



It's Not About Religion!

Everybody knows that the Bible was written to turn irreligious people into religious people. Right? Wrong. Religion actually isn't the point at all. Religion has to do with forms and formalities, rites and rituals, ceremonies and procedures for doing sacred things in sacred ways. As such, religion is a fairly rare word in the Bible, and when it's used it's often in negative contexts.

It's used, for instance, by Festus, the Roman governor of Judea, to refer to the Christian faith as he explained to King Agrippa that the Jews "had some points of dispute with [Paul] about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive" (Acts 25:19). Festus was shooting in the dark, so lumped both Judaism and Christianity into a vague "religion" box. Paul complimented the pagans of Athens, "I see that in every way you are very religious" (Acts 17:22). Paganism and "religion" fit together. He cautioned the Colossians that they should let nobody judge them "with regard to a religious festival" (2:16) because religious festivals aren't what the Christian faith is about.

The Lord's brother, James, loved to use the literary technique of setting up straw men and knocking them down. He introduced one of his straw men in James 1:27 with the words, "If anyone considers himself 'religious...'" Then he explained: "Here's somebody who thinks he's hot stuff in the church—he thinks he's really 'religious.' We don't much use that word—that's not what our faith is about—but we'll work from his word. If anyone considers himself 'religious,' this is how he shows it: not with the usual rituals and ceremonies usually associated with 'religion,' but with a lifestyle that takes care of the people close to God's heart: 'to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.'"

It's not about religion. It's not about becoming religious. The aim of our faith is to help us grow closer to the likeness of Jesus, to take on his lifestyle, to become one with him in purpose and substance. Being shaped into the image of the Son is the goal of our faith, "attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). Religion has nothing to do with it. *G. Crowe*

Broken Bootstraps

We were talking recently in a Men's Bible study about obstacles to faith. Everywhere one looks there are obstacles in life. The American people are used to obstacles. Our history books emphasize how we "pick ourselves up by our bootstraps" as a nation any time we face an obstacle and overcome.

The Israelites constantly faced obstacles as well. From internal strife to external threats, obstacles were a way of life for the Israelite. And the Israelites overcame. Time and again they prevailed when God saved them.

The difference between our two nations lies in the rescuer.

We, as a nation, love to give ourselves credit for overcoming the obstacles in our lives. That sometimes makes its way into our personal lives as well. We sometimes blame God for all of the bad things in the world, but then give ourselves credit for any progress we make.

The truth of the matter is that our bootstraps are broken. We cannot pull ourselves up far enough to get over the greatest obstacle in our lives: ourselves. Only God can be our rescuer

~Dan



Madeline Stewart, infant granddaughter of Cecil & Carol Koons, is now home (in Searcy, Arkansas) from the hospital after being diagnosed with RSV last week....

A.J. Wilson, 9-month old son of Leslie & Carl Wilson, will have an EEG on Wednesday and an MRI on Thursday. He has been having seizures....**Willard Farmer's** surgery for cancer last Wednesday went well....Jack and Sue McCoy's grandson, **Kaden Koebecke**, is up to 5 pounds 5 ounces! He has been transferred to IU Medical Center NICU....Continue praying for **Phyllis Simmerman, Noah Powlen, Sarah Bird, Edith McCoy, Natasha Risley, Amber Tolle, Phyllis Gray** (in University Place undergoing rehab), **Ryan Woolard, Mark Eddy, Marie DeWoody, Anna Dale, Delpha Allen, Carrie High** (Regency Place Nursing Home), and **Irene Fox** (George Davis Manor Nursing Home). Those in Rosewalk Village: **Paul & Ruth Marks, Minnie Scott, and Burnell Gulden.**

Serving in Iraq: **Jon Kiefner, Loren Sniffen, and Brad King.**

Yorktown Rd. Church of Christ Hosts Teacher Training April 29

Attention teachers of students ages 0 to 120: **Saturday, April 29, Tom Tignor**, Curriculum Editor for 21st Century Christian will present three teacher training sessions that will revolutionize your teaching. The Northern Indiana Teacher Training Seminar begins with registration at 8:30 AM, followed by sessions that will run from 9:00 until noon. The seminar is free but space is limited, so if interested, contact Rob Hall at Yorktown Road Church of Christ (574-753-2757) or Tom Tignor (800-251-2477) to reserve your spot. -Joe Ruhl

LTC Helpers Needed

A few judges and door monitors are still needed for LTC in Indianapolis on April 14 & 15. Talk to Barb Tilley (538-3270), Phyllis Simmerman (474-6277), or Lee Porter (447-2874) if you are interested.

