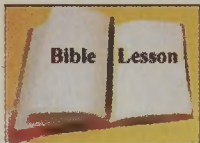


5B

RELIGION

Life 1B



Called to help the weak

There are doctrinal essentials in the Christian faith. The inspiration and authority of Scripture, Jesus' virgin birth, His vicarious death, His glorious resurrection, and His second coming are non-negotiables. To this list could be added a number of other Bible doctrines.

On the other hand, there are a variety of opinions held by both individual believers and various Christian groups that do not relate to matters of faith. The problem is that we sometimes elevate opinions to the status of essential doctrine. The Pharisees did this with their traditions and were condemned by Christ for doing so (Mark 7:5-7). Let us fall into the same trap, we must always be careful to distinguish between nonessentials and essentials.

All should be done in love. If an individual has trusted in Christ as Savior, that person is my brother or sister in Christ. We may not agree on everything, but we must treat each other with courtesy, kindness, and love.

LESSON BACKGROUND

During these times, the Greeks and Romans were polytheistic (worshipping many gods) and polydemonistic (believing in many evil spirits). They believed that evil spirits would try to invade human beings by attaching themselves to food before it was eaten, and that the spirits could be removed only by the food being sacrificed to a god. The sacrifice was meant not only to gain favor with the god, but also to cleanse the meat from demonic contamination. Such decontaminated meat was offered to the gods as a sacrifice. That which was not burned on the altar was served at wicked pagan feasts. What was left was sold in the market.

After conversion, believers resented eating such food bought out of idol markets, because it reminded sensitive Gentile believers of their previous pagan lives and the demonic worship. Paul and mature believers knew better than to be bothered by such food offered once to idols and then sold in the marketplace. They knew the deities didn't exist and that evil spirits did not contaminate the food. But some of the weaker believers struggled with this and brought it to Paul's attention and he addressed the issue.

1 What questions did the church have concerning "things offered unto idols" (1 Cor. 8:1)?

In last week's lesson, Paul had begun to answer practical questions written to him by the Corinthians with the first question referencing marriage. In this week's lesson, Paul deals with another concern raised by the Corinthians

Please see CALLED/7B



PHOTO/ARCHIDOSE.ORG

Activists say that megachurches are about Benteleys and bling, rather than the social issues that the black church has always stood for.

Black activists blast megachurches for ignoring self-help and justice

Criticism erupts during conference of prominent ministers

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DALLAS—Prominent black leaders have denounced increasingly popular megachurches, saying many have abandoned Jesus' emphasis on social justice to preach a gospel of wealth and self-help.

"The message of many churches has been co-opted by American capitalism," said the Rev. Frederick Haynes III of the Friendship-West Baptist Church in South Dallas. "A megachurch should not just be known for the traffic jam it creates on Sunday, but for doing something more in the community."

The criticism came at a summit of about 100 black ministers—including the Revs. Joseph Lowery, Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson and scholar Cornel West—held this week at Haynes' church.

Several popular black megachurch leaders and televangelists, such as Bishop T.D. Jakes in Dallas and the Rev. Creflo Dollar of Georgia, openly back President Bush. They preach to stadium-sized congregations that worshippers

receive health and prosperity through their faith—a belief system called Word of Faith, said Lawrence Mamiya, professor of religion and African studies at Vassar College. Leaders often speak proudly of their own wealth and success, he said.

Jakes, who claims 30,000 churchgoers, said in a written response Wednesday that his church, The Potter's House, and his ministries give

Please see BLACK/6B



Jakes



Dollar

South Carolinian takes over as AME leader

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHARLESTON, S.C. — Bishop Preston Warren Williams II plans to strengthen ties among the African Methodist Episcopal churches and help the poor during his yearlong term as the denomination's highest-ranking leader.

At a gathering attended by more than 3,000 people Monday night, Williams became president of the AME Church's global council of bishops. The South Carolin-

ian is the church's 119th bishop.

Before he received the ceremonial medallion marking his post, Williams discussed his plans.

"The main issues are what we read about every day," Williams said. "It's hunger. It's disease. It's children without parents."

Williams, 67, wants to create a program where churches give food to needy children when school is out.

He also wants to strengthen

the AME Church's ties to districts in Africa, where he served as a bishop before taking over the South Carolina district.

"We were able to add to the church over 150,000 souls," Williams said of his time as Central Africa's bishop. "We have made a difference in Africa."

Williams' new post reflects the importance of South Carolina to the AME Church. The church's South Carolina district is the second-largest in

the world, behind the 1st Episcopal District, which covers the northeast United States.

Charleston is the church's birthplace in the South. The AME Church, founded by free blacks in Philadelphia in 1793, has grown to approximately 3 million members worldwide, with about 300,000 of them in South Carolina.

People who have worked

Please see SOUTH/6B

Senator: Democrats should take faith seriously

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Sen. Barack Obama is warning fellow Democrats they must take religion seriously, delivering a highly personal speech that noted his own religious awakening and how his father died an atheist and his mother a skeptic about organized worship.

