

THE LOCAL CONGREGATION

Levi Sides, Jasper, AL

When a person is scripturally baptized (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38), he becomes a member of the Lord's universal church. The Lord adds every saved person to His church (Acts 2:47). A saved person needs to work and worship with other saved people, and for this reason the New Testament places great emphasis on local congregations of the Lord's people.

Every Christian should be a part of a local congregation. A local congregation exists for the purpose of helping Christians practice Christianity. If it does not accomplish this purpose, then it is failing in what God designed for it. How does a local congregation help Christians practice Christianity? There are three ways:

1. By providing an atmosphere conducive to spiritual growth, or edification. God expects Christians to grow, and this is best done in association with other Christians. Can you imagine trying to be a Christian all alone on a deserted island? Every activity of a local church should aid in spiritual growth. If it fails to help each other grow, then it is not serving its God-given purpose.

2. By providing an atmosphere for taking the Gospel to the whole world, or evangelism. This is the great never-ending task of God's people (Matthew 28:18-20). It should receive great emphasis in the local setting. It should involve the best of planning and praying. There should be constant training, assistance, and encouragement. All should be involved. Herein is the real

life of any local congregation. We must ever guard against becoming side-tracked.

3. By providing an atmosphere conducive to helping heal the hurts and supplying the needs of others, or benevolence (Luke 10:25-37). The church is people in love with God and with one another. The church is people weeping and rejoicing together (Romans 12:15).

The local congregation is people looking upward in praise, inward in penitence, outward in practice, and forward in promise. The local church is hearts knit together whose spirits share together. The heart of the local congregation is the heart of life.

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). "Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:1-2).

PRAYER

"Lord, help me to be a faithful, dedicated member of the local congregation. In Jesus' name." Amen.

EDITORIAL

HOW CAN WE AVOID GOSSIPING?

As children we all heard the old adage, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” This saying was untrue then, and it continues to be untrue even as we have matured beyond childhood. Words do hurt, and often they hurt very, very deeply. Some of the most lasting wounds we experience have resulted from the stinging criticism of our enemies, the slanderous words of one we considered a friend, or words expressing disappointment from someone we love dearly. Sins involving the tongue are some of the most divisive and despicable transgressions to be found in Scripture. The catalogue of sins of the tongue is quite lengthy, including blasphemy, slander, backbiting, lying, bearing false witness, cursing, and gossip. Because of the destructive power of the tongue, we must be those who are “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19).

Gossip, referred to in Scripture as tale bearing or whispering, is one of the grossest abuses of the tongue. Such evil speaking often divides friends, families, communities, and congregations. Gossip is an insidious evil that seeks to destroy the one of whom it speaks, the one who speaks it, and the one who would incline his ear to hear it. The words of the Proverbs writer ring true, “The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly” (Prov.18:8; 26:22). “A forward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends” (Prov.16:28). “He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends” (Prov.17:9). Among the list of sins Paul catalogued among the Gentiles is found whispering and backbiting (Rom.1:29,30). O, how much grief and heartache we bring upon ourselves and upon others because of a desire to tell tales! If only we could learn, “Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth” (Prov.26:20). It requires constant vigilance on our part to see that the tongue is held in check, for in the instance we become lax in guarding it, we may say something which can never be taken back, and which will do far more harm than we ever intended or imagined (see James 3:5-8). As with any sin, the Bible does not leave us without a way(s) to overcome it. God has

given us direction as to how we can overcome the temptation to gossip.

