CHRISTIAN WORKER

"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Corinthians 6:1)

VOLUME 109, NUMBER 7

A CHANGE IN SWSBS DIRECTORSHIP

From the SW Elders

s elders, we realize that the fields are "white unto harvest" and that many good, honest people are seeking to be taught God's Word. Therefore, faithful men and women who are well prepared with a deep knowledge of the Biblical text are urgently needed to sow the seed of God's Kingdom (Luke 8:11).

The Southwest church of Christ, aware of this need and understanding our responsibility to help meet it, inaugurated a full-time school of Bible studies on September 4, 1978. Since that time, a respected and learned Bible faculty has been assembled which is capable and experienced in the work of the Lord.

Regarding the faculty, the elders wish to make an announcement. Effective immediately, Trent Kennedy will assume the role of Director and Steven Lloyd will assume the role of Associate Director of the Southwest School of Bible Studies. We extend our appreciation to Steven for the excellent job he has done directing the school. Though he did not come here to take that role, he was willing to do it when asked, and has done a very good job navigating the school through the challenges of Covid, and capably leading for the last 4 years.

We do not expect any significant changes or disruptions in the day to day operation of the school, nor will there by any other changes to the faculty at this time. We are confident that the SWSBS staff is second to none, and will capably position the school for growth and stability through the coming years, as we seek "To Know Jesus and Make Him Known." Please continue to support and pray for Trent, Steven, and the rest of the SWSBS faculty as they work together to train men and women to know, love, and proclaim the Kingdom of God.

In Him,

The Southwest Elders

Brett Gerhardt, David Hopkins, Mark Speir.

JULY 2023

IN THIS ISSUE:

A Change in SWSBS Directorship THE SW ELDERS1
A Good Look in the Mirror CODY WESTBROOK2
Keep the Church Pure JOHNNY RAMSEY4
Speaking the Truth in Love THOMAS B. WARREN5
None of These Things Move Me JOEY DAVIS6
A Great Debt

RONNIE SCHERFFIUS.....

FROM THE EDITOR:

A GOOD LOOK IN THE MIRROR

Cody Westbrook

any years ago the founding fathers of this nation envisioned a society unparalleled Land unrivaled by any in the annals history. They saw a country in which people of varying cultural backgrounds and religious faiths could live together harmoniously, united under one American idealfreedom. Thus the motto emblazoned on The Great Seal of the United States, E Pluribus Unum-out of many, one. Sadly, we have learned throughout our short history that maintaining that sense of national unity is extremely difficult. What began as a small collection of Colonists all working together for a common purpose quickly transformed into a nation of millions of people, many of whom solely motivated by their own desires. "Today what unity we had is fracturing as selfconscious, competing, and even hostile groups selfishly pursue their own way."1

The portrait of the church found in Ephesians 2:14-16 bears some interesting points of similarity to the purpose of the founding father's in establishing our Country. Paul wrote,

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

Through His death, Jesus removed the Old Law and every other obstacle standing between Jew and Gentile unity, thus joining the two together with God and with one another in His body, the Church (Eph. 1:22-23).

1 James Montgomery Boice, Psalms 107–150: An Expositional Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 1158.

God's eternal purpose (Eph. 3:9-11) is a singular entity composed of individuals of every language, culture, and life situation (Gal. 3:26-29) united together in heart and mind (1 Cor. 1:10), governed by the same system of faith (Eph. 4:4-6), and working together for the same purpose (Phil. 1:27), to God's glory (Rom. 15:5-6; Eph. 3:21). According to Ephesians 2:14-18 the fulfillment of this purpose is the reason Jesus died.

