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**Pastor Cory Ramirez and family**  
**Central Baptist Church**  
**Little Rock, Arkansas**

**God feeds the sparrows, but they all have to scratch for worms.**

# CONNECTED

January-March, 2024

## YE KNOW NOT WHAT A DAY MAY BRING FORTH

We plan, prepare, pray and do all within our power to make some things happen. Suddenly, one definitive act takes the possibility right off the table. That's what happened with our long and carefully planned *Holy Land Tour*, December 30-January 8. HAMAS attacked Israel, and we instantly realized there will be no tour to Israel in the foreseeable future. As I sat stunned, trying to absorb the reality before my eyes, the words of wise King Solomon echoed through my head: *"Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth," Proverbs 27:1.*

Many of us have invested ourselves heavily into this effort. We will move forward praying for Israel, and grateful we weren't there when things erupted.

I started October with three clustered funerals. We are mortal beings and never fully spared from grief when we give up dear and close loved ones. My heart aches to see my friends and loved ones suffer. My one funeral a month average is still intact.

As the years take their toll, it seems that more and more time is spent in doctor offices. Also, the list of doctors and medicines grows. I thank God that help is available, but I'm not blind to what's happening. All of us are going to lose this war with mortality. That's okay; I know what's coming soon. *"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we*

*shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," 1 Corinthians 15:50-57.* Yes, I know the Savior, and He's got everything covered. I'm REALLY looking forward to my new body.

Margaret and I had the blessed privilege of preaching both Sunday services at the Rodgers Baptist Church in Garland on October 8. They're a most gracious people. Pastor Gilbert was taking care of business at the Amazing Grace Children's Home in Mexico City. Two weeks later, we were with the Central Baptist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas. Pastor Cory Ramirez invited us there. It was a true blessing to be with those dear people to present my *History of Churches* weekend seminar.

It was good to be at home most of November and December. I was able to complete several chapters in my third volume of *What We Believe and Why*. I hope to complete this new book by the middle of next year. Life seems to never be

without snags for very long. My computer bit the dust. It's a chore royale to move everything over to a new computer. I'm most grateful to God for my yoke-fellow, Philip Rice, who took care of the really heavy stuff.

We greatly enjoyed Thanksgiving and Christmas with our family. Christmas was in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. For a guy who lives in Houston, a *White Christmas* is pretty rare. This year, it happened for us.

Margaret and I wish each of you our dear friends a belated Merry Christmas, and a blessed and prosperous 2024!

*The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago.*

*The second-best time is now.*  
 Chinese proverb

*"How come your arm is in a sling? Is it broken?"*

*"Yes. Unfortunately it is."*

*"An accident?"*

*"No. I broke it when I was trying to pat myself on the back."*

*"No kidding. Why would you be giving yourself a pat on the back?"*

*"For minding my own business."*



## SUNDAY DOESN'T COVER EVERYTHING

*Calvary Covers it All* is a wonderful song. When in our hearts we trust Christ, our sins are forever under His blood. Yes. Forever! Eternal life is a matter of grace; not merit. Being saved from sin's penalty is a one-time event; not an on-going process.

Real biblical Christianity, being saved from sin's penalty changes lives. Trusting Christ who died, was buried and rose again instantly produces a new relational standing. Believers are immediately born again into the family of God, and thus become children of God. They have an eternal Father-son relationship and position.

However, being a true Christian is far more than a ticket-to-Heaven. There is a life to live, and God expects it to truly reflect the new, inward relationship. He expects His people to act like Him. He says, "*Be ye holy; for I am holy,*" **1 Peter 1:16**. God's people are to be humble, giving, forgiving, honest, respectful, moral, pure and full of integrity. Every day! And every night! No pretense! No hypocrisy! No self-exaltation! The same at home, work and church!

For over 82 years, I have lived around *Christian, church* people. I've been up-close and personal with thousands of them. At church. When church was over. I've seen them when they knew I was looking, and when they didn't know it. Most of my observations are not based on one or a few church services. Time has a way of exposing people, the genuine from the pretenders, the ones who are actually holy from the ones who say and pretend to be holy. Those who put on quite a show!

I have observed a growing number of people who seem to think that Sunday, and a little tear-jerking religion measures their spiritual depth. There's reason to be skeptical of people who put on a passionate, emotional religious show at church (especially during worship), but who are known as hateful, conniving, dishonest, gossips, proud, self-righteous, disrespectful, lacking in compassion and grudge-holders. Some who can put on a religious worship show with the best of them are widely known for being controlling, legalistic, mean-spirited and hard as nails. Oh, they can step up front, put on that pious teary-eyed sanctimonious look, get the hands together and in the air and sway the body to the beat of the music. There's a mystique about being breathy and a bit weepy. These tactics play to most audiences better at church than in a bar, especially with dimmed colored lights, a smoke-filled room and lots of tearful lofty talk about God. After all, at church there's a holy spin to it. At church, the human spirit is supposed to be touching God. It's moving and impressive.