First of all, we must learn to love our neighbors as ourselves. This commandment is one of the two commandments upon which every law God has ever given rests (Matt.22:37-40). He who would love his neighbor as himself is fulfilling what man has deemed “the Golden Rule” (Matt.7:12). We must come to value the soul of every individual as we would our own, more valuable than all of earth’s treasures combined (Matt.16:26). I do not desire that others spread rumors about me, or speak evil of me. I do not wish for others to accuse me without allowing me opportunity to talk with my accusers and answer the accusations. If I value the soul of my friends, neighbors, co-workers, relatives, and my brethren in Christ, I will not treat them in such fashion. Gossip is generally based on hearsay, often founded upon half-truths or even upon complete falsehoods. A child of God has no business repeating such, nor should he even listen to such nonsense. All gossip would cease if the talebearer had no one to listen to his idiotic and sinful palaver. We should be party to neither end of this heinous chain of character assassination. It may be the case that what I hear and/or speak is true regarding the individual under consideration, but nonetheless it should not be repeated. Just because something is true does not remove it from the realm of gossip. Before speaking of another, I should ask myself, “Is what I am about to say regarding this individual true? Will it help the individual if I repeat this? Will I honor God by what I am about to say?” If the answer to any of these questions is “No,” I should not say it.

Second, to overcome the temptation to spread gossip we need to realize that “every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matt.12:36). When we stand before God in the judgment day, the words we have spoken will either justify us or condemn us (vs.37). Gossip is nothing more than idle chatter, mindless drivel. While gossip serves no good purpose in the kingdom of God’s dear Son, it is one of Satan’s most effective, and most preferred, tools. Often idle words are a result of idle workers in the Lord’s vineyard. Many who would attempt to sully the reputa-

tion of another do so because they have nothing better to do. As the old saying goes, "Idle hands [and minds] are the Devil's workshop." Hands that should be busy gathering sheaves for the Lord are too busy prying into the business of others. "And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not" (1 Tim.5:13). If we are busy working for the Lord (as we should be), we will have no time for idle chatter.

Third, to overcome the evil of gossip we must mature. He who is able to control the tongue exhibits control that belongs only to those who are mature Christians. "For in many things we offend all. If any many offend not in word, the same is a perfect [complete, mature] man, and able also to bridle the whole body" (James 3:2). It is not an easy task to bridle the tongue, for it is "an unruly evil" (James 3:8). It requires patience, wisdom, and maturity to exercise proper control over this little member. Though difficult, it is our obligation as Christians to practice such restraint. The child of God who engages in gossip (or any other abuse of the tongue for that matter) displays his lack of maturity in things spiritual. Failure to grow as a child of God is expressly condemned in Scripture: "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb.5:12-14). The practitioners of gossip often see themselves as religious giants, when in reality they are nothing more than spiritual imps. Just as taunting and teasing are characteristic of immaturity, gossip, slander, whispering, backbiting, and the like are indicative of those who have failed to progress past spiritual infancy.

Gossip has brought to ruin many a good man and woman who were the subject of it. How unfortunate it is that good names may be marred by vicious lies and half truths. Sadder still is the condition of the souls of those who would be guilty of speaking such and/or providing a forum for such to be spoken. While attempting to destroy another, whether knowingly or not, gossip will ultimately destroy him who supports it. May we endeavor to overcome this great evil by loving our fellow man, by realizing we will answer for the words we speak, and by maturing in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.

WOT

OUR FATHER PLANNED THE FAMILY HOME

Eva Nell Brown Naramore

"Not good that man should be alone,"
Our Father planned the family home.

In His creation, God above
Made a help meet for man to love.
He, from a rib, while Adam slept,
Created Eve, a wife, to help.
In time were children born to bless;
Each one to hold, love, and caress.

Life always has, and always will,
Be at its best when we fulfill
The plans that God, in his own way,
Blazed out for couples to obey.
We find no place where Jacob shirked,
But seven years for Rachel worked.
As of "few days" he could refer,
Because of love he had for her.

God joins together man and wife;
This union is to be for life.
Then gives us children, oh, so dear,
To mold like clay, with love and care.
Love is the key our Father gave,
To lock within the home to save.
True love can mend a broken heart,
Before the family's torn apart.

Christ and the church as bride and groom:
To separate, there is no room.
In marriage two become as one,
By man it's not to be undone.
First things are first, when from the start,
We love the Lord with all our heart.

Marriage we'll better understand,
If we obey the Lord's command.
Divorce is not what parents need.
Stay together, with love, we plead.
With dreams of golden years ahead,
Sweet memories of the day you wed.