The Illinois lawmaker recounted before an audience of church and lay leaders at National City Christian Church how it was not until after he graduated from college and became a community organizer in Chicago that he confronted his "spiritual dilemma."

"The Christians who I would work with, they recognized themselves in me, they saw that I knew their Book

and shared their values and sang their songs. But they sensed a part of me that remained detached and removed, that I was an observer in their midst," Obama said.

"In time, I came to realize that something was missing... that without a vessel for my beliefs, that without a commitment to a particular community of faith, at some level I would always remain apart, and alone," he said.

Obama, now the Senate's only black member, said he drew closer to the church, in part because he believed in the power of the African-American religious tradition to spur social change, and also because he realized that having faith does not mean that one does not have

doubts. As a result of his newfound understanding, he said he eventually walked down the aisle of Trinity United Church of Christ and affirmed his Christian faith.

"It came about as a choice, not an epiphany—I did not fall out in church," he said, drawing a roar of laughter.

Obama cautioned against Democratic or progressive strategies that would avoid conversations about religious values altogether. He said most Democrats have "taken the bait" to avoid debating such issues out of fear of offending anyone.

"We first need to understand that Americans are a religious people, 90 percent of us believe in God... and substantially more people believe

in angels than do those who believe in evolution," Obama said.

For many of our problems to be solved, it will require not only changes in government policy, but also changes in hearts and minds, he said.

"I believe in keeping guns out of our inner cities, and that our leaders must say so in the face of the gun manufacturers' lobby—but I also believe that when a gang-banger shoots indiscriminately into a crowd because he feels somebody disrespected him, we have a problem of morality, there's a hole in that young man's heart—a role that government programs alone cannot fix."

Obama pointed out that national denominations have

Please see OBAMA/7B



Ki-Ki a chip off the old vocal block

Kierra "Ki-Ki" Sheard
This Is Me
Various producers
EMI Gospel



Kierra Sheard's latest CD could easily be titled "I Am My Mother's Child."

Sheard, like her mother Karen Clarke-Sheard, has a sledgehammer of a voice that can beat her weighty message directly into your brain. She's rarely subtle and never boring, but needs to cuff herself from time to time.

There's certainly nothing subtle about "The Only One." Its booming bass drum and disco handclaps can barely out-power Sheard's jazz riffs and hip hop swaggering vocals. This is gospel? In this day and age, yes. The music is high tech but the lyrics are unabashedly gospel.

The same for "Yes." Sheard bulldozers this song into your memory with those jazzy riffs as the louder-than-necessary music kicks you into the next room.

She can turn things down a bit when needed. "It Is What It Is" is the CD's most likable song. Its lyrics show Sheard is firmly rooted in her faith. There is no lukewarm - it's either heaven or hell without compromises. She gets kudos for that.

But too much of this CD sounds like what you hear on any urban station these days. There's nothing churchy or reverent. That's not a bad thing because this CD is aimed at folks who may not find the whole gospel thing appealing. There's nothing here cleverly disguised but the urban music tends to grab you before the gospel lyrics.

Still, Sheard is part of a new batch of gospel singers that have to be dealt with. She's got the pipes (she is her mother's child) and her song selection is getting better. But she still needs one big song - a churchy song - to show those who don't already know how fine-tuned an instrument her body houses



Ratings

- Classic: ★★★★★
- Excellent: ★★★★★
- Good: ★★★★★
- Fair: ★★★★★
- Why? ★★★★★
- No stars - A mess

CHURCH NEWS

The deadline for announcements in the calendar is noon on Fridays. Fax to (704) 342-2160 or e-mail to cheris.hodges@thecharlottepost.com.

July 14
University Park Baptist Church, 6029 Beaties Ford Road, will host comic Jonathan Slocum at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$13 if purchased in advance and \$15 at the door.

July 16
The 33rd Annual Women's Day Celebration will be at 4 p.m.

Guest speaker will be Minister Chris Whitely, First Lady of Mount Moriah Baptist Church.

• Greater Mt. Sinai Baptist Church, located at 1243 West Boulevard, will host its Youth Revival with the theme "A Child Shall Lead Them... word on the street."

Services Sunday begin at 6 p.m. and run through Wednesday with services beginning at 7 p.m. For information, call (704) 332-2163.
July 20

The CHOSEN Youth/Young Adult Department of the New St. Luke Holy Baptist Church of God will host the NuNation Youth Convocation. Theme: Generation X - Marked for Greatness! Times: July 21-22 at 7:45pm and July 23 at 11am and 5:30pm. Location: 910 Winchester Ave. Monroe. For more information call Prophet Lorenzo A. Moore at (704) 605-5112 or church at (704) 218-3662
July 22
New St. Luke Holy Baptist Church of God

presents Unity in Praise Community Festival, 910 Winchester Ave. in Monroe. Clothes giveaway, carnival games, food, music and fun for the family. Looking for step team, youth choirs, gospel hip-hop artist, mime teams to participate. To participate and for more information call Prophet Lorenzo Moore at (704) 605-5112

• United Baptist/March of Faith Ministry, 1115 Hawthorne Lane, will host the United
Please see CHINESE/6B

