



2024 at a Glimpse

The World is Not at Peace



Conflict and Resolution

The war in Ukraine reached the beginning of its third year and has been going on since February 27th, 2014. Israel was still at war with Hamas in the Gaza strip due to their attack of Israel on October 7th the previous year. Hezbollah began adding attacks as a result of that conflict, but

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Christian Press is a magazine of McDowell Bible College, which is a nonprofit, free or low tuition college and seminary serving English speaking Christian students around the world. MBC was officially formed as a non-profit, was awarded accreditation and gained state approval to operate in the Fall of 2018. It is an institution of higher learning formed to provide a quality, free or low cost education especially needed by, but not limited to, lower to moderate income servants of God. For more information, go to:

<https://www.christianpress.org>

Israel responded heavily, devising a scheme to destroy most of their leadership with pager bombs and air attacks in Lebanon. With Russia in Ukraine and Hezbollah weakened, Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian leader whose family ruled with an iron fist for 53 years, fled the country after a 10-day campaign by rebel factions ended in the taking of Damascus. The primary leadership amongst the rebels stated that they will respect minority and religious rights and will institute a representative government. Sweden finally joined the NATO alliance, which was added along with Finland after Russia invaded and attacked Kiev.

Economics

The year began with hope and prosperity after a couple of years of growing inflation and other economic issues left over as a result of mismanagement from the previous administration. The pandemic was ended during the current U.S. administration mismanaged so badly by the previous administration that a Forbes article in February 11th of 2021 quoted a Lancet Report stating that the Trump administration policies caused hundreds of thousands of unnecessary deaths. The previous administration's policies brought higher unemployment, lower health care enrollment, higher crime, and the largest debt in history for a single presidential term. We currently enjoy a robust economy, lower unemployment, higher health care enrollment, higher market value and a lower crime rate. We end the year well.

Politics and Religion

Pro-Palestinian protests erupted on college campuses throughout the U.S. Putin wins re-election virtually unopposed. Voters in Mexico, the United Kingdom and the U.S. elected new leadership with Mexico choosing a woman in Claudia Sheinbaum and the

U.S. continues to be against female presidential leadership, rejecting Kamala Harris. Once again, Evangelical Christians chose the irreligious Donald Trump over the devout Christian and church member Vice-President Harris. One study indicated that President Biden attended more services while in the White House than any other president in six decades, with Trump as the



least, having attended only ten times in his four years. He did hold a Bible in front of one for political purposes. Donald Trump suffered an ear wound during one assassination attempt and one other attempt was thwarted on his golf course at Mar-a-Lago during the campaign. He won 312 electoral votes - eight votes greater than his 2016 win. The CEO of United Healthcare, was assassinated with the motive being corporate greed in the healthcare industry. As many Americans have supported such violent acts on social media, Christians should be concerned with the soul of the country. Notre Dame de Paris reopened with dignitaries from around the world present.

Science and Technology

There was a wave of AI development that caused many issues, mostly regarding fraudulent depiction of people and their actions. Two NASA astronauts rode a Boeing Starliner out to the Space Station on June 5, 2024, only to be stuck the rest of the year. Climate change contributes to the hot-

test summer on record. Massive solar storms make solar flares visible. Japan lands a probe on the moon. A total solar eclipse was seen in parts of North America. Trillions of cicadas emerge in North America with both the 17- and 13-year cycles coinciding.



The Olympics were held in Paris with record breaking performances by swimmer Katie Ledecky and gymnast Simone Biles. The Michigan Wolverines won the 2023-2024 NCAA football playoff title after beating the Washington Huskies 34-13. The Los Angeles Dodgers won their eighth World Series championship taking down the New York Yankees at Yankee Stadium in the final game. They did this after erasing a five-run deficit. Caitlin Clark breaks multiple NCAA scoring records and goes pro. LeBron James reaches 40,000 points in the NBA.

Christian Press is Born

Christian PRESS (CP) is a magazine for all Christians around the world and those who would learn more of the Christian lifestyle and beliefs. We offer insights into what it is to follow Jesus and be a good Christian, not only in the eyes of God, but to all the peoples of the world. We work to provide biblical training and a real Christian perspective on current events around the world. We offer this information free to those who seek it on the web and provide a hard copy magazine to those who wish to donate and support us in this effort.

Christian PRESS (CP) is a successor through its editor to Independent Press (IP) founded in 1976. IP informed readership about injustices, exposed corrupt and immoral activities, and enhanced the civil discourse, originally in Birmingham, Alabama. As IP would speak to issues that affect people regarding those issues, Chris-

tian PRESS accomplishes a similar goal in addressing the lives of Christians today by applying biblical and theological principles to those issues, with the goal of determining what would Jesus do (WWJD). Born also in Birmingham, Alabama, CP also continues the goal of its sponsor, McDowell Bible College, to follow the great commandment and teach all nations the Gospel and what it is to be a Christian.

We look forward to keeping you informed and provide biblical instruction as we develop these pages. Please pray for this effort as we build this website and magazine in the future, all for the Glory of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

**God Bless All
In the New Year!**

Some Recent News and Commentary from CP Online

**The House Passes a
Stop-gap Budget Bill
on the Evening of the Last Day**

Washington, D.C., Dec. 20, 2024

The House of Representatives passed a last ditch budget bill and sent it to the senate this evening which should pass in the senate without problems. The newest House proposal is a 118-page bill that contains most of the provisions that were put in place in the bipartisan bill that was agreed to on Wednesday. The bill includes \$100 billion for disaster aid, \$30 billion for farmers and a one-year extension of the farm bill, provisions that were under heavy debate prior to this week's votes. It does not include the increase in the debt ceiling that President-elect Trump wanted.

This is similar to the original bill that the House rejected after multiple tweets by Elon Musk and later President-elect Trump threatening Republican representatives to be primaried if they voted for it. They caved, although it had bipartisan support previously, and tanked the original proposal. The Republicans tried to pass a bill with many Democratic provisions gutted and adding purported five trillion dollars to the debt. Fiscal conservative Republicans voted against this bill, along with Democrats. Finally, Speaker Johnson managed to put together a temporary fix until March,

with provisions similar to the original bill, which passed with bipartisan support. The senate has already approved pediatric cancer research that was stripped out of the current stop-gap measure. Senators were also expected to advance both the government funding bill and the Social Security Fairness Act this evening.

Commentary

It is a serious problem when some members of congress are cowed by billionaire tweets, especially when one of those billionaires, the richest man in the world, currently holds no elective or even administrative office at this time. When the rich can unfairly influence our country's elections, that is bad enough. When they use that influence to hurt those less fortunate (farmers in need, disaster victims, children with cancer, etc.), it is indeed evil. Here is what the Bible says about it in Proverbs 14:31, "Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him." The rich, Elon Musk and President-elect Trump, are billionaires who look out for nobody's interest but their own. They have both stated that they would rather the government shut down than for congress to fail to give them their way. Imagine soldiers and police and other emergency personnel who are still required to work without pay. Now imagine the two million government employees who will not get a check during the Christmas season. Trump nor Musk care about those people, it doesn't affect them. My question is this. We know that Trump had this attitude before in his previous term, but with guardrails of good people who talked him down when he tried to do the worst (although he did leave us 7 trillion dollars more in debt). Now, he is trying to load the executive department with loyalists who are not only not qualified for many of the positions, but who will do his will without any pushback. How could good Christians have voted for such a man. Remember, whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker. But then, Trump has never really been a religious man to begin with and does not fear God's reprisal. Do you honor God? Did you honor God with your vote? Because, I am telling you, a majority of Evangelical Christians did not when they voted for this irreligious, immoral individual. (*Note: The senate went on to pass the bill early the next morning.*) Editor, CP Cont' pg.12

The Church Today

Issues that Affect Churches in Modern Times

The Potluck Dinner

By Qunhong 'Hong' Tan

The potluck dinner was always a great tradition in the American church. Some recall the day of outside potlucks with tables built many yards long of a permanent material, often concrete, on which members laid out their favorite dishes to share with others in the congregation. Often, this was a great outreach to the community as it became a social event shared even amongst those who did not attend, or at least attend regularly. In any event, it was considered a blessing to breaking bread in this manner amongst those who love the Lord.

Often, especially in the fast-paced world we live in now, as most working age women are busy in the workforce, this tradition has gone to the wayside in favor of catered meals from professionals. We still break bread, but we have lost the "flavor" of sharing. Potluck is now relegated to a once or twice a year activity, if at all in many churches.