Focus on the Family Programs

Upcoming **Focus on the Family** programs are heard on local radio, WHPL-FM 89.9 at **7:30 PM Monday-Friday.**

March 30-31 The Importance of Sexual Health-Dr. Joe McIlhane and Amy Stephens provide an update on the current epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases. (Part 1 & 2)

April 3-4 Inspiring Kids to Be Leaders-Pat Williams discusses his book **Coaching Your Kids to Be Leaders** and gives practical ideas on how parents can encourage leadership abilities in their children. (Part 1 & 2)

April 6-7 Practical Advice for Parents of Teens-Our guests discuss issues related to parenting teens, such as discipline, spiritual growth and communication. (Part 1 & 2)



Everyone is invited to the Crowes' house, 2601 Sunrise Avenue, Lafayette, this **Saturday, April 1, 2:00-4:00**, to congratulate **Ernest Nyannor** and meet his new bride, **Dr. Angela Darko**. See Susan Huff or Lisa Crowe if you wish to participate in a cash gift.



Dear Church family,
Thank you for all the kindness you have shown during my sorrowing days over the loss of my first grandson, Ryan Lee Baker. The cards, calls, prayers, visits and flowers helped me so much. Also, the love and concern from my small group.

In Christian love, Delores Nolan



The food pantry is in need of **canned fruit and soup.**

March 26, 2006
Class: 201 Worship: 310
Contribution: \$5,795
Budget: \$8,100

ELMWOOD CHURCH OF CHRIST newsletter (USPS 758-630) is published weekly, except the week of Christmas, by the Elmwood Church of Christ, 2501 Elmwood Ave., Lafayette 47904. Periodical postage paid at Lafayette, IN. POSTMASTER: send address changes to ELMWOOD CHURCH OF CHRIST, 2501 Elmwood Ave., Lafayette, IN 47904.



Phil² is Coming!

In the past couple weeks; I have mentioned that our summer intern is going to be Phil Travis. We are really excited to have him coming and are really looking forward to an awesome summer in the youth ministry and in the church at large. We haven't posted any sign ups for housing Phil or providing meals for him, but the Sutherlins have already claimed him as their "temporary son" for the first part of the summer. If you have a specific time you would like him to stay with your family, you can let me know now. Concerning meals, I asked Phil about allergies and he said the only thing he knew about was apples. He can be around them, he just can't eat them. He also does not know of any pet allergies – that will be good news to many of you. Be sure to welcome Phil with open arms...Steve Corp and others have been telling him how awesome Elmwood is. DID YOU KNOW...Philip Devine is coming, too? If everything works right, Hedi will bring Phil back from his graduation from boot camp in California, sometime in the evening on April 9. He will be able to be with us for a few days and plans to be a part of the Senior Sunday presentation on April 16. The other seniors really wanted Phil to be able to be here and be a part. Make plans to spend time with Phil during the time he is here. Once he takes off for his assignment, we don't know when we will see him next.

LTC

A couple things to note about LTC: First, if you want a room at the Marriott, I need to know now. Rooms not claimed by our group will be released to the general public next week. Second, since the convention is just a couple weeks away, it is crunch time! All students participating in LTC are asked to plan to make this Sunday, April 2 an LTC work day. Stay after services, eat lunch together (provided) and work through to LIFE Group (LIFE Group will be at the house, hosted by the Miller LIFE Group – they will provide food and join us for the lesson). Finally, don't forget that LTC Preview will be Sunday night the 9th at 6 pm. Please remember this is a preview, not a showcase, so some of the work will still be in progress, but it will serve as a good rehearsal for our group. If you want to see the real thing, you will have to come to Indianapolis, April 14 & 15.

Senior Sunday

As mentioned above, Senior Sunday will be April 16 at 6 pm. We will have a video presentation and will follow that time with an Ice Cream Social (with cake) to honor our graduating high school seniors. – Lee

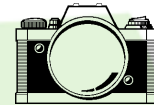
Ramona Farris 1918–2006

Ramona Farris, a pillar of the Elmwood church since 1952, died last Tuesday, March 21. Her funeral was at Elmwood on Saturday.

Ramona combined her artistic talents and her love for children in many ways through the years. She, along with Joe Ruhl, developed the Worship Appreciation ministry which has aided countless children in understanding the purpose as well as the mechanics of public worship. Ramona's paintings, in a variety of media, are scattered throughout the world though, happily, a few remain in the Elmwood building.

Suffering with Alzheimer's in her declining years, Ramona was attended to faithfully and lovingly by her husband of 66 years, Bill. Our sympathies to Bill, and to their sons Bill and Jon and their families, on the loss of this great woman.