Until you look on Facebook, find yourself in a business deal with one of those great *Christians* or observe one of their temper outbreaks. What a pain in the heart to learn *Mr./Mrs. Model Christian* threw his own fleshly brothers and sisters under the bus in order to get the inheritance! Trust, confidence and respect plummet when you learn that one of those *Sunday showmen* got another *Christian* pregnant, is into pornography, embezzled church money or is hooked on alcohol or drugs. How did you feel when the truth about Jimmy Swaggart and Ravi Zacharias came to light?

Do not imagine that Sunday covers everything. Nobody is a "*good Christian*," spiritual giant or model to follow because he/she puts on a good show at church. A sporadic appearance even accompanied by quite a bit of money when fun and games don't interfere qualifies nobody as a *true Christian*. Jesus asked, "*Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*" **Luke 6:46**. In fact, an occasional show of religious showmanship, and a great affection for God and His cause apart from apart from a life to back them is obnoxious to the core. Hypocrisy always stinks. Always! It turns people away from God and His church. Never feel good about yourself or think that you have everything covered because you occasionally *feel* close to God, or because you can put on a big, impressive worship show.

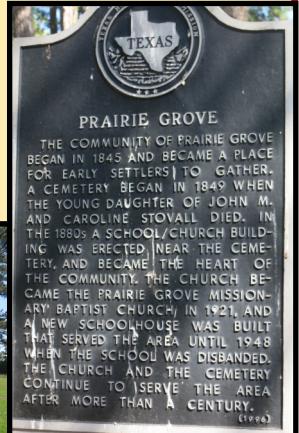
I despise cold, dry, heartless church service and worship. There is something worse, much worse: worship that is pretense and showmanship in the name of God; a Sunday stance that doesn't match the Monday-Saturday stance. I am quite aware that only God knows the heart. I am equally aware that a big appearance of love and devotion for God void of a daily lifestyle that reflects Jesus Christ is public mockery. True Christianity is a lifestyle; not an occasional outburst of religious piety. All who trust Jesus Christ who died, was buried and rose for them have eternal life in spite of their failures. The New Birth is an on-the-spot event. Being like Jesus Christ is another matter. It's a daily lifestyle; not a series of occasional religious outbursts.

## ROOTS AND STRONG MEMORIES

On May 1, 1955, I walked the isle of Fairview Baptist Church in the country outside Lufkin, Texas and publicly surrendered my life to the gospel ministry. That was a month before my 14<sup>th</sup> birthday. The old folks thought it was such a cute thing, and were sure this passing fantasy would soon blow over. Four months later, the Prairie Grove Baptist Church in the deep country outside Diboll, Texas called me as its pastor. My sakes! I didn't know one thing about preaching, let alone being a pastor. All of my life, I had been watching those ole East Texas preachers, so I just got up there and *told 'um* all I could about what God said in His Word. There weren't many of them, about 25-30 on most Sundays. Those dear people were so good to me. In the pulpit, I was God's little man; after church, I was one of the little kids.

In October, I preached the funeral of Wilton Whitehead in the old Fairview Cemetery where my precious mother and dad are buried. It's hard to convey what I felt as I stood in that special place and spoke of what is takes to be born again, and of joining our loved ones in that land where we'll never grow old. The cemetery is just behind the Fairview Baptist Church. That's where I grew up. It's the church that ordained me into the gospel ministry. It was my second pastorate. I was a 17-year-old boy when Wilton Whitehead was saved right there at Fairview Baptist Church. I had the privilege of baptizing him.

After the funeral, I drove by the old homeplace where I grew up, and followed the country road down to the Prairie Grove community where the church still stands. I parked there for a while, and thanked God for being so good to me. It was a very moving time; just God and me out there where I have so many roots. It's been many years since I was there. I took this picture which embodies lots of precious memories for me.



## A BOOK I HAVE RECENTLY READ AND HIGHLY RECOMMEND

### **William Carey: Obliged to Go**

By Janet and Geoff Benge

YWAM Publishing

Seattle, Washington

Audio book: 1998

ISBN: 9781576581476

*An extraordinarily good book.*

*You should make sure you children and grandchildren read it.*

*It's available as an audio book.*

Sensational! The story of one of the greatest Christian heroes since New Testament days. If you've never read a biography of William Carey, you're cheating yourself. To say the least, this true story is challenging, inspiring and motivating.

