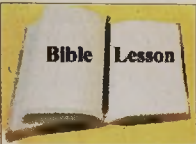


Religion

THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 2007

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Staying true to God

One of the major themes of the New Testament is love. Among the ancient Greeks there were several words for love. One word meant romantic love, another family love, and another love between friends.

There was, however, one word that was rarely used among the secular Greeks: agape. Appearing in its various forms about fifty times in 1 John, it most often is used for God's love for us and the love we are to have for one another. Compared to the other kinds of human love, agape is more likely to involve self-sacrifice.

When asked about the greatest commandment, Christ quoted the Law, which declared that we are to love both God and our neighbor (Mark 12:28-34; cf. Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18). When addressing the problem of misusing spiritual gifts in the Corinthian church, Paul established that love is the proper motivation for Christian service (1 Cor. 13).

While love is one of the most talked about teachings of Christ, it may be one of the least practiced. The Lord Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

Lesson Background
John wrote this epistle against a background of false teachers who came to be known as gnostics. Among other things, gnostics taught that it did not really matter if a person had morality or love-as long as he or she had "secret knowledge." To combat this false teaching, John emphasized the interconnection of right belief, right actions, and right love. To put it another way, it is the right involvement of head, hands, and heart. The child of God must believe the truth, obey the commands, and love the brethren.

Of these three areas, John's clear favorite is the emphasis on love (although they cannot really be separated). In last week's lesson

John equated the love of love with walking in the light. Today he will examine God's love, the world's lack of love, and the saints' love that meets every test.

Supportive Love (1 John 3:11-15)

1. What did John mean by the "beginning" (1 John 3:11)?

To remind his readers that they were to love one another, John stated that this was not a new revelation. This was the "message" they had "heard from the beginning."

Here, the word "beginning" does not mean the beginning of the world. Rather, it refers to the beginning of the readers' acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ and their acceptance of the gospel (Acts 11:15; Phil. 4:15).

The command to love one another is not new to the Christian, yet we must be reminded

Please see **STAYING/6B**



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

Megachurches aim to make Sunday morning more diverse.

Megachurches aim to improve ethnic mix for Sunday services

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LEXINGTON, Mass.—Sundays at the evangelical Grace Chapel megachurch look like the American ideal of race relations: African-American, Haitian, white, Chinese and Korean families sing along with a white, guitar-playing pastor.

U.S. churches rarely have this kind of ethnic mix. But that's changing. Researchers who study race and religion say Grace Chapel is among a vanguard of megachurches that are breaking down racial barriers in American Christianity, altering the long-segregated landscape of Sunday worship. "Megachurches as a whole are significantly better than other congregations at holding together multiracial, multiethnic congregations," said Scott Thumma, an expert on megachurches and a professor at Hartford Seminary in Connecticut. "It's absolutely clear."

A study by Thumma and the Leadership Network, a Dallas group that works with pioneering churches, found that minorities make up 20 percent or more of worshippers in nearly one-third of the nation's 1,200 megachurches. More than half of the megachurches say they are intentionally working to attract different ethnic groups, according to the 2005 study, part of a book that Thum-

ma and network executive Dave Travis will publish in July.

The question now is whether the new diversity is just a fad or a permanent shift.

Although megachurches each draw at least 2,000 worshippers a week, they are a small percentage of the estimated 350,000 congregations across the United States. And leaders at Grace Chapel and other megachurches where whites remain the majority acknowledge enormous challenges in making minorities feel included so they'll stay for the long term.

Still, megachurches are trendsetters, and the change they've made is startling considering nearly all other American churches serve one ethnic group. Even churches with a large number of immigrants generally have separate English and non-English services. For black and white Christians, pre-Civil War church support for slavery and the general absence of white evangelicals from the civil rights movement continue to drive the two groups apart.

Most megachurches don't carry that historical burden; nearly all have been built since the 1970s and play down any ties to a denomination.

Please see **MEGACHURCHES/8B**

Minister who called homosexuality 'sinful' claims right to solicit police

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

OKLAHOMA CITY —The lawyer for a former Baptist church leader who had spoken out against homosexuality said Thursday the minister has a constitutional right to solicit sex from an undercover policeman.

The Rev. Lonnie W. Latham had supported a resolution calling on gays and lesbians to reject their "sinful, destructive lifestyle" before his Jan. 3, 2006, arrest outside the Habana Inn in Oklahoma City.

Authorities say he asked the undercover policeman to come up to his hotel for oral sex.

His attorney, Mack Martin, filed a motion to have the misdemeanor lewdness charge thrown out, saying the

Supreme Court ruled in the 2003 decision Lawrence v. Texas that it was not illegal for consenting adults to engage in private homosexual acts.

"Now, my client's being prosecuted basically for having offered to engage in such an act, which basically makes it a crime to ask someone to do something that's legal," Martin said.

