



Green Run Tidings



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Green Run Baptist Church

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Facts and Brief History of Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses: Almost everyone knows of their aggressive door-to-door proselytizing. The organization they represent, known as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WTB&TS), emphasizes end time prophecy and has unsuccessfully predicted the end of the world many times. The WTB&TS exercises rigid control over Jehovah's Witnesses and forbids their participation in such common activities as taking blood transfusions, celebrating birthdays or holidays (including Christmas, Easter, and Mother's Day), voting, flag saluting, and military service. Through these restrictions, the WTB&TS builds a wall of isolation between Jehovah's Witnesses and the rest of society.

Historical Background: The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society boldly claims to be the only organization God is using today to teach His truth and speak for Him. According to the WTB&TS, all non-Jehovah's Witnesses will be destroyed at Armageddon, an event of divine judgment it threatens is just around the corner. The Watchtower Society prints over 15 million copies of its magazines every week into 120 languages, and has over 5 million active Jehovah's Witnesses ("publishers") spreading its doctrines in 230 countries. What follows are some essential facts everyone should know about the history and beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Borrowed Beliefs and Doctrines: Charles T. Russell (1852-1916) founded the Jehovah's Witnesses movement. As a teenager he rejected his Presbyterian roots, joined a more liberal Congregational Church, then left this group as well. He denied the deity of Christ and the biblical teachings on hell and eternal punishment. Russell had no formal Bible training, but borrowed and built upon various teachings that were popular at the time. For example, Adventism influenced his denial of hell, and a splinter Adventist group led by N.H. Barbour aroused his interest in end time prophecies. From Barbour he borrowed the belief that Christ returned *invisibly* to the world in 1874, and that 1914 was the year the world would be destroyed and the Millennium would begin.

Fantastic Claims: In 1879 Russell started his own magazine, *Zion's Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (now known as *The Watchtower*), to promote his doctrines. People were drawn to Russell's sensational end time predictions, and the organization grew. In spite of his lack of formal training in theology or biblical languages, Russell claimed to be the only one with the truth, and he vigorously condemned all other Christian religions. As a result, ministers of various denominations began exposing Russell's false teachings and questionable character.

Flawed Character: Rev. J. J. Ross published a pamphlet that exposed Russell's false claims and doctrines. He revealed that Russell "never attended the higher schools of learning; knows comparatively nothing of philosophy, systematic or historical theology; and is totally ignorant of the [biblical] languages [i.e. Hebrew and Greek]". Russell unsuccessfully tried to stop circulation of this damaging information by suing Rev. Ross for defamatory libel. However, Russell not only lost the suit, but in the process perjured himself in court when he lied under oath about his knowledge of the Greek language. In the end Russell admitted the statements about himself in the pamphlet were true. In 1913, Russell unsuccessfully sued *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* for libel when that paper exposed his fraudulent attempts to sell ordinary wheat at the exorbitant price of \$60 a bushel, claiming it was "Miracle Wheat."

Failed Prophecies: Despite these setbacks, Russell continued to attract people with his fantastic prophetic interpretations and dramatic warnings that Armageddon would strike in 1914. When 1914 came and went, he changed the date to 1915. Russell died in 1916, leaving his followers doubting and disillusioned by his predictive failures. Joseph Franklin Rutherford then took control of the organization.

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Prophecy For Profit: Rutherford (1869-1942) also used the threat of Armageddon to intimidate Jehovah's Witnesses. He published *The Finished Mystery*, a book which predicted that in 1918 God would destroy churches and millions of their members, and claimed that by 1920 every kingdom would be swallowed up in anarchy. Rutherford taught that the only way to escape the impending judgment and destruction was to join the Watchtower organization.

Tampering With The Bible: Under the leadership of Nathan H. Knorr (1905-1977) the WT Society put away date setting for a time and switched to a different strategy. Since many of their teachings are easily refuted by key verses in the King James Bible, Knorr set out to publish a different Bible for Jehovah's Witnesses to use. The WT Society Bible, called the *New World Translation* (NWT), blatantly alters many verses that show the errors of Watchtower teaching. The single best example of this is John 1:1, which in the King James Version clearly declares Jesus' deity — "*the Word was God.*" The WT Society denies the deity of Christ, so the NWT renders this phrase "*the Word was a god.*"

Doctrinal Beliefs: When an organization like the WTB&TS claims to be the only true religion and the sole source of correct Bible teaching, we must carefully examine its beliefs. If its doctrines are true, they will be found in the Bible, and its teachings will be consistent and unchanging year after year. Jehovah's Witnesses, however, deny or twist many of the Bible's basic teachings, and their beliefs conflict with those held by orthodox Christians down through the centuries. *Consider the following comparisons:*

The Nature of God: The Bible teaches that there is only one true God (Isa. 43:10-11; 44:6,8). Father, Son and Holy Spirit are identified as distinct Persons within the one Triune Godhead (Matt. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 13:14). Throughout the New Testament the Son and the Holy Spirit, as well as the Father are separately identified as God. The attributes and prerogatives of Deity are ascribed to each (*Son:* Mark 2:5-12; John 20:28; Heb. 1:8; *Holy Spirit:* Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 3:17-18).

