

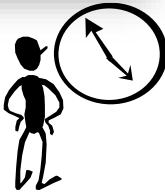
THE BATTLE CREEK BULLETIN

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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.
(every other week)	

Wednesday:

Bible Study	6:30 p. m.
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Canceled!

By Jefferson David Tant

During our recent Christmas holidays, several churches around the country canceled their Sunday services. Some of the statements made by church spokesmen probably revealed more than they realized, as they not only reflected an attitude towards the mistaken idea concerning the birth of Christ but an attitude towards the religion of Christ in general.

"It's more than being family-friendly. It's being lifestyle-friendly for people who are just very, very busy," said Cally Wilkinson, a spokeswoman for Willow Creek Community Church, the biggest in the Chicago area.

"...lifestyle-friendly for people who are just very, very busy." That says much about our time and culture. It doesn't matter that we are to "*seek first the kingdom of God*" (Matthew 6:33). Just cancel such verses! Even though we are still one of the most churchgoing nations on earth, the number of people who are regular churchgoers continues to decline. Religion in Europe is in its death-throes. For example, in Norway, 95% of the people belong to the state church, while only 5% are active.

We have been on this trend for a long time, with churches canceling services for "more important" events such as the Super Bowl and other such momentous occasions. In my younger years, a church in Abilene, Texas held services in a drive-in theater. "Just come as you are" included pajamas and bathrobes, with hair in curlers. The preacher stood on top of the concession stand, as I recall, and preached through the P.A. system with individual speakers in each car. And of course, the ushers went from car to car with a collection basket in hand. Our trend of having myriads of stores open 7 days a week has forced many to choose between working or going to church and often work wins out.

“Lifestyle-friendly” also speaks to those churches that cater to the current trend of accepting and celebrating homosexual couples. You will remember the flap a while back about the ordaining of Gene Robinson as an Episcopalian Bishop. He had left his wife and children 13 years before and was living in open sodomy with his male wife/lover/husband/concubine (choose one). He was ordained a high official in the church, even though there was some strong opposition. I wondered if he had left his wife and children and had lived with his 25-year-old female secretary without marriage, would he have been ordained? I seriously doubt it. The word of God does address this lifestyle: “*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals*” (I Corinthians 6:10). More and more churches are canceling such teaching.

“At first glance, it does sound contrarian,” Willow Creek senior pastor Gene Appel told the Tribune. “We don’t see it as not having church on Christmas. We see it as decentralizing the church on Christmas — hundreds of thousands of experiences going on around Christmas trees. The best way to honor the birth of Jesus is for families to have a more personal experience on that day.”

By all means, we surely need to have a “more personal” experience. After all, myself is what is most important. Our mantra is “What’s in it for me?”

Well, the church really isn’t that important, after all. It’s common knowledge that you can be a good Christian and go to heaven without going to church. Haven’t you heard that? I certainly have, more times than I can count. In fact, many denominational churches are becoming less and less “church” and more and more “entertainment.” The bands, orchestras, stage productions, and ball teams are growing in popularity. I am told that sermons are often a reincarnation of “Dr. Phil” in the pulpit, using one scripture to launch into a good lesson on human psychology.

Never mind that God has placed great emphasis on the church. It was so important in God’s mind that he gave his son to die for it. He admonished the elders of the church at Ephesus to “*Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood*” (Acts 20:28). But let’s go ahead and cancel or decentralize the church. We have more important things to do.

Hmmm. Is there anything else we can cancel? I’ve got it! What about baptism? It’s so much simpler to be saved by simply raising your hand and saying “I believe.” Most denominations have already effectively canceled baptism in their creeds. *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches* (Hiscox) declares that “Baptism is not essential to salvation” (p. 20), and a Jehovah’s Witnesses book states: “What, then, does Christian baptism signify? It is not a washing away of one’s sins, because cleansing from sin comes only through faith in Jesus Christ” [*The Truth that Leads to Eternal Life*, p. 183]. While these churches do practice baptism, it has become only a hollow symbol, while

the true meaning of baptism has been canceled.

The Bible does have several words to say about baptism, including Christ's own statement in Mark 16:16: "*He that believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he that does not believe shall be condemned.*" Then the Holy Spirit directed Ananias to tell Saul of Tarsus, "*Why do you delay? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name*" (Acts 22:16). But since it's more important what we think than what the Bible says, we can cancel all the many scriptures that deal with baptism (and there are many).

"It's a sign of how totally identified with the culture [evangelicals have] become," Calvin College historian James Bratt told the Tribune. "The church has subordinated to cultural icons, and family is one of them." This statement very well sums it all up. What has happened is that the world ("culture") has changed the church, rather than the church changing the world, and wherever the Bible contradicts what culture dictates, or what modern denominations say, or whatever interferes with personal or family interests, we just mark it "canceled." Well said, Mr. Bratt.

But let it be known that there are churches all over the earth that still seek to follow the words of God given to the prophet Jeremiah: "*Thus saith Jehovah, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way; and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls*" (Jeremiah 6:16). To do otherwise is certainly fraught with danger. We are given clear warnings about tampering with God's revelation in more than one place.

