and a Christian friend began reading the book of *Matthew*. Now here is the quote that moved me:

"And I found Jesus very disturbing, very straightforward. He wasn't diplomatic, and yet I felt like if I met Him, He would really like me. Don, I can't explain how freeing that was, to realize that if I met Jesus, He would like me. I never felt like that about some of the Christians on the radio. I always thought if I met those people they would yell at me. But it wasn't like that with Jesus."

In the margin, I wrote "wow." I recalled my freshman year at Howard Payne, when Dr. Nat Tracy, in Old Testament class, said early on, "No matter how much you think of yourself, it is not as much as God does." I have never forgotten that, and neither has Gary, my friend from day one of college, who was sitting next to me in class. I rejoice to see what a lay leader Gary has become in the BGCT. Dr. Tracy is a tie that binds many of us together who went to HPU. Friends, our BGCT-related universities are special places! They touch people's lives for eternity.

Well, Dr. Tracy's one statement of a very simple theological truth changed my life, helping me to realize that God was not an angry God as much as a loving God who cared deeply for me — just as I was — and wanted to share life with me. As you can tell, his words touched my life in a way that I'll never forget. Yes, I still sometimes struggle with believing them as much as I should, but I've never forgotten them.

On Monday, I read an online article that was headlined "More Americans say they have no religion." It reported the results of a recent study conducted on American religious life. One of its findings was that the percentage of Americans calling themselves Christians had fallen from 86% in 1990 to only 76% in 2008.

The researchers blamed much of the decline on the loss of membership among the mainline Protestant denominations, particularly Methodists, Lutherans, and Episcopalians.

But that doesn't really tell us why, does it? Personally, I think one of the major reasons is the domination of Christian media by leaders of the Religious Right, who have represented Christianity with a mean-spirited message of judgment and condemnation rather than love and grace. These people — who many in this country see as the face of Christianity — have shown a concern primarily for political power rather than the Gospel. This saddens me, because, if the Gospel of the Living Christ means anything at all, it means "Jesus would like you if He met you." Would He approve of all of your activities and actions? No, probably not, but that wouldn't keep Him from liking you, because that's Jesus' nature — and don't forget, Jesus is the only complete revelation of the Father and His nature. As Dr. Tracy said over and over, "God's

character is unconditional love, acceptance, and forgiveness."

It appears to me that, possibly, more and more people in America do not want to have anything to do with Jesus because of the Jesus they hear preached all too often. Frankly, I can't say that I blame them. If I seriously thought Jesus sees me as a scumbag...that He looks down His nose at me...shakes His finger at me...and refuses to have anything to do with me until I clean myself up... then I wouldn't want to know Him, either. Yes, we human beings are a sorry lot...we don't deserve Jesus' love. But the good news is that He loves us, anyway. That's why they call it grace. And that's the kind of Jesus I want to know...and the kind of Jesus that is presented to us throughout the Gospels.

Which, finally in some roundabout way, brings me to my sermon title for this Sunday: "Making Foolishness Real."

Second Baptist Church asked for my sermon title by Tuesday and sent me this week's Scriptures from the Lectionary. Something tells me that most of you already know I am not a Lectionary sort of guy. In fact, I am not exactly sure what it is, but I'm pretty sure it has something to do with the Church Calendar.

Anyway, I read one of the recommended Scriptures — *I Corinthians 1:18-25*. Verse 18 says, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

And I remember how Penny said she was saved because God became real to her when she realized "Jesus would like me if He met me."

And I emailed the church the sermon title, "Making Foolishness Real." I then had a title before I had a sermon. The fact is, I still do not have a sermon as I write this column, but I do know it will involve how we as the Church — that is, the people of God — must share a message about the foolishness of the Gospel in such a way that it becomes "real" for people, that people realize Jesus would like them if He met them. And if Christians were to start both preaching and living this message — making it real to the people in their own world at home, work, etc. — it would, I believe, turn things around in America for the cause of Christ.

We all need to start letting people know that Jesus would like them if He met them — and then introduce them to Him. Let them find out how real He can be in their lives.

March 20, 2009

MAKING FOOLISHNESS REAL, part 2

Judging from my email, last week's *Rumblings* — "Making Foolishness Real" — was better received than any since I started writing this column over 2 years ago. I'm tempted to follow that one with a sequel. Of course, that can be risky.

I remember enjoying the first *Rocky* with Sylvester Stallone. But then came the sequels. I may have watched *Rocky II* and *Rocky III*...but by the time they got to *Rocky V* or *X* — or however many they did — I mostly wanted somebody to just beat Rocky up and get it over with.