But sadly, the unity and purity of the church have been attacked since her inception. Acts 5:1-11 records the account of Ananias and Sapphira, who lied about their giving. Acts 6:1-6 reveals a "complaint" against the Hebrews by the Hellenists because their widows were neglected. The Corinthians had denominated themselves (1 Cor. 1:10-17), Paul wrote of "false brethren secretly brought in who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage" (Gal. 2:4), and Jude wrote of "sensual persons who "cause divisions, not having the Spirit" (Jude 19). Disrupting the peace and unity of the body of Christ is a very serious matter, and such actions actively fight against the purpose for which Christ died! Thus every Christian is charged with the responsibility of "endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

Fulfilling the command of Ephesians 4:3 is only possible by applying the attitudes in Ephesians 4:2–lowliness, gentleness, long-suffering, and forbearance. These qualities are focused in two different directions. Gentleness, long-suffering, and forbearance have to do with how we treat one another as brethren. They each require us to look externally, beyond ourselves. Are we kind to one another, or rude? Are we patient with one another, or do we pounce too quickly? Are we willing to put up with one another's personality quirks and help foster spiritual growth, or do we ostracize and reject those with whom we simply don't mesh? We are

charged to beware of wolves in sheep's clothing, and inspect fruit closely (Matt. 7:15-20). Timothy was to command some that they teach "no other doctrine" nor engage in useless speculation and idle chatter which turned people away from Christ (1 Tim. 1:3-11). Even Elders in sin are to be "rebuked before all" (1 Tim. 5:20).

But the most difficult component of "endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit," is internal. It is often easy for us to spot false doctrine, sinful behavior, or unauthorized practices in others, but sometimes very difficult for us to see them within ourselves. The first attitude listed in Ephesians 4:2 is lowliness, or, humility. Unity is often disrupted because we allow our pride to shoot to the top of our priority list. Paul wrote, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). Timothy was to "take heed" to himself and tovthe doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16). Certainly the principle of Matthew 7:1-5 must apply here. Though it is necessary for us to fulfill our scriptural obligations in looking outside of ourselves, it is just as necessary, perhaps even more so, for us to look within ourselves first.

Too often we think too highly of ourselves and allow our purposes to outweigh the Lord's. Preachers, unfortunately, are particularly skilled in this area. We may say something that sends ripples throughout the brotherhood and, for whatever reason, be unwilling to accept culpability for the fruit produced. Consider, for example, the recent controversy over the doctrine of the "Renovated Earth." In its early stages, many of the proponents of that doctrine would openly admit that it was a novel doctrine, and would likely not be accepted by the brotherhood at large. And yet they taught it, wrote about it, and defended it anyway. Further, many of these same brethren would adamantly say that the doctrine is a matter of judgment. And yet, when pushed, they doubled down on the doctrine and played the victim. That same scenario has recycled itself many times over. A brother writes or preaches something that he suggests the church has gotten wrong all along, then when he's challenged he points the finger at everyone else as if they are the problem-as if they are the ones who have disrupted the unity of the church. Perhaps a good look in the mirror would be appropriate.

If something is a matter of doctrine, then by all means preach it, write about it, and defend it with everything you have. True unity is only possible when there is doctrinal unity (Eph. 4:1-16; 2 John 9-11). But do so with the right attitude. Remember that Ephesians 4:15 governs Ephesians 4:11-14. But if something is a matter of judgment, why

disrupt the unity of the church unnecessarily? Romans 16:17-18 says,

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

Note that while they are certainly implied, the passage does not specifically mention false teachers. It mentions those who cause division in the church because of their own selfishness. This passage must be read with Romans 14 in mind. A brother who pushes a matter of judgment to the point of divisiveness ought to be "noted" and "avoided" just the same as the brother who preaches that baptism is not essential for salvation.

Our country may be hopelessly divided at this point, but the same cannot and must not be said about the Church. Jesus said "Blessed are the peacemakers..." (Matt. 5:9) and the church must be full of Christians who value peace over conflict. But peace does not happen by accident. James wrote, "Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (Jas. 3:18). One commentator's translation of that passage stands out -"peacemakers produce, in the atmosphere of peace they create, the harvest of righteousness." It begs the question, "What am I doing to create an atmosphere of peace within the body of Christ?" The flippant attitude present in many podcasts and blogs is not it. Throwing something out haphazardly or attacking sound brethren of the past as if they were Biblically ignorant is not only disrespectful and unwise, it harms the unity of the Lord's body.