Jesus broke bread with His disciples in Matthew 26:26 and in Acts 2:46-47, the apostles went on "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

We often fail to understand the outreach nature of this tradition. Potlucks can be a way to help those in need in the community, because no congregation would turn away someone who had little or no dish, but be happy to share bread with all.

Those churches who offer meals on Wednesday evenings have found a much higher attendance to the bible study, because Christians love to eat with each other. But more than that, they are receiving often healing benefits from this Christian tradition as they share fellowship and prayers with oth-

ers. Jesus and His disciples very often shared meals with each other. We as Christians could also benefit in our faith and our own shared blessings by doing no less.

I hope as you enter the new year, that you will also consider bringing back the potluck Christian fellowship if your church has lost some of its flavor. God will surely bless your efforts and if you use this as an outreach to your community, your church will be blessed as well.

Here is one of my favorites. Share your recipes with us and we may publish them in the future:



Sweet and Sour Chicken

2 tbs. cornstarch
 2 tbs. water
 1 cup flour
 Salt and pepper to taste.
 1 tbs. soy sauce
 3/4 cup chicken stock
 1/3 cup pineapple juice
 1/2 cup pineapple tidbits
 2 oz. maraschino cherry juice
 1/2 cup maraschino cherries
 2 tbs. tomato paste
 2 tbs. rice vinegar (*regular vinegar can be used*)
 2 tsp. honey
 4 tbs. peanut oil (*vegetable oil if allergic*)
 2 green peppers, pith and seeds removed, then cut into half inch pieces.
 1 large onion cut into half inch pieces
 1 inch piece of fresh ginger peeled and chopped finely.
 1 lb. of chicken breast cut into one inch pieces.

Combine the soy sauce, chicken stock, tomato paste, vinegar, cherry juice, pineapple juice, and honey in a small bowl, stirring it until it is well blended, then set aside. Combine the cornstarch and water in a cup until diluted with no lumps. In a shallow bowl, combine the flour, salt and pepper. Bread the chicken pieces in the flour mixture then set them aside.

Heat half the oil in a wok or similar frying pan and wait until the oil is quite

hot, but not smoking. Then add the breaded chicken pieces and stir fry until browned and well done. Remove the pieces onto a plate covered by a paper towel to drain the oil. Set aside until time to serve.

Heat the other half of the oil in the wok. When it is hot, add the peppers, onions, cherries, and ginger and stir fry for two minutes. Then add the chicken stock mixture and stir it until it boils, then thicken the mixture with the cornstarch and water. Pour into a large bowl.

It is recommended that you do not combine the meat and sauce until just before you serve them by adding the fried chicken pieces to the sauce and vegetable mixture. For potlucks, I keep them separate, then warm up the sauce mixture before adding it to the chicken for serving. That keeps the chicken crispy longer.

What Are We Doing to the Older Members?

By Larry McDowell



Earlier last year I moved out of my neighborhood in the East Lake community of Birmingham, Alabama up to Fultondale just north of the city. I moved to East Lake seven years prior to take my first paid pastoral ministry position as Assistant Pastor of Lake Highland Baptist Church and wanted to be near my ministry. The church had a traditional service with the old hymns. I attended a bible study for the elderly at the senior center at East Lake Park almost daily, and later taught on Thursday mornings. For over a year, we sang hymns from the National Baptist hymnal and listened to a different pastor or lay minister each day of the week present a bible study. Being the only white person in the study, nevertheless, I was familiar with the old National Baptist hymns as I had played piano for the National Baptist service in a chapel at Ft. Leonard Wood and many were the same hymns as all protestant denominations sing. I realized that loving and singing old hymns breached racial and de-

nominational boundaries amongst seniors.

A year later, I became a senior pastor of a church for a year, then served in several other churches in my ministry to try and revive outreach from those congregations with my Motivated Outreach training. All of those churches sang the old hymns, during which we sat through at least half, with a possible sprinkling of newer praise songs along the way.

But, I digress. After I moved to the Fultondale community, my wife and I visited several churches of the Southern Baptist tradition in the Fultondale and Gardendale. I avoided the very large churches as I am more comfortable in a medium to small church. Yet, most of the churches we attended spent 15-20 minutes or more standing. Of the older members, some tried to keep standing, but a few embarrassingly sat down after tiring. They were surrounded by a sea of standing people singing repetitive praise songs and they seemed to be left out. The younger members were enthusiastic and in most of the churches, there was growth. It seemed to me that the better the success, the longer the standing.

The problem is that now most churches have decided that if they want to grow, they must become mostly a modern service with standing, waving of arms and praising the Lord with these simple, repetitive songs, or they will not continue to grow. They take no pity or understanding of the senior members amongst them who lack the energy or physical ability to participate.

We eventually returned to First Baptist Church of Birmingham and its commute over the mountain on Sunday mornings. They are a medium church with a great mixed music program and respect is given to the older members regarding lengthy standing. The quality of the music service is well done, despite the fact that unlike the mega churches who have large orchestras, they do very well with a few instruments and a medium choir, respecting the piano and organ as the primary instruments.

Worship leaders need to be more respectful of the seniors in the congregation and offer more respite to the long standing periods. Senior pastors and church leadership should also understand and respond to this issue.

Though I hate to put it in fiscal terms, but the seniors simply support



the church much better than the middle aged or the youth in terms of tithing. The days of a preponderance of 10 percent tithes are long gone. But there is certainly an age difference.

A Lifeway study indicated that 22% of 18-34 aged stated "I try to give, but I am not always consistent" with the average giving less than one percent (Billy Graham study). . This goes down to 20% for aged 35-49 with an average of 3%, with only 12% of 65+ stating that they are not consistent and often they average 5%, with many seniors meeting the 10% tithe despite often dwindled income after retirement.

Gain, I understand it is about bringing people into your congregation, but I think many churches have lost respect for the generation that gives the most support for the church, fiscally and spiritually. It comes down to respect for your senior members. Are you showing it or not.

Some larger churches have resolved this issue with two services, one modern one for the youth and another more traditional service for the seniors. Whatever your solution, give the seniors a break. I think you will find that even the younger folks don't want their service to be like a rock concert and can worship with enthusiasm, even with the occasional break from standing. Also, the traditional hymns are coming back to popularity.

Being in the music ministry off and on for 50 years, I can understand Worship Leaders appreciating the feedback of waving hands, clapping and standing ovation to their efforts. However, I also understand their can be a balance and should be a balance. Psalms calls us to "worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord" (Psalm 95:6), but also "praise him with tambourine and dance" (Psalm 150). That's my point-you can and should do both: praise and be respectful in the service.

Interfaith Homes

The ideal is to marry and build a family with a Christian spouse. However, sometimes love does not always follow down that path, or the marriage starts out with an agnostic or other faith basis, but one becomes a Christian later on. In any event, it becomes quite complicated, especially in how children are raised in the home.

This year, the first night of Hanukkah falls on Christmas, which means many interfaith homes will be celebrating both holidays. Religion News had an article of one mixed Christian and Jewish marriage that found compromise by celebrating 'Christmukkah'. There is a Christmas tree adorned with ornaments to include two Stars of David. The children have blue "Hanukkah stockings" and there's an Advent calendar and presents under the tree along with menorahs and a collection of dreidels. Interfaith families are constantly deciding how to embrace both traditions. One God prevails, but Christ is also there. We can only hope that the Jewish half will come to know Him.



CP Sermon Series

This month we begin a series on the churches of Revelation.

Keep the Lamplight Shining

Rev. Larry McDowell



Our scripture is taken from Revelation 2:1-5 (ESV):

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.””

John passes on the prophesy from Jesus in the book of Revelation and in the first two chapters, he speaks to seven churches. Over the next few issues, I am going to look at each of these seven churches and try to apply them to modern churches. I am not going to take them in the order John gave them, but will take a look at themes. This month we will take a hard look at the church at Ephesus.

In chapter two, verse one it refers to the angel of the church. It is commonly thought that the angel may be the pastor of the church at Ephesus, or an angel looking in on the workings of the church at Ephesus. In some way, this angel represents this church; but the letter isn’t written just to the representative, but to the whole church.

Ephesus was a famous city in the ancient world, with an equally famous church. Paul ministered in Ephesus off and on for about three and a half years. It was a major city in Asia Minor famous for

its temples to pagan gods, particularly the goddess Diana, worshipped with immorally. This tremendous temple to Diana in Ephesus was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was supported by 127 pillars, each pillar 60 feet tall, and it was adorned with great sculptures.