Thus, I realize the risk I run by writing Part 2, but I think the risk is worth it. In fact, I may even keep on writing about the "foolishness of the Gospel" all the way to Easter, if I keep finding new things to say about it. Funny, but, at age 56, with two seminary degrees, I find that I have never intellectually or emotionally

A Rancher's Rumblings

focused on the passage found in *I Corinthians 1: 18-25*. Last Sunday was my first sermon from that text. I have just never thought much about Paul talking about the “foolishness of the Gospel,” but I have suddenly become fascinated by Paul’s concept.

This week, I want to begin by defining the “foolishness of the Gospel,” as I understand it. What Paul called “the foolishness of the Gospel” is the unconditional love, acceptance, and forgiveness offered by God and displayed most clearly and profoundly in Jesus’ death on the cross.

The cross is God crying out, through eternity, “I love you, every single one of you, this much.”

Why did Paul call the cross “foolishness”? Because it is so unlike anything else we experience in life. It is so contrary to human logic. We — especially WE Americans — are taught that we get what we deserve in life. If we are successful, we must have earned it, “pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps.” Poor people are poor because they deserve to be poor; rich people are rich because they earned it. Those of us who are relatively well-off look down on those who have less than we do.

We want what we believe is coming to us. We are taught and relish “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” — as long as it’s not our own eyes or teeth that are at issue. If we have been done wrong, we hold onto our anger and resentment as long as we can and even revel in it.

But then comes the scandal of the cross. It is foolishness, because it turns on its head all of the logic and “common sense” that we hold dear. The cross is God doing what we cannot do for ourselves! We cannot save ourselves; we cannot earn God’s love and forgiveness. The cross is a scandal and foolishness, because it is God giving us life eternal and a relationship with Him forever. And all we have to do is accept it. All we have to do is stop trying to earn God’s favor and simply accept the love that we could never earn. It’s a gift — utter foolishness to our way of thinking. But that’s what makes it so real.

And how do we share it? One person at a time. My great friend, David Sapp, pastor of Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church, Atlanta, wrote an awesome article for the latest issue of the Logsdon Seminary journal *Window*. David wrote about the human part of the foolishness of the Gospel:

“The incarnation did not end with Jesus...Paul also taught us that God had also promised to indwell all those who believe. God was still communicating His Word to a lost world, Paul said, by means of a letter written on the ‘fleshy table of the heart’ (KJV).

“Most of us know this is true even if we have never thought about it, because we first encountered God through another person. It may have been a pastor or a dear Christian friend. It may have been a parent; but few have ever come into the faith through any other means than a firsthand involvement with a person who is a follower of Christ.”

Remember Penny in the book *Blue Like Jazz*, whom I quoted in last week’s column? Penny accepted Christ after she realized that “if I met Jesus, He would like me.” But what led her to that revelation? A Christian friend, who took the time to read Matthew’s account of the Gospel with her.

You know, the foolishness is real, and how we share it really never changes. Think about it. Live it. Share it.

Columnist misrepresents religion clauses

by K. Hollyn Hollman

General Counsel, Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
EDITOR’S NOTE: This column was originally published in the Nashville Tennessean on March 14, 2009.

When a public school is sued repeatedly for violating the U.S. Constitution’s religion clauses, it needs help.

Religious freedom is the crown jewel of the Constitution and public schools play an important role in upholding the Constitution’s ban on establishment of religion, while protecting the free speech and free exercise rights of students. Unfortunately, after a Wilson County school lost a federal case for promoting religion last year, the school board now faces a suit for failing to respect students’ rights to religious expression after school officials insisted upon removal of religious references in student artwork promoting a student-led event.

There is no doubt that cases concerning religion in the public schools turn on precise facts and the balance of competing principles.

That is why federal guidelines on religion in the public schools have been promulgated and distributed by Democrats and Republicans and are consistently recommended as a basis for school policies. They are designed to help schools avoid promoting religion but also affirm the rights of students consistent with the U.S. Supreme Court’s interpretation of the First Amendment.

Talk-radio host Phil Valentine has a point when he referred to the school’s behavior as an overreaction in his op-ed in last Sunday’s edition of *The Tennessean*. But he is guilty of overreacting himself, when he refers to the separation of church and state as a mythical concept and claims that states do not have to comply with the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

The “separation of church and state” was first proclaimed by Colonial Baptist Roger Williams, who founded Rhode Island as a haven for religious freedom. Yes, that phrase was later echoed by Thomas Jefferson and is often used as a shorthand reference to the religious liberty protections of the Constitution, including by members of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Regardless of what Valentine thinks of the phrase, denigrating constitutional principles in the public discourse will only make matters worse.

Valentine is dead wrong when he says “that issue is clearly under the authority of the states to decide.” Like other fundamental protections, the religion clauses of the First Amendment apply to the states, as well as the national government, through the application of the due process clause of the 14th Amendment.