There are times when brethren must divide over matters of doctrine (2 John 9-11). Those times have come in the past and they may come again in the future. But they should be approached with patience, gravity, and tears. Would to God we would prevent them by loving the Lord so deeply that we put the Kingdom first, and strive to be peacemakers.

² Douglas J. Moo, James: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 16 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 141.

KEEP THE CHURCH PURE

Johnny Ramsey

In once heard an aged brother pray these words: "Lord, help us to keep the spiritual body of Christ as pure as he kept his physical body." This statement, coming from a grand old soldier of the cross, has lingered in my memory for many years now. It is challenging and thought-provoking to every member of the body of Christ. We should all pray: "Lord, help us to keep the church pure." The very fact that the New Testament depicts the church as the bride of Christ, his body, God's family (Eph. 5; 1 Cor. 12; 2 Tim. 3:15) and other close relationships should cause each Christian to realize the need for purity in the Lord's church. Let me briefly list ways that we can, by God's instructions, keep the church pure.

Preach the Truth. The church can never be what the Lord desires until it stands as a bulwark of truth. The pure gospel must be preached if we are to keep the body of Christ uncontaminated. Substitutions, perversions, additions, subtractions, philosophical entreaties— all of these corrupt the purity of the message that God has left for the church to promulgate. Regardless of how intellectual the preacher might be, or how refined the congregation, there will never be a substitute for plain, fearless, heart-searching gospel preaching. This type of preaching has always been and shall continue to be one of the identifying marks of a pure church. We must not be ashamed of the gospel (Rom. 1:16) but preach it "in season and out" (Tim. 4:2) as we strive to keep Christ's kingdom undefiled. I verily believe that all the liberalism and modernism we have read about (and witnessed in some places) in the New York City, Chicago, and Pepperdine areas (within the church itself) can best be traced to a failure to keep the church pure by pure teaching from the pulpit and elsewhere. I once quoted Colossians 2:8 to a Catholic priest in Wisconsin to rebuke him for failing to teach New Testament Christianity. Those stirring words might well be remembered by all of us as well—lest we turn away from pure deliverance of the oracles of God. Paul was inspired to write: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." Over and over again in his epistles to Timothy and Titus, Paul exhorted those evangelists to be sure their message was "sound doctrine." (Tit. 2:1) Brethren, if the spiritual body of Christ is as precious to us as it should be, we must preach the truth—all of the truth—to a lost and bewildered world.

This is one step in our task of keeping the church pure. We must also:

Live right. Last year, while preaching in a gospel meeting in South Texas, I was impressed with the closing sentence of a brother's prayer. He said: "Lord, help us to live right." That simple statement becomes profound when we really try practicing it. All of the eloquent sermons a man can preach will never hide an impure life. Paul was very plain when he told Timothy: "Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine." (1 Tim. 4:16) An evangelist of the Lord must never condemn his own sermons by failing to practice what he preaches. Every child of God must remember that the most memorable, indelible sermons are the lives we live before our neighbors and friends. The population of heaven and hell will largely depend on how members of Christ's body con-duct themselves in this pilgrim journey. Should we fail to live right, the day of judgment will be a sad, sad day for us. As Christians we must "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" and "cleanse ourselves of all defilement of flesh and spirit." (1 Pet. 2:11; 2 Cor. 7:1). This is another step we must accomplish if we keep the church pure. Not only must we preach right and live right we are also admonished to:

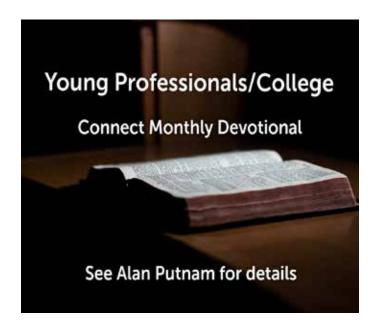
Withdraw from the ungodly. Regardless of how diligently the truth is preached and lived a congregation can still be impure if ungodly, worldly-minded brethren are not disciplined. The Lord has left specific instructions in his will concerning this matter. It seems that few of us are willing to abide by God's wishes for we fellowship anybody and everybody and precious little discipline is used in the church of the Lord today. As long as there is "sin in the camp" we can expect discord, worldliness and chaos from within the ranks of the Lord's army. The church at Corinth was commanded to "put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Cor. 5:13) for "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." (Verse 6 of same chapter.) When we tolerate evil doing we are breeding corruption in the bloodbought church of Jesus Christ. It is impossible for elders in the church of God to condone and use adulterers, gamblers, drunkards, etc. and still fulfill their obligations as shepherds of the flock. It is also impossible for preachers of the gospel to preach the whole counsel of God and fail to condemn such immoral characters who cast the cause of Christ into ill repute by their hypocritical living.