For many years during the Roman period, the city was considered the second largest populated area of the Roman Empire. It had a population in the first century time of Paul and John of about a quarter million.

The Temple of Artemis was also a major treasury and bank of the ancient world, where merchants, kings, and even cities made deposits, and where their money could be kept safe under the protection of deity.

Ephesus was a hotbed of superstition, evil and satanic practices. Books on sorcery and other ungodly and forbidden arts were plentiful in that city.

He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: These images were taken from John’s vision of Jesus in Revelation 1. They emphasize the authority of Jesus in the Church (He holds the seven stars) and His immediate presence in the Church (He walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands). This introduction stresses that Jesus is central to the church, and should be recognized as central to the church.

Jesus says, “I know your works”: Jesus looked at His church, and He knew its condition. It was no mystery to Him. There may be sin or corruption hidden in a congregation, but it isn’t hidden to Jesus. He would say the same thing to us today, both as individuals and as a congregation: I know your works.

Now think about that for a minute, if Jesus knew the works of the early churches, do you think He would not know what we are doing right here in this church? God is omniscient, he knows the heart of each and every person in this sanctuary today.

Jesus speaks of “Your works, your labor, your patience”: Jesus knew what this church did right. They worked hard for the Lord and they had Godly endurance. Patience is the great ancient Greek word *hupomone*, which means “steadfast endurance.” In this sense, the church in Ephesus was rock-solid.

Jesus states, “You cannot bear those who are evil”: The Ephesian church pur-

sued doctrinal purity.

Paul warned the Ephesians in Acts 20:29-31: “29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

Christians today, like the Ephesian church then, must vigorously test those who claim to be messengers from God – especially those who say they are apostles, because deceivers will speak well of themselves. The greater the evil, the more deceptive its cloak.

In the nineteenth century the great preacher Charles Spurgeon wrote this about Paul’s warning: “This was grand of them: it showed a backbone of truth. I wish some of the churches of this age had a little of this holy decision about them; for nowadays, if a man be clever; he may preach the vilest lie that was ever vomited from the mouth of hell, and it will go down with some.”

Spurgeon had a sad experience with some of those of his day who would turn his Baptist beliefs in more liberal ways. His efforts to stop it caused him to be censured and he died of a broken heart.

John writes of the words of Jesus, “You have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary”. The Ephesian church continued doing these things without becoming weary. They showed a godly perseverance that we should imitate. We should all do our part as we go out and invite others to church and witness to the community. By all outward appearances, this was a solid church that worked hard, had great outreach, and protected the integrity of the gospel.

But, Ephesus was not perfect. What did Jesus has against the church at Ephesus? “Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love.” Nevertheless – in other words despite all the good things they had done for the Lord, they left their first love. Oh, everything looked good from the outside, but it was all a façade.

If you would have attended a service of the church at Ephesus, you might have thought, “This church is getting busy. They are doing so much, and they really keep it biblical.” But then as you sat in the pew and observed, you might have had

a vague, uneasy feeling – yet it would probably be hard to figure out. It wasn't hard for Jesus to see the problem.

You see the problem was serious. Without love, all is vain. No wonder Jesus said, "Nevertheless I have this against you."

Jesus told them that they had left their first love: What love did they leave? As Christians, we are told to love God and to love one another. Did they leave their love for God? Did they leave their love for one another? Probably both are in mind, because the two loves go together. You can't say you love God and not love His family, and you can't really love His family without loving Him first.

The Ephesian church was a hard-working church, a doctrinally pure church, but they were also a hard-hearted church. If you become arrogant and hard in your view of others from your theology, you can have a congregation that is cold, suspicious and intolerant. Today, that means that the congregation, instead of loving their neighbors as the Lord loved them, become less than welcoming to all.

So how does Jesus know this? I truly believe that they had rejected the fruit of the spirit of love. When you reject a gift of the Holy Spirit, you have rejected God and of course the Son of God being one with the trinity would know your heart as the cold and intolerant thing it has become.

Jesus remembers your first love. He remembers it like a wife remembers the first period of romance with her husband, the early days when everything was beautiful and loving. That time when you went up the aisle and fell in love with Jesus. You see, Jesus wants us to keep the honeymoon going, He wants us to love him as well now as we did then. He wants that first love.

Remember therefore from where you have fallen: The first step in restoration for the Ephesian church is for them to remember. They need to remember from where you have fallen. This means remembering where they used to be in their love for the Lord and for one another. This means bringing on a second honeymoon. This means a revival of love for the Lord.

When the Prodigal Son was in the pigpen, the first step in restoration was remembering what life was like back in his father's home in Luke 16:17-19). This is always the first step in getting back to where we should be with the Lord.

Repent: This is not a command to feel sorry, or really to feel anything. It means to change your direction, to go a different way.

Do the first works: This means that they must go back to the basics, to the

very first things they did when you first fell in love with Jesus. These are the things that we never grow beyond.

What are the first works?

- Remember how you used to spend time in His Word?
- Remember how you used to pray?
- Remember the joy in getting together with other Christians?
- Remember how excited you were about telling others about Jesus?

One commentator writes, "We might say that Satan does a masterful job in creating a sense of general dissatisfaction with these first works. Christians will run after almost every new, strange method or program for growth and stability. Our shortened attention spans make us easily bored with the truest excitement. Sometimes we will do almost anything except the first works."

Or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place: Jesus gave them a stern warning. Unless they repent, He will remove their light and His presence. When their lampstand was removed, they could continue as an organization, but no longer as a true church of Jesus Christ. There are a lot of churches out there today who do a lot of works, and some have some modicum of success and even growth, but it is not a biblical growth, it is not from God.

You see there was a lampstand in the tabernacle of the Israelites and the light was tended by Aaron and his sons so that its light never went out. The lampstand of the New Testament church was a symbol for Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. A church cannot exist without the Holy Spirit. If it is not a church if God is not there. It reminds me of those lines in the movie *Souder*:

The character David Lee asks, "What do they do in the white churches, Mama?"

His mama answers, "Same as we -- they pray."

Ike says, "You know, one time by mistake I went into a white church down in Row County and to this day I don't know how'n the devil I got outta that church alive."

Nathan Lee interrupts, "They probly thought you was crazy."

Ike replies, "I guess so -- but I went home and did me some praying to the Lord. I said, 'Lord, I went into this white church down in Row and all I want you to tell me is how I ever got outta there in one piece?'"

Nathan Lee asks, "What did the Lord tell you, Ike?"

Ike answered, "He said, I don't know, Ike -- you doin' better'n me, I been tryin' to get in there for 200 years and ain't make it

yet!"

Apparently, at least in the short term, the Ephesians heeded this warning. In the early second century (not too long after John wrote), Ignatius, an early church father, praised the love and the doctrinal purity of the Ephesians. Ignatius wrote, "You, who are of the most holy Church of the Ephesians, which is so famous and celebrated throughout the world . . . you, being full of the Holy Spirit, do nothing according to the flesh, but all things according to the Spirit. You are complete in Christ Jesus."

From what Ignatius wrote, it seems that the Ephesians returned to their first love without compromising doctrinal purity. That isn't always an easy balance to keep, but the Ephesians apparently kept it, at least for a time.

You've got to love everybody and love the Lord to be a church. Remember Jesus probably had in mind what he said in Matthew 22:37-40 and Mark 12:30-31 when He was talking about love. Remember, when He was asked what the greatest commandment was by the pharisee, and He quoted Deuteronomy 6:5, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Then Jesus added Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

That is the love the Church of Ephesus had lost. That is the love many Christians in many churches today has lost.

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." However, you cannot gather in his name and not follow His commandments. You must love the Lord you God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and you must love your neighbor as yourself. If you cannot do those two things, you are not worshipping in His name and your lampstand is missing.

Don't lose the love. Don't lose the love you felt for Jesus Christ from the day you walked up the aisle and accepted him. The day some heard an evangelist and came to tears as they realized the love of Jesus Christ. Don't lose the love for your fellow Christians as you fellowship and worship in His name.

Is your lamp light glowing? Do you feel the spirit of Jesus Christ here this morning? Are you feeling the spirit right now? If you cannot feel the spirit, then come down here and pray with me as Laurie leads us in our invitational hymn. If you cannot feel the love, then its time to pray to the Lord and have him light that lamp again, feel the warmth, feel the glow, feel the Lord once again in your life.

