

McCLAIN MINISTRIES

Since 2000 A Quarterly Christian Newsletter Publication

January-February-March 2010



WERE YOU THERE?

PREPARING FOR EASTER

This Month's Issue

LIFE EVENTS



MELVA'S CORNER – Inspirational Message
Can Christians Have Conflicts?



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PRAISE REPORTS



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Beating Temptation



RESURRECTION POWER



PRAY FOR PRESIDENT OBAMA
Our Prayers Continue

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Life Events

Happy Birthday



Denise Jones
(Month of January)

Sunnye McShann
Michael Williams
Mary Simpson
Ricky Jones
Jan Smith
(Month of February)

Deborah Watson
Gean Tucker
Keneshia Myers
(Month of March)

Happy Anniversary



Love Is Forever

Jannice & Joe Horton
Lena & Oris Williams

MELVA'S CORNER

What about the Body of Christ?

CAN CHRISTIANS HAVE CONFLICTS?

PART VI

To a church plagued with division over preacher loyalties, differences of interpretation about eating meat that had been used in sacrifice to idols and pettiness leading to frivolous litigation in public court, a Spirit-guided apostle wrote this:

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. . . . The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" . . . Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it (I Corinthians 12:10-13, 21, 27).

If we were to take this seriously in our modern setting, we would have to understand that God has challenged us to seek the unity of the Body of Christ in a most deliberate, most serious way. We would not leave things to chance and happenstance. We would not be content to wait for unresolved grievances to work themselves out over time. We certainly would not treat one another with contempt and disrespect.

At a personal level, people who know how good and pleasant it is for brothers to live together in unity would aggressively attack

the hateful barrier of racial prejudice in the church. For the moment, I am not even talking about challenging the world around us to address its racist institutions and attitudes. I am talking exclusively to Christians about the racism that still exists in our hearts, our churches, our schools. We must learn the meaning of an insight that came to Peter while he was visiting a Gentile home for the first time in his life. **"I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:34-35).**

Then there are related personal matters like misunderstandings, hurt feelings and gossip that touch the lives of Christians. Do we deal with these things as unbelievers do? Or do we deal with them as brothers and sisters in Christ who are committed to maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? (cf. Ephesians 4:3).

In our families, it is good and pleasant to experience unity as well. Christians can't always stave off divorce, but they have a motivation and resource unbelievers don't have. Parents and children in Christian families won't always be close, but they have a hope for intimacy because of Christ that is missing in other dysfunctional families. The presence of Christ and the desire He creates for unity among His people is always a positive factor at work in any situation of alienation.

At the level of our church function, we must continue to affirm our oneness. In addition to the personal and family issues just raised, we must enlarge our corporate ability to function as one body with many members, one healthy organism with many functional parts. God has gifted His church with all the abilities it will need in any generation to accomplish the things He wants done. Sometimes we make the mistake of "showcasing" a few gifts such as preaching or music or administration

and neglecting other equally necessary functions.

When a quartet or chorus sings in harmony, there is a single song being heard. Even though different persons in the group sing different notes, there is no dissonance. This is exactly Paul's point at I Corinthians 1:10 when he said: **"I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (I Corinthians 1:10).**

To be "perfectly united in mind and thought" does not mean that everyone will share the same understanding of every Christian theme or biblical text. It does not mean that they will have identical church polity or theology. The context speaks of a divided church that was making different personalities its central concern — Paul, Apollos, Peter, and Christ. An army can't march in unity while listening to different cadences and a symphony can't play in harmony with its instruments tuned to different notes.

Christ alone must call the cadence for His people. All our churches must be tuned to the same "middle-C" of the gospel. That done, we can sing our different notes and still be in harmony. The Spirit of God is doing such a work in the church of our time.

A Ministry of Reconciliation

As Jews from all parts of Israel and the world traveled from their various places toward Jerusalem three times a year, they sang the 15 "Songs of Ascents" found in the Psalms. When they sang this one, it must have pricked some consciences and brought the challenge of being reconciled to someone traveling in the larger group. It might have been an old friend now considered an enemy.

It might even be a member of one's family — or someone who was formerly a mate or mother-in-law.

Everyone who was a descendant of Abraham was called to enter Zion with shouts and joy to the Lord. But those elements of their praise could easily have been mere pretense without the challenge of this song. What a sweet fragrance — like the precious oil used to anoint Aaron — spread through the pilgrims when reconciliation took place. And what joy it produces yet when the Lord is allowed to bestow His blessing on a people united in His Son!