WOT

HYPOCRISY

Tom Moore, Malvern, AR

The story is told about a father complaining about the amount of time his family spent in front of the television. His children watched too many cartoons and neglected their homework. His wife preferred watching soap operas as opposed to doing housework. What is his solution? He declares, "As soon as the football season is over, I'm going to pull the plug." Hypocrisy! Someone once said, "Hypocrisy is like a pin. It is pointed in one direction, and yet headed in another."

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines hypocrisy as an "act of playing a part on stage; a feigning to be what one is not; the false assumption of an appearance of virtue or religion." A hypocrite is one who fakes virtues or qualities he does not have.

In any great forest you will find huge trees. They tower above other trees and appear to be the very picture of strength and maturity; however, loggers will sometimes not even bother to cut down these huge trees. At first one wonders, "Why leave them? - After all, a tree that big must contain twice or three times the amount of lumber as a smaller tree." The reason is simple; huge trees are often rotten on the inside. They are the hollow trees that children's picture books show raccoons living in. They are the trees that are often blown over in a strong windstorm because, while they appear to be the picture of strength, in fact their hollowness makes them weak. This is the essence of hypocrisy – appearing strong on the outside, but hollow and rotten on the inside.

One of the saddest things about hypocrisy is that many in the Lord's church have succumbed to this deadly playacting. Some Christians try to outwardly appear faithful and concerned about the Lord's work, but inwardly they are worldly – they are only pretenders. Jesus said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites!** for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but inwardly ye are full of **hypocrisy** and iniquity" (Mt. 23:27-28). Jesus said we must beware of **hypocrisy** (Lk. 12:1). Paul speaks of hypocrisy when he says, "They profess that they know God; but by their works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate" (Tit. 1:16).

In our present day, many are hypocrites in wor-

ship. Our Lord declared, "Ye **hypocrites**, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people honoreth me with their lips; But their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, Teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men" (Mt. 15:7-9). How many Christians come to the assembly to worship but have left their heart elsewhere? Simply "going through the motions" is not pleasing worship to God – it is hypocrisy!

Many Christians are hypocrites when they see only the faults of others and refuse to see their own. "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me cast out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? **Thou hypocrite**, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote that is in thy brother's eye" (Lk. 6:41-42).

One can be hypocritical when he tries to make laws where God has not made them. Our Lord warned, "But the Lord answered him, and said, **Ye hypocrites**, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan had bound, lo, these eighteen years, to have been loosed from this bond on the day of the sabbath?" (Lk. 13:15-16).

There are many other ways that one can be a hypocrite that are just too numerous to mention. But remember this, hypocrites are great pretenders. Thus, let us be warned, for the Great and Almighty Judge said that hypocrites will not go to heaven (Mt. 24:51)!

WOT

WHY I PREACH

Chris Hodges, Valrico, FL

Of all professions for a person to consider, becoming a gospel preacher normally does not make one's list. Oftentimes preachers are not held in high esteem and are believed to be people who couldn't do anything else. As in the first-century, preaching is still considered by many to be "foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:21). Nevertheless, I am proud to be a gospel preacher. I consider it to be the greatest profession upon earth.

In order to understand why I preach, note two things that don't motivate me. First, I am not driven by a desire to be rich. If I were, then I have obviously chosen the wrong profession. Needless to say, I desire to be able to "make ends meet" and to adequately provide for my family (1 Tim. 5:8). However, I realize that life is more than just "stuff," and I want to have treasures stored for me in Heaven (Matt. 6:19-21). Second, I am not driven by a desire to be popular. One of the hardest things for me to do is to stand in the back of the auditorium after I've preached awaiting people's feedback. I'm certainly open to receiving constructive criticism and am thankful for the kind words that are said in appreciation. However, I always want the sermon to be about Jesus, never about me. Thankfully, God has His ways of reminding me of this fact. For example, there are times when I step down from the pulpit feeling as though I did a good job only to receive an average or below average number of positive comments. However, there are other times when I feel as though I didn't do a good job only to receive an unusually high number of positive comments. I believe that this is a reminder of the fact that the power is in the gospel (Rom. 1:16), not in me. Unfortunately, some preachers have a strong desire to be popular. Paul mentioned such preachers who would tickle the ears of people desiring to hear messages that they liked (2 Tim. 4:3-4). I want to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) and to step on toes, including my own. I may not be popular, but I'll be faithful to God and His Word. I am more concerned with being Biblically correct than with being politically correct. I'm not concerned with whether or not I hold gospel meetings or speak on lectureships. Certainly, it is a privilege to be asked, but this is not why I preach. I'm okay with nobody really knowing my name.