Upon joining First Baptist Church of Hoover several years back, it was not more than a week or two that Sister Barba-



ra Bailey came to join. Because of our newness in the church at the same time, there was a bond formed between her, myself and Hong, my wife. Barbara Bailey soon became a regular at the Wednesday morning senior bible study. It was there that she often shared her ideas on passages and discussed the bible with myself and others.

Barbara loved the bible and love the Lord and she found solace in the 23rd Psalms:

1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

You see, Sister Barbara now dwells in the House of the Lord forever. You can find solace in the fact that she knew what awaited her on the other side. She knew that one day she would be welcomed into the arms of her Lord.

Barbara was a servant of the Lord. She many times had to miss church and miss Wednesday bible study because of various illnesses and afflictions. Yet, she would always return with love in her heart for her fellow Christians. She always had

an encouraging word to me as I began my pastoral ministry as Outreach Leader at First Baptist Hoover.

I remember after a series of sermons on outreach and witnessing and talking about it in the bible study, one Wednesday morning Barbara came in and said, "Well, Brother Larry, I did it. I went around my neighborhood and knocked on doors and invited my neighbors to church. Now you have to understand, at the time, Barbara did not get around so well. Yet, she wanted to be a part of the program to reach out to others in the community and invite them to church. I like to think her example encouraged others to do the same.

Barbara has suffered in her health over the years, but as is stated in Revelation 21:4, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

At times like this, the phrase is sometimes overused, but we can all be confident that Barbara is now in a better place. She is with the Lord she loved so well, and she no longer has any pain.

From John chapter 14 Jesus told his disciples, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. 4 And you know the way to where I am going." It is a promise we can all share if only you believe in Him as Barbara did.

God Bless!

Pulpit Humor

(We do not guarantee the age or pun factor of the following humor.)

Six-year-old Angie and her four-year-old brother Joel were sitting together during church services. Joel giggled, sang, and talked out loud. Finally, his big sister had enough. "You're not supposed to talk out loud in church."

"Why? Who's going to stop me?" Joel asked. Angie pointed to the back of the church and said, "See those two men standing by the door? They're hushers."

We had a substitute preacher preaching at our church and he told this story. He said, when he was younger, he thought that the doxology went: "Praise God from whom all blessings go, Praise him all preachers here we go (instead of creatures here below), then praise him above the heavenly host, praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." He said he thought that because, when everyone sang that, often the preacher leaves the pulpit and walks out!

A boy came late to Sunday School. Knowing he was usually very prompt, his teacher asked, "Johnny, is anything wrong?"

"No, ma'am, not really," he said. "I was going to go fishing, but my dad told me that I needed to get on up and go to church."

The teacher was very impressed and asked Johnny if his father had explained why going to church was more important than fishing.

"Yes, ma'am, he did," Johnny said. "My daddy said he didn't have enough bait for both of us."



Feature Article

The Affect of the Pandemic on Churches

The following is a transcript of an interview conducted after the worst of the pandemic with Dr. Chris Crain the Director of Missions of the Birmingham Metro Baptist Association in Birmingham, Alabama. It sheds a lot of light on the impact of the pandemic on churches.

Larry McDowell: This is a survey to determine the impact of the pandemic on churches in terms of their services, retention and finances. I want you to answer questions based on your knowledge of the situation of churches within the Birmingham Metro Baptist Association. First, at the beginning of the pandemic, in February 2020, approximately how many churches were in your association?

Dr. Crain: 126

Larry McDowell: During the period of the pandemic between February 2020 and now March 2022. How many churches in your association had to close their doors permanently?

Dr. Crain: Five.

Larry McDowell: Of those that closed permanently during that period. About how many do you believe closed their doors due to the pandemic that otherwise not have closed due to attrition or other reasons?

Dr. Crain: Zero.

Larry McDowell: Of those that closed under their own name during that period, how many churches had to merge with other churches due to the pandemic?

Dr. Crain: Four.

Larry McDowell: Of those churches that closed during the pandemic, what do you feel was the primary cause of those closures, such as retention, finances, normal attrition, remote services or any combination of those, [such as] finances?

Dr. Crain: Normal attrition.

Larry McDowell: Thank you. You [may] expand on these answers. Okay, uh, how many new churches have joined your association during the last two years?

Dr. Crain: So, that's the wild card. So, because of a merger, we had 50, joined through the merger and then four that joined that were unaffiliated Baptist churches.

Larry McDowell: I'll just go with the four then, how many churches are within your association today?

Dr. Crain: So, because of the merger, there are 180.

Larry McDowell: That would be 130 of the original, during the pandemic. About what percentage of churches in your association had to close for in-church services during that period due to self-concern for safety or government mandate?

Dr. Crain: So, during the pandemic, we had, at least for a period of time, for some part of that duration, at least 45% of churches that completely closed for at least some period of time.

Larry McDowell: What do you believe was the average period of time churches were closed for in church services during that pandemic?

Dr. Crain: I would say on average, so, we're taking churches that closed for months and then churches that closed for a few weeks. Um, I would say the average would have been two months.

Larry McDowell: Okay for those churches that reopened for in-church services. About what percentage had to close in-church services, once again, due to new variants?

Dr. Crain: I would say roughly 20%.

Larry McDowell: What percentage of churches were able to provide services during the period of in church closure through either audio or video means?

Dr. Crain: I would say roughly 55% or so, a little more than that.

Larry McDowell: Now. That is surprising. I thought it would have been more than that.

Dr. Crain: Yeah. So many just didn't do it

Larry McDowell: Of those about what percentage were able to stream their services in real time, either by audio [or] video means. And what percentage were only able to provide remote services after the fact.

Dr. Crain: I would say that those that provided their service in real time were pretty high. So, that would be more like 75%. Um, so, well, maybe a quarter of those by the other means here.

Larry McDowell: Of those churches able to provide remote services, about what percentage continued these remote services even now,

Dr. Crain: That's the good news. At least 75% of those that had started continued. Yeah.

Larry McDowell: What effect do you believe remote services had on attendance for the average church in your association?

Dr. Crain: So, um, anecdotally and just like you say, my belief, I believe that it has been a mixed result. You know, there have been some who have reported that they have more who have just decided to stay home and worship at home using their, their phone or device. And then we've had others that have replied that they've had new people come that had seen the worship or the preaching or both online, even some that have reported Sunday school classes or bible study groups that they've watched online and then joined later in person. So, it has been both a positive and negative experience.

Larry McDowell: That's... I didn't think about the, the new part. You know, that's, that's interesting. What effect do you believe remote services have on retention of membership of the average church in your association?

Dr. Crain: So, I believe that it has been a positive effect on keeping those who were not able to come engaged with the church. So, some of our pastors have a

theological issue with remote services, and that would be that they believe that the church is to be the gathered assembly, and to that, whatever people enjoy at home remotely is may be good. It may be edifying, but it is not corporate worship. So, however, there has been a positive effect in that those who are engaged in worship or in their congregations remotely that has helped them stay connected. So, so I would say overall positive with those negative caveats.

Larry McDowell: What do you think was the effect on the finances for the average church due to the remote services?

Dr. Crain: Most churches had a negative overall result. So, that at least some decline in finances.

Larry McDowell: Yeah, I found it rather interesting because that's my, what my basic thesis here is that the pandemic had some negative effect in that area on retention and finances, but, Birmingham, The 1st Baptist Birmingham has done better or at least as well. And I found that really, really good. How did the pandemic affect church outreach and personal witnessing during the pandemic?

Dr. Crain: Negative. Those searches that had any kind of in-person outreach, door to door or visitation programs suspended those? And it was, was detrimental. And so, it had an overall negative effect on personal evangelism

Larry McDowell: Other than remote services, what other steps or strategies have you heard that your churches and your association took during that period of the pandemic to improve attendance, retention and finances?