Indeed, school administrators have a tough enough job attempting to negotiate difficult church-state issues, without culture warriors offering bad legal advice. Supporting robust religious freedom for all — the goal of the religion clauses — is not promotion of a “godless agenda.” It is work worthy of the best efforts of Wilson County’s students, parents, teachers and administrators.

BAPTIST REFLECTIONS

December 2, 2008

THE CABOOSE OF CHRISTIANITY

by John D. Pierce

Executive Editor, Baptists Today

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This article originally appeared as a post to the Baptists Today Blogs (<http://bteditor.blogspot.com/>) on November 25, 2008. We are reprinting it with the permission of John D. Pierce and Baptists Today.*

We all have our blind spots. Clarity often comes only from the perspective of hindsight.

That's what leaders of Bob Jones University confessed in apologizing for the independent, fundamentalist Christian school's past racist policies.

A statement on the school's website reads in part: "For almost two centuries American Christianity, including BJU in its early stages, was characterized by the segregationist ethos of American culture. Consequently, for far too long, we allowed institutional policies regarding race to be shaped more directly by that ethos than by the principles and precepts of the Scriptures. We conformed to the culture rather than provide a clear Christian counterpoint to it. In so doing, we failed to accurately represent the Lord and to fulfill the commandment to love others as ourselves. For these failures we are profoundly sorry."

African-American students were not permitted to attend the school until 1971 — some 17 years after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that public school segregation was unconstitutional. Only within the last decade has BJU dropped its policy forbidding interracial dating.

In other words: the secular Court interpreting a secular Constitution reached the right conclusion about God-given human equality well before these devout Christians interpreting the Bible they hold as divine truth.

The most significant aspect of this confession is found in the words: "We conformed to the culture rather than provide a clear Christian counterpoint to it."

The continuing tragedy of fundamentalist American Christianity is the unwillingness to learn from mistakes. Past failures do not seem to bring any humility that would recognize the possibility of misinterpretations of the biblical revelation in the present or future.

It brings to mind a question I have raised before: When will the evangelical Christian church become the engine rather than the caboose concerning societal change regarding the basic biblical issues of justice, equality and compassion?

When land was taken from Native Americans and thousands died during forced, inhumane relocation, where was the Christian outcry?

When Baptists of the North questioned Baptists of the South on the issue of owning for economic benefit precious human beings of African descent created in the image of God, Southern Baptists just formed their own group.

When the secular government enforced public school desegregation, white conservative Christians just started their own schools.

Yet the unfailing fundamentalist mantra is that they alone stay true to Scripture while all others head down the path of cultural accommodation. (The opposite of what Bob Jones leaders admitted concerning their racist past.)

Just this month, when the Georgia Baptist Convention (GBC) pompously brushed aside the First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga., for calling a female pastor, the charge was that the congregation had violated biblical truth and embraced secular social patterns.

In a letter to the GBC newspaper, *The Christian Index*, pastor Bobby Braswell Jr. of Guyton, Ga., wrote that the convention's action is "not a popular position in today's cultural climate, but we are following the dictates of Scripture, not culture."

Brother Bobby, so said the Baptist slaveholders; so said the good Christians who forced "savages" off the land they wanted; so said the earlier leaders of Bob Jones University in forbidding African-American students from studying at their "Christian" school — and on and on.

It is amazing how fundamentalist Christians — many decades after societal change occurs through the motivation of secular forces and more-attuned Christians and those of other faith traditions — can confess that they "conformed to the culture" at the expense of biblical truth. Yet they cannot — in the present tense — humbly allow for even the remotest possibility that any current blind spots might exist.

If so, at the very least the self-righteous leadership of the GBC would have left the Decatur congregation alone to suffer in their "error." But, no, they had to straighten them out.

Why? Because fundamentalists don't think Paul's admission that we all see through dark glass applies to them. Because they do not learn from their own tragic history.

Or, more specifically, it is because that is the nature of fundamentalism. It is marked by a resistance to change, a proclivity toward propping up one's predetermined belief system with isolated biblical texts, and an attitude of condemnation toward those (even other Christians) who would dare hold a different viewpoint.

Fundamentalist Christians are always denouncing "secular" society. But thank God for a secular court and a secular Constitution — and open-minded, compassionate religious peoples of varied traditions — that lead us to truth pertaining to basic (biblical) concerns of human justice.

But never fear ... somewhere way, way, way back there, the caboose will be coming.

"Who do you love so much that you would — or do — keep watch over them by night? Have you told them how much you care? Who do you know that feels that they do not matter? Don't they need for you to tell them that Jesus was born specifically because they matter to God and to you?"

— David R. Currie, *A Rancher's Rumbblings, KEEPING WATCH OVER THEIR FLOCKS BY NIGHT, December 17, 2008*

December 18, 2008

WHOSE TEXAS? WHOSE INFLUENCE?

by Phil Lineberger

Pastor, Williams Trace Baptist Church, Sugar Land; and member, TBC Board of Directors

WHO ARE OUR NEIGHBORS?