By contrast, the WTB&TS denies the triune nature of God and teaches that such a belief is inspired by Satan. It teaches that Jehovah, the name of the one true God, corresponds only to God the Father. The Society also denies that Jesus is God (see next point). They deny the Holy Spirit is a person, and instead teach he is merely God's active force, analogous to electricity.

Jesus Christ: The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh, and is the Creator of *all* things (John 1:1-3, 14; Col. 1:16). While never less than God, at the appointed time He laid aside the glory He shared with the Father and took on a human nature (John 17:3-5; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 2:9). Following his death, Jesus Christ rose bodily from the grave, appeared to and was recognized in his body by over 500 people. This fact was crucial to both the preaching and faith of the early church (Luke 24:39; John 2:19-21; 1 Cor. 15:6, 14).

By contrast, the WTB&TS denies the deity of Jesus Christ and teaches that Jesus is a created being. He first existed as Michael the archangel then later was born as a perfect man. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that after Jesus was buried, God disposed of his physical body. Jesus was raised a spirit creature and "materialized" a fleshly body to make himself visible. Now in heaven he is again known as Michael the archangel.

Salvation: The Bible teaches that the atoning work of Christ alone provides the solution for man's sin problem. Jesus Christ took the personal sins of all men — past, present and future — in his own body on the tree (1 Pet. 2:24), and as perfect God and perfect man he fully met the demands of Divine justice for us (Rom. 3:22-26). Therefore, any and all who receive him by simple faith (John 1:12; Acts 16:31), can be forgiven, declared righteous and restored to fellowship with God (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:24-26).

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By contrast, the WTB&TS teaches that only an elite group of Witnesses, known as "the 144,000," or the "anointed ones" are presently credited with Christ's righteousness. Only the 144,000 are born again and expect to reign with Christ in heaven. For the vast majority of remaining Jehovah's Witnesses, known as the "other sheep" or the "great crowd," the atoning sacrifice of Christ only provides a chance at eternal life on earth.

The Bible also teaches that we are saved by grace alone apart from any self-righteous works; salvation is God's gift. There is nothing we can do to contribute to our salvation because apart from Jesus Christ we are "dead in our sins" (Eph. 2:1-9).

By contrast, the WTB&TS teaches that we must earn our own salvation; salvation will "depend on one's works." A person must first "come to Jehovah's organization for salvation" and then comply with everything they teach. In this way, a relationship with the Jehovah's Witnesses organization, rather than a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, is presented as the basis of salvation.

The Human Spirit & Eternal Punishment: The Bible teaches that the human spirit continues to exist consciously after death (Luke 16:19-31; 2 Corinthians 5:6, 8; Philippians 1:23-24; Rev. 6:9-11). Those who have rejected God's gift of eternal life will suffer conscious eternal punishment (Matt. 25:41,46; Rev. 14:10,11; 20:10,15).

By contrast, the WTB&TS denies eternal punishment and teaches that man does not have a spirit that survives the death of the body. Witnesses believe that death ends all conscious existence. Hell refers to the grave, and those who are ultimately judged by God will be annihilated and simply cease to exist.

The Bible: The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit's anointing enables individual Christians to understand God's Word and properly apply it to their lives (John 16:13; 1 John 2:27).

By contrast, the WTB&TS teaches that the Bible can only be interpreted by the Watchtower Society, and no individual can learn the truth apart from them.

Conclusion: In light of the preceding facts, do we dare trust the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society? It has falsely prophesied the end of the world at least 6 times and used these predictions to intimidate its followers. The Bible warns us that many false prophets will come claiming to speak for God (Matthew 7:15; 1 John 4:1). Thankfully, it also provides a practical test for identifying false prophets. In Deuteronomy 18:21-22 we are told that anyone who claims to speak as a prophet of God and predicts something that does not come true is a false prophet.

You may say to yourselves, 'How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?' If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD *does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken.* That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him. (NIV)

According to the Bible, one false prophecy makes the speaker a false prophet. By this test, the Watchtower Society's failed prophecies concerning 1914, 1915, 1918, 1920, 1925 and 1975 prove beyond a doubt it is a false prophet.

This group has also repeatedly changed its doctrines and contradicted previously held beliefs, all while claiming that it alone has the truth. Is this consistent with God's perfection and holiness?

We do not intend to ridicule or belittle individual Jehovah's Witnesses; they are generally sincere, dedicated people. In one sense they are more like lost sheep than ravenous wolves, for they have been deceived by an organization with a history of false prophecies and false doctrines.

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Jehovah's Witnesses truly believe that if they leave the Watchtower Society they will be destroyed at Armageddon. They need our love and compassion. Our desire for them, as for everyone else, is that they come to a true knowledge of what the Bible teaches, and the understanding that salvation is God's *gift* to us. Only by entering into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ will any of us be guaranteed forgiveness and eternal life. ~ **Joel B. Groat**