Conflict can happen among Christians. Because the church is made up of redeemed sinners, there will be times of contention and discord, disagreement and pulling back. But we must value the unity of God's people above winning or getting the last word. And we must certainly resist the temptation to form cliques or nurse grudges. It is a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit that a believer cannot be at ease with such situations and will seek reconciliation.

To be sure, it is better to be divided in order to stand with the truth of the gospel than to be united in error. But the battles that have divided our churches (i.e., millennial theories, doctrines etc.) do not distinguish themselves as being central to the gospel. They have to do with methods and tastes and interpretations. They have had even more to do with inflated egos and quarrelsome personalities.

But the call of Psalm 133 is not a call for people to find unity in rejecting the authority of God or the truth of His word. It is a call for those who love Him, honor the authority of His word, and put themselves under its influence to the degree they understand it to stand in unity with all others of like mind.

In addition to a simple doctrinal foundation on which Christian unity is based (cf. Ephesians 4:4-6), the Bible makes it clear that spiritual oneness is equally conditioned by certain necessary attitudes that one brings to her brothers and sisters. **"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:2-3).** Before anyone can justifiably claim that another is in "doctrinal error" (i.e., denying the truth of the gospel), he must be sure that the implications of these conciliatory attitudes have been given full sway in the situation.

Conclusion

When the Persian Gulf War of 1991 ended, a bright yellow ribbon on the porch of a Detroit house promised a hero's welcome for a young soldier. Within a few hours of his homecoming, though, that young soldier was dead. He had been shot to death on the street in front of his own home. Newspapers carried the story, and people were shocked and grieved. But that wasn't the end of the story. It turned out that the soldier's "widow" and her brother were charged with his murder.

Lives are lost in war. And people are sometimes the victims of crime in their own neighborhoods. But we don't expect a soldier to survive the dangers of combat and then return home only to be killed by his own family.

The church should be a safe place for the people of God in a world that is filled with spiritual perils. So how great is the disillusionment when someone flees to Christ only to be hurt, betrayed, or destroyed by his or her own spiritual family. But that sort of disillusionment will continue to surface if we do not learn to love one another and live in the unity of the Father's love, the Son's redemption and the Spirit's empowerment.

ENTREPRENEUR ANNOUNCEMENTS

EASTER IS APRIL 4th

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Higher Mountains... Higher Praises

WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR PRAISE REPORT

Praise reports are a vital part of the ministry's newsletter. God is revealing Himself in your life daily. Share it with others. When you share your praise report it guarantees continued victory in your life and can also serve to encourage others in the "Body of Christ."

My Valentine Gift Denise Jones

Valentine was a great success, Sylvia and I sold out. I must add the snow kind of bothered me a little but all I could do was TRUST GOD! And boy did he ever come thru for me.

I think the best part of selling the baskets were THE PEOPLE they were saying how nice and professional the baskets were and how no one else makes them like we do. One man asked if we were from Jackson . . . LOL !

**PRAISE GOD ALMIGHTY! IN JESUS NAME,
AMEN AND AMEN!**

Every Day Is A New Day Belinda Johnson

I just wanted to give praise to God for how he has really sustained me. There have been so many things that could have been my complete down fall in the past few years and without God there is no way I could of weathered these storms. As recent as last Tuesday he was there for me.

He has provided me with a house when I lost mine. He provided me with a car when mine was on its last leg.

I just have to continue to praise him for all

that he has done and continues to do.
Thank You Lord.

My Daughter's Home Shirley Mae Jones

About two weeks ago my daughter Lily was rushed to the University Hospital with severe stomach pains. They diagnosed her with both a lung and kidney disease (I can not pronounce the names). She was in and out of consciousness for several days. I called Melva to pray for us last week.

Update:

Today, (March 10) my daughter came home. Praise God!

Please continue to pray for my daughter Lily Stewart that she gets all of her health and strength back. Her appetite needs to improve, she's not eating all that good. Thank you so much.

Learning To Rest Brenda Holms

Last year the economy took its toll on me, I lost everything I thought was dear – including my husband. I did not think I would ever recover.

My church prayer group started to pray for me and slowly I started to recover.

Day by day God shows me the truly important things and people were still in my life.

Last week I was able to get a job and next week I will have my own place, thanks to the people God put in my life. Praise the Lord.

What I have learned most in this experience is to trust God and above all that I can rest in him. Please pray for me.

