

# Fulton County Gospel News

*Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World*

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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## “WITHOUT EXCUSE”

### Part Two

by Lee Moses

What do most people do when they have been caught doing something wrong? They make excuses. Failing to find the time in our lives to know and obey God is the epitome of “wrong,” and it is inexcusable. As the Holy Spirit warns, *“For the invisible things of [God] from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse”* (Romans 1:20). In our last issue, we saw that “I didn’t know,” “I couldn’t help it,” and “I couldn’t understand the Bible” are not legitimate excuses for failing to know and obey God. However, these are not the only “excuses” that fail to excuse.

**“I had other obligations” is not an excuse.** A few years ago, a book was published that was entitled, *Busier Than Ever! Why American Families Can’t Slow Down*. It is at least the common perception that Americans, and likely inhabitants of other lands of the globe, have filled their plates fuller than ever before. Workers are commuting longer distances to work, children are involved in more extracurricular activities, and people are recreating in ways involving greater commitment.

Although Americans are apparently busier than ever, it seems most are actually **accomplishing less** than ever, and this is certainly true on the spiritual front. Whereas Gospel meetings would once typically bring in overflowing crowds, the weeknight sessions of a twenty-first century Gospel meeting do well to bring in over half of the same

people who come on Sunday morning and a small handful of additional visitors. Whereas the typical American home once had daily Bible study and devotion, the home that includes such things even weekly or monthly is now the positive exception.

But our busyness fails to excuse our inattention to the things of the Lord. Jesus pictured His kingdom as a great feast, but the people honored with invitations to this extraordinary event *“all with one consent began to make excuse”* (Luke 14:18).

*The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come* (verses 18-20).

Did the Lord tell His “too-busy” invitees, “I understand—you had other obligations; you had other things to do; you had other places to be. Maybe next time”? Far from it. The Lord is depicted as *“angry”* with them, allowing everyone **but** those initially invited to come to His feast, seething, *“None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper”* (verse 24). A similar parable Jesus told on another occasion saw yet fiercer wrath attending those who thought their “farms” and “merchandise” more important than responding to the King’s invitation (Matthew 22:1-8).

The Lord made clear to Ahab that being *“busy here and there”* did not

excuse Ahab’s negligence of the Lord’s commandment (1 Kings 20:39-40). Jesus told the story of a rich farmer who had achieved material success, no doubt in part because of his diligence and hard work; *“But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?”* (Luke 12:20).

Some consider themselves “too busy” to commit to living the Christian life, whether by initial obedience to the Gospel (Romans 6:3-4, 17) or by the repentance and confession required of an erring child of God (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). Some consider themselves “too busy” to attend all the assemblies of the congregation of which they purport to be members (Hebrews 10:25). But the fact is they are not too busy to do that which they find most important. As one observed, “No matter how busy people are, most are never too busy to stop and talk about how busy they are.” Busy people still find the time to go to work; they still find the time to attend their children’s ballgames and other extracurricular events; they still find the time to participate in recreational activities here and there. But what **is** most important? The rich farmer learned that all his *“goods laid up for many years”* would avail nothing when he had not made preparations for his soul to enter eternity.

It is agreed that one should make the most of his limited time on earth. We should be always *“Redeeming the time, because the days are evil”* (Ephesians 5:16). But one is not making

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P.O. Box 251

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

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the most of his limited time who is not living every moment for the Lord. James warned,

*Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that (James 4:13-15).*

Everything we do or plan to do ought to be prefaced with the condition, "If the Lord will." When man's primary obligation and purpose in life is to know and serve the Lord (Ecclesiastes 12:13; Matthew 6:33; Acts 17:26-27), "I had other obligations" simply will not suffice as an excuse.

**"I was afraid" is not an excuse.** Many fail to accomplish what they should because of fear. And many believe their fear excuses their failure to accomplish what they should. The "one-talent man," who hid the one

talent of silver with which his lord had entrusted him to make profit, tried to take the edge off of his transgression: *"And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine"* (Matthew 25:25).