<http://www.towerwatch.com/Witnesses/History/history.htm>

Highlights of the Beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses are controlled by a "Governing Body" which they claim is the "faithful and discreet slave" spoken of in Matthew 24:45. This group consists of 10 to 15 mature men that, Jehovah's Witnesses are told, have direct guidance from God. The Governing Body in turn instructs followers with this guidance through the pages of the Watchtower and other publications. Jehovah's Witnesses are told by this "Governing Body" that Scripture alone is insufficient to understand the things of God. One needs the Watchtower Society and the literature it publishes to properly understand the Bible. ("Jehovah God has also provided his visible organization, his "faithful and discreet slave," made up of spirit-anointed ones... Unless we are in touch with this channel of communication that God is using, we will not progress along the road to life, no matter how much Bible reading we do. Watchtower, December 1, 1981 p.27) They are the instruments God is using to teach the world the deeper things of the scriptures. People are not to think for themselves but instead submit to the Watchtower Society teachings. (" But a spirit of independent thinking does not prevail in God's organization, and we have sound reasons for confidence in the men taking the lead among us. Watchtower September 15, 1989 p. 23) Jehovah's Witnesses believe they are the only people on earth that are serving God and the only ones that will be saved. They dare not question the teachings of the Watchtower Society; one who questions the Watchtower Society is considered to be weak in faith and could be disfellowshipped.

Disfellowshipping

Most Christian churches have a system of moral oversight, but their systems are set up to help individuals with problems. Only after extensive effort over a period of time is action taken. Jehovah's Witnesses claim that Disfellowshipping is a loving act but in fact it is their most important control mechanism. It allows the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society to control its members with guilt and fear.

The Watchtower Society makes a lot of rules, based on their interpretations of various scriptures, that all Jehovah's Witnesses must follow. Members are taught that that they must turn each other in for any rule violations. If they observe another Jehovah's Witness breaking a rule and do not report him or her to the elders they are as guilty as the offending party. Anyone breaking any of the Watchtower Society rules is called before 3 elders in a private meeting that is conducted like a trial. The elders become judge and jury deciding whose is repentant and who is not. Members who are found to be unrepentant of violations of Watchtower rules by these elders, are disfellowshipped. Jehovah's Witnesses can be disfellowshipped for a number of rule violations: premarital or extramarital sex, using alcohol excessively, using tobacco products, celebrating Christmas, reciting the pledge of allegiance, lying, stealing, joining the military, speaking to a disfellowshipped Witness, reading religious material not published by the governing body, or running for political office just to name a few. Fellow members are then required to shun him/her completely, having no contact even if the disfellowshipped person is a family member. Disfellowshipping has a devastating effect because the individual's entire religious, family and social life are rooted in the Society. Keep in mind Jehovah's Witnesses who are disfellowshipped are no longer part of the Watchtower Society and have, therefore, lost all hope of salvation until they can prove themselves worthy of being accepted back into the Watchtower Organization by their works.

Elders in the congregation are the ones who decide when an individual has earned the right to come back into the fold, and the Watchtower Organization instructs elders that it would be very rare for one to earn their way back in less than a year. In order to earn their way back they must attend meetings regularly, sit in the back of the church - Kingdom Hall- while everyone in the congregation ignores them. If anyone did dare to speak to them they could be disfellowshipped themselves.

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Highlights of the Beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses - Cont.

They must do this with the knowledge that if Armageddon should come before they have earned their way back they will be destroyed. Sad to say Disfellowshipping has resulted in suicide. Those who leave on their own are treated just as a disfellowshipped one. Once you join their group there is no easy way out.

Marking

If a member is guilty of breaking a minor rule such as associating with a worldly person (one who is not a Jehovah's Witness) that individual could be marked. This means that other Jehovah's witnesses may only speak to them at the Kingdom Hall (the name Jehovah's Witnesses use for their churches). Jehovah's Witnesses are not allowed to associate with a marked individual in a social setting.

Blood

Jehovah's Witnesses are not allowed to accept blood transfusions for themselves or their children, believing that this is the same as eating blood and is forbidden by the Bible. Many of Jehovah's Witnesses have died because of this restriction the Watchtower Society has placed upon its followers. In the past the Watchtower Society has forbidden its followers to get vaccinations or accept organ transplants, many people died needlessly before the Watchtower Society changed its rules and allowed these procedures. They still hold fast to the prohibition of receiving blood transfusions. See the web site "New Light on Blood"

Nationalism

Jehovah's Witnesses are not allowed to salute the flag of any nation, recite the pledge of allegiance, stand for or sing the national anthem, run for public office, vote, or serve in the armed forces.

Holidays

Jehovah's Witnesses are not allowed to celebrate Christmas, birthdays, Easter, Thanksgiving, or any other holidays, claiming they all have pagan roots.

Associates

Jehovah's Witnesses are not allowed to associate with non-Witnesses including family. Exceptions are made if the non-Witness family member is living in the same household.

Trinity

They do not believe in the Trinity. Instead, they follow a strict monotheism, in which: Jehovah is the Supreme Being. Jesus is the Son of God, a created being. Christ is believed to have originally existed in a pre-human state as the Archangel Michael. He later took human form as a man like any other person, except that he was sinless at birth and remained so throughout his earthly life. Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ. They believe that after the crucifixion, Christ died and was resurrected as an invisible, non-material, glorious, spirit creature. They believe that Jesus appeared on earth after his resurrection in a special body that Jehovah created for him.

The Holy Spirit they believe, is not a separate entity, but is simply a force: the method by which God interacts with the world.

Man's Soul

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that a person is the soul the Bible speaks of, and when a person dies nothing lives on, the person is dead and is conscious of nothing. When the time comes for God to resurrect them from the dead He will create a new body for them from His memory.

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Highlights of the Beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses - Cont.