THE GOD EFFECT OF PRAYER

6:00 P.M. Hour of Prayer



SPEND TIME PRAYING FOR OTHERS

Use this wonderful supernatural tool the Lord has blessed us with **the 6 o'clock hour of power**. This is the time to intercede for the needs of others, the concerns of the ministry, and to pray for the leadership within our community, our nation, and our world.

Hearts throbbing as one, prayers ascending to heaven multiplied by those praying in **one accord**. Sharing burdens, joys, and petitions to bear. Lay all your cares at the foot of the cross and encourage others to do the same. Lives are being changed. Breakthroughs are happening.



WEBSITE OFFERING

www.mcclainministries.org

Excerpts

BEATING TEMPTATION

Temptation always needs a partner in order to do its destructive work. Someone has to welcome it and open the door when it comes knocking. Otherwise, it is defeated.

Jesus Himself was tempted via the same three avenues that approach us. When satan tempted Him to turn stones into bread, he was appealing to the elemental desire to

meet the needs of His physical body — in this case, not for sex but for food. When he offered Him the kingdoms of this world in exchange for worship, satan was trying to stir greed and the lust of His eyes. When the deceiver tried to get Him to jump from the high corner of the Temple compound before the people and be rescued by angels, he was attempting to break through at the juncture of His ego by offering Him a way to gain power over the masses.

Jesus' experience lets us know that temptation and sin are not the same things. That you can be tempted does not mean that you have sinned or that you must. It means simply that you must have a strategy for dealing with temptation in the power of the Spirit of God. Here are some suggestions that might help you.

First, never be surprised by temptation. No one is exempt from it, and no one is invincible to it. Something that you have prayed about and struggled with and thought you had overcome may still have an appeal to you at some weak moment. Don't be shocked by your humanity! In fact, a failure to take your vulnerability to temptation seriously could be satan's most effective way of destroying you. We must always be on guard. **"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (I Corinthians 10:13).**

Second, stay in the Word of God and prayer for the sake of keeping your conscience tender to the Lord. It was not coincidental that Jesus responded to satan's temptations in the wilderness encounter with quotations from Scripture. His deep personal grounding in the Word of God made its guidance available to Him in His crisis moments.

If you are not living with that same Word in your life, it will not come to you magically in your times of temptation. And Jesus taught us to pray for deliverance from satan and his seductions to evil (Matthew 6:13).

Third, be serious enough about your spiritual life to avoid people and situations you know to be unhealthy for you. All of us have the ability to play games with our own hearts to rationalize our presence in situations where we have no business. That person provokes you, but you continue being with her. He does not respect your personal boundaries and tries to seduce you into having sex with him, yet you still occasionally accept a date with him when he calls. The team you signed up to play softball with has turned out to be a group with whom you will never fit except by drinking with them after games. Nobody needs to tell you the right thing to do in situations like these. You simply need to decide how serious you are about following Christ.

Fourth, if there is an area of particular vulnerability in your life (e.g., sex, money, power), dedicate a time of prayer and fasting to that issue this week — at least twelve hours, and perhaps a full day. Fasting does not force God's hand. It signals your repentance, consciously opens your heart to the Spirit's purifying power, and puts you on heightened alert against satan. You have this promise from Jesus: **"But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you"** (Matthew 6:17-18).

Fifth, see the positive side to temptation. And what could that be? If you take it seriously, it will drive you near to your Father. Resisting satan has the effect of showing you the one safe place in all the

cosmos. **"Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded"** (James 4:7-8). Christian character results from the struggle waged against satan in the power of God's indwelling Spirit.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP WON'T SAVE YOU

Being a church member won't save you, but everyone who has been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ is automatically added to the church (Body of Christ). In Luke's story of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the first thirty years of reverberation from that event, he tells about the establishment of the church at Jerusalem. This is his final comment on the founding of that first church: **"And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved"** (Acts 2:47b).

The question arises, however: Am I really living what I believe about the church? Do I value my own place in that body? Do I value the place of others in it? Do I fulfill my own ministry? Do I affirm my sister's work and support my brother's service to the Lord? Or do I undervalue, distance from and diminish the health and function of Christ's spiritual body?

KICK THE HABIT (Religion Addict)

Know what one of the latest identified addictions is? **Religion!**

Religion addicts don't believe in God so much as they believe in some system that is supposed to deliver or manipulate Him.