The future of Texas will be determined by our changing demographics and who influences those people the most. For Christians and Baptists in particular, WHOSE TEXAS will be determined by how willing we are to make those who are different a part of us...our family.

In his book, *The Blue Zone*, Dan Buettner quotes a woman named Kamada, 102 years of age, living in Okinawa, as saying, "Sometimes you can best take care of yourself by taking care of others." We can best take care of Texas by taking care of others.

One of the best examples of taking care of the needs of others is found in Jesus' parable of the Samaritan, found in *Luke 10:25-37* — WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR? Jesus called loving one's neighbor equal to the highest law of loving God with all our heart, mind, and soul. It is clear that our neighbor is anyone who is in need.

WHOSE TEXAS will be determined by how we love those in need — in need of salvation, in need of education, in need of food, in need of employment, in need of medical care, in need of shelter — loving our needy neighbor.

TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OUR NEIGHBOR, WE MUST LOVE UNCONDITIONALLY

The word love, *agape*, means to care for the welfare of another. You don't have to be like another person, be related to another person, or even *like* another person to love them this way.

To love as Jesus commanded, we must first see the need. The Samaritan probably did not personally know the man on the road. He probably did not recognize the man, but he did recognize his need. This man was unable to help himself, so the Samaritan stopped to help him — to meet his need.

We are never more like Jesus than when we are loving some-

one unconditionally by meeting their need. We came into the kingdom because Jesus loved us unconditionally and met our need for forgiveness. Paul writes, in *Romans 5:6-8*, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

We are never closer to Jesus than when we are loving someone unconditionally by meeting their need. In fact, Jesus made it very clear that ministering to human need was ministering to Him — in *Matthew 25:45*, Jesus said, "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'" When the poor are out of our lives, *Christ* is out of our lives.

We are never more influential than when we are loving someone unconditionally by meeting their need — *John 9:24-25*: "A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. 'Give glory to God,' they said. 'We know this man is a sinner.' He replied, 'Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!'"

An Amish man said recently, "We believe in shining our light but not shining it in someone's eyes." We shine our light when we love unconditionally. It is this powerful influence of unconditional love that changes both the one giving the love and the one receiving the love.

Over a year ago, a couple came to visit our church. They had recently married after their spouses had died. The woman was Baptist, the man was Jewish. We accepted them both into our church — the woman by transfer of letter and the man by watchcare membership. Watchcare membership tells people that, although they are not Baptist or even Christian, they are welcome in our fellowship, and we will watch over them and care for them while they are with us.

Several months after Bob and Shirley Gindler came into our fellowship, I received a phone call from Bob, telling me that he wanted to visit with me. He dropped by my office, and we visited for about an hour. He brought a magazine article from a major magazine, which included interviews with some Christian theologians who said that a Jew did not have to accept Jesus in order to go to heaven. After discussing this, I shared with Bob what the *New Testament* teaches about accepting Jesus as Savior. Bob looked at me and said, "So, what you are saying is that I am going to hell." I said, "No, Bob. I am not saying you are going to hell. I am not God. I do not assign people to heaven or hell. I am telling you what the *New Testament* teaches about your need to accept Jesus

A NOTE FROM BILL JONES, TBC COMMUNICATIONS EDITOR:

Last fall, Dr. Phil Lineberger, pastor of Williams Trace Baptist Church, Sugar Land, preached the Convention Sermon at the BGCT Annual Meeting in Fort Worth. As Christmas approached, and we prepared to celebrate the coming of God's sacrificial gift to us — His Son, our Saviour — I felt that there could be no more appropriate challenge to us as Texas Baptists than the one delivered by Dr. Lineberger in his sermon. At my request, Phil graciously gave his consent and encouragement for us to publish his sermon as a *Baptist Reflections* column during the Christmas season. But the challenge he presents to us is timely in any season, so we are republishing it in this edition of the *TBC Newsletter*.

"I started the New Year by speaking on religious liberty. . . . If I have one request for 2009, it would be to give that speech at least 100 times across America. Please call or email me, and ask me to come. . . . There's nothing more Baptist than religious liberty, because Christ is all about freedom, and Baptists are all about Christ."

— David R. Currie, *A Rancher's Rumbblings*,
STARTING NEW AGAIN, January 9, 2009

BAPTIST REFLECTIONS

to be saved.” Bob looked at me and said, “Well, my wife says I am going to hell.” I said, “Well, she knows you better than I do.” We both laughed. After a few more minutes, Bob left.