Dr. Crain: I've, I've heard of several that have put together packets of material for Children's classes and adult classes, um, to distribute and that those would be targeted to those that really needed threat materials as opposed to all. So that has been good. Now, this would be virtual uh, to some degree, but it would be recorded. Uh, some had prerecorded lessons and provided links to those. So those were not remote services, but they were bible studies. So, they've done prerecorded bible studies. Also, they've done virtual bible studies. Those will not be worship services, but we're also remote. Remote giving is another tools. We have had At least 20 of our churches that had no remote giving platform to come and get help or we've resourced them to others who could help them to set that up. So remote giving is another way that churches have tried to reach or retain people. There there's probably many others that I'm not... Several churches, I would say four that come to mind, did outdoor type events where people could social distance. So, when they could not go out and

...at least 45% of churches that completely closed at least for some period of time...

visit, they would have events that were evangelistic in nature for people to drive up and stay socially distant in their cars. So, four churches out of our association that I'm aware of, possibly others did that. Um, I know of one congregation that delivered iPads or tablets to the elderly and gave them specific instructions and how to use those and that, that has helped them stay connected. I know of couple of churches that used print newsletters through the mail that had suspended those long ago or never had a printed newsletter. And that was a good tool um to improve attendance retention and finances. Let's see. I know several that had, had um, had attempted new ministries locally. Outreaches to 1st responders, teachers, also to medical personnel that served as an outreach to improve attendance, retention, and finances and that was very good local missions type work. I'm sure I'm missing some, but those are several. Let me think [if] there's anything else? Yeah...

Larry McDowell: That's actually quite helpful. I appreciate it.

Dr. Crain: I'm thinking there was at least one church that rewrote a job description of ministers to deal with specifically virtual ministry. So that would be another avenues to, to kind of reassigned staff to be in charge of improving attendance, working with people that are not attending, you know, in person, so [I] hope that's helpful.

Larry McDowell: Okay. Uh, I'm gonna kinda add this one as an addendum, because it wasn't mentioned. I noted that the streaming services used by my church had a real time social media attached to it, for example, Google and Facebook where the members during the service would be putting in comments. I don't think my church responded to any of those real time. Were there was that being done in other churches? And did you know of any churches that actually had someone responding during the service real time to those?

Dr. Crain: Um, several one that comes to mind that did it very well was they did have at Hunter Street Baptist, someone who was monitoring all live services and his people came online, they would welcome them. If they made a comment, they respond to it. And, certainly if there's anything inappropriate, they would delete it, you know. But, they were there to help get people, uh, to feel that they were a part of something that was actually going on. And several churches did that. Valleydale is another one. Let's see. Crosspoint, which is not in our association, but north in Argo. They did that. So those are just larger church examples. I just have to believe that some of the smaller churches did that as well. So yes, there were some [?] yes.

Larry McDowell: And finally, what lessons have you learned from the pandemic uh, that really stick out with you. That would... You know, the way modern science is going, this may indeed occur again down the road. Has your association? I started thinking about that. And what lessons have you learned that that that would improve things the next time around.

Dr. Crain: I think, uh, that's an excellent question. One thing that we've talked about a lot here is pastoral wellness. So pastors and staff members and leaders made

Dr. Crain: health to navigate challenging situations, including crises like, and they often don't realize how overwhelmed they are until they have that one more straw on their back. And so we've, we've done a lot to bring that level of care up for pastors who want that and also to partner provide weeks and weeks of biblical counseling and find that for pastors and churches. So that that's been a, I think the big ones bold print. This is what we've learned that we have, um, we need our pastors to be resourced uh, and be well. I think another one that's similar to that is, is when it comes to pastoral leadership. We heard a lot of predictions about how many might quit the ministry and what we've seen here is that there have been a few that have resigned. But I think we've underestimated the resilience

Dr. Crain: of pastors who have been called by God to serve the church. We we've underestimated that because I confess that I've re shared some articles about that with, so our association about pastor and quit how many may not make. And then I think we've sold them short that the pastors were called by God are there for the right reasons and they are tough. So I think that's a big learn learning experience for us. And what has been brought up to your survey is the importance of virtual technology and streaming and all those things in perspective. So a lot of our pastors had very high hopes of how virtual content was going to help their church maintain and even grow during the pandemic,

this might be a breakthrough and there have been some anecdotal evidence of that, but I think

Dr. Crain: as you've seen there has been still yet a decline and we are still not, I was talking to Several pastors yesterday and they're still only about 75% of where they were before, so it seems like the larger the church, the bigger that gap is um larger churches seem to not rebounded in attendance, although they're giving has held pretty strong and that to me has been perplexing, so larger churches have done well with finances, but their attendance gap um yeah, larger than some smaller churches where there may be more relational ties, more pressure is social pressure to be at church in person. That's my evaluation of it, right? But what I've seen go out, I think maybe a third or fourth thing I've learned watching this is that um we we we have to um look at ways of mhm um.

Dr. Crain: Doing our bible studies or discipleship processes that that involves offsite. Oh, you know, activities that may be home bible studies and things of that nature, those those who have already had those in place seem to have been able to regain attendance quicker than those who expect people to come to one facility because especially in the black community it seems like because one third of our churches are predominantly african american, there's a lot of still some fear about coming to a building full of people. So the churches, well in offside bible studies have, have rebounded quicker and seemed to be more resilient. And then back to the virtual issue, like I mentioned a moment ago, several pastors have really struggled with this idea of is it church at all if you cannot come as the gathered people.

Dr. Crain: And I think it's, it's been a rebirth or renaissance in, in studying ecclesial ology, what is the church or what is worship And and some of our studying the ordinances and they're studying gathered worship and trying to make sure that they're not leading the people astray and making them feel as though they're worshipping and part of the church family in an appropriate way while they're distant. There's still this thing that's missing.

Dr. Crain: So think At least five things many others. hope that helps your project a little bit.

Larry McDowell

Oh, that's great. Uh that's exactly what I was looking for and this is not a question, but one of the problems that Brother Jim mentioned that bothered him. It's the same thing that bothered

me when I was preaching at Cahaba Heights. He's preaching to an empty sanctuary and I don't think he'd ever done that before and it really affected him. Have you heard any anecdotal evidence of that from pastors.

Dr. Crain: Yes, I've talked to several that have felt as though they were ill equipped to, to do any kind of on camera preaching at all. Even just preaching with a full room of the camera would have been a new experience for I think that their fault

Larry McDowell: very

Dr. Crain: material would be out there in perpetuity that that never crossed their mind. And so it's that aspect as well is now that

Dr. Crain: held to a standard that our works can be brought back to us. So that just that aspect, but then an empty building, that's a whole another layer of it to preach to a camera. That could be the material morning represented. But now you're preaching to an empty building on top of several guys have had stage fright. They said that just it just felt like I couldn't felt like I was slurring my words. I couldn't think clearly because I'm not used to preaching and there's no affirmation at all, because I think they sermon as not not in a full extent, but somewhat of a dialogue. You know, your it's not a monologue, you're preaching and you're watching the expressions of people, you're listening to their verbal responses amen or whatever they might say.

And to not have any of that, especially for those who are in more participatory worship styles, you know, more freedom in their worship as opposed to liturgy. It was almost this crippling to some movie skies. And so they have learned this skill that they now have learned the hard way I think will serve them well, right, That has been something has been brought up over and over.

Larry McDowell: Well. I wanna thank you, Dr. Crane. This is [was an interview with Dr. Chris Crain, the Director of Missions, Birmingham Metro Baptist Association.

**Larry McDowell:
How many churches in
your association had to
close their doors per-
manently?**

Dr. Crain: Five.

Rebels Take Syria as Fifty-Three Year Assad Family Reign Ends

Damascus, Syria., Dec. 8, 2024



Early this morning rebels took over Damascus and had the government turned over to them peacefully with Assad apparently nowhere to be found. It was reported that Assad's family had fled earlier to Russia and Russian state media reported that Assad himself landed in Moscow after having fled. This is a historic moment as the collapse of more than 53 years of al-Assad family rule has finally ended. (See Historical Background below.) The rule was marked by so much violence and hard rule, with any dissent being quashed to point of literally killing thousands of their own countryman, including the use of chemical weapons. This harsh rule began a civil war in 2011 that continued to this day as the people attempted to overthrow Assad. Only the help of Russian air forces, Iran and Hezbollah allowed him to continue his rule to date. However, with Russia's interest heavily vested in Ukraine and Hezbollah leadership destroyed and military forces seriously weakened by Israel recently in Lebanon, Syrian rebel forces were able to take the country.

Al-Jalali, leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has taken a more moderate stance in the 10 days leading up to the capture of Damascus. Although he once had ties with Al-Qaeda and spent five years in American prisons in Iraq after fighting the Americans there, he has since denounce Al-Qaeda and taken a more Syrian nationalist approach to his rebel activities. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham is designated as a terrorist organization by the United States and the United Nations, a designation Al-Jalali has been trying to get removed. During the recent ten days, he ordered his forces not to attack minority religions, such as Christians, and had them go around and tell Christians in occupied areas that they may celebrate Christmas. He also told forces to stay out of government offices until they were voluntarily relin-

quished to them. Perhaps this more moderate approach and his handling of Syria from this point forward will allow Al-Jalali to achieve his goal of normalcy.