According to the emerging theory, there are several types of religion addicts: lazy addicts, who leave everything to God; investment addicts, who believe they have

to give something (especially money) in order to get anything from God; and churchaholics, who immerse themselves in religious activity to avoid facing painful realities.

Working the angles of a religious system produces frustration, intolerance, hypocrisy, and shame. The void in the human soul that can only be filled by God goes begging. Only a personal relationship with God through Christ can satisfy the urgent need for love, acceptance, and security that all people feel instinctively.

Are you wondering whether you might be a religion addict instead of a Christian? Here are a few questions that might help you decide . . .

Do you fear that God will turn His back on you if you do not do enough for Him?

Do you only give money to a church or ministry in order for God to bless you?

Do you often tell your spouse or children what to do without explaining your reasons, just because you know you are right?

Do you have to check with your minister or a trusted interpreter of Scripture in order to decide your position on every spiritual issue?

Do you believe you are still being punished by God for something you did a long time ago?

Do you think that if you work harder for Him, God will eventually forgive you?

An affirmative answer to even one of these questions may indicate that one is an addict to religion rather than a devotee of God. Multiple positive answers testify to a major problem.

How sad that so many eat the empty husks of religion addiction when God meant us to know the abundance of authentic faith. But I have good news. You can kick the habit and you can kick it today!

WHAT'S IT LIKE BEING A CHRISTIAN?

The essence of being a Christian is not an extended set of correct doctrinal beliefs or even well-formed personal character. To be a Christian is to be connected to Christ in such a unique and special way that all other relationships are defined by that union. The perfect triune fellowship of God as Father, Son, and Spirit from eternity 'past' has been opened to me by the blood of Jesus at Calvary. But I cannot experience their fellowship in isolation from all others who have been called into it.

Having others around is not a nuisance but a necessity for families. These interactions shape us. We sing and read, stand and bow, laugh and cry. And, yes, we certainly eat and drink together. But we do all these things as a network of relationships. A gathering of family members. A church whose identity is not contained in itself but is found in the God who has formed it. We are the Body of Christ!

We are the community of the children of God! We bear His name. We have a great inheritance. Awareness of these things makes a difference in how we see ourselves and function in the world.

If we really love God the Father, we will create churches that are communities of love, accountability and nurture where gradual spiritual transformation takes place over time. We will live gently with one another. Listen to one another's stories. Teach and learn from one another.

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!” exclaimed John the apostle. “And that is what we are!” (I John 3:1). There is no greater honor to which a human could aspire. To be part of the Family of God. To have Him as our Father. To sit at the table where there is always abundance. And where there is always room for others.

UNITY: NOT AN OPTION

The time has come for us to be mature enough to admit our limited grasp of the truth without feeling compromised. Strong convictions don't have to be carried with an ugly, hypercritical attitude toward people with whom we disagree. If I didn't believe my view on this or that was either correct or the best I'd change my view to some other. If I didn't think the church within which I function seeks to honor Christ under the authority of Holy Scripture, I'd find another and ally with it.

We've slain the faith of enough people through our arrogant sectarianism. It's time that we laid down the weapons of judgmental arrogance for the sake of seeking Christ and finding our identity in Him.

May God bring the day when the Body of Christ will experience a unity that is larger than our religious tribalism and fratricidal conflict. A day when more and more people will say we are simply Christians.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, in John 17 we hear our Savior in prayer today and we are reminded of the importance of spiritual discipline in His life and in ours. Let us also hear the concerns of His prayer for faithfulness to the life-mission to which each of us is called and to the unity of the Body of Christ

in mutual support. Teach us to pray one for another, to value one another, to guard the spiritual welfare of one another. Thereby may we make your name known in the world through our love for you and one another. We pray these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.

WILL THE REAL JESUS PLEASE STAND UP PART I

The generation waiting to hear the gospel today reminds me of the people Jesus faced at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem back in A.D. 29. They are more troubled by doubt than by guilt, more concerned to find meaning for their lives here than worried about life after 'death'. Recent events in our world have shaken the confidence of many people that their psychological peace of mind had been secured by America's geographical refuge and economic security. War, terrorism and recession have left those people wondering if there is something more - more secure, more satisfying, more fulfilling than our science, politics and money.

They are thirsty. They have drunk from the shallow wells of human design and are still thirsty. They need to drink Living Water - to have a personal relationship with God through Christ. And the bubbling spring of spiritual life through the presence of the Holy Spirit will evidence a continual stream of joy, peace and righteousness in their lives from that point forward. Their thirst will be satisfied.