April 2 last sign-up date for Directory Pictures



This Sunday, April 2, will be the last sign-up day at the church building for your photo to be taken. Follow-up calls will be made if you haven't had the opportunity to schedule your appointment. Sign-up will be available **after the second service this Sunday as well as from 9:00 until 9:30 and 10:15 until 10:45 AM.** A photo studio will be set up at the church building on **April 14, 15, 25 and 26** (Friday, Saturday, Tuesday and Wednesday). Every participating family gets a **free directory and 8 x 10 picture. There is no cost to the church and you are not obligated by high pressure sales to buy any pictures.**



March 29, 7 PM...Bible classes for all

April 2, 6 PM...LIFE Groups

April 9, 6 PM...Leadership Training for Christ Preview

April 16, 6 PM...High School Graduation service

April 23 & 30, 6 PM...LIFE Groups

Read:
Joshua 23-24; Psalms 56-62;
Matthew 1-15

2006 Spiritual Adventure

Week 15: April 9-15

Remembrance, Obedience, and Consequences

I love to cook. It's one of my favorite pastimes. Many of the women in my family are such good cooks, and have been cooking for such a long time, that they no longer have any use for recipes—just a pinch of this, a dash of that and voila, a wonderful dish. Sometimes, however, even the greatest among us has to look up a recipe to make sure they have it just right.

I get into a lot of trouble with trying out new things on old recipes. Sometimes the slightest change can ruin the whole dish. This is exactly what Joshua 23 is about. Joshua, the senior “cook” of the Israelites, has given the people the perfect recipe for growing strong and expanding their territory. He is reminding them of the recipe they know so well so that they will not mix in the wrong ingredients, such as the peoples of the nations they conquer, and ruin the whole meal. These people may appear to be just what the dish needs, but they are snares.

Today, we have so many recipes to choose from—recipes for moods, tastes, and special occasion—but there still remains one recipe that is always pleasing and acceptable to God, and that recipe includes prayer, love, kindness, patience, and obedience, among other things. There are new ingredients added, but we consult God, our head chef, for approval on them. God never tires of our spiritual dish, even though he enhances it as he enhances us. Bon Appetit!

–Erica Hearn



This Week's Highlight: Triumph of Easter

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. –I Corinthians 15

It's death that gets our attention.

It doesn't matter whether it is the evening news, or our newspaper headlines, our politics, or at the movies or at our church services. It's death that gets our attention.

Death looms large, once we ever catch sight of it. As long as we are unaware of it, we don't give it a second thought. But once we ever really catch sight of death and realize that it is headed our way, coming either for us or someone we love, we are never really ever without an uneasy awareness of death.

And what gets us about death is our powerlessness to do anything about it.

That's what makes it the most powerful tool of social control, of course. Human beings have always tried to control the uncontrollable by the use of death. Certainly all empires of the world have prized the ability to inflict death, and they want everyone to feel powerless in the face of their ability to do so. That was the whole point of crucifixion, of public torture and execution. "We can do this, and you cannot do anything about it if we choose to do it to you. Never forget who you are dealing with. Never forget who holds the power of death." And crucifixion was the Roman Empire's signature of its ability to wield death.

That is what is hanging in the balance in the conversation with Pilate. "Don't you know that I have power of life and death over you?" Pilate asks Jesus. "Surely you haven't forgotten that while you Jews play around with all your religion, when it comes time to settle up accounts and do what is necessary, it is we Romans who have the power of death. It's nice to tell Sabbath stories about how God created everyone, but everyone knows that sometimes someone just has to string someone else up. That's the way of the world. It's the way death makes life possible for the rest of us. Death is supposed to get your attention."

Death was supposed to get Jesus' attention too. Pilate wants to make sure of himself and test Jesus' sanity at the same time. Death *does* get your attention, doesn't it?

Pilate need not have wondered whether Jesus understood death. Death got Jesus' attention. It got God's attention, too.

Death is the ultimate enemy of God, and all the powers of evil work for it and worship it. And so Jesus came to destroy the power of death over God's creation.

But isn't death the ultimate predator that gobbles up everyone and walks away with impunity? Is anyone able to prevent death or force it to relinquish its grip on humanity? Even those who sic death on others are ultimately devoured by it. Is death the ultimate reality, the "final finality," the destination no one can escape, not now, not ever? Is death the final demon that must be placated and yet never can be? And we are all so many sitting ducks, just waiting our turn to be thrown into the furnace of its belly—forever?

Until that Easter morning, death had been the master of humanity. Death sends out its ghost riders and panicked people into sin and self-worship. Death's riders preach despair everywhere they go, trying to shred all faith in God as "nice but useless."

Death had laughed at God. "Create all you care. It all winds up on my plate, sooner or later." Death always mocks faith with words like these: "He trusts in God. Let us see if God will save him." Death always wins, doesn't it?

Until Easter morning. When at long last, faith triumphed over death and broke its mastery forever. On Easter morning, for the first time since Adam, One walked the earth freed from both the power and the fear of death. No wonder the earth shook.

On Friday, it appeared that death had triumphed again, and it definitely got the attention of the disciples of Jesus. The Risen Jesus must convince them no longer to let their lives be dominated by death. The Gospel is that it is the Risen Christ, not death, who is Lord of all. Our lives are no longer dominated by the power or fear of death but by the freedom of faith in the Risen Christ and the God who raises the dead. And *that* is what should get our attention.

–Robert Montgomery