If the church does not arise and fulfill its God-given duty in this realm we will fail in our efforts to keep the church pure. The purpose of "church discipline" is at least threefold: (a) To bring the erring brother to his senses. (b) To keep the church clean and cause the other members of the body to take notice of how the Lord looks on sin. (c) To forever remind the world that the church stands for something and that there is a vast distinction between the children of God and the offspring of the devil! But, there is still one more necessary element in a pure church and that is:

A burning zeal and enthusiasm. We have all seen congregations who preached the truth, lived as they should, and even disciplined their wayward members. Yet, something was still lacking. That something was enthusiasm. We must be on fire for the Lord. Too many of us seem contented and passive in the Lord's work. We have a nice, convenient religion and we need not be concerned over the teeming millions who do not share the rewarding pleasures of a Lord's day spent in true worship and service to God. Brethren, the greatest hindrance to the vitality of the church is our indifference and complacency. It is not enough to preach the truth and live accordingly — we must be energetic, zealous and fervent in our service to Christ. Laodicea's great sin was her indifference. (Rev. 3:14-16) There are congregations just like Laodicea today. They are much like a room where no fresh air ever enters, that is, stale, stagnant, lifeless. That room is not impure because of dangerous, deadly gas entering it — but because no air at all is there. Thus, many times the lack of growth in the church of the Lord can best be traced to no life at all instead of rank immorality.

The Lord of Glory shed his blood for the church. (Acts 20:28) He's coming one day to receive it unto himself. May we do all we can to keep the priceless possession pure "not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Eph. 5:27)





SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

Thomas B. Warren

Lach of us must strive to be loyal to Jesus Christ, and it is certainly clear that no man can be loyal to Him if he does not love Him and his fellowman (Matt. 22:37-38). However, it is very easy for any one of us to become unbalanced in our response to His teaching. It may be that one observes others who, it seems, in giving too much emphasis to doctrine, give too little 'emphasis to love and, in reaction to that observation, comes to give too much emphasis to love and too little emphasis to doctrine. Both of these are wrong.

Brother R. L. Whiteside rightly urged that the "preacher should so love the truth that he will not sacrifice any of it nor pervert it...." Yet one who has come to wrongly emphasize love may come to feel that he ought not to preach certain passages in the Bible because such preaching might "hurt the feelings" of some who might hear that preaching. But to refrain from preaching what God wants preached is to give proof that one does not love adequately either God or his fellow man. If one withholds from his fellow man certain truths (which God has instructed us to preach), because he thinks those truths will be unpleasant to at least some hearers, then he thereby proves that he does not truly love either God's creatures (human beings) or His truth (the Gospel of Christ).

While it is certainly the case that Paul said that we should speak "truth in love" (Eph. 4:15), it is also the case that when the apostles faced being charged "not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18), Peter and John replied, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye..." (Acts 4:19). And it is also the case that when the high priest said to them, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name: and behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us," Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). The apostles then proceeded to preach that the Jews did slay Jesus. As a result of this preaching which, no doubt, was done in love of both God and man (in this case, the Jews who had crucified Jesus) (Acts 5:30-32), many were baptized into Christ.

Our responsibility is not to "put our ears to the ground" (in an effort to learn what men want us to preach) but to "preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and

teaching" (II Tim. 4:2). Let us not allow the devil to deceive us into believing that we show love when we fail to preach "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) to a lost and dying world. Let each of us examine himself to see if he is in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5). To be sure, we must love-but our love must be guided by God's Word.