WILL THE REAL JESUS PLEASE STAND UP PART II

Sin forces you to judge everybody and everything by worldly standards. It takes eternity out of the picture. It scrambles and confuses reality so that you no longer know

who Jesus is, who the people of faith are, or - eventually - even who you are and were meant to be. Then you die. You die in sin - and without hope. Don't let satan blind you to the identity of **The Great I Am** and His purpose for your life.

Eternity has something better in mind for you.

HAVE A HEART CONDITION? (Human Or Hypocrisy) PART I

The biggest obstacle to faith in our unbelieving time is the church. The greatest handicap God has in reaching the lost is dealing with the people He has already saved. We become denominationally minded, turf - protective of **our** church, **our** heritage, **our** beliefs and **our** positions.

We know and understand that the church is supposed to be "distinctive," but we get confused about what makes us authentically unique. We choose the easy way of being distinctive — we enforce rules about card-playing, movies, dancing, instrumental music, weekly communion and a dozen other things. Not one of these things requires any significant **heart adjustment** in us though. So we don't dance but let children suffer abuse because of a lack of safe foster homes. We sing capella and continue to play the race card against whites or blacks or Hispanics. We eat the Lord's Supper and sow discord among members of the Body of Christ.

We've strained out a gnat and swallow a camel — a two-humped camel at that.

HAVE A HEART CONDITION? (Truth Or Tradition) Part II

Unless we get over some of our "hung-

upness" - is that a word? - about religion, we are going to continue missing Jesus. We won't see Him. We won't understand His words. We won't be able to reveal Him to others - and will, indeed, get in the way of His effort to make Himself known to them.

It is time for us to choose Jesus over religion. It is time for us to seek and affirm personal - relationship – with - Jesus spirituality over hide – bound - legalistic religion. It is high time to learn the meaning of Christ's challenge about mercy over sacrifice.

Religion put Jesus to death once! Then again. And again and again over time. It is time to put away human - controlled, rule - bounded, life-stifling religion for the sake of letting Him live.

WHAT IS EVERLASTING LIFE?

Jesus said in John 3:16 that God loved the world so much, He gave His only begotten Son so those who believed on Him wouldn't perish but have everlasting life. If all you have done is believe on Jesus so you won't go to hell, then you are missing out on the everlasting life the Lord wants to have with you right now.

Why is this so misunderstood? It is because many churches have changed the message of salvation. They have placed a period after the word "perish" in John 3:16. They have told the world that the reason God sent His Son to die for their sins was so they wouldn't perish, PERIOD. That excludes the true message of eternal life and intimate relationship with God as the goal of salvation.

Faith comes from hearing God's Word (Romans 10:17). If we don't hear that Jesus came to bring us back into intimate relationship with God, then we won't have faith for that and we won't experience it. This describes some modern-day churches to a tee.

PARTNERSHIP COMMITMENT

THANK YOU partners for doing your part. You are truly a blessing to McClain Ministries. Your faithful commitment and support is greatly appreciated. If you have not yet made a commitment to partner with us, please ask the Holy Spirit to speak to and guide your heart about it. If you will do your part God will do His part.

Spring Forward



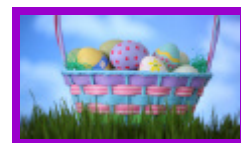
Daylight Savings Time Begins
March 14

Pray for our Troops



Pray for our nation and its protection from terrorism and for the success of President Barak Obama's executive order to prohibit controversial interrogation tactics.

Give thanks and praise to God for the dedication and service of our military troops as they safeguard our freedom around the world. Pray for their protection and well being, asking God to cover each one with His extraordinary blessing and care.



We have many people who have come to the Lord and received the forgiveness of their sins, but they are **saved and stuck**. They are just waiting for heaven so they can really start living. That is missing the main point of salvation.

This was one of the main differences between the first-century church and today's church. Those people knew God intimately. They had a relationship with the Lord that wasn't waiting to start in heaven, but was working in them while they were still in this world.

WHAT IS EASTER?

What do Christians Celebrate
on Easter?

By Mary Fairchild



On Easter Sunday, Christians celebrate **the resurrection** of the Lord, **Jesus Christ**. It is typically the most well - attended Sunday service of the year for Christian churches.

Christians believe according to Scripture, that Jesus came back to life, or was raised from the dead, three days after his death on the cross. As part of the Easter season, the death of Jesus Christ by **crucifixion**, is commemorated on **Good Friday**, always the Friday just before Easter. Through his death, burial and resurrection, Jesus paid the penalty for sin, thus purchasing for all who believe in him, eternal life in Christ Jesus.