Hell

They totally deny the existence of the traditional Christian view of Hell. Satan is regarded as having created the concept of Hellfire in order to turn people against God. They believe that hell is the "common grave of mankind" where people go when they die. They are not conscious there. Unbelievers simply cease to exist at death. Believers remain in death until the resurrection.

144,000

The Heavenly Kingdom took effect in 1914 with the invisible enthronement of Christ as King. A little flock or Anointed Class of about 135,300 people currently occupies it. All were selected after Christ's ascension into heaven at Pentecost (33 AD) and during subsequent centuries. The selection of the full complement of 144,000 was completed in 1935. Some 8,700 are still living on earth. They will spend eternity as spirit creatures in heaven with God and Christ and will rule over the other Jehovah's Witnesses who remain on earth. Those spending eternity on earth are what Jehovah's Witnesses call the Great Crowd or Other Sheep.

Salvation (Grace vs. Works)

Salvation requires that one accept Bible doctrines as interpreted by the Governing Body, be baptized as a Jehovah's Witness and follow the program of works as laid out by the Governing Body.

Jehovah's Witnesses claim that they believe in the grace of God and that one does not earn salvation by their works. While they give lip service to God's grace, their actions indicate differently. Consider the policy of making a disfellowshipped person earn their way back into the congregation. Remember you must be a Jehovah's Witness "in good standing" to survive the end times, and to remain in good standing you must follow the rules and *works* set out by the Watchtower Organization. If someone breaks a rule, the elders decide whether that person is repentant or not, if they decide they are not repentant they are disfellowshipped. A disfellowshipped witness will not survive the time of the end. Think about it, they are deciding who deserves God's grace and who does not.

Wherever you find the word grace in most Bibles you will find the term "undeserved kindness" in their Bible. While this may or may not be an acceptable translation of the original Greek word, it gives them a great deal of latitude in their teaching. In the December, 1993 issue of The Kingdom Ministry (a publication for members only) in an article titled "Sow Bountifully but With Discernment" the Watchtower Organization printed this thought "We want to give deserving ones the opportunity to learn of Jehovah's undeserved kindness and the Kingdom hope". This brings to mind some serious questions: How can anyone deserve God's undeserved kindness if it's undeserved? And just what methods would mortal man use to discern who deserves *God's* undeserved kindness and who does not, are not God's thoughts higher than man's? This statement really shows the attitude of The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society—not all people deserve God's grace and it is the job of Jehovah's Witnesses to *discern* who does and who does not. Jehovah's Witnesses constantly boast that they alone are "preaching the good news of the kingdom in all the inhabited earth". Are they preaching in all the inhabited earth or just to the ones *they* deem deserving?

Jesus crucified on a stake not a cross

They reject the traditional symbol of Christianity, the cross, as being of pagan origin. They translate the Greek word from the Christian Scriptures "stauros" as "torture stake", and believe that Jesus was crucified on a single upright wooden stake with no crossbeam. They view the cross as an Idol and wearing or displaying one is considered idol worship.

http://www.towerwatch.com/Witnesses/Beliefs/their_beliefs.htm

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Is the Megachurch the New Liberalism?

The emergence of the megachurch as a model of metropolitan ministry is one of the defining marks of evangelical Christianity in the United States. Megachurches — huge congregations that attract thousands of worshipers — arrived on the scene in the 1970s and quickly became engines of ministry development and energy.

Over the last 40 years, the megachurch has made its presence known, often dominating the Christian landscape within the nation's metropolitan regions. The megachurch came into dominance at the same time that massive shopping malls became the landmarks of suburban consumer life. Sociologists can easily trace the rise of megachurches within the context of America's suburban explosion and the development of the technologies and transportation systems that made both the mall and the megachurch possible.

On the international scene, huge congregations can be found in many African nations and in nations such as Brazil, South Korea, and Australia. In London, where the megachurch can trace its roots back in the 19th century to massive urban congregations such as Charles Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle, a few modern megachurches can be found. For the most part, however, the suburban evangelical megachurch is an American phenomenon.

Theologically, most megachurches are conservative in theological orientation, at least in a general sense. In America, a large number of megachurches are associated with the charismatic movement and denominations such as the Assemblies of God. Many are independent, though often loosely associated with other churches. The largest number of megachurches within one denomination is found within the Southern Baptist Convention, the nation's largest non-Catholic denomination.

The emergence of the megachurch was noted by sociologists and church researchers attempting to understand the massive shifts that were taking place in the last decades of the 20th century. Researchers such as Dean M. Kelley of the National Council of Churches traced the decline of the liberal denominations that once constituted the old Protestant "mainline." This decline was contrasted with remarkable growth among more conservative denominations and churches — a pattern traced in Kelley's 1973 landmark book, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*. Kelley argued that conservative churches were growing precisely because of their strict doctrine and moral teachings. The early megachurches were the leading edge of the growth among conservative churches, especially in metropolitan and suburban settings.

The megachurches were not without their critics. Theologian David Wells leveled a massive critique of the doctrinal minimalism, methodological pragmatism, and managerial culture of many megachurches. Os Guinness accused the megachurch movement of "flirting with modernity" to the degree that put the Christian identity of the massive congregations at risk.