**William Carey: Obliged to Go** is well-written. The opening chapter is a glimpse into Carey's young adult life when he was at a crucial time of what seemed certain defeat and the death of a lifelong dream. From early boyhood, William Carey realized the glorious gospel message of Jesus Christ was for all the people of the world, not just Englishmen. Foreign missionary work became his passion. Few, if any, messages were more unpopular and rejected in England at that time. After a brief glimpse into the hardships, set-backs and overwhelming obstacles which face William Carey for his entire life, this biography jumps back to his childhood when he was 6 years old; and chronologically follows his life story until his death.

William Carey was born in rural Paulerspury, Northamptonshire in 1761. William's father was a weaver before his appointment to parish clerk in the Church of England. The appointment was pivotal to 6-year-old William who was brilliant. It enabled him to get schooling through the 6<sup>th</sup> grade in a private school for 12 children. It also exposed him to books including books in other languages. Over the next 10 years, William Carey taught himself Latin, Hebrew and Greek. He was fascinated with plants, animals and geography. His Uncle Peter who spent many years in the Americas had a huge influence on William, and further exposed him to the wonders of the world.

Circumstances arranged that at 12 William Carey had to get a job to help sustain the family. His father made a binding contract with a master cordwainer (one who made shoes) to take William as an apprentice for only room and board. There was no pay. William was 14. It was during this apprenticeship that William Carey met John Moore. Moore was a Baptist. The truths which Moore taught and lived ultimately resulted in William's conversion.

Over the next few years, he was baptized and ordained as a Baptist minister. He became a pastor and met many Baptist pastors and leaders in England. They did not think they had any responsibility to reach lost people outside of England. His diligent studies in the Bible galvanized his conviction that every effort must be made to get the gospel to people world-wide. Convincing others was an uphill, daunting task; but William Carey would not stop. He wrote a manuscript called *The Inquiry* on why and how missionary work must be done. It was published, and hearts began to turn. An organization was established, and William Carey volunteered to be the first missionary from England to a foreign shore.

Against overwhelming odds, on Thursday, June 15, 1793 William Carey sailed for India. He faced tremendous opposition from preachers in England, from his family and from the East India Trading Company which had exclusive power over who entered India. They didn't want the truths of the Bible to reach the people of India; they were afraid such knowledge would hurt their trade business. Once in India, William Carey faced enormous obstacles: religious, cultural, financial and death in his own family. Before he died on June 9, 1834, William Carey was used of God to impact the entire nation of India with the gospel. His impact on Burma was huge. He translated the Bible into Bengali, Sand Script and dozens of other languages. He set up a printing house, and produced hundreds of copies of the Bible. He established three newspapers, and many schools. With only a 6<sup>th</sup> grade education, William Carey became head of the college that offered official state-recognized degrees.

William Carey opened the door for the gospel message to India. He was in high demand by the highest officials in India. He rose against overwhelming odds. Every time he was knocked down by a fire, a flood, a death, a betrayal or in some other way, William Carey got up, rebuilt and found a way to go forward.

Ironically, it was the new, young preachers who came to join his work who did him the most harm. With his own personal integrity and mostly with money he earned or raised with his own hands, Carey did a work that touched millions of people and brought multitudes to a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ as personal Savior. Through his efforts new, young missionaries were brought to India from England. They picked, criticized and condemned Carey on how he did things. They wrote poisoning letters to pastors, churches and leaders back in England. They worked themselves into positions of power, and greatly undermined one of the greatest works for God this world has ever witnessed. They slandered one of God's greatest champions; yet in spite of their devilish efforts against William Carey and the great work God used him to do, he still stands as one of history's greatest Christian champions. He truly lived up to his famous words in early life, "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God."

There are few books that I unequivocally recommend. **William Carey: Obliged to Go** is one of them.

Japanese and American executives were discussing the state of the world economy. Assuming the answer would be English, one of the Americans asked which language the Japanese regarded as the most important language for world trade. One Japanese executive immediately replied, "My customer's language."

## TOGETHER OR SIDE-BY-SIDE

A casual glance at a yard full of school children at recess will rarely tell you the whole story. From a distance, the scene usually appears so lovely and warm: little children having such a wonderful time together. An up close and personal look is likely to reveal lots of children alone or in private little groups doing their own things. Over here, there's a couple of children actually talking to each other. Over there, a small group are engaged in a common game or playing chase. One little group is not engaged with the next; and some of the kids are doing their own private things, mostly unengaged with the others.

Sure sounds a lot like church. Before the worship service starts, there's a big flurry of visiting and glad-handing. People are catching up with each other, learning the latest news and welcoming new people. How nice and healthy!