The biblical account of Jesus' death on the cross, or crucifixion, his burial and his **resurrection**, or raising from the dead, can be found in the following passages of Scripture: **Matthew 27:27-28:8; Mark 15:16-16:19; Luke 23:26-24:35; and John 19:16-20:30.**

RESURRECTION POWER



HOLY SPIRIT EMPOWERED 2009 Easter Article Continuation

Holy Scripture has been subjected to a degree of scrutiny and skepticism that would be too harsh for any other document of antiquity. It has survived determined efforts of the enemies of Christianity to destroy it. It has been maligned, insulted, and written off by its harsh critics. But it not only survives but continues to anchor lives, give hope, and inspire devotion. The Bible is able to function as the very Word of God only because it is made powerful by the Holy Spirit. It is not simply a book. It is not mere words on a page. And it is not the struggling of human minds to find and communicate with the Divine Mind. That reverses the process at work in Scripture! These are God-breathed words (II Timothy 3:16) that penetrate to the depths of the human heart (Hebrews 4:12) and which are powerful enough to bring people to salvation (Romans 1:16). Scripture is God's initiative to the human race and is part of the "perpetuation of proof" to generations past his own about the saving work of Jesus Christ.

There is still another way by which the Holy Spirit creates and empowers faith in the world. He acts not only through the Empowered Word of God but through the Empowered Church of God as well. And this is simultaneously both a great advantage and liability for creating faith in the world today.

Read the Scripture closely: Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (20:20b-23).

Do you hear an echo of the language of Genesis 2:7 here? Just as God created the physical (i.e., corporeal, natural) race of humankind by breathing into us the breath of life, so the Risen Christ is now creating the spiritual (i.e., Spirit-empowered, supernatural) race of Christians by breathing into His disciples His Holy Spirit. Yahweh breathed into the first human, and both he and those born of his descent became breathing, inspirited, animated souls; Christ breathed into that first body of His spiritual creation, and both they and those born of their descent became His living, vigorous, and dynamic presence to the world. The first race was given authority for tending the material universe; the second race has been given responsibility for nurturing the world of the new creation (II Corinthians 5:17; cf. Romans 8:19-21).

Announcing the "gift of the Holy Spirit" is not an afterthought to the forgiveness of sins on Pentecost Day but the means to living as a forgiven, Christ-claimed person (Acts 2:38; cf. 1 Cor. 6:19). The Holy Spirit is not an ornament for the church but its beating heart that gives it spiritual life and power to function on behalf of Christ's redemptive work for all humankind (I Corinthians 3:16).

The forgiveness of sins linked to Holy Spirit presence among Christ's disciples is a bit unusual – and obscured in the vast majority of English translations. Literally, Jesus says this: "Of whomever you forgive the sins, they stand as having been forgiven to them; of whomever you hold [the sins], they stand as having been held."