After several months had passed, I received a phone call from Bob. He said, “Preacher, can Shirley and I come by to see you? I want to accept Jesus in my life.” He came by. I shared the Scripture with him again, and he prayed to receive Christ. I baptized him on his 79th birthday. He told me that the reason he came to Christ was the love and care shown to him by our members. In fact, he later wrote me a note, which read, in part, “When you told me that there were two important things in Christianity: Forgiveness and Giving, you should have added a third, ‘Caring.’ I have never been in a Synagogue or Church that truly cared as much as Williams Trace Baptist Church.”

WHOSE TEXAS? THOSE WHO LOVE UNCONDITIONALLY!

TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OUR NEIGHBOR, WE MUST SERVE UNSELFISHLY

We aren’t told where the Samaritan was going that day or what was on his agenda. But whatever it was, it was changed by the plight of the man on the road. He didn’t ask, “What will happen to me if I stop and help the man on the road?” He asked, “What will happen to the man on the road if I don’t stop and help him?”

We live in a self-serving world. The prosperity gospel wants you to do everything within your power to have your best life now by getting and consuming more and more.

We also live in the kingdom world. The kingdom world demands that we give what God has given us to those less fortunate.

Jesus set the example for service when He came to the earth as a servant — *Philippians 2:5*: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”

The only “example” Jesus ever told His disciples to follow was doing the menial work of a servant — *John 13:15*: “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”

In fact, Jesus taught that one could not be one of His disciples unless that one was willing to serve others — *Luke 14:26*: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.”

My life was changed eternally by Christians who served unselfishly. My early years were spent living in a housing project called Bowie Courts, located in Texarkana, Texas. We were not the kind of people who were highly recruited into anyone’s church. We were poor people. But some members of Highland Park Baptist Church took an interest in us. When my Dad was out of work

“We can also take great pride that another brick has been chipped away from the wall of racism in America. I hope that all of us, whether we voted for Mr. Obama or his opponent, can celebrate what this day says about America – that we’re really getting somewhere when it comes to giving equal opportunity to all people.”

— *David R. Currie, A Rancher’s Rumbblings, HOW DREAMS TURN INTO HISTORY, January 21, 2009*

for awhile, they brought us food and clothing. Another time, they brought us Christmas presents when we would have had none. A widow in the church would drive to the Projects on Sunday morning, pick us up, and take us to church. In fact, she took me to the revival being preached by Freddie Gage, where I professed faith in Jesus Christ.

The unselfish service of these church members helped change my life, caused me to love the church, and set me on a path of pastoral ministry.

WHOSE TEXAS? THOSE WHO SERVE UNSELFISHLY!

TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OUR NEIGHBOR, WE MUST GIVE SACRIFICIALLY

We aren’t told how wealthy the Samaritan was, but it doesn’t really matter. He was wealthy in spirit and attitude. He used his own resources to put the man on the road to recovery. He promised the innkeeper whatever it took to make the man whole.

The Samaritan made two commitments: What it takes. What it will take.

One of the great examples of sacrificial giving is the Macedonian church — *2 Corinthians 8:1-5*: “And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will.”

They gave themselves first to the Lord. Selfishness begins internally — a person withholds himself from the Lord before he withholds his goods from others. When we give ourselves completely to the Lord, we give all that we have to Him as well.

There are no free rides in the Christian faith. I think that David best sums up sacrificial giving when he is offered the threshing floor of Araunah for nothing: “No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”

It is impossible to do sacrificial service without paying a price!

Some years ago, a young man related the clearest picture of sacrificial giving that he had ever witnessed. In fact, he said that it was the day *he saw Jesus!* He was working in a food pantry providing food for homeless and hungry people. As he was passing out food to those in line, he noticed a young girl standing under a tree across the street. With her were three small children. He assumed they were her siblings. They looked poor and hungry, and he wondered why they didn’t come across to get food. He was afraid that, if they didn’t come soon, there would be no food left. After some time, the young girl left the other three and crossed the street. By now, the only thing the young man had to give the little girl was a banana. She took the banana, thanked him, and crossed back to the other three kids. She carefully took the banana, peeled it, broke it into three pieces, and gave each child a piece. Then she took the peel and began to lick the inside. This young man said, “*I saw Jesus that day.*”

WHOSE TEXAS? THOSE WHO GIVE SACRIFICIALLY!

BARRIERS WE MUST OVERCOME

What are some of the barriers we must break through before we can love unconditionally, serve unselfishly, and give sacrificially? First, we have to overcome the barrier of not being aware of the needs around us. Second, we have to overcome the barrier of a short memory — of forgetting that at one time we were the man on the road, unable to help ourselves. Someone reached out to us to help us become whole in Jesus. Third, we have to overcome the barrier of selfishness by denying ourselves for the sake of those in need.