President Joe Biden called it a "moment of historic opportunity for the long-suffering people of Syria" in his remarks at the White House today, according to NBC News. Celebrations broke out in Damascus after the fall of Assad.

Historical Background

Syria has always been viewed as an important geographical location subjecting it to conflicts throughout its history. Syria was a province of Rome in the first century AD and is mentioned ten times in the New Testament, as well as 108 times in the Old Testament (ESV). Syria and Cilicia together was a mission area for the early Christian church. Syria was a country in which the Greek language came together with the Syriac language, the latter being closely related to the Aramaic dialect used by Jesus and the Apostles. The Phoenicians of biblical times lived on the coast of ancient Syria and were the most skilled seamen of that era. Control of Syria passed to the Byzantines after the split of the Roman Empire. It was conquered by the Arab Rashidun army by AD 640 and fought over by various Muslim leaders and even a tribute nation of Mongols during the middle ages. Sections were held by French, English, Italian and German overlords during the Crusades. The Ottoman Empire controlled the region from the sixteenth century. After the Ottoman Empire chose the wrong side in World War I and was defeated, they lost control of the entire region. France and Great Britain had already begun parsing up the Middle East two years before the war ended, with France eventually taking control of Syria after many conflicts against local rulers. After the end of World War II, the Syrian Republic was founded in 1946, ending in constant upheaval. Beginning in 1949, there were a series of military coups. After the Suez Crisis of 1956, Syria signed a pact with the Soviet Union, which continued to influence the nation under Russia even as the bloc was broken up. Hafiz al-Assad controlled the military and eventually became the cult leader of the ruling Ba'athist party and turned the country into a totalitarian dictator-

ship, eventually succeeded by his son, Bashar al-Assad who took over the country in 2000 in an unopposed election. Syria's attack of the nation of Israel weakened it and eventually caused the loss of the Golan Heights in the south as a result of the Six-Day war in 1967. There was rioting in the years after Assad took over and Assad clamped down on any dissent. During the Spring 2011 attempt to overthrow his government, there were many reprisals. Assad is purported to have killed thousands of his own people, to include using chemical weapons. His support by Russian air forces, Iran and Hezbollah allowed him to continue in control, albeit with constant civil conflict throughout the country, until now. With Russia drawn to Ukraine and the defeat recently of Hezbollah leadership and forces in Lebanon, rebel forces were able to make a 10-day sweep to take Damascus and overthrow the Assad and end his tyrannical rule.

Commentary

I would like to begin with this from Ephesians 6:12:

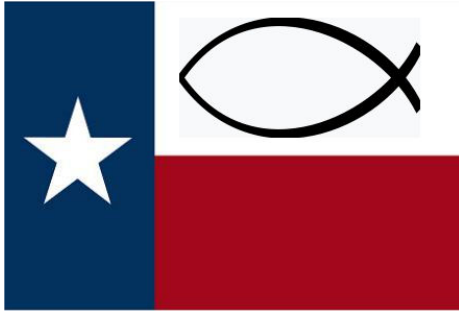
"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (ESV)

For 53 years the al-Assad family ruled over Syria with an iron fist, including subjugation to the evil sphere of the Soviet Union and Putin's Russia to keep that power. When rulers make deals with the devil to stay in power, to the detriment of their own people, there eventually comes a price to pay. While Assad did not suffer the humiliation and execution of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, but escaped to Russia, he finally lost the power he had committed so many sins to keep. While I am reluctant to say at this point that the new ruler(s) of Syria will be better, there are positive signs this will be so. The Syrian people did what was instructed in James 4:7, "Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (ESV)

Larry McDowell
Editor, CP

Texas State Board of Education Approves Bible Curriculum for K-5

Austin, TX., Nov. 23, 2024



CNN reports that public schools in Texas now have the option to teach a Christian biblical view as part of their K-5th grade curriculum. It is a part of the state developed curriculum called Bluebonnet Learning. School districts in Texas are autonomous in choosing their curriculum, however, the state offered \$60 per student to accept this curriculum will be hard for most to turn down.

Critics of the curriculum argue that it heavily favors Christianity over other faiths. Some suggest that it violates the establishment clause of the First Amendment, which states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of a religion." On Saturday, Rachael Laser, CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State told CNN that, "Parents and families, not politicians or government officials, should get to decide if, when and how their children engage with religion."

An opponent to the Bluebonnet curriculum, Sharyn Vane, emphasized that it was the job of parents to teach their children about religion - not public schools. She told CNN, "As a Jewish parent, of course, we taught our child our faith at home, and I think no matter your faith, the parents are the ones who need to be teaching those lessons."

For similar reasons, seven of the 15-member board voted against the measure, narrowly passing by one vote. The tally was four Democrats and three Republicans who opposed this measure, including Pam Little, the Republican vice chair of the board., whose additional argument was that materials are too rigorous for young students.

Texas is among several Republican-led states that have passed legislation that incorporates Christianity in public schools. A federal judge this month temporarily blocked a Louisiana

law that would have required the Ten Commandments to be displayed in every public school classroom by the new year. It is likely that other states will be similarly challenged on religious overstep in public schools when they favor one religion over another.

Commentary

I stated this previously and I will state it again: we are not a theocracy. The framers of the United States Constitution Bill of Rights realized that they needed to curtail some of the governmental abuses they had experienced in Great Britain and elsewhere in Europe and set out to right those grievances. When you permit one religion to dominate public schools over another, you risk the tide turning in decades or even centuries later. Globally, Christians make up only 31.5% of the people of all religions. We are globally in a minority. Could you imagine having the strict tenants of the Koran being enforced on American education as it is in numerous Middle East countries. We are not Muslims.

In fairness, as much as we as Christians would love to have young people exposed to the teachings of Jesus at a early age, it is not our government's responsibility to do so. It is our responsibility of us as Christian parents, much like the Jewish parent above stated. I can tell you from my own studies, we are falling down on the job considerably. According to one study, only 17 percent of Christians have any type of religious activity at home in the week that separates services in the church, to include bible study, prayer, and yes, teaching the little ones. As a result of this, our own children are not even being taught by their own parents at home. I suggest we clean up at home first, before we start trying to force our religious beliefs down the throats of other American children.

I was a Gideon, on and off in three camps Alabama. We distributed our little testaments to children in the fifth grade. Fortunately, the school districts allowed us to do this for the most part, though some in Alabama had begun stopping the practice. I found this practice acceptable, because, we were not their teacher and therefore were not forcing our religion on these children. We merely offered the testaments, then it was up to them, and later their parents, what to do with them.

When I was in the fifth grade, I remember clearly a bad feeling I had when I looked up from the daily morning prayer, allowed in 1960 in Alabama, and saw the look of discomfort on a Jewish girl's face as it ended, "In Jesus Name, Amen". Even at so young an age and for a very religious boy who attended both services each Sunday at Centercrest Baptist Church, I still felt the wrongness of that and was ashamed. I stated this earlier as well, "Give unto Caesar..." You know the rest. When you threaten to put your own religion over another, be prepared down the line to have your own religious freedom challenged. If we just simply did our jobs as parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, in educating our youth about Jesus, we would make a huge impact on church attendance. We should not try to force the government to do our job, as parents and churches.

Larry McDowell
Editor, CP

Matt Gaetz Withdraws Nomination

Washington, DC. Nov. 21, 2024

ABC News announced today that former Rep. Matt Gaetz has withdrawn his name for consideration for Attorney General in President-elect Donald Trump's upcoming administration. "I had excellent meetings with Senators yesterday," Gaetz wrote in a post on X. "I appreciate their thoughtful feedback - and the incredible support of so many. While the momentum was strong, it is clear that my confirmation was unfairly becoming a distraction to the critical work of the Trump/Vance Transition. There is no time to waste on a needlessly protracted Washington scuffle, thus I'll be withdrawing my name from consideration to serve as Attorney General. Trump's DOJ must be in place and ready on Day 1." Gaetz's nomination was a surprise to many lawmakers, with, even high level Republicans, suggesting that his nomination was not going to be easy. Gaetz resigned from Congress in an effort to stop the ethics investigation that alleged sex trafficking and drug use.