On the other hand, there is evidence that the megachurches have also helped to anchor conservative Christianity within the social cauldron of the United States in recent decades. The evangelistic energies of most megachurches cannot be separated from a deep commitment to conversionist theology and conservative doctrinal affirmations. Within the Southern Baptist Convention, megachurches played an essential role in what became known as the Conservative Resurgence — the movement to return the Convention and its institutions to an affirmation of biblical inerrancy. The most intense years of this controversy (1979-1990) saw the Convention elect an unbroken stream of conservative megachurch pastors as SBC president. In the main, the megachurches provided the platform leadership for the movement, even as the churches themselves became symbols of denominational aspiration.

Sociologically, the megachurch model faces real challenges in the present, and even greater challenges in the future. The vast suburban belts that fueled megachurch growth in the last few decades are no longer the population engines they once were. Furthermore, cultural changes, demographic realities, and technological innovations have led to the development of megachurch modifications such as churches with multiple locations and sermons by video transmission. From the beginning, the megachurches led in the embrace of new technologies, and these now include the full array of digital and social media.

What about theology? This question requires a look at the massive shifts in worldview now evident within American culture. Trends foreseen by researchers such as James Davison Hunter of the University of Virginia and others can now be seen in full flower. The larger culture has turned increasingly hostile to exclusivist truth claims such as the belief that faith in Christ is necessary for salvation. One megachurch pastor in Florida recently told me that the megachurches in his area were abandoning concern for biblical gender roles on a wholesale basis. As one pastor told him, you cannot grow a church and teach biblical complementarianism. Even greater pressure is now exerted by the sexual revolution in general, and, more particularly, the question of homosexuality.

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Is the Megachurch the New Liberalism? (Continued)

The homosexuality question was preceded by the challenge of divorce. By and large, the story of evangelical Christianity in the United States since the advent of legal no-fault divorce has been near total capitulation. This is certainly true of the megachurches, but it is unfair to single them out in this failure. The reality is that the “Old First Church” and smaller congregational models were fully complicit — and for the same basic reason. Holding to strict biblical teachings on divorce is extremely costly. For the megachurches, the threat was being called judgmental, and the perceived danger of failing to reach the burgeoning numbers of divorced persons inhabiting metropolitan areas. For smaller churches the issue was the same, though usually more intimate. Divorced persons were more likely to have family members and friends within the congregation who were reluctant to confront the issue openly. Church discipline disappeared and personal autonomy reigned triumphant.

Is the same pattern now threatening on the issue of homosexuality? No congregation will escape this question, but the megachurches are, once again, on the leading edge. The challenge is hauntingly similar to that posed by divorce. Some churches are openly considering how they can minister most faithfully, even as the public and private challenge of homosexuality and alternative sexual lifestyles has radically transformed the cultural landscape. Other churches, both large and small, are renegotiating their stance on the issue without drawing attention to the changes.

A shot now reverberating around the evangelical world was fired by Atlanta megachurch pastor Andy Stanley in recent days. Preaching in a sermon series at North Point Community Church known as “Christian,” Stanley preached a message titled “When Gracie Met Truthy” on April 15, 2012. With reference to John 1:14, Stanley described the challenge of affirming grace and truth in full measure. He spoke of grace and truth as a tension, warning that “if you resolve it, you give up something important.”

The message was insightful and winsome, and Andy Stanley is a master communicator. Early in the message he spoke of homosexuals in attendance, mentioning that some had shared with him that they had come to North Point because they were tired of messages in gay-affirming churches that did nothing but affirm homosexuality.

Then, in the most intense part of his message, Stanley told the congregation an account meant to illustrate his message. He told of a couple with a young daughter who divorced when the wife discovered that the husband was in a sexual relationship with another man. The woman then insisted that her former husband and his gay partner move to another congregation. They did move, but to another North Point location, where they volunteered together as part of a “host team.” The woman later told Andy Stanley that her former husband and his partner were now involved as volunteers in the other congregational location.

The story took a strange turn when Stanley then explained that he had learned that the former husband’s gay partner was still married. Stanley then explained that the partner was actually committing adultery, and that the adultery was incompatible with his service on a host team. Stanley told the two men that they could not serve on the host team so long as the one man was still married. He later told of the former wife’s decision not to live in bitterness, and of her initiative to bring the whole new family structure to a Christmas service. This included the woman, her daughter, her former husband, his gay partner, and his daughter. Stanley celebrated this new “modern family” as an expression of forgiveness.

He concluded by telling of Christ’s death for sinners and told the congregation that Jesus does not condemn them, even if they cannot or do not leave their life of sin.

Declaring the death of Christ as atonement for sin is orthodox Christianity and this declaration is essential to the Gospel of Christ. The problem was that Stanley never mentioned faith or repentance — which are equally essential to the Gospel. There is indeed no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, but this defines those who have acted in repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). As for those who are not in Christ, they stand condemned already (John 3:18).

The most puzzling and shocking part of the message was the illustration and the account of the homosexual couple, however. The inescapable impression left by the account was that the sin of concern was adultery, but not homosexuality. Stanley clearly and repeatedly stressed the sin of adultery, but then left the reality of the homosexual relationship between the two men unaddressed as sin. To the contrary, he seemed to normalize their relationship. They would be allowed to serve on the host team if both were divorced. The moral status of their relationship seemed to be questioned only in terms of adultery, with no moral judgment on their homosexuality.