**WHOSE TEXAS? WHOSE INFLUENCE?
THOSE WHO LOVE UNCONDITIONALLY.
THOSE WHO SERVE UNSELFISHLY.
THOSE WHO GIVE SACRIFICIALLY.**

December 23, 2008

THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS: THEN NEITHER DO I CONDEMN YOU

by Bill Jones

TBC Communications Editor; and member, TBC Board of Directors

Jesus' words seemed to accuse the accusers.

If any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her (John 8:7). So the Pharisees, standing convicted, slunk away, one by one.

But just a minute. Why didn't Jesus finish what the Pharisees left undone? Why didn't Jesus carry out the execution of the woman? He would have been fully justified, both by the law and by the standard He had just stated — *If any of you is without sin...* After all, Jesus was the one person on the scene who had no sin of His own.

But He didn't do it. *Then neither do I condemn you*, he says. *Go now and leave your life of sin.*

That may well be the essence of the Christmas message: **Then neither do I condemn you.**

Did Jesus deny the woman's sinfulness? No. Did He excuse her sin? No. Did He affirm her sinful lifestyle? No. Quite the contrary. He recognized her sin and challenged her to turn away from it. What do we call that? Redemption.

Jesus chose redemption over condemnation. Earlier in the same gospel, we read, *For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him (John 3:17).*

Some have said that we Baptists — and evangelical Christians in general — have, in recent years, become better-known for what we are *against* than what we are *for*. To me, though, it seems not so much a matter of "against" vs. "for" as a matter of condemnation vs. redemption.

Sometimes we Christians seem to be more comfortable with the law than with grace. We give the impression that we think we keep the law pretty well and that we like to keep the law handy to "lord it over" those who don't. That probably sounds harsh, but

think about it. If this event happened today, in our own community, would we side with Jesus or the Pharisees? I can't answer for you, and I'm pretty uncomfortable answering for myself. Frankly, I'm afraid I might wind up on the wrong side of this story.

"Hot-button" Christian leaders denounce selected groups of "sinners" and use them to advance a political agenda. And many Christians have fallen right in line behind them. The result has been a spewing of condemnation and hatred in the holy name of Christ...the one who was without sin yet refused to condemn sinners.

Have we forgotten the parable that Jesus told about the Pharisee and the tax collector? (*Luke 18: 9-14*) The Pharisee prayed in the temple, thanking God that he was so much better than other men — *like this tax collector*. The tax collector, standing at a distance, prayed a much different prayer — *God, have mercy on me, a sinner*. Jesus tells us that it was the tax collector, not the Pharisee, who *went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*

Condemnation seeks to destroy and manipulate while puffing oneself up. Redemption seeks to love and restore while confessing one's own unworthiness.

We Christians like to talk about "hating the sin and loving the sinner," but this phrase has turned the word "love" upside-down. Christ's life and example, more than anything else, define "love" for us, and our way of "loving the sinner" often has nothing in common with the love that Christ lived out and exemplified for us.

The message of Christmas is that the holy and righteous God could have condemned us but chose instead to redeem us by sending His Son. Jesus' first concern was not the sin but the person. His first concern was not to make an example of the sinner but to *be an example for the person*. His first concern was not the sinner's past but the person's future. He saw a humanity struggling to overcome its sinful nature and offered redemption. He saw people who needed His love.

How do we see the people in our community? In our church? In our world? Do we see them in terms of their sin? Or do we see them as people . . . people who Jesus loves enough to redeem? In our everyday interactions with people, do we seek to be redemptive . . . in whatever way that person needs redemption?

Maybe it's food or shelter for those Jesus described as the "least of these" (*Matthew 25: 31-46*). Maybe it's an encouraging word in difficult times. Maybe it's a listening ear. Or maybe it's simply acceptance for one whom everyone else has rejected.

This applies to our family relationships, too. Are we so focused on being right or winning an argument that we lose sight of our loved ones and their needs? Might they, too, need a redemptive spirit from us?

So how do we live redemptively? Well, Jesus showed us that redemption must start with a refusal to condemn. Jesus always begins by not condemning and then offers redemption...restoration.

Then neither do I condemn you.

That, I believe, is the message of Christmas. May it be our message throughout the year, as we share the grace and redemption that only Christ can give.

BAPTIST REFLECTIONS

January 27, 2009

DECATUR CHURCH COULD FACE MORE GBC WRATH

by John D. Pierce

Executive Editor, Baptists Today

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article originally appeared as a post to the *Baptists Today Blogs* (<http://bteditor.blogspot.com/>) on January 24, 2009. We are reprinting it with the permission of John D. Pierce and Baptists Today.

In her church newsletter column, pastor Julie Pennington-Russell of the First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga., reported on an early January visit by representatives of the Georgia Baptist Convention.

It was the first direct communication since the convention passed a somewhat-veiled motion in November permitting leaders to reject mission funds from the congregation and to prohibit First Baptist members from having representation in the convention.

