

February 18, 1969

PROBLEMS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE
(Sixty-sixth in a series)

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL MORALITY

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Unfortunately personal morality and social morality are rather sharply divided in the thinking and practice of some Christians and Christian groups. Too frequently one or the other is neglected.

Some Christians, who seem to be above reproach regarding personal morality, have thoroughly unchristian attitudes toward and relations to some of the more serious moral and social issues. On the other hand, some who have excellent attitudes in the area of social issues are quite careless concerning personal morality.

As is so frequently true, we should not permit a false alternative to arise. We should not neglect either personal morality or social morality. The choice should be a both/and rather than an either/or.

Many who emphasize rather exclusively personal morality tend to magnify unduly the negative aspects of the Christian life. For them the quality of the Christian's life is measured primarily by what he does not do.

If one will major on the positive aspects of personal morality it will more or less inevitably move him toward the broader social and moral issues of life. He will see that the positive aspects of the Christian life are expressed in and through relationships.

In other words, a positive perspective regarding personal morality will more or less naturally cause one to see that being a Christian means to apply the Christian spirit and Christian teachings to his relations in the home, in the work, play, racial or cultural group. Put plainly, being a Christian involves the totality of life.

We can summarize by saying that one is not as Christian as he ought to be until he maintains in his personal life, both from a negative and positive perspective, thoroughly Christian moral standards. Neither is he as Christian as he ought to be until he is thoroughly Christian in the broader social relationships of life and until he has an unquestioned Christian perspective concerning all of the major issues that face and frequently plague our society.

Christian groups as well as individuals frequently tend to give primary emphasis either to personal morality or social morality and sometimes to the neglect of the other. Which one receives primary emphasis will be determined largely by whether or not the group, to use a distinction that is frequently made, is a sect or churchly type of group.

In general, a sect type of Christian group tends to separate itself from the world while the church type tends to make its peace with the world. The sect type tends to major on personal morality; the church type on social morality.

Baptists, who have a sect background and who still reveal a considerable sect tinge, have tended to major on personal morality. Baptists, however, are moving up in the world. We are increasingly becoming a church type of group. This means that it is natural for contemporary Baptists to give a more prominent place to social morality.

With our sect background, which has not been entirely lost, Baptists have an unusual opportunity to work out and to maintain a proper balance between personal morality and social morality.



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February 18, 1969

**Criswell Urges De-emphasis
Of Pre-convention Meetings**

NASHVILLE (BP)--The president of the Southern Baptist Convention, expressing concern about attendance trends at the annual meeting of the SBC, suggested here that the pre-convention meetings held in conjunction with the SBC be de-emphasized.

Speaking to the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, SBC President W. A. Criswell of Dallas said that by the time the pre-convention sessions are over, those who attended have been "bled emotionally dry."

Instead of emphasizing five different "conventions" in addition to the annual session of the nation's largest Protestant denomination, Criswell urged the program planners for the five group meetings to cooperate in making the SBC meeting more powerful and meaningful.

He urged the convention program planners to admit that "it is not possible any more to have these long, extended conventions."

Criswell, pastor of the 14,000-member First Baptist Church of Dallas, used three words to describe the annual cluster meetings at convention time: "anti-climactic," "fragmentary," and "aimlessness."

He cited trends nationally for big conventions to be shorter. He noted the tendency of many Baptists to skip the closing sessions of the SBC.

He suggested joint planning by the committees that outline the program of the SBC and the Woman's Missionary Union Convention, and even the possibility of pooling resources to bring outstanding speakers to both meetings.

Citing the organization of the SBC and past history, Criswell said that concern for missions ought to bind all Baptists together when they meet for their annual sessions.

Criswell reserved his strongest words for the SBC Pastors' Conference which precedes the SBC each year, and the Evangelists' Conference that usually meets on Thursday afternoon.

"My impression of the Pastors' Conference and Evangelists' Conference is that they are just having a preaching marathon," said Criswell, who added he was a frequent preacher at both meetings.