Then, church starts, the time when everybody is to worship the great God of heaven and earth, the one who created all things and makes them continue as they do, the one who has our very being in His hands. We've all done our private worship at home, at work and at other places all week. Now, the church has "*come together in one place*" to worship our God corporately as one. We're together to sing, pray, give, preach and observe the Lord's Supper. As one! This is not a time for everybody to do his own thing. One person prays, and he speaks for all of us. We all listen and agree with *amen*. This one is speaking for me, and God knows my heart is with him. We're worshipping together, not just side by side. Our worship of our great God is rising up as one voice, in one accord.

The preacher stands up and preaches God Word, and we're all involved in the preaching. He's delivering God's Word, and we're receiving it. We're all engaged, focused as one on the message from God. It's time to worship God with our substance, to acknowledge that He's the owner and we're only stewards of His material goods. It's time to give as one. As members, we are *one body* of baptized believers covenanted together; His church. We're giving as one to His treasury. We sing together in the place where our God said of our head, Jesus Christ, "*Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen,*" **Ephesians 3:21**. One song rising from one church in unison in worship and praise of Him who is our all in all. The Lord's Supper! What a unified message! One Savior whose body was broken, whose blood was shed, whose death, burial and resurrection is our only hope. One body of believer humbly bowing their hearts before God in recognition and thanksgiving!

Yet, what you just read is rare, even in good, sound and sincere churches. Too often people are singing; but their minds are not on the truths or beauty of the song at hand or the God who is being worshipped. They're fixed on the hymnal, the screen, who is singing off key or on *the performance*. "*Wow! Wasn't that great!*" Somebody's praying, too often the same old vain repetitions. The one praying is not an expert, and speaks too low. Minds are wandering; *it's too hot in here, too cold. I didn't see my friend today. Did you see how short that skirt was?* It's time for the tithes and offerings. *I wonder what ole tight-wad is giving today. I think too much is being spent on maintenance and repairs.* The preacher's up. *I wonder how long this is going to take. It's nearly noon, and he's still at it. I'm going to be late to lunch. Man, that's boring.*

You'd probably be shocked if you knew how many people at church were silently taking roll, surfing their smart phone, out shopping or at a football game in their minds. Oh, my soul grieves when I think of how seldom our worship is in *one accord*, goes up before God as one unified petition from His people. No wonder there's such little power with God in too many churches. No wonder worship is so dry and empty. It's not hard to see why most worship lacks compelling magnetism, and fewer and fewer people are darkening church doors these days. It seems to me that most of the time when we are in church, we're just side-by-side; not together.

### FOUNDATIONAL RESPECT AND APPRECIATION

Number 5 on God's list of Ten Commandments is, "*Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee,*" **Exodus 20:12**. Children and their immediate parents? Yes, but MUCH more. This is "*the first commandment with promise,*" **Ephesians 6:2**, and it's talking about the survival of societies and nations. If any civilized people, especially Christians, want to preserve their values for many generations, the children MUST get on board. They have to *honor* (ascribe value and weight) the wisdom of their fathers and forefathers, get hold of it and make it their own.

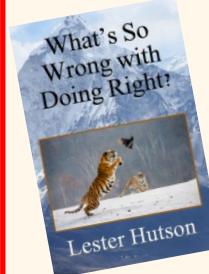
Lack of appreciation and disrespect ultimately undermine most things. That includes families, churches and societies.

For a long lifetime, I've been around preachers and church people. I've seen lots of churches change guards. Pastors come and go. Members (and pastors) get old and move off the scene. The old church is now made up of a new people. Really often, an almost predictable phenomenon occurs. Though it's the same *church*, the *new church* forgets the *old church*. They forget that the *old church* started from scratch. The *old church* won people to Christ, sacrificed and bought land and built buildings. The *old church* loved the Lord too; and sang and preached and honored God in lots of ways.

Most of the time (oh, it hurts me to say "*most.*" I wish it wasn't true), the *new church* could care less about what the *old church* thought or did. *We're here now. This property, and this money is ours. Those old people really didn't know much about church and worshipping God. We'll do things our way now.* Yes. It's a repeated story, and almost predictable.

Where is respect and thanksgiving? Are they not vintage Christian virtues? Are *new churches* exempt? Shouldn't *new churches* be thankful and respect their spiritual forefathers? Will there not someday be a day of reckoning?

*I am only one,  
But still I am one.  
I cannot do everything,  
But I can do something.  
And because I cannot do everything,  
I will not refuse to do  
The something that I can do.*  
Edward E. Hale



Contact us at:

[lesterhutson  
@gmail.com](mailto:lesterhutson@gmail.com)

Customer: 'I've been calling 700-1000 for two days and can't get through; can you help?'

Operator: 'Where did you get that number, sir?'

Customer: It's on the door of your business.'

Operator: 'Sir, those are the hours that we are open.'

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want!*