Now, I would like to discuss the true reasons that I preach. First, I preach because I am indebted. God has given everything to me, and I fully acknowledge that I deserve none of His blessings. However, because He has saved me and blessed me beyond measure, I owe Him everything. I must devote my life in service to Him.

Second, I preach because I have been called by God. No, I didn't have some wild dream or a voice in my head. I completely understand that we are all called by the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). However, I firmly believe that God put people and circumstances in my path throughout my life to encourage me to preach. God made me as I am and gave me my talents. I believe that I must

preach in order to be a good steward of what God has given me and in order to be true to His calling.

Third, I preach because people are lost in sin, and they must hear the gospel in order to be saved (Rom. 10:13-17). Since I believe in God and believe that the Bible is the Word of God, then I also believe that Jesus alone is the way to God (John 14:6) and that those who reject Him will be punished eternally in Hell because of their sins (2 Thess. 1:7-9). Therefore, I am compelled to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. Like Jeremiah, I cannot keep the message to myself (Jer. 20:9). There is no message any greater than the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. I must tell everyone. Also, I want to ensure that the saving message is faithfully proclaimed. As there has always been, many false teachers are in the world today failing to tell people the whole story. As a preacher, I must declare what God has done while at the same time declaring what man must do in order to be saved (Acts 2:37-38).

Fourth, I preach because I love being a preacher, I cannot imagine doing anything else. There are weeks that I want to pull my hair out and days that I have considered walking away. Nevertheless, I don't—and won't—because I love my job. I know that what I do makes a difference in this world. Doctors are very important because they help people with their physical ailments; preachers deal with people's spiritual ailments. The joy of seeing people become Christians and returning to the Lord is unlike anything else. Preaching changes lives. God promised His Word will never return void (Isa. 55:11). True, many will reject the gospel, but a precious few will accept it and be forever changed. As a preacher, knowing that I played a small role in helping someone become a Christian is something that I will forever cherish.

Fifth, I preach because of the "retirement plan." Truth is, it is the same retirement plan for all faithful Christians. I look forward to the day that I hear God say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21), to the day that God will award me the crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8). I look forward to seeing the beauty and splendor of Heaven (Rev. 21:1ff.), to see God and to praise His holy name.

Preaching is the greatest profession that a man could consider. I pray that more faithful Christian men will choose to become preachers. I pray that parents will encourage their boys to preach. I pray that churches will encourage and train young men to preach. I pray that schools and teachers will continue to train and equip young men to preach. I pray that congregations will let their preachers know that they are appreciated so that no one else will leave the ministry. To those who are or have been a gospel preacher, thank you for all your hard work. I am honored to be a co-laborer with you.

WOT

WHAT DID THE POPE SAY?

Todd Clippard, Hamilton, AL

In 1962, Pope John XXIII convened what is known as the Second Vatican Council, also called Vatican II. Vatican II was closed under Pope Paul VI in 1965. Also present and taking part in the council were four future popes, including Karol Wojtyla (John Paul II) and Joseph Ratzinger (the present pontiff, Pope Benedict XVI).

Recently, while answering questions about Vatican II, Ratzinger made some statements regarding Catholicism's view of denominational bodies. These statements caused quite a furor as many did not take time to examine what exactly was said. To be honest, some of his comments were misquoted or misinterpreted due to a knee-jerk reaction to what people *thought* he said (or what others told them he said).