The GBC's punitive action was in response to the church daring to call a female pastor — something some Southern Baptist men just bristle over.

Pennington-Russell reported that Executive Director Bob White — accompanied by GBC Church-Ministers Relations director Danny Watters and *Christian Index* editor Gerald Harris — informed her and two other church representatives that, while the church is free to call the pastor of their own choosing (something known as local church autonomy that Baptists have valued for some 400 years now), the convention is also free to decide with whom they choose to relate.

Decatur First Baptist is not welcome in their clubhouse. Also, Pennington-Russell reported, the GBC leaders warned that “some individuals” are not satisfied with the action from last November and will likely move to formally “withdraw fellowship” from the Decatur church.

When she asked about the difference between the vote last year and the potential stronger action this year, Pennington-Russell said she was told that a formal “withdrawal of fellowship” would mean that the church could not receive materials or services from the GBC, such as training in Vacation Bible School, Sunday School, or evangelism.

Here's how she explained it in the newsletter: “Not sure I'd heard correctly, I pressed a little. ‘Do you mean that if I called you up one day and said—“The Spirit is doing something amazing at First Baptist Decatur! Waves of men, women and teenagers are responding to God and are being baptized and we could use some additional help in giving them a good foundation. Could you send a team over to meet with our folks?”—are you telling me that the GBC wouldn't want to help us with that?”

The answer was “no.” Heroically, however, Bob White said he would be willing to help “personally” in such a situation, but not as an official representative of the GBC.

For Julie — and those of us who read of this ongoing, unnecessary, childish saga — there are lessons to be learned. Here are her good conclusions, shared with her church family:

“Friends, in that hour-long conversation it became crystal clear to me why people are abandoning denominational structures in droves and why denominationalism as it exists today is doomed: It is largely missing the point. The denominational leaders in my

office that day love people and care deeply about the gospel—I'm certain about that. But the sad reality is, most denominational organizations are stuck in bureaucratic systems that have forgotten why they exist in the first place.”

I have a few observations of my own:

1. Fundamentalism has no “stop” button. The circle keeps getting smaller; the noose gets tighter.
2. The Georgia Baptist Convention is clearly in a Fundamentalist stranglehold.
3. The Decatur church (and any others wise enough to learn from this experience) are more effective apart from — rather than connected to — such hostile, myopic organizations.
4. The “Fundamentalist clubhouse” concept is growing in my mind. (*This is good editorial fodder.*)

And one more point: a member of Decatur's First Baptist Church told me recently that he has never been more excited about being involved in a congregation. More than 60 members joined last year, he said, while most churches inside the Atlanta perimeter are struggling. New converts are being baptized, and people are giving generously to support innovative ministries to reach out into this diverse community.

The First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga., is doing well. The buffoons guarding the old declining GBC clubhouse — no matter how many hostile actions they take — are irrelevant to them and to any other person or church wise enough to see the modern-day realities and move on.

February 4, 2009

DOERS OF THE WORD

by Ken Hall

President/CEO, Buckner International; and member, TBC Board of Directors

One of the biggest concerns I have when we talk about Baptist distinctives is that people tend to understand the theological concept while neglecting to carry out the practical application of what we believe. Maybe that's the reason so many people don't really understand what it means to be a Baptist.

Our Baptist heritage was birthed in the fire of adversity, persecution, and theological discovery. Our forefathers came primarily from people of need and those who were considered outsiders by the religious elite. Truly, they were reformers and advocates for a transitional way of thinking as Kingdom Christians. As we celebrate our 400th anniversary as Baptists, please allow me to reflect upon why I am a Baptist.

I'm a Baptist because, when I ponder the priority of missions and evangelism, I immediately go to the concept of sharing the *whole* gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus used human need as His entry point to share the truth with those He taught. His disciples, as they took leadership in the new Church, met the needs of the widows, those who had lost property, and those who were unemployed, to make truth the reality that God cares for every part of a person's life. True Baptists are about doing ministry as the means of missions and evangelism.

I'm a Baptist because it's important that I *learn* how to be a Kingdom Christian in the world. Baptists were at the root of building some of the greatest Christian universities the world has ever known. Texas Baptists are blessed to have nine universities

that are building Kingdom Christians. From 1845 forward, our theology has emphasized that the best way to make a disciple is to teach Christians how to live for Christ in the real world. It's never been about just understanding the right theology or orthodoxy. It's about being real, so that you can apply your theology to investing in the lives of others.

I'm a Baptist because Baptists have always *believed* that the Great Commandment of *Matthew 25* is also about justice and mercy. In the 1870s, Texas Baptists gave birth to the Buckner ministries that would stress the pure and undefiled religion of the *New Testament* to serve widows and orphans. Texas Baptists helped build Baptist health care systems that today serve millions of people annually in the name of Christ. Our collective Texas Baptist human care ministries make real the mandate of Christ to serve all people.