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Is the Megachurch the New Liberalism? (Continued)

Was this intended as a salvo of sorts? The story was so well told and the message so well constructed that there can be little doubt of its meaning. Does this signal the normalization of homosexuality at North Point Community Church? This hardly seems possible, but it appeared to be the implication of the message. Given the volatility of this issue, ambiguity will be replaced by clarity one way or the other, and likely sooner than later.

We can only hope that Andy Stanley and the church will clarify and affirm the biblical declaration of the sinfulness of homosexual behavior, even as he preaches the forgiveness of sin in any form through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His affirmation of grace and truth in full measure is exactly right, but grace and truth are not actually in tension. The only tension is our finite ability to act in full faithfulness. The knowledge of our sin is, in truth, a gift of grace. And grace is only grace because of the truth of what God has done for us in Christ.

And yet, even as we know this is true, we also know that the Christian church has often failed miserably in demonstrating grace to those who struggle with same-sex attractions and those who are involved in homosexual behaviors. We have treated them as a special class of sinners and we have assured ourselves of our moral superiority. The Gospel of Jesus Christ destroys that pretension and calls for us to reach out to all sinners with the message of the Gospel, declaring the forgiveness of sins in Christ and calling them to faith and repentance.

The Gospel is robbed of its power if any sinner or any sin is declared outside its saving power. But the Gospel is also robbed of its power if sin — any sin — is minimized to any degree.

What does Andy Stanley now believe about homosexuality and the church's witness? We must pray that he will clarify the issues so graphically raised in his message, and that he will do so in a way that unambiguously affirms the Bible's clear teachings — and that he will do so precisely because he loves sinners enough to tell them the truth — all the truth — about both our sin and God's provision in Christ. Biblical faithfulness simply does not allow for the normalization of homosexuality. We desperately want all persons to feel welcome to hear the Gospel and, responding in faith and repentance, to join with us in mutual obedience to Christ. But we cannot allow anyone, ourselves included, to come to Christ — or to church — on our own terms.

The current cultural context creates barriers to the Gospel even as it offers temptations. One of those temptations is to use the argument that our message has to change in order to reach people. This was the impetus of theological liberalism's origin. Liberals such as Harry Emerson Fosdick claimed that the Christian message would have to change or the church would lose all intellectual credibility in the modern world. Fosdick ended up denying the Gospel and transforming the message of the Cross into psychology. Norman Vincent Peale came along and made this transformation even more appealing to a mass audience. Fosdick and Peale have no shortage of modern heirs.

Theological liberalism did not set out to destroy Christianity, but to save it from itself. Is the same temptation now evident? The Great Commission, we must remind ourselves, is not a command merely to reach people, but to make disciples. And disciples are only made when the church teaches all that Christ has commanded, as the Great Commission makes clear.

The megachurches are once again on the leading edge of these questions, but they are not alone. The urgency to reach people with the Gospel can, if the church is not faithful and watchful, tempt us to subvert the Gospel by redefining its terms. We are not honest if we do not admit that the current cultural context raises the cost of declaring the Gospel on its own terms.

Given their size and influence, the megachurches have an outsize responsibility. I am a member and a teaching pastor in a megachurch, and I am thankful for its faithfulness. I know a host of faithful megachurch pastors who are prepared to pay whatever cost may come for the sake of the Gospel. I know that my own denomination was regained for biblical fidelity under the leadership of brave megachurch pastors, who used their pulpits to defend the truth. We desperately need these churches as both theological anchors and missiological laboratories.

The times now demand our most careful and biblical thinking, and our clearest conviction matched to a missiological drive to reach the world with the Gospel. We must embrace the truth with the humility of a sinner saved only by grace, but we must embrace it fully.

Once again, the megachurches are on the leading edge. We must pray that they will lead into faithfulness, and not into a new liberalism. ~ **Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.**

Green Run Tidings

Having No Fear of Death

Christians no longer look forward to death with silent dismay, as a horrible thing which they don't like to think about. Through Christ they can look this last enemy calmly in the face, and say, "You cannot harm me." They can look forward to all that comes after death – decay, resurrection, judgment, and eternity – and yet not be the least concerned. They can stand by the side of an open grave, and say, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" They can lay down on their deathbeds, and say, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." "Not a hair of my head will perish." This is true liberty. This is to be truly free. Best of all, those set free by Christ are free forever. ~ *J.C. Ryle*

Above Reproach

A small item I read in the news twenty years ago has stuck in my mind ever since. The Rockdale County High School Bulldogs basketball team of Conyers, Georgia, won their first-ever state championship in March of 1987, rolling over all their opponents. After eighteen years of coaching the team without a championship, coach Cleveland Stroud was ecstatic.

But a few weeks after the championship game, Coach Stroud was doing a routine review of his players' grades when he discovered that one of his third-string players had failed some courses, rendering the player academically ineligible for the basketball team.

The struggling student was by no means a factor in the team's victory. He was an underclassman who suited up for games but hadn't actually seen any playing time all season. During one of the semifinal matches, however, with the team leading by more than 20 points, Coach Stroud wanted to give every player an opportunity to participate. He had put that player in the game for less than 45 seconds. The ineligible man had scored no points. His participation had in no way affected the outcome of the game. But it was, technically, a violation of state eligibility standards.