Were the one-talent man's fears justified? He tried to justify his fears and consequent inaction, saying to his master, *"Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid..."* (verses 24-25). He expressed a fear of failure, that he might not turn the profit that his lord expected. He expressed a fear of not being fairly compensated for whatever good business decisions he might make with his lord's money, that his lord would simply reap and gather what the one-talent man had sown and strewn. But both of his fears were unfounded. He was afraid of failure? His lord pointed out that he could have invested the money risk-free by putting it in the bank (verse 27). He was afraid of not being fairly compensated? His lord had rewarded the other servants with recompense far exceeding what they had done for their lord: *"[T]hou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things"* (verses 21, 23; emphasis LM).

Most of our fears are unfounded. Sometimes we create additional threats in our minds to excuse ourselves from doing something. Solomon wrote, *"The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets . . . The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets"* (Proverbs 22:13; 26:13). This is almost as ridiculous as Twain's "I-need-my-axe-to-eat-soup" excuse. The likelihood of being killed by a lion in the middle of a city street is tremendously low, even in 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Palestine. We worry about what others will think of us if we try to live the Christian life, despite the fact that they will have no say in our final Judgment (Matthew 10:28). We worry about failing in our Christian

duties, when we are assured God's presence to see us through (Matt. 28:20; Romans 8:31-39; Hebrews 13:5-6), and we are assured success if we remain faithful to the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10). With such assurances, Paul reminds Christians, *"Be anxious for nothing"* (Philippians 4:6, New King James Version). The Christian has no reason to be gripped with anxiety and fear, *"For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father"* (Romans 8:15). All fear does is counteract faith, stunt spiritual growth, and prevent Christian accomplishment. Edmund Burke observed, "No power so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear."

And the Lord will not accept fear as an excuse. The one-talent man attempted to excuse his inaction by fear, but his lord (a picture of **our** Lord) responded by identifying him as a *"wicked and slothful servant,"* instructing other servants, *"Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents . . . And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (Matthew 25:28-30). Likewise, we are informed, *"The fearful . . . shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death"* (Revelation 21:8).

*To Be Continued*

## TWENTY FOUR YEARS IN THE FIRST GRADE!!

by Jess Whitlock

A bulletin crossed my desk years ago. It contained this clip: "Twenty four years in the 1<sup>st</sup> Grade—that is how long it would take to pass if public schools met only as often as Sunday School, and IF NO BIBLE CLASSES WERE MISSED!" A 2012 survey (Rankin)

revealed that only 19% of “churchgoers” read the Bible daily. 25% stated they read the Bible a few times each week. A staggering 14% indicated they read the Bible once a week. 22% confessed to reading the Word of God “once a month or a few times each month.”

Several months ago the elders at the Evant, Texas church of Christ and myself had a long discussion of our Bible class curriculum. So much of “our literature” has to be proofed to make sure it is Scriptural, and so much of the instruction has to be “weeded out,” and then the price is atrocious. We decided to write our own material. In asking around, I contacted Gary Summers, who responded by saying, “We’ve done that!” The elders looked over that material, ordered the material, and we are now implementing Bible material that covers the Bible in 5 ½ years! This means our very young kids could cover the Old and New Testaments twice before High School graduation.

The late brother Eldred Stevens once observed that if a person spent 20 minutes a day on any given subject for a period of 20 years, that at that time, he/she would be considered an “authority” in that field! The Bible furnishes us completely unto every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17), the Bible is the Truth that can set us free (John 8:32; 17:17), the Word of the Lord is pure and righteous (Psalm 119:140; Proverbs 30:5-6). Let us never forget the value of God’s Word and that His Word will be the final standard of judgment for all mankind (John 12:48). By the way, the Supreme Court is not the final authority! That august body will one day stand before the real SUPREME COURT!

Every parent and grandparent should think seriously about our opening statement! How do your children (grandchildren) do in attending Bible classes? If they only make it to about half of those classes, that would mean it would require 48 years to finish

the 1<sup>st</sup> Grade! What if public schools met only as often as our Bible classes? Do you realize that the majority of youth in this nation would not live long enough to enter Junior High School! Let’s get serious about studying the Bible.

If we love Christ, we will follow His will (John 14:15; 15:14), we will handle the Word correctly (2 Corinthians 4:2; 2 Timothy 2:15), we will abide in Truth (2 Tim. 3:14), and we will not tamper with His Holy Word (Revelation 22:18-19; Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:6). To do this will require time and effort on your part and mine. Years ago the late brother Guy N. Woods had completed a week long Gospel meeting. One sister in Christ had attended each service and was impressed with his masterful knowledge of Scripture. This sister shook his hand, and said, “Brother Woods, I would give half my life to know the Scripture as well as you do.” Brother Woods replied, “Madam that is precisely what it has cost me.”