So, rather than argue about what a real Baptist *believes*, my argument is for a real Christian who is a Baptist to act accordingly. I'm proud of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and support it financially and with committed advocacy, because I know that the distinctives of missions and evangelism, Christian education, and Christian service to the least of these is a priority for our free Baptist tradition.

April 1, 2009

CHRISTIAN ETHICS – A REQUIRED COURSE FOR CHRISTIANS

by Bill Jones

TBC Communications Editor; and member, TBC Board of Directors

He has showed you, o man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8) (NIV)

In this verse, the prophet Micah caught the essence of biblical ethics, even foreshadowing the essence of Christ's life and teaching — to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Dr. T. B. Maston, who founded the Christian Ethics department at Southwestern Seminary and taught there from 1925 to 1963, loved to quote *1 John 2:6* – *Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did (NIV)*. The discipline of Christian Ethics seeks to teach us how to walk as Jesus walked.

Christian Ethics, as an academic discipline, is ignored by most Christian universities and seminaries today. Is it any wonder that our society likewise ignores it as a way of living? Christian ethics — biblical ethics — are inconvenient. It is easier to talk about Jesus than to live like Him. It is easier, in fact, to mouth His words than to live them. But live them Jesus did — and He challenged, indeed commanded, us to do the same.

In his short but unyielding epistle, James refused to let us off the hook with a cheap and easy grace. *Show me your faith without deeds*, he proclaimed, *and I will show you my faith by what I do...As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (James 2:18b, 26) (NIV)*

As are many Texas Baptists, I'm excited about TexasHope 2010. I love Randel Everett's emphasis on concentric circles of concern — that evangelism starts where we are, with those who we know and who know us...that it starts in real relationships. But

that brings us right back to what James said about faith without works. Let's not kid ourselves — if people don't see Christ in our lives, they won't hear Christ in our words.

Christian Ethics should have a central place in every Baptist university and every Baptist seminary. But it shouldn't be limited to academic settings. Christian Ethics should be central to the proclamation of the Gospel from every pulpit. If we Texas Baptists were to strive to better understand the ethical challenges of the Gospel, it would change our lives. *Walking as Christ walked — in a life committed to justice, mercy, and humility in relationship with the Father — would change our relationships...the way we do business... the way we deal with the critical issues of our day...and the way we look at the world around us.*

This month, those of you in West Texas have a priceless opportunity...no, make that *two* priceless opportunities — on April 13-14 in Abilene and April 27 in Brownwood — to hear serious discussions about living out biblical ethics in facing the challenges of today's world.

On April 13-14, the annual **T. B. Maston Lectures in Christian Ethics** will be held at Logsdon Seminary on the campus of Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene. The T. B. Maston Lectures are named after the late Baptist ethicist who spent his life calling Christians, especially his fellow Baptists, to live out the radical demands — ethical imperatives — of the Gospel, which he exemplified with his own life. Dr. Maston pioneered the study of Christian Ethics among Baptists.

The speaker will be Dr. Emmanuel McCall, pastor of Fellowship Group Baptist Church in East Point, Georgia. Dr. McCall also serves as adjunct professor at McAfee School of Theology, Mercer University; and vice president of the Baptist World Alliance.

Dr. McCall will speak at 7 p.m., Monday, April 13, in Logsdon Chapel; and 9:30 a.m., Tuesday, April 14, in Behrens Auditorium. The theme of Dr. McCall's lectures will be *Neither Jew Nor Greek*. They are free and open to the public.

The Lectures will be preceded by an undergraduate Christian Ethics retreat, to be held from Sunday evening through Monday morning; and then a Monday afternoon session led by Dr. Rob Sellers, professor of missions ministry, Logsdon School of Theology; and Dr. Rick McClatchy, coordinator of Texas Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The afternoon session will focus on the relationship of missions to ethics.

On April 27, the annual **Currie-Strickland Distinguished Lectures in Christian Ethics** will be held on the campus of Howard Payne University in Brownwood. The Currie-Strickland Lectures are named in honor of Dr. David R. Currie, executive director, Texas Baptists Committed; and in memory of Dr. Phil Strickland, longtime director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission.

The speakers will be Dr. Bill Tillman, T. B. Maston Professor of Christian Ethics, Logsdon Seminary; and Dr. Jim Denison, Theologian in Residence, Baptist General Convention of Texas, and former pastor of Park Cities Baptist Church, Dallas. The theme of the lectures will be *Ethics and Evangelism and the Problem of Hunger*.

The lectures will be held from 1:30 p.m. to 5 p.m., Monday, April 27, at Howard Payne University. They are free and open to the public.

I urge you to take advantage of opportunities like this. You will learn, you will grow, and you will be changed.

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