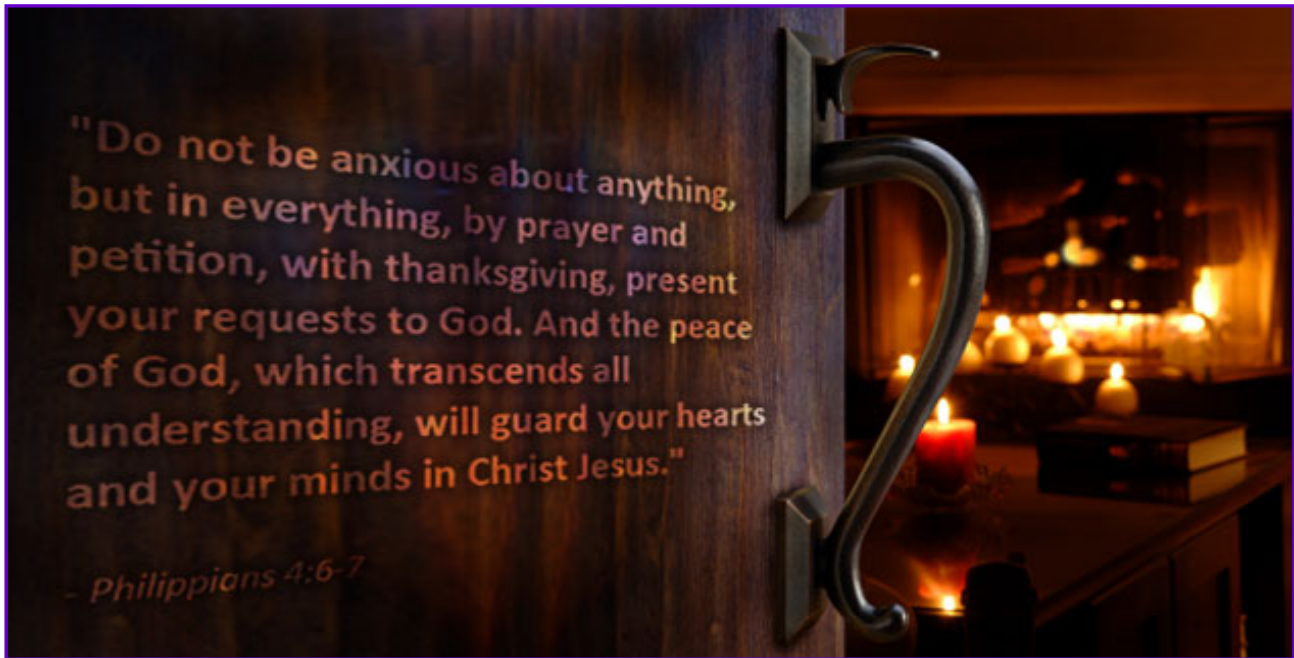
There is a critical point to be gleaned from this. No priest, clergyman, or church either "triggers" or "holds back" forgiveness from anyone. The perfect-tense verbs that come second in the two clauses of Jesus' statement refer to an abiding situation that actually began before the action of the two aorist verbs that come first in both clauses. In other words, God does not forgive or retain sins to someone because we grant or withhold mercy. We are not the ones who pardon or hold liable. To preach the gospel is to proclaim forgiveness or judgment, life or death dependant on whether the hearer accepts or rejects Christ. We only announce salvation; we do not originate it.

When a Spirit-empowered church functions in His life and vitality to love the unlovable, minister to the rejected, and eat with prisoners, lepers, and the poor, that church perpetuates the proof of Christ's resurrection. He is alive and doing again what He did in the flesh! That is why a church's first question about every one of its projects and ministries must be "If we do this, does it make us look more like Jesus to the people who are watching?" That is the question of biblical authority before the church – and not some contrived search for book, chapter, and verse. A church that lives with Scripture in preaching, teaching, and personal study will be led in fact by the Spirit in making correct judgments about its attempts to look like Jesus.

When a church lives by the power of the Holy Spirit, faith arises easily and naturally around that body of people. As each believer surrenders more completely to God's Spirit and bears the Spirit's gentle fruit in his or her life, Christ's resurrection power is on display. Faith is being lived out in the saved person and legitimated for the lost soul. The written and lived Word of God are both works of the Holy Spirit, and they combine to evoke saving faith.

PRAY FOR PRESIDENT OBAMA

Issues Facing America and our President



Our Prayers Continue

Father, thank You for the United States and its government. We pray for the president, the national and local government, the judges, the policemen, the business leaders and all those who are in leadership positions in this country. Please protect them from the evil that is in the world and keep them safe and free from all harm.

You have promised to bless any nation that follows after You. Help us to live quiet and peaceful lives so that we can continue to spread the Good News of the Gospel throughout our land. In Jesus' name, Amen.

- **The War:** As a nation, we seek peace – but not peace at all costs. When America is threatened, we must defend it or risk losing the liberties that we hold dear. Yet, even when we struggle against forces that would destroy us, we pray for the ultimate victory: lasting peace.

The beautiful words of John 14:27 give us hope: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you...” We, as believers, can accept God’s peace or ignore it. When we invite the peace of God’s into our lives, we are transformed. And then, because we possess the gift of peace, we can share that gift with fellow believers and citizens of all faiths.