Both sides agree there was no offer of money, but prosecutor Scott Rowland said there is a "legitimate governmental interest" in regulating offers of acts of lewdness.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma has filed a brief claiming that Latham's arrest also violated his right to free speech.

Before his arrest, Latham had spoken against same-sex marriage and in support of a Southern Baptist resolution that called upon gays and lesbians to reject their lifestyle.

He has since resigned as pastor of the South Tulsa Baptist Church and stepped down from the executive committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, where he was one of four members from Oklahoma.

On Thursday Latham declined to talk to reporters at the non-jury trial.

Judge Roma M. McElwee said she would rule on the motion and issue a verdict in about two weeks. If convicted of the misdemeanor, Latham faces up to a year in jail and a \$2,500 fine.



Black shoes are a hit with American women.

'Heart and soul' of Va. community nears 140

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALEM, Va.—In the bustling old Water Street district, carved from former plantation lands, barbers cut hair and children skipped rope after school.

First Baptist Church in Salem is a cornerstone of the once-thriving segregated neighborhood. In years past, it offered a sanctuary for black residents who were less welcome in other parts of what was then part of western Roanoke County.

The church and its congregation have weathered dramatic social change, from the early days of emancipation to the later inequities of segregation.

On March 25, the white clapboard church and its 95 active members will celebrate its 140th anniversary. Churchgoers, busy planning for the event, shouted "amen" and urged their preacher to greater rhapsody on a recent Sunday.

"When I'm in the pews, I think of those pioneers," said pianist Louise Braxton, wife of the church's 14th minister, the Rev. James Braxton. "This church has such a rich history. We haven't lost anything and we're continuing to build on it."

Churches were a "nation within a nation" for many segregated blacks, providing "a refuge from a hostile white world," according to Edward Franklin Frazier in his 1974 book "The Negro Church in America."

In 1866, First Baptist Church's handful of members met in the home of Salem resident Elizabeth Campbell, a single mother and free woman. Freed slaves, carpenters and plumbers built the church in its current location in the 1870s.

Betty Kolb, 73, grew up in First Baptist Church and said she's humbled by its history.

"It is a milestone because when I look back we're enjoying a structure that was built 140 years ago by our ancestors," Kolb said. "They took a lot of pride in building that church and that's why it is standing today. So, we're standing on the shoulders of those who looked out for us many, many years ago."

The building has several distinctive elements, such as original stained-glass windows the color of rubies, garnets and other gems. Its wooden floors intentionally slope toward the pulpit, so that anyone in the back pews has a clear view of the preacher. There's also a "horseshoe gallery," a balcony with no supporting pillars. Beneath the pulpit is the original baptismal pool, which parishioners still use.

The church didn't have a full-time pastor in its early days, instead relying on lay people or local preachers from other churches to deliver sermons. Some of those early services were in the home of the Rev. Walker Smith, who owned property on White Oak and Calhoun streets.

"After the release of slaves after emancipation, what they called the 'colored' could only go to certain churches and that is how First Baptist got started," said church member George Clemons, 67.

The Rev. Benjamin Fox, a prominent early pastor, came to the church in 1899. But by the late 1890s, a rift developed and Fox left the church with 125 members, forming the nearby Shiloh Baptist Church. First Baptist survived, but lacked a full-time pastor until the Rev. Edward Catefor arrived in 1910.

The church was the heart of the roughly five-block Water Street district, now called South Broad Street. Roughly

Please see **HEART/7B**

CHURCH NEWS

The deadline for announcements is noon on Fridays. Fax to (704) 342-2160 or e-mail your announcement to cheris.hodges@thecharlottepost.com. Please put "church news" in the subject line.

Ongoing

We Empower Women For Life At Women of The Harvest Bible Study Wednesdays at 6 p.m. at 6636 Suite I Hickory Grove Business Park.
Steele Creek AME Zion Church, located at

1500 Shopton Road, will have noon day Bible study from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m.

Join Scouting at Steele Creek AME Zion Church, 1500 Shopton Road. Boy Scout and Girl Scout troop meetings are held each Wednesday night at 6:30 p.m. Call 704-523-6552 to register or to obtain additional information.

New Life Outreach is seeking donations for its residential training center in Concord. The program's services are provided at no cost

and helps men with addiction problems. The residence is located at 2216 Kannapolis Highway. The home is in need of appliances, cooking utensils, linens, china, flatware, clothing and cash donations. Donations can be dropped off at Olive Branch Furniture, located at 2603 S. Cannon Blvd. For more information call (704) 701-8783.

Restoration Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ has moved to 220 East Peterson St. off South Tryon Street. The church's phone

number is (704) 523-1441.

Celebrate Ole' Timey Day with the Council of Elders at Clinton Chapel AME Zion Church, located at 1901 Rozzelles Ferry Road, at 4 p.m. for contests, games, reenactments of life after slavery, food from the period and good music.

March 10

Evangelist Jerri Reed, of Living Waters Outreach Ministries. Theme: "Naughty Women of

Please see **FOOD/7B**