"They're just up there feeling good, (God bless them for that--I need to feel good--they're up there saying marvelous words, but we're not going anywhere," Criswell declared, drawing both laughter and applause.

"We love that convocation--why, I love to hear a gifted preacher preach. ...But as surely as God lives in heaven, we are taking the energies of our Southern Baptist people, its leaders, its pastors, its people, and we are channeling it in an aimless convocation."

"And when the time comes to get down to do something," he added, "the people are all gone. They have washed out. They've been bled emotionally dry."

As a solution, Criswell proposed that the Woman's Missionary Union begin their convention on Sunday, and that the leaders of the four other groups jointly help plan a SBC program that is "powerful and meaningful."

"We don't know what a blessing it would be to take all of the energies of our convention and channel them all toward solving and facing some of the tremendous, overwhelming problems of our day and generation," he said.

He specifically mentioned the need for joint planning by the SBC Woman's Missionary Union Convention, the Religious Education Association, the Church Music Convention, the Pastors' Conference, and the Evangelists' Conference.

Southeastern Founders Day
Speaker Urges Youth Ministry

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--The provost of the University of Richmond, speaking at the Founders' Day observance at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary here, issued a plea for the Southern Baptist Convention to address itself to the needs of "the neglected majority of today's students."

Robert F. Smart of Richmond told the seminary faculty and students that he felt the mass communications media had given too much attention to small groups of dissident and militant students, and that a false image of today's youth has resulted.

"My close contact with college students through the years and my observations of their struggle for self identity convinces me that during these times of changing moral and ethical values, college students--with unique intensity--are seeking answers to age-old questions of religious faith and the role of the church," Smart said.

He described today's youth as "less hypocritical" than the youth of his generation, and warned that unless church members cease trying to make the church over "in our image" rather than in the image of God, "we can expect the church to experience further decline as a force in molding the lives of our young people."

"The church will become believable to the world when its actions are consistent with its beliefs, when it lives like its Master--dangerously, openly, sacrificially, heroically; not cowardly, timidly, unlovingly, afraid of itself," he said.

"The church," he added, "must be relevant to the times; it must have imagination to see behind social labels and see lives; it must study every living issue in the light of the teachings of Jesus and maintain a sensitivity to human needs."

"When we stop considering ourselves a collection of saints, but rather a company of sinners willing to rest our fears in God's love, and begin building beliefs that we can honestly hold and supporting a total ministry worthy of the world's respect, down to earth in severanthood and willing to accept all truth, then we shall build the church in which youth can believe, and we shall capture him (youth) for Christ."

Smart, a native of Mississippi, is a trustee at Southeastern Seminary. Before becoming provost at the Baptist college in Richmond, he was professor of biology, chairman of the science and math division, and then dean.

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Baptist Bookstore Worker
Accidentally Shoots Self

(2-18-69)

ST. LOUIS (BP)--An employee of the Baptist Book Store here died Feb. 14 from an apparently accidental pistol wound.

Dead on arrival at City Hospital was Thomas Simmons, 26, stock clerk at the book store and a night guard for J & K Security Service.

St. Louis Police said that Simmons was found near a stock room supply shelf by co-workers who heard the shot.

"I have shot myself in the stomach," Simmons reportedly told another employee.

Found near Simmons' body was a .22 caliber Derringer double-barrelled pistol. An inquest will be held.

Simmons had been employed as a stock room clerk for one year.

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Millionth Copy of Marked
Bible Presented To Criswell

(2-18-69)

LONGVIEW, Tex. (BP)--The millionth copy of the Soul Winner's New Testament produced by the National Bible Press has been presented to the president of the Southern Baptist Convention, W. A. Criswell of Dallas.

The presentation was made by Southern Baptist Evangelist Clifton Brannon here, a former attorney and general counsel for R. G. LeTourneau, Inc., a well-known Christian layman and industrialist here.

Brannon compiled and edited the notes in the book in an effort to outline clearly with underscored passages the plan of salvation. It was first published in 1958.

The Soul Winner's New Testament is available only in Southern Baptist Book Stores, and is produced by the National Bible Press for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville.

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