

11A

RELIGION

Greed
leads to
SORROWSunday
School Lesson

Devotional readings: 1
Corinthians 3:10-15
Lesson scripture: James 4:1-
10, 13-17

A ship laden with treasure was making its way from a colony to the mother country. In the middle of the Atlantic, the ship sprang a leak. The sailors worked desperately to stop it, but in vain. An order was given to abandon ship.

One of the sailors seized this opportunity to enrich himself with as many gold bars as he could hide in his clothing. Encumbered by the weight as he stepped into a lifeboat, he lost his balance and plunged into the sea. The heavy gold took him swiftly to the bottom. His greed was his undoing.

For their own safety, James spoke out against those who selfishly sought things and more things. They sought wealth for the wrong reasons to satisfy their own lusts.

An observer of our society could not draw a more accurate picture of its problems than James gives us. Daily we are bombarded by advertisements that name material possessions, we sacrifice our good name for material possessions, we sacrifice our children for material possessions and we sacrifice our piece of mind for them. Tragically, we sometimes even sacrifice our lives.

It is not possible for Christians to always avoid strife. When we stand firm in the faith, we can be certain that Satan will find some way to disturb the peace. But James is not talking about this kind of fighting. He is concerned about the strife that is rooted in lust.

The Greek word here translated "lusts" may be aptly translated "pleasures." The English word hedonism, meaning devotion to worldly pleasures, comes from this word. Paul speaks of a civil war that rages within the heart of each one of us between fleshly lusts and our higher spiritual being. This spills over into conflict with others.

History bears ample testimony to the truth of James' statement. Across the centuries tribes and nations have fought bloody wars for plunder, for power, or for revenge. Historians would be hard pressed to find a war that did not have its roots in these baser motives. We may accumulate vast armaments to deter aggressors and we may pass laws to protect us from violent persons; but unless we can change the hearts of men and women, we will never see an end to the violence.

If James had been taking his cue from this morning's newspaper, he could not have more accurately described the present world situation. When the 20th century began, many optimistically believed the day of world peace had arrived; but tragically, ours has been the bloodiest, most violent century of all human history.

Many factors can be blamed for this; among them racism, nationalism, advanced technology, Communism and religion. James gets to the root of the problem: lust. Until we can find a way to control lust, any thought of peace in our world is a hopeless dream.

Only by yielding to Christ can we hope to overcome the power of greed and desire. That is why it is so essential that our efforts be turned to winning people to Jesus.

Baptist Convention takes on burnings

By Jeri Young
THE CHARLOTTE POST

ST. LOUIS — The opening ceremonies of the National Baptist Convention took on ominous tones as members of the nation's largest African American denomination converged on St. Louis for their 91st annual Congress of Christian Education.

The estimated 55,000 conventioners and their leaders expressed shock and outrage at the recent church burnings that have plagued African American congregations throughout the Southeast.

In a hastily called press conference before opening cere-

monies, conference issues took a back seat as Henry Lyons, president of the 8.5 million member group, spoke on the rash of suspicious fires. Lyons offered assurances that all was being done to end what he calls the "appalling desecration of the house of God."

Said Lyons, in an interview after the press conference, "I am astonished that this has been allowed to go on. We have left ourselves open to the shame of overt racism."

Lyons said that the surging conservative wave that swept Congress in the 1994 election is at the root of the church arson.

"This has been building for the last 10 to 15 years, the current

Republican Congress has struck down affirmative action, welfare," he said. "It is all a symptom of the same festering sore. The poor are getting poorer."

Lyons recently met with President Clinton and Attorney General Janet Reno in closed door session at the White House.

"President Clinton and Attorney General Reno assured me that all was being done to investigate the crimes, for now that is the best we can do," said Lyons. "I will continue to monitor the situation carefully and will not rest until it is declared what it is — a conspiracy brought on by the festering sore of racism."

Convention delegates, many from Southern states, expressed the same fears.

"I think it is a conspiracy," said Barbara Dandridge. "We had a burning about four years ago in Como, Miss. They said it was accidental, but now, I just don't know."

Dandridge, a native of Sardis, Miss., lives only a few miles from the sight of what is now identified as the first church burning.

"My church fits the bill, we are small, rural," said Dandridge. "We fit the (modus operandi)."

According to Dandridge, recent strides made by African Americans have made many whites nervous.

Said Dandridge: "We just opened a restaurant. We have a new black owned B.F. Goodrich and several black cosmetology shops. We have never done that in our end of Mississippi."

Dandridge, a respiratory therapist, also expressed concern for her safety at the National Convention, a concern echoed by Lyons.

"With all of us here," said Dandridge, "it would be an opportunity to cause a great deal of harm, you know, a bombing."

"We have heightened security, limited access on some downtown streets," said Lyons.

"As you can see," he said,

See BAPTISTS on page 12A

Getting
messages
acrossFriendship puppet
ministry shares the
gospel with others

By Tammie Tolbert
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Friendship Missionary Baptist Church is reaching out into the community with puppets.

"We believe the puppet ministry is an important part of the church ministry," says Angela Kelly, a member of the puppet group.

The group began the puppet ministry in 1994. "We decided to get our confidence up and work with our presentation before going into the community," said Bill Jones, another puppeteer.