The Lord’s church must get the BIBLE back into BIBLE classrooms at every opportunity. It is time for the Lord’s people to remove the skits, crafts, and silliness gone to seed. Instead let us teach our youth what it means to “speak where the Bible speaks, and to be silent where the Bible is silent.” We live in an age of continuing education. You may have graduated from high school or college back in nineteen-hundred and none-of-your-business. My friend, you have not graduated from Bible knowledge and learning. This is “higher learning” that is needed by every Christian in every congregation.

The Word of Jehovah is powerful (Hebrews 4:12-13; Matthew 24:35), God’s Word is able to purify the soul (Psalm 119:9; 1 Peter 1:22), the Word of the LORD can build us up (Acts 20:32; 2 Timothy 3:16-17), and His authoritative Word is forever settled in heaven (Psm. 119:89; 1 Pet. 1:23-25).

How much longer will our young people spend so much time preparing for a profession that MAY last forty or fifty years at the most, and so little time in making preparation for a ceaseless eternity the other side of death’s door? (Hebrews 9:27). I was a student to the late brother Hugo McCord (Oklahoma Christian College). I once commented on his tremendous knowledge of the Scripture. He replied, “Jess, if I could study the Bible for another hundred years, I would still be a novice.” Then I did not understand what he meant; however, today I understand fully. As a Christian, may I ask of you this one question: “Have you graduated from your study of the Word of the Living God?” I sincerely hope not!

Evant, TX

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## DOCTRINE

by Clovis Ragsdale

(1918-2004, from *FCGN* Aug 1957)

There is much confusion in the minds of people today concerning doctrine. One often hears the expression by many of the famous radio preachers that they are “non-doctrinal.” They make much over the fact that they stress faith and not doctrine. This leaves the impression that doctrine is not necessary, and should even be avoided. Is this attitude in keeping with the teachings of the Bible? I think that we can learn beyond a shadow of doubt that it is not.

Many will ask the question, what is doctrine? The dictionary defines doctrine as a principle, view, or set of opinions maintained or set forth by a person or set of persons. The word doctrine is mentioned less than a dozen times in the Old Testament but is found about fifty times in the New Testament. It is found for the first time in the New Testament in Matthew 7:28, where we are told that the people were astonished at the doctrine of Jesus after He had completed the Sermon on the Mount.



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By this we can see that what was set forth by Christ was doctrine.

In Matthew 16:12, Jesus warns against the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees. By this we can see that there are many doctrines. In Matthew 15:9 our Saviour states that many would worship Him in vain, because they would teach for doctrine the commandments of men. We can see that this condition still exists today. Even those who claim to stress faith and leave off doctrine are teaching a doctrine when they make this claim, for they are expressing their opinion on the matter and that is a doctrine. What then should be our attitude toward doctrine? In Acts 2, we learn about three thousand people who, after they had answered the first gospel invitation and were baptized, continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, and fellowship, in breaking of bread and in prayers.

Then the doctrine that we need to heed today is that given by the Apostles who were divinely inspired men. Their views and opinions were given unto them by the Holy Ghost and were from Heaven itself. Many today will not

accept their doctrine because they do not agree with some of the points of doctrine, such as the necessity of baptism, observance of the Lord's supper each first day of the week, the position of women in the Church, the need for elders, the possibility of apostasy, and many other things.

We today have no choice in matters pertaining to doctrine. We are commanded to keep the doctrine as taught by Christ and his apostles and to avoid all others, because they would have to be the ideas and opinions of men. Because men have not heeded the teachings of Christ on this matter, we have the confusion and division that is now so evident.

It is not coincidental that we include an article by Clovis Ragsdale as this year marks the 60<sup>th</sup> year of publishing the *Fulton County Gospel News*. Brother Ragsdale and brother Boyd Morgan began editing *FCGN* in 1953. It now has a circulation exceeding 11,000, reaching almost every state and numerous countries. We are thankful for the good that has been done through the years as a result of their godly idea and hard work.

**GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION**

1. Hearing the word of God. (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

**THE CHURCH OF CHRIST**

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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