Coach Stroud was in a distressing predicament. If he revealed the infraction, his team would be disqualified and stripped of their championship. If he kept quiet, it was highly unlikely anyone outside the school would ever discover the offense.

Yet the coach realized that at the very least, the player involved was aware of the breach of rules. It was also possible that other students on the team knew and thought their coach had purposely ignored the eligibility guidelines. But more important still, Coach Stroud himself knew, and if he deliberately tried to keep the facts from coming to light, his greatest coaching victory would be forever tainted with an ugly secret.

Coach Stroud said from the moment he discovered the violation, he knew what he had to do. He never even pondered any alternatives. His priorities had been set long before this. He realized that his team's *championship* was not as important as their *character*. "People forget the scores of basketball games," he said. "They don't ever forget what you're made of."

He reported the infraction and forfeited the only state championship his team had ever won.

But both coach and team won a far more important kind of honor than they forfeited. They kept their integrity intact and gained an immeasurable amount of trust and respect. The coach was recognized with numerous teacher-of-the-year, coach-of-the-year, and citizen-of-the-year awards, as well as a formal commendation from the Georgia State Legislature. A few years later he was elected to Conyers City council, where he still serves. *He was right*. People who would have long ago forgotten about the Bulldogs' victory in the state championship have never forgotten about this coach's integrity.

Green Run Tidings

Above Reproach - Continued

Ethical integrity is one of the indispensable attributes of Christlike character. As vital as it is to be sound in doctrine and faithful in teaching the truth of Scripture, it is by no means *less* crucial for Christians to be upright in heart and consistent in our obedience to the moral and ethical principles of God's law.

That is no simple duty, by the way. The moral standard God's people are supposed to live by far surpasses even the highest principles of normal human ethics.

This was one of the main points of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: "I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). The whole sermon was an exposition of the Law's moral meaning. The heart of Jesus' message was an extended discourse against the notion that the Law's moral principles apply only to behavior that others can see.

Jesus taught, for example, that the sixth commandment forbids not only acts of killing, but a murderous heart as well (vv. 21–22). The seventh commandment, which forbids adultery, also implicitly condemns even adulterous desires (vv. 27–28). And the command to love our neighbors applies even to those who are our enemies (vv. 43–44).

How high is the moral and ethical standard set by God's law? Unimaginably high. Jesus equates it with God's own perfection: "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (v. 48).

That sets an unattainable standard, of course. But it is our duty to pursue integrity relentlessly nonetheless. Perfect ethical consistency is a vital aspect of that consummate goal — absolute Christlikeness — toward which every Christian should continually be striving (Phil. 3:12–14). No believer, therefore, should ever knowingly sacrifice his or her ethical integrity.

Here are three powerful reasons why: **First**, for the sake of our reputation. Of course, Christians should not be concerned with issues like status, class, caste, or economic prestige. In that sense, we need to be like Christ, who made Himself of no reputation and took on the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7).

There is a true sense, however, in which we *do* need to be concerned about maintaining a good reputation — and that is especially true in the matter of ethical integrity. One of the basic requirements for an elder is this: "He must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1 Tim. 3:7 (NASB)).

Nothing will ruin a good reputation faster or more permanently than a deliberate breach of ethical integrity. People will forgive practically any other kind of error, negligence, or failure — but ethical bankruptcy carries a stigma that is almost impossible to rise above.

Several years ago, a parishioner told me something no pastor ever wants to hear. He had invited a business acquaintance to our church. The man replied, "You go to that church? I wouldn't go to that church. The most corrupt lawyer in town goes to that church."

I didn't — and still don't — have any idea whom he was talking about. There are dozens of attorneys in our church. My hope is that it was a case of mistaken identity and that the person he had in mind was *not* a member of our church. But the following Sunday I recounted the incident from the pulpit and said, "If the lawyer that man described is here this morning, please take a lesson from Zaccheus: repent and do whatever you can to restore your reputation in the community. In the meantime, stop representing yourself as a Christian. You're destroying the whole church's reputation."

Green Run Tidings

Above Reproach - Continued

According to Proverbs 22:1, “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.” You don’t have a good name at all unless your ethical integrity is intact and above reproach.

Second, for the sake of our character. More important still is the issue of personal character. There’s a good reason why Jesus’ exposition of the moral law in Matthew 5 focused so much on uprightness of heart as opposed to external behavior. That’s because the real barometer of who we are is reflected in what we do when no one else is looking, how we think in the privacy of our own thoughts, and how we respond to the promptings of our own consciences. Those things are the true measure of your moral and ethical fiber.

As important as it is to keep a good reputation in the community, it is a thousand times more important to safeguard our own personal character. That is why Jesus dealt with the issues of morality and ethics *beginning* with the innermost thoughts of our hearts. “For *out of the heart* come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander” (Matt. 15:19).

It’s probably not overstating the case at all to say that the single most important battlefield in the struggle for integrity is your own mind. That’s where everything will actually be won or lost. And if you lose there, you have already ruined your character. A corrupt character inevitably spoils the reputation, too, because a bad tree can’t bring forth good fruit (Matt. 7:18).

That brings to mind a **third** reason why it is so vital to guard our moral and ethical integrity: for the sake of our testimony. Your *reputation* reflects what people say about you. Your *testimony* is what your character, your behavior, and your words say about God.