Commentary

It is unsure the motive of Donald Trump as to why he would nominate such a controversial figure to our na-

tion's top law enforcement post. However, it is reassuring that even some Republicans will draw the line to inexperience and immorality when advising and consenting on cabinet level posts to lead our nation's government, even if they still refuse to refute the very leader of this government on the similar grounds - they have done the right thing here. Character counts, and the character of that nomination was certainly in question. There are still others being nominated whose character, loyalty to the nation, other than Trump, and morality are under question. Let us hope that Republicans continue to scrutinize other unworthy picks.

Larry McDowell
Editor, CP

Mass Deportations Using the Military Confirmed by President-Elect Trump

Washington, DC. Nov. 18, 2024



According to ABC News, President-elect Donald Trump confirmed he would declare a national emergency in order to implement his campaign promise of mass deportations of illegal immigrants. Trump replied on social media that such reports of using military assets was indeed "TRUE!!!".

In his original campaign pledge at a rally at Madison Square Garden he stated, "On day one, I will launch the largest deportation program in American history to get the criminals out. I will rescue every city and town that has been invaded and conquered, and we will put these vicious and blood-thirsty criminals in jail, then kick them the hell out of our country as fast as possible."

Commentary

Leviticus 19:33-34 states, "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God." (ESV)

You did not have to become a Jew to be a foreigner in Israel. To become a Jew, all you originally needed was a belief in the one true God and circumcision. To become a Christian, the requirement was less physical and was simply, but most importantly, repent and accept Jesus Christ as your Savior. To become American, it was once much simpler as a portion of Emma Lazarus' poem on the Statue of Liberty monument states:

*"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to
breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming
shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-
tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

In the most egregious use of the U.S. military domestically since the attack on the veterans of World War I on the capitol mall by Herbert Hoover, the republican president-elect intends to use the military for his own political purposes. Republicans are supposedly for States-rights, however they have failed miserably under the Trump administration who would impose his MAGA will on as many states with which he can. Governor Walz, the 2024 Vice Presidential candidate for the Democrats, stated his states-rights position on immigration in 2018 in a CBS interview, "My position on Minnesota becoming a sanctuary state boils down to who has the responsibility for enforcing immigration law." While Trump supports the states as having a right to determine their own rules on abortion, he refuses to give them the authority over immigration within their own border, except to demand they send all undocumented aliens packing. Now he wants to use the military. As a military man of 20 years, I find that offensive and quiet bordering on an unlawful order, forbidden under the post-Vietnam Code of Conduct. I hope the generals remind their commander-in-chief of that code and that such a use of the military domestically is the

unlawful act that it is and they are not bound to follow such an order.

In this editor's opinion, MAGA does not mean Make America Great Again. It is a dog whistle for Make America White Again. That explains the support from the KKK, Nazi groups, Proud Boys, etc., of whom Trump said there were good people and patriots. Donald does not have a problem with European immigration and sponsored his wives to come to America, he just hates all those others out there. Do you hate immigrants? As a Christian, have you followed God's commandment and loved our immigrants ... all of our immigrants - legal or not? The Bible made no such legal distinction. Trump's own mother was a Scottish immigrant, as was his first wife Ivana from Czechoslovakia and his current wife, our former and soon First Lady, Melania from Slovenia. Remember the days when former Eastern Europeans, even naturalized citizens, were suspicious and could not hold certain security clearances. Love your immigrants. The Donald does, if they are white and from Europe.

Yes, let's make America great again. You know what they mean. Let's go back to the days of my Daddy, where he said there was a sign outside the city limits of Cullman, Alabama stating something like, "Nigger, don't let the sun set on you in Cullman". When I received a note scrawled in bad penmanship by mail as editor of the Independent Press stating, "Nigger, take this penny and save on welfare. Go back to pickin white mans cotton. KKK" [there was a penny enclosed]. Being white myself, I found the letter both amusing, yet frightening in the mid-seventies. As a boy in the mid-fifties in Birmingham, Alabama, I remember the days of Jim Crow when my mother admonished me not to drink out of the water fountain labeled "Colored" (she spelled it out for me as an English lesson), because it was nasty. There was also the time I went to the back of the city bus to go to school and the bus driver hollered, "You better get back up here boy before I tan your hide." The people around me were encouraging me to obey him, as they feared they would be in trouble having a white boy in the colored section. Yeah, those were the good ole days - just ask a large segment of Trump voters pining for their return.

For those Republicans who now

revere Ronald Reagan more than their founding President Abraham Lincoln (and certainly have forgotten his notion of equality for all in America), I leave you with his final words in his farewell address:

January 19, 1989: "Now, tomorrow is a special day for me. I'm going to receive my gold watch. And since this is the last speech that I will give as President, I think it's fitting to leave one final thought, an observation about a country which I love. It was stated best in a letter I received not long ago. A man wrote me and said: "You can go to live in France, but you cannot become a Frenchman. You can go to live in Germany or Turkey or Japan, but you cannot become a German, a Turk, or a Japanese. But anyone, from any corner of the Earth, can come to live in America and become an American."

"Yes, the torch of Lady Liberty symbolizes our freedom and represents our heritage, the compact with our parents, our grandparents, and our ancestors. It is that lady who gives us our great and special place in the world. For it's the great life force of each generation of new Americans that guarantees that America's triumph shall continue unsurpassed into the next century and beyond. Other countries may seek to compete with us; but in one vital area, as a beacon of freedom and opportunity that draws the people of the world, no country on Earth comes close.

"This, I believe, is one of the most important sources of America's greatness. We lead the world because, unique among nations, we draw our people - our strength - from every country and every corner of the world. And by doing so we continuously renew and enrich our nation. While other countries cling to the stale past, here in America we breathe life into dreams. We create the future, and the world follows us into tomorrow. Thanks to each wave of new arrivals to this land of opportunity, we're a nation forever young, forever bursting with energy and new ideas, and always on the cutting edge, always leading the world to the next frontier. This quality is vital to our future as a nation. If we ever closed the door to new Americans, our leadership in the world would soon be lost.

A number of years ago, an American student traveling in Europe took an East German ship across the Baltic Sea. One of the ship's crewmembers

from East Germany, a man in his sixties, struck up a conversation with the American student. After a while the student asked the man how he had learned such good English. And the man explained that he had once lived in America. He said that for over a year he had worked as a farmer in Oklahoma and California, that he had planted tomatoes and picked ripe melons. It was, the man said, the happiest time of his life. Well, the student, who had seen the awful conditions behind the Iron Curtain, blurted out the question, "Well, why did you ever leave?" "I had to," he said, "the war ended." The man had been in America as a German prisoner of war.

"Now, I don't tell this story to make the case for former POW's. Instead, I tell this story just to remind you of the magical, intoxicating power of America. We may sometimes forget it, but others do not. Even a man from a country at war with the United States, while held here as a prisoner, could fall in love with us. Those who become American citizens love this country even more. And that's why the Statue of Liberty lifts her lamp to welcome them to the golden door.

"It is bold men and women, yearning for freedom and opportunity, who leave their homelands and come to a new country to start their lives over. They believe in the American dream. And over and over, they make it come true for themselves, for their children, and for others. They give more than they receive. They labor and succeed. And often they are entrepreneurs. But their greatest contribution is more than economic, because they understand in a special way how glorious it is to be an American. They renew our pride and gratitude in the United States of America, the greatest, freest nation in the world - the last, best hope of man on Earth." [President Ronald Reagan]

You see, immigrants, (almost all of them, are not the criminals, rapists and drain on resources that Trump would have you believe. The crime rate amongst illegal immigrants is lower than the general population. They contribute to the economy greatly. It is estimated that the cost of such a mass deportation to be almost a trillion dollars over a decade. That is just the up front cost. The loss of labor and its impact on the economy would be massive as the construction and agriculture industries would lose at least one in eight workers and one in 14 workers in hospitality, including 30 percent of

the workers in major construction trades, such as plasterers, roofers and painters; nearly 28 percent of graders and sorters of agriculture produces; and a fourth of all housekeeping cleaners. Most Americans are too lazy to do the work or find it beneath their dignity. There are at least 1 million undocumented immigrant entrepreneurs who generated \$27.1 billion in total business income in 2022.