"But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" (Galatians 1:8-9).

"I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18-19).

As for me and my house, we will choose to follow the Word of the Lord. To do otherwise, I am afraid that when we would stand before the Judgment Throne of God, he would take my passport to Heaven and write across it "**CANCELED.**"

On Judgement Day
You'll Wish
You Had Been
Biblically Correct
Not
Politically Correct

The Seriousness of Teaching

By Jarrod M. Jacobs

Twice in Ezekiel, God warns him about how serious it is to teach God's truth and warn people when they are in sin. Ezekiel 3:17-21 and 33:2-9 make it clear that Ezekiel served as a "watchman" for the Lord. As such, he had the duty to warn people about sin and the need to repent. If Ezekiel refused to warn, those in sin would die in their sin, but their blood would be on the head of Ezekiel. In other words, he would be responsible for not giving them the warning they needed. Conversely, if Ezekiel warned and the people ignored him, they would die in their sins as before, but Ezekiel would not be held responsible.

James 3:1 reminds us that being a teacher means receiving a "*greater condemnation*" (KJV). Some versions say it will be a "*stricter judgment*" or a "*more severe (greater, heavier) judgment.*" A version called "The Remedy New Testament" says it perhaps the most straightforward way: "*My brothers and sisters, few of you are ready to become teachers because those who teach must function at the highest standards.*"

I believe Ezekiel 3:17-21 and 33:2-9 give us some insight into this passage in James by noting that God held Ezekiel accountable for his words, or lack thereof, and that if he refused to speak when he needed to then there would be consequences he would suffer!

Let the words in Ezekiel and James serve as warnings to those who wish to teach God's word. Whether we teach publicly or privately, let us appreciate the responsibility in so doing. When one teaches, he is not merely speaking an opinion or "thinking out loud." His work is to "*speak as the oracles of God*" (I Peter 4:11). He is to do so "*in season and out of season*" (II Timothy 4:2). In other words, to speak the truth when people like it and when people do not like it. Ezekiel has already been told he will have to have a "hard forehead" as he taught the people (Ezekiel 3:9). This gives us an idea of their attitude toward God's warnings. If Ezekiel refused to warn, he would be held accountable. At the same time, I find it interesting that while God held Ezekiel responsible for teaching and warning, He did not hold Ezekiel accountable for their obedience or disobedience!

Men have free will. Therefore, the decision to obey or disobey does not rest with the teacher (Mark 16:16; Revelation 22:18-19; Romans 10:13-17). At the same time, if men never knew they had an option, this lack of knowledge rests with the teacher. If you have felt intimidated by the idea of teaching others for fear of how people might respond, then let these words be of comfort to you. You are responsible for teaching but not responsible for their decision or response to the truth!

When Paul preached, he understood what God said to Ezekiel. When Paul went to Corinth and encountered opposition from the Jews, it finally reached the point where

Paul said, “*Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles*” (Acts 18:6). Paul had spent several Sabbaths teaching (Acts 18:3), but it finally came to a point where Paul had to focus upon those who were willing to listen, just like Jesus had taught (Matthew 10:14; Mark 6:11; Acts 13:51). He was “pure” from their blood because he had taught the truth and had not held back. Yet, Paul also understood he was not responsible for their obedience to the truth. Thus, the apostle went to those he thought would listen and obey.

Paul repeated this in Acts 20. When he met the Ephesian elders for the last time, among other things, he stated, “*Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God*” (Acts 20:26-27). He had emphasized earlier that his teaching had been done “*publicly, and from house to house*” (Acts 20:20). He was free because he had taught the people all that God had wanted and did not spare for people’s feelings or for folks being upset at the words. He explains this further in Acts 20:31.

Teaching God’s word is serious business because the souls of men are what is at stake! Ezekiel was made aware of this in a very real way, as was Paul, and as are we through James! There is a great need for teachers and preachers of the gospel, but we don’t need folks just to say the things that are easy to hear or what we intend to do anyway! We need folks to tell us the hard things and the things that demand introspection, sorrow for sins, repentance, and obedience so that we might rise above this old world and be “holy people” (I Peter 1:15-16; Matthew 5:48; Hebrews 12:14), folks who are preparing themselves for Heaven!

Preoccupied with Heartbeats

By Ronny Milliner

In the latest issue of *Science*, dated 3 November 2023, is an article that speaks of “our preoccupation with fetal heartbeat” when considering the subject of abortion. The article is a book review of *Policing Pregnant Bodies: From Ancient Greece to Post-Roe America*, authored by Kathleen Crowther.

Crowther argues that anti-abortion laws “treat pregnant people themselves as the greatest threat to fetal life,” when we should be thinking about “healthy food, clean water, safe housing, and medical care.” Aren’t “pregnant people themselves” (we wouldn’t want to exclude anyone by saying “pregnant women”) the ones that determine whether they are eating healthy food, drinking clean water, living in safe places, and seeking proper medical care? How can you say one is greater than the other?

For years now we have been told to “follow the science.” But this “scientific” article declares that when considering the question of abortion, it “must be answered by history, not science.”

So, I guess we should always “follow the science” unless it deals with aborting babies.