Consider what is being communicated when a Christian lacks ethical integrity. That person is saying he doesn’t truly believe what Scripture plainly says is true of God: That “to do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice” (Prov. 21:3). That “the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him” (15:8). And that God “delight[s] in truth in the inward being” (Ps. 51:6).

In other words, the person who neglects ethical integrity is telling a lie about God with his life and his attitude. If he calls himself a Christian and professes to be a child of God, he is in fact taking God’s name in vain at the most fundamental level. That puts the issue of ethical integrity in perspective, doesn’t it?

That’s what we need to call to mind whenever we are tempted to adapt our ethical principles for convenience’ sake. It isn’t worth the high cost to our reputation, our character, or our testimony. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**

Ignorance of the Bible Leads to Error

Let us read our Bibles in private more, and with more pains and diligence. Ignorance of Scripture is the root of all error, and makes a person helpless in the hand of the devil. There is less private Bible reading, I suspect, than there was fifty years ago. I never can believe that so many men and women would have been “*tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine*,” some falling into skepticism, some rushing into the wildest and narrowest fanaticism, and some going over to Rome, if there had not grown up a habit of lazy, superficial, careless, perfunctory reading of God’s Word. *But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God”* (Matthew 22:29). The Bible in the pulpit must never supersede the Bible at home. ~ **J.C. Ryle**

Green Run Tidings

London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689

Good Works - Chapter 16

1. ONLY the works that God has commanded in His holy Word are to be accounted good works. Such works, as men have invented out of blind zeal or upon the mere pretense of good intentions, are not good, for they lack the sanction of Holy Scripture.
2. Works that are truly good, and which are done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and living faith. By means of them believers make known their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance of salvation, edify their brethren, adorn their Christian witness, and deprive their opponents of arguments against the gospel. In sum, they glorify God who has made them what they are, namely, new creatures in Christ; and as such they yield fruit that evidences holiness, eternal life being the outcome of all.
3. The ability of believers to do good works does not spring in any way from themselves, but is derived from the Spirit of Christ alone. But besides the graces which they receive from Him in the first instance, they need His further actual influence to give them the will and ability to perform the works that please Him. Yet this does not mean that, without that special influence, they are at liberty to grow careless of duty, for they must be diligent in stirring into activity the grace of God that is in them.
4. In rendering obedience to God, those believers who attain to the greatest height possible in this life are so far from performing works of supererogation (that is, beyond what God actually requires) that they fall short of much which, as their duty, they are bound to do.
5. We cannot, even by our best works, merit either the pardon of sin or the granting of eternal life at the hand of God, for those works are out of all proportion to the glory to come. And furthermore, there is infinite distance between us and God, and no works of ours can yield Him profit or act as payment for the debt of our former sins. Indeed, when we have done all that we can, we have done but our duty and remain unprofitable servants. We are also to remember that, so far as our works are good, they are produced by His Spirit. As far as they are our work they are marred, and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection that they fall utterly to meet the searching requirements of God's standards.
6. Nevertheless, since believers as to their persons are accepted by God through Christ, their works also are accepted as being wrought in Christ. Not as though they were, during this life, beyond reproach and unreprouvable in the sight of God, but that, as He looks upon them in His Son, He is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, even though it is accompanied by many weaknesses and imperfections.
7. As for works done by unregenerate men, even though God may have commanded them, and they may be highly useful both to themselves and to others, yet they remain sinful works for the following reasons: they do not originate in a heart purified by faith; they are not done in the right manner prescribed in Scripture; and they are not directed to the glory of God as the only right end. Hence they cannot please God, nor can they make a man fit for the reception of grace. Yet the neglect of such works is more sinful and more displeasing to God than is the performance of them.



Green Run Tidings



GREEN RUN BAPTIST CHURCH – SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

Anniversary and Birthday Celebrations for June 2012!

Anniversary

Birthday

Rick and Alyson Crews - 6/5
Luke and Jeania Doddy - 6/7
Joshua and Karen McSpadden - 6/11
Andrew and Lea Baskerville - 6/23
Ron and Marla Miller - 6/27
David and Janice Rodriguez - 6/27

Janice Rodriguez - 6/1
Johnny Morris - 6/19
Kathy Pregitzer - 6/24
Robin Cook - 6/25
Debbie Anderson - 6/26
Steve Dees - 6/30
Crystal Felton - 6/30

Grandparents Answering Machine

Good morning . . . At present we are not at home but, please leave your message after you hear the beep. Beeeeppp !!!!

If you are one of our children, dial 1 and then select the option from 1 to 5 in order of "arrival" so we know who it is.

If you need us to stay with the children, **press 2**

If you want to borrow the car, **press 3**

If you want us to wash and iron your clothes, **press 4**

If you want the grandchildren to sleep here tonight, **press 5**

If you want us to pick up the kids at school, **press 6**

If you want us to prepare a meal for Sunday or to have it delivered to your home, **press 7**

If you want to come to eat here, **press 8**

If you need money, **press 9**

If you are going to invite us to dinner, or, take us to the theater, start talking as we are listening !!!!!!!!!!!!!



Green Run Baptist Church

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Submit information to Walt Lawrence by the second Sunday of the month preceding publication by e-mail, in person or at the church office. The editor reserves the right to edit for content or space. May the Father be glorified in every word.