Now the group goes into the community and performs stories from the Bible. Puppeteers arrange the stories to make them relevant to issues that kids face today. Kelly said that a skit that was well received was "Rapping Noah," who told a student who was contemplating cheating to have faith in God.

After the performances, there is an open forum for the audience to share its feelings. "Our puppet ministry is therapeutic for some children," said Calvin Fleming, a puppeteer. "When we are performing, I often watch their faces and see how they open up and begin talking."

Eleanor Toliver said "we perform mainly for younger children and teenagers, but we have found that our ministry has an effect on people, no matter what their age."

"Our hope is to be a true ministry and to get out and do something to uplift people in the community," Kelly said.

Performances vary, depending on the number of requests the troupe receives and the amount of preparation time needed, because they write most of their own scripts.

"There are a lot of scripts that are already published, but we find that most of them don't fit our culture," said Toliver. "We decided to brainstorm and write about things that our audience could relate to. It takes weeks to work on a program and get it just right."

The writers for the six puppets range from teenage to adult. "When we have stories that deal with teenage issues, we realize that our young writers can put a new slant to the story and we value what they have to say," Jones said.

Sometimes the puppeteers take the show on the road and give performances for the children at the Carolinas Medical

See PUPPETS on page 14A



PHOTO/SUE ANN JOHNSON

Aaron Evans, Carolinas field representative for Promise Keepers (left) chats with Rev. Robert Griffin of Philadelphia Community Church in Rocky Mount during the organization's rally last week at Charlotte Motor Speedway.

Promise Keepers
opens doors to color

By Tammie Tolbert
THE CHARLOTTE POST

CONCORD — In the soaring heat at the Charlotte Motor Speedway, men from all across North America gathered to receive messages of God's love.

Promise Keepers, a Christ-centered ministry dedicated to uniting all men, held a conference in Charlotte last weekend that welcomed more than

60,000 people, mostly men. The conference, titled "Break Down the Wall," has been held in major cities like Los Angeles, Atlanta, Kansas City, and Detroit.

Promise Keepers has seven promises it wants men to uphold. The sixth promise states that a Promise Keeper is committed to reaching beyond racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity.

The organization, which is predominately white, is working on this image by asking more African Americans and other ethnic groups to be a part of the national organization.

"The organization really highlights this sixth promise," said Aaron Evans, field representative for the Carolinas. "There are a lot of African Americans in positions that have decision-making power. When things appear to have only a 'white perspective' we tell them, 'Hey you're looking over the African American perspective.'"

Evans said blacks give a new flavor to the organization.

"Promise Keepers are very open to talking to African American leaders to find ways to communicate more with each other, especially in the body of Christ," he said.

One of the four key principles detailed in the book, "Breaking Down Walls" by Raleigh Washington, is intentionality, which teaches Promise Keepers that they must intentionally invite someone of another race into their home and visit an ethnically or denominationally different church at least four times.

The empowerment principle teaches members that forgive-

See PROMISE on page 14A

Eye On Gospel

Fired up: Moved by the recent church burnings in the South, which have reignited a spark of unity in African American churches across the country, Intersound Records announced that it is contributing \$10,000 to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference for the reconstruction of burned-out churches, and is challenging other labels to do the same. With the gesture, Gospel Vice President James Bullard hopes to raise more than \$100,000 for the churches in crisis. Notes Bullard, "an industry wide contribution would really assist the churches during this crisis."

Sony Music is among the labels who have accepted the challenge. Other labels like GospoCentric have not yet determined whether they will join Intersound's effort or go ahead with singular plans to help, but have echoed the senti-

ments of Vickie Mack-Lataillade, who states, "the church is an integral part of the community we serve so we must be supportive." In the meantime, Kirk Franklin has signed on as the featured musical guest for the season premiere of New York Undercover, whose storyline will revolve around the recent church burnings.

The rebirth of a label: The resurrection of Muscle Shoals Records, whose roster at one time included Vanessa Bell Armstrong, Keith Pringle, the Christianaires, and Ricky Dillard's New Generation Chorale, seems to be right on target. That according to Telisa Stinson, who was brought in as label director last fall.

The label, which is being reactivated as the Malaco/Savoy group's urban contemporary arm will celebrate the release of their first group, called "Men of Standards" in August.

The buzz on the project is high, due mostly to the fact that two of the group's four members were former featured vocalist of John P. Kee's New Life Community Choir; and that the self-titled debut was produced by Donald Lawrence. Other key signings to the new label are set to be announced in the near future. Meanwhile, speaking of resurrections, Dorothy Norwood's careers seems to have been revived with the release of her current project "Shake The Devil Off" which the label reports is doing phenomenally well. Averaging 10,000 units per month, sales have exceeded initial expectations and are projected to hit the six figure mark. Meanwhile, Norwood's next project is set to be recorded this September in Tulsa.

In other related news, Malaco Records is gearing up for a live recording of the Jackson

Southernaires on July 13 that will reunite all of the famed Williams Brothers on stage. The album will also serve as a tribute to their brother, the late Frank Williams.

Briefly: Next month Atlanta International Records will direct it's attention to new releases from Byron Cage and James Bignon. Cage's "Transparent In Your Presence" ship July 16 and is accompanied by a full concert video. So too is Bignon's "What a Mighty God We Serve." Bignon assembled over 400 voices representing 96 churches, to back him on the project which was recorded live in Atlanta in March.

This week's scripture: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" — Galatians 6:1.