 CW

None of These Things Move Me

Joey Davis

If you ever needed an example of what it looks like to maintain Christian commitment and focus, Paul certainly fits the bill. In the face of adversity, Paul said, "but none of these things move me" (Acts 20:24a). More on that later. For now, think about how often things happen that make you second-guess your commitment. Think about times when you have felt like throwing your hands in the air and saying, "that's enough, I quit!" Have you been there? Paul certainly had, but he was not willing to surrender to potential discouragements. Past, present, or future, Paul was not moved from his Christian foundation. It will do us good to reflect on what that looked like in Paul's life.

Paul's past was not one that he celebrated. Some would consider Paul's past accomplishments worthy of commendation. On the contrary, Paul saw it as a negative. When his accomplishments in the Jewish religion were weighed in the balance with his becoming a Christian, the former things were as rubbish (Phil. 3:8). His former life involved beliefs and actions for which a person could rightly feel ashamed and unworthy of forgiveness. Paul did many things contrary to the cause of Christ and was responsible for injuring Christians. He consented to the murder of Stephen (Acts 8), He made havoc of the church and made murderous threats against Christians (Acts 9), and he forced Christians to blaspheme the Lord (Acts 26). With that kind of past, how could he even move on as if that did not happen? Paul was determined to allow the grace and mercy of God to address his past. A history riddled with that kind of regrettable behavior is enough to defeat anyone, but Paul was not going to let that move Him away from the forgiveness that Christ offers to all, regardless of their past (Hebrews 8:12 - stop and read it).

Paul's present was no easy street. After his conversion, his heart was on fire with the force of a rocket

blast to preach the Gospel to the lost (2 Cor. 5:14; 1:16-17). Yet throughout his faced he adversity and disappointments. 2 Corinthians 11:23- 28, he recounts imprisonments, beatings, and a variety of other dangers that would have been enough to send most Christians retreating back into the world to avoid the persecution. Paul did not allow viciousness, cowardice, and unfaithfulness on the part of some to weaken his resolve. Paul, much like Joshua, was determined to serve the Lord, regardless of what other's chose to do (Josh. 24:15). He confronted a fellow apostle who was embracing error (Gal. 2:11). He challenged elders who were apparently on the threshold of unfaithfulness (Acts 20:30). Similar disappointments have been plenty enough to send preachers back into secular work. I am both impressed with and encouraged by Paul because he embraced an attitude of faithful commitment that would not allow him to be moved from his faithfulness, regardless.

Paul's future looked very grim. In Acts 20, Paul recounts that the Holy Spirit had made it clear in every city that chains awaited Paul in Jerusalem. We know now that Paul was within a few years of the end of his life. As Paul stood before those elders from Ephesus and appealed to them for their faithful commitment to Christ and His church, Paul was peering into his future which was being made clear by divine revelation. I can only imagine the emotion. Did he have intrusive thoughts about the benefits of laying down his cause to preserve his life and ease his hurt? Most of us would have, and many have accepted that alternative. Yet, the power in Paul's example is that he said, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy..." What a wonderful personal mission statement. Perhaps, if we would adopt the same motto and learn to say that, we will be more inclined to live it when people disappoint and being a Christian gets difficult.

CW

A GREAT DEBT

Ronnie Scherffius

here was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I

suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged" (Luke 7:41-43).

The book of Luke has many unique characteristics. For example, Luke writes on the subject of prayer more than any other gospel writer. He alone records that Jesus prayed at His baptism (3:21); before His first confrontation with Jewish leaders (5:16); before choosing the twelve (6:12); before the first time revealing His suffering (9:18); at the transfiguration (9:29); before instructing the apostles "how to pray" (10:1); while on the cross (23:34, 46); for Peter's faith not to fail (22:32).

Another characteristic that sets Luke's gospel account apart from his inspired companions is the number of parables he records. Of the 26 parables recorded by Luke 17 are peculiar to him. Some the most recognizable parables of Jesus are the Good Samaritan (10:30-35), the Lost Sheep (15:3-6) and Lost Coin (15:8-9), and the Prodigal Son (18:11-32). All of these are found only in the book of Luke. Another parable unique to Luke is the Two Debtors. (7:41-42) In this parable we learn the reality of one's love for God is the estimate of his indebtedness to God.