But what *exactly* did he say? Many, including some with whom I have spoken, contend Ratzinger claimed the Catholic Church was the only true church and that all who are not members thereof were consigned to eternal perdition. In his defense, Ratzinger did not say any such thing. In fact, he said the very **opposite**. To quote him, "Separated churches and communities, though we believe they suffer from defects, are deprived neither of significance nor importance in the mystery of salvation." Furthermore, Ratzinger said God uses these bodies as "instruments of salvation." Finally, the document declared the "Church of Christ is present and operative in communities not in communion with Catholicism "on account of the elements of sanctification and truth that are present in them."

So we must be honest in our examination of his remarks. He did not say the Catholic Church was the only instrument of salvation, but that individuals may be saved in non-Catholic Christian fellowships.

But here we must make the following observation: recent statements of the Catholic hierarchy and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) are often ambiguous so as to please the Catholic faithful and those who are pushing for ecumenism among Catholicism.

Continuing with the subject at hand, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) includes among the saved many more than just the 'non-Catholic Christian community. Section 839 of the CCC includes present-day Jews among the saved, for "The Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God's revelation in the Old Covenant." Never mind that the Old Cove-

nant to which the CCC refers has been taken out of the way, being nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ (Col 2:14).

So, whom else do we find among the CCC's ranks of the saved? The list includes just about every person on earth. Don't believe it? Section 841 includes **Muslims** as among the saved: "The Plan of Salvation includes those who acknowledge the Creator, **in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims**; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day."

Sections 841-842 include **non-Christian religions** as among the saved: "The Church considers all goodness and truth found in these religions as "a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men **that they may at length have life.**"

Finally, and perhaps most amazingly, Sections 847-848 of the CCC include among the saved those, "who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and his Church." Consider this quote: "in ways known to himself God can lead those, who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel, to that faith with which it is impossible to please him, . . ."

Let it never be said again that the Catholic Church believes that salvation is only found within the borders of her kingdom. Her doors of salvation are far wider than I ever imagined!

Unlike the view of the CCC, which appears to make a way to heaven for just about everyone, the Bible says the way to heaven is strait and narrow, and few there be that find it (Matt 7:13-14). Briefly, let's examine these groups and see how the CCC holds up under the light of the Scripture.

All four of these groups are excluded from salvation according to the teaching of 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, wherein Paul says that all those who "know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of God and the glory of his power" (vv 8-9). Those in non-Christian religions (Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'i, etc) fail to meet both criteria of this passage. Modern-day Jews and Muslims fail to meet the second ("obey not the gospel"), though it could be argued that Muslims do not know God.

The Jews continue to look for One to come who has already come and gone and is coming again (Rev 1:4-8).

Their first-century fathers killed their only hope to be saved (Acts 2:22-24). Unless they repent toward God and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, they cannot be saved (Acts 20:21).

Muslims do not believe in the divinity of Christ or the person of the Holy Spirit. They were born of the sword, live of the sword, and die by the sword. Unless they forsake their religion of violence and embrace the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17) and the Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6), they cannot be saved.

Those in non-Christian religions and those who have never heard the name of Christ are failing in the most fundamental of all salvation truths – there is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ. Jesus said “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father but by me” (John 14:6). Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus said that repentance and remission of sins must be preached in his name among all nations (Luke 24:47). Speaking of Jesus, Peter said there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12). And on his first recorded missionary journey, Paul preached to both Jews and Gentiles that only through Jesus Christ was the forgiveness of sins preached to them (Acts 13:38).

Further commenting on Vatican II, the group of which Ratzinger was a member wrote: “What the Church has taught down through the centuries, we also teach.” But nothing could be further from the truth. Catholic doctrine is always changing, and sometimes latter “revelations” blatantly contradict the former.

Consider, Ratzinger specifically included denominational bodies as “instruments of salvation.” This is contrary to the position held by the Catholic Church for more than 1000 years. The Lateran Council IV in the year 1215 declared, “One indeed is the universal church of the faithful, **outside of which no one at all is saved.**” (Emphasis mine JTC). Now, considering the authority, position and influence of the Catholic Church during this time (they executed thousands who dared stray from their self-made hierarchal orthodoxy), the point is explicit – **one cannot be saved outside the Catholic Church.** And anyone who would deny this conclusion is ignorant or dishonest.