Today, as a gift to yourself, to your family, to your friends, and to your nation, pray for peace in the world and for peace within your soul.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, You offer a peace that is perfect and eternal. Let me turn the cares and burdens of my life over to You, and let me feel the spiritual abundance that You offer through the person of Your Son, the Prince of Peace. Today, I also pray for peace among nations, Father, and for brotherly love among Your children throughout the world. I pray for Your safety and comfort for those soldiers fighting for the freedoms of our great nation. You are the source of peace, Dear Lord; let us find it in You. Amen

- **Terrorism:**” With liberty and justice for all.” These familiar words from the Pledge of Allegiance remind us that the promise of America is the promise of freedom. And as loyal citizens, we must seek justice not only for ourselves but also for our fellow citizens and for those around the world. America remains a nation dedicated to the principle of equal justice for all its citizens. May we, as modern - day patriots, commit ourselves to lives characterized by truth and justice. And, let us pray that America remains a land of liberty for all of the people. Amen

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, our Source of strength and courage, we ask You to guide the leaders of nations in the ways of peace and justice and enduring freedom for the peoples of the world. In these times of peril and war against terrorism, we pray for the men and women serving in our armed forces, our military leaders and our allies. Protect them all from harm as they go into battle on land, in the sea and in the air. Take away whatever fear from their hearts and enable them to overcome swiftly and decisively the violence and cruelty of the enemy. Protect them from the hatred of others and bolster their personal pride of being American as they rid our world of the works of darkness and weapons of mass destruction. Console their loved ones and family members who remain on the home front. Gently dry the tears of those who mourn for the wounded in battle and those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice. Oh Lord, bless them with Your presence. Grant us homeland security. May Your Peace, the fruit of justice, truth and mercy, reign in America and throughout the world. Amen

- **The Economy:** The American dream was forged on the anvil of adversity. Tough times are nothing new to the American people: we’ve begun facing and overcoming adversity long before John Hancock proudly penned his name on the Declaration of Independence. Through wars, epidemics, social unrest, and economic distress, Americans have faced their problems and risen above them.

And so it is today. But through adversity, we grew stronger. Abigail Adams, said it well, “It is not in the still calm of life, or in repose of pacific station that great characters are formed . . . Great necessities call out great virtues.”

The times that try men’s souls are also the times when wise men and women turn to God in prayer. E. M. Bounds writes, “God shapes the world by prayer. The more praying there is in the world, the better the world will be, and the mightier will be the forces against evil.” Today as in years gone by, Americans will grow stronger as we turn to the Creator of the universe for the victory that only He can provide.

Prayer:

Lord, we give You thanks in all circumstances. And, when we face the inevitable challenges and difficulties of life such as we are with unemployment and financial hardship, we turn to You. When we encounter situations that we cannot understand, we trust in You. You are the Creator and the sovereign God. And we give the glory and the thanksgiving to You, God, for the ultimate victory that You have promised Your faithful children. Amen

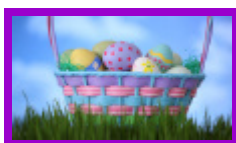
- **Peace in Israel and the Middle East:** With what seems to be no end in sight to the turmoil in the Middle East, all signs and prophecies seem to point to an escalation in the violence and conflict. Yet no matter where we stand politically or spiritually regarding the current unrest in Israel, as Christians we can unite on one front: prayer.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we pray for the peace of Jerusalem. We are sad to see the violence and suffering as men, women and children are injured and killed on both sides of the conflict. We don't understand why it has to be this way, nor do we truly know if war is right or wrong. But we pray for justice, your sovereign righteousness, Lord. And at the same time we pray for mercy. For everyone involved we pray, for governments and peoples, militants and terrorists, we ask for your kingdom to come and rule over the land. Protect the soldiers and civilians from bloodshed. May your truth and light shine in the darkness. Where there is only hatred, may your love prevail. Help me as a Christian to support Israel and those who you support, Lord, and to bless those who you bless, my God. Bring your salvation to Israel, dear God. Bring your salvation to the whole earth. Amen.

- **Health Care:** In a land so richly blessed, it is easy to forget how hard our forefathers struggled to earn the blessings that we enjoy today. But we must never forget, and we must never become complacent.

Abraham Lincoln's words still ring true: "No man is good enough to govern another man without the other's consent." And so it is when an issue like health care reform threatens the freedoms of Americans in one form or another. In America, no man governs alone. We the people make the laws, enforce the laws and change the laws when they need changing. For these liberties, we must thank those who have gone before us and our Father who reigns above us. And, the best way to say "thank you" for our blessings is to defend them, whatever the cost.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for this nation and for the freedoms we enjoy here. Give us the courage to preserve our precious liberties and the strength to make sure we share them with the less fortunate in our nation who have not had access to health care. May we speak out against injustice, and may the flame of freedom that burns brightly in America be a beacon to all. Amen



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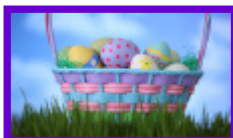
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