Consider first that a great debt was owed: "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty" (41). In real terms, one man's debt was the equivalent of 500 days wages and the other 50 days wages. One might suppose the debtor who owed the 500 owed a greater debt, but the fact is both men owed a great debt because neither could afford to pay (42). If a man has no means of paying off a debt the amount matters little—it is a great debt because it is unplayable! A great debt was owed by both men.

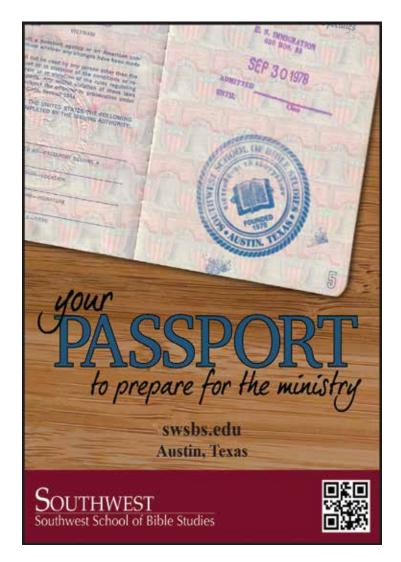
Observe next a great forgiveness is given: "And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both" (42). The Greek word translated forgave is found only in this parable in Luke and only in Luke of the four gospel writers. The literal meaning of the word is "to do something pleasant or agreeable (to someone), or to do a favor." In fact, the root from which this word comes would be translated grace. If we were relating such a story to someone we might say that by forgiving the debt, "the creditor was very gracious."

Finally, in our parable we see a great love is shown. After speaking the parable Jesus asked Simon (40): "Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most" (42). Simon's answer very revealing: "I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most" (43). We know Simon's answer is correct because of Jesus response, "thou has rightly judged." What is most striking is revealed in Simon's words "I suppose." The man Simon supposed or assumed to have the greater love is the one he himself assumed to have had the greater

debt. But each man's debt was equally great because neither could pay! The lesson of the parable is clear: the love and gratitude one shows to God is based on one's estimate of their debt to God.

Those who reject God, the sacrifice of His only begotten Son, and the authority of His Word fail to see not only the greatness of His grace but also their indebtedness. The one who loves God "most" is that one who truly realizes the immeasurable love and bound- less grace of God has made available for them the forgiveness of all sins by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. A sacrifice that stands as the payment for a debt none can pay. How much do you love God? What is the estimate of your debt?

CW





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"To Know Jesus and...make Him known"

From the Director's desk



Trent Kennedy

Director

SWSBS

fter Rick Brumback departed SWSBS to teach in the Bible department at Freed-Hardeman University in 2017, the Southwest elders chose Don Walker to direct the school. Brother Walker's time as director was cut short by his untimely passing in January 2019. Brother Steven Lloyd, who had joined Don at SWSBS in 2017 from his long-time work in Chino, California, took over as interim director. Brother Lloyd was then named to the permanent role of director in preparation for the 2019-2020 school year.

Brother Lloyd has directed the school through difficult times as we have endured significant obstacles like death, faculty turnover, and Covid; and more minor challenges that happen day-to-day and year-to-year. His good work is evident in the graduates, students, and faculty under his direction. Sister Valerie Lloyd, Steven's wife, began serving as the registrar for the school. She helps students daily with accounting matters, book orders, and much much more. The time these two put into ensuring SWSBS runs smoothly is unknown to most people. They work diligently in front of and behind the scenes. If you asked them about this service, they would simply say they are part of a team of people who make sure everything gets done.

As we look forward to the new school year, Steven and Valerie remain as constants at the Southwest congregation and the Southwest School of Bible Studies. Officially, Steven's new title is Associate Director, but his work will be that of continued teaching, counseling, training, mentoring, and serving. His humble service as part of the SWSBS team has been, is, and will be invaluable. Personally and selfishly, I am so thankful to be working alongside Steven Lloyd in the kingdom, the local church, and the school. He and Val are loved and appreciated.