However, in the twentieth century, the Catholic Church sought to be more ecumenical in her approach to matters of salvation and fellowship. This change was necessitated by Catholicism’s decreasing influence upon European governments and even among her own members. Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II) was instrumental in promoting ecumenism among the Catholics. Because

of this, Catholic authorities and apologists have for years sought to explain away the clear statement of Lateran Council IV.

To me, the irony in all of this is – the original position of the Catholic Church is closer to the truth than their present one! The doctrine of one church is clearly and unequivocally taught in the Bible. The body of Christ is the church (Col 1:18). There is one body (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:4). The Roman Church had the proper view of the church; they just misidentified it!

Furthermore, Ratzinger’s present statements are in stark contrast to the teaching of the one whom he claims to vicariously represent. In his prayer recorded in John 17, Jesus prayed for the unity of all believers (vv 17-23). This unity was to emulate the unity shared by himself and his heavenly Father. So, the real head of the church, the one who died to establish and purchase the church, is now being contradicted by the one who supposedly sits on his throne on earth and claims the same authority.

Papal decrees and the CCC notwithstanding, we must remember that one cannot paint this religion with a single broad brush. There are tens of millions of Catholics who do not adhere to the authority of the Pope or the Catholic hierarchy in many areas (e.g. abortion, birth control, ordination of women, etc). Each situation must be dealt with individually. A failure to do so may well close the door of opportunity while it is only slightly open. **WOT**

WEBSITE UPDATE

The website for the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ is currently undergoing a complete overhaul. We are in the process of making our website more user friendly, as well as adding many tools and other things to benefit those who use it. We hope to catalog all issues of *The Words of Truth* on our new site. Our domain name has also changed. **The new website for the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ is www.sixthavenuechurch.org.** Effective immediately, the old web address is no longer valid. If you have links on your website to our site, please take note of this change, and update your links. May God be glorified through all efforts to disseminate the Gospel.

ASK A BIBLE QUESTION

QUESTION: What is the “secret rapture” doctrine and where did it come from? Also, what are your thoughts on it?

ANSWER: Dave MacPherson, in his book *Cover-Up*, traces the “secret rapture” idea to a feverish vision by a Scottish teenager named Margaret MacDonald in 1830. Here is a quote from MacPherson’s book, “We have seen that a young Scottish lassie named Margaret MacDonald had a private revelation in Port Glasgow, Scotland, in the early part of 1830 that a select group of Christians would be caught up to meet Christ in the air before the days of the Antichrist. An eye-and-ear witness, Robert Norton M.D., preserved her handwritten account of her pretribulation rapture revelation in two of his books, and said it was the FIRST time anyone ever split the second coming into two distinct parts, or stages” (p. 93). The “split second coming” and “secret rapture” theories were instantly incorporated into the theology of the early Plymouth Brethren leader, John Nelson Darby. Darby’s work and writings almost solely influenced certain evangelicals then and today, such as W.E. Blackstone, Dwight L. Moody, C.I. Scofield (esp. through his Scofield Reference Bible) and L.S. Chafer; and more recent writers such as Hal Lindsey, J.D. Pentecost, John Walvoord, Herman Hoyt and Tim LaHaye, to name just a few. The “secret rapture” theory is one of many methods of interpreting biblical prophecy called Dispensational Premillennialism (a.k.a. “pretribulation premillennialism”). In regard to Dispensational (pretribulation) Premillennialism, I consider it incorrect, because Christ’s return will be an event; a single event (Heb. 9:28). Dividing Christ’s Second Coming into two second comings (i.e. 1st Second Coming “parousia,” 2nd Second Coming “literal earthly reign”) cannot be coincided with scripture any more than the “secret rapture” theory can be considered legitimate, having originated from a fever induced dream.

—Mark N. Posey
Decatur, AL