Overall, mass deportation would lead to a loss of 4.2 percent to 6.8 percent of annual U.S. GDP, or \$1.1 trillion to \$1.7 trillion in 2022 dollars. In comparison, the U.S. GDP shrunk by 4.3 percent during the Great Recession between 2007 and 2009 making the chances of another large economic downturn under Trump's next administration highly probable. The negative impact would be the most significant in California, Texas, and Florida, the three states that were home to 47.2 percent of the country's undocumented immigrants in 2022 and where one in every 20 residents would be deported. (American Immigration Council)

It is not a surprise, when you consider that Trump, thought by his voters to be great on the economy and the nation as a whole, is quite the opposite. It is also not a surprise in that almost every Republican president since Herbert Hoover has cause an economic downturn with their trickle-down economic policies of helping the rich at the expense of the poor and middle-class. Even Reagan caused economic woes, it was just delayed until his Vice-President George H. W. Bush took office (remember "Its the economy , stupid!") True conservatives should be aware of the poor results recorded during Trump's previous four-year administration:

- The federal debt held by the public went up, from \$14.4 trillion to \$21.6 trillion or 7.2 trillion dollars.
- The economy lost 2.7 million jobs.
- The unemployment rate increased by 1.7 percentage points to 6.4%.
- The trade deficit in goods and services in 2020 was the highest since 2008 and increased 36.3%.
- The number of people lacking health insurance rose by 3 million.
- Illegal immigration increased.
- The murder rate in his last year rose to the highest level since 1997.
- Home prices rose 27.5%

(FactCheck.org)

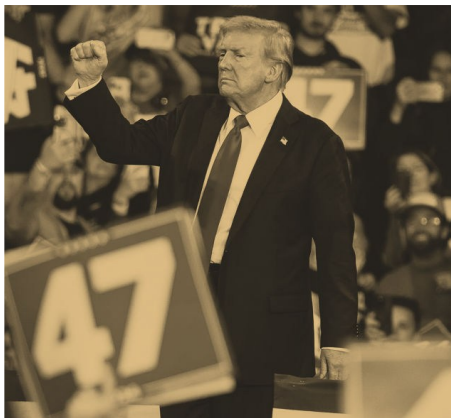
In fact, much of the inflation that was credited/blamed on Biden's administration, was caused by many of the fiscal policies of the Trump administration. Yet, Trump used inflation to win the 2024 election when he himself contributed to much of it. You cannot let the rich get out of paying taxes, yet keep spending to the greatest deficit in our nation's history. Any high school economics student can tell you that causes inflation. Now Trump, in his xenophobic frenzy, wants to contribute to the loss of 4.2 percent to 6.8 percent of annual U.S. GDP, while reducing taxes for the wealthy once again and raising tariffs, which will cause inflation to go into orbit.

Enough said. God commanded us to love immigrants, so how can any good Christian support this attack on millions of people contributing greatly to our American economy and who just want to be free.

Larry McDowell
Editor, CP

Trump Declared Winner of the 2024 Election

Washington, DC. Nov. 6, 2024



The Associated Press declared Donald Trump the winner in Wisconsin at 5:34 am EST the day after the election, wrapping up his chances for the White House when it was determined that the remaining votes would not be enough to turn the tide towards Vice President Kamala Harris to overtake Trump. Trump had already swept the other two must-have states of Pennsylvania and Michigan in the "blue-wall" and Wisconsin sealed the deal.

Commentary

Also on this date, as editor of the former Independent Press of the sev-

enties and now a licensed and ordained minister, I have decided there is a need for a truthful news source that Christians can come to other than politically motivated right-wing evangelical sources, Fox News, Newsmax and even more crazy right-wing internet sites. I provided some news and commentary on the McDowell Bible College supported Bible College Radio internet radio site. However, it did not have the audience that was hoped in that media. Christian PRESS (CP) was created to bring back into focus a moral outlook for the Christian world for both hardcopy and online media. Many good and well-meaning Christians have been deceived into following an immoral, corrupt, mendacious, authoritarian, anti-democratic and, when you realize the truth, irreligious leadership. They look with tunnel vision to one or two narrow issues they believe is important to them such as abortion or the immorality of the gay lifestyle, ignoring the character and moral foundation of the leader. Those deceived Christians chose a leader who rarely ever attended a church service. Even the church he claimed to have attended in his youth stated that he was never a member and voted that he would never be allowed membership due to his immoral character. In supporting this con man who would use anything, even religion, to gain power, these deceived Christians are willing to throw the baby out with the bath water. Fortunately, many Christians, including the staff of CP, still feel that character counts when choosing those who would be role models to our youth and examples to the rest of the world.

In 2019, the editor of Christianity Today, an evangelical magazine that was founded in the fifties by Billy Graham, came out against Trump. Galli wrote in the editorial, "The president of the United States attempted to use his political power to coerce a foreign leader to harass and discredit one of the president's political opponents," Galli wrote in the editorial. "That is not only a violation of the Constitution; more importantly, it is profoundly immoral." He put a crack in the evangelical support of Trump because he had the moral courage to stand up to that bully. However, he paid the price of having to step down from his position at the magazine. With 81 percent of evangelicals voting for the morally corrupt president in 2016, it was refreshing to see that not every Christian had

drunk the Trump Kool-Aid.

I am not putting myself on the level of Mark Galli, as I have so much less to lose, but when I took on bigotry and hate in the seventies with Independent Press in Birmingham, Alabama, I received threats. I spent 20 years in the military and although I never served in combat, there was always the chance I would be called. I answer that call again. Christians need to start following the teachings of Jesus and God's commandments and refute this evil, deceiving, immoral Trump, or I worry about their very souls, much less the soul of our nation. You cannot support a wicked ruler and still consider yourself a follower of Jesus.

We know well the words of Jesus when he stated in Matthew chapter 7:15-20:

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits." (ESV)

and Mark 13:5-6:

And Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray." (ESV)

While Jesus stated that this would happen. Remember the more of Mark 13:7-8:

"And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains." (ESV)

Those strong in Jesus Christ can avoid the worst. It is never too late to turn to truly Christian leaders who actually attend a church and pray to the Almighty. But how are you going to know if your only news source is Fox News or Newsmax (who have collec-

tively spent billions of dollars in lawsuits for lying) or even less reliable sources on the internet.

Good Christians followed Hitler on to the path of the destruction of Germany. Years ago, an old Nazi told me once of voting for Hitler and enjoying the promise of a schnitzel in every pot and a Volkswagen in every garage, until he was no longer allowed to vote. A clergyman did not speak up about the horrible treatment of the Jews, because he was not a Jew. Then, it was too late and it was his turn to be sent off to the concentration camps. Christians around the world, even today, follow would be dictators until it is too late for them to change course. Now, good Christians in America have followed another would be dictator down the path to destruction - twice. They forget he instigated an attack on the Capital building and democracy itself, they have no memory of his numerous adulterous acts (none of which he has repented for - he does not believe he needs to repent), his deception during the pandemic that cost the lives of thousands, his numerous bankruptcies to steal from others, and finally, his seven trillion dollar deficit (the largest in history) that contributed to most of the inflation that he blamed on his successor.

But, it is not too late to turn back towards the Lord. To turn away from evil and to do what Jesus would do. America is not a theocracy. By taking rights away from one group so that you try and force your own beliefs on others, you risk losing your own rights in turn. Hillary Clinton once stated that abortion should be legal but rare and woke up to read a devotional each morning. She attended church regularly. Yet, Franklin Graham never mentioned any of that or the fact that her opponent never went to church, except for political gain, when he sent out blatantly one-sided support for Trump to churches nationwide. Churches as nonprofits should never involve themselves in politics, yet they do, failing to remember the master's words, "...render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (ESV) Trying to do the right thing about abortion and gays, churches and Christians have allowed a would be dictator to attack the basic precepts of this nation under God. Freedom of religion also means freedom from the domination of one religious denomination over another. That is a foundational concept we

must always remember.

As the website is built and I begin the process of building the hard copy magazine, I will also put these news and commentary pieces on the Bible College Radio several times a day and on YouTube. I hope you will come back and read or view these issues of importance to all Christians from a biblical and moral perspective, all for His Glory.

Larry McDowell
Editor, CP

Let Us Know Your Opinion

If you would like to share your own opinion, please send it by email to the editor. Letters to the editor must be reasonably polite, respectful, and the language should reflect what a Christian would use, even if you may disagree with any CP positions that you may have read. To send a letter to the editor, email it to the editor at the address on the left. We look forward to your response and your opinion.

Letters to the editor should be sent to:
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COM5005-611 Visual Presentation Preparation for Churches and Nonprofits 3 hrs.
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BIB5801-612 Genesis 3 hrs.
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