

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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Editor ~ Wade Stanley

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Memories of Tom

Charles Fry

EDITOR'S NOTE: Brother **Tom Dennis** was an evangelist among the churches of Christ for many decades. In addition to his many good works, Tom served as the editor and publisher of *The Gospel Message* for a few years. Paul said of his fellow worker Epaphroditus, "Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem" (**Philippians 2:29**). It is with that spirit that your editor asked Charles Fry to write a brief tribute to Tom.

If you have ever heard Tom Dennis deliver a sermon, you will probably remember his distinctive speaking style. Tom dramatically stressed the points in his messages with highs and lows of tone and volume. He taught the scriptures for decades with vigor and conviction. When Tom left this world on July 14, 2024, he was ready and willing to go to be with the Lord, trusting the message of redemption he had faithfully taught. Tom stayed on course among us for 95 years of life and 75 years of preaching and teaching the good news of Jesus Christ and his church. In his final years of service, Tom was a respected elder of the **church in Nixa**.

Tom was admired for knowing his Bible well enough to speak lessons and cite scriptures from memory, even when he lost his sight for a time due to diabetes. He had been determined to keep on doing the Lord's work when his legs stopped working, and he could no longer drive himself from place to place, as he always persisted despite various challenges through the years from his personal "thorn in the flesh." Tom wrestled with diabetes all the years I knew him and generally prevailed over the difficulties it presented. His long life with diabetes was emblematic of how he lived as a servant of Christ, disciplined and determined, never quitting, and always working through the challenges.

Tom labored for decades as a traveling evangelist. He considered the work he did visiting congregations scattered across the USA not only an opportunity to teach and encourage those churches he visited, but also a broader benefit in keeping churches connected with one another and aware of one another. He was always willing to visit congregations that were struggling or isolated, as well as those that were thriving,

near or far.

In the course of his work as an evangelist, Tom welcomed several young men over a span of years to spend time, often weeks or months at a time, sometimes longer, to travel with him and work alongside him. I myself was a beneficiary of Tom's willingness to open his home and his schedule to young men aspiring to work as evangelists, and I am grateful for his help and endless encouragement. When Tom visited our home congregation early in 1976, the elders conferred with Tom and then proposed to me that my wife and I should travel with Tom that summer, which we did, not really being sure what we were getting into. Tom and his precious wife Anne were very gracious, always hospitable, and accessible. Our time with Tom in those summer months, sometimes along with other young men with similar goals, was a great blessing for us.

Over the years of his labors, Tom led half a dozen tour groups to Israel and Egypt. Many brothers and sisters benefitted from the opportunity to travel together in the lands of the Bible and get some taste of the reality of those ancient places. As was his habit, he did his best to make it easy for the travelers, taking care of details to make the trip as pleasant and burden-free as possible. He shouldered the responsibilities as a shepherd caring for his flock when he led those groups, as he did also while serving as an evangelist and then as an elder when he settled into the church in Nixa, MO.

Shortly after Anne died, my wife and I were in the vicinity of Nixa, and we called Tom to see if we could stop by when we passed through. He was, as always, gracious and hospitable, eager to see us and determined to provide a meal. True to form, not only did he welcome us into his home that afternoon, but when he learned our travel plans, he made sure we could find the church in Pueblo that we intended to visit on Sunday and called ahead to make connections so they would be ready to receive us. That business of helping brethren and congregations make connections and stay in touch was a work that Tom excelled at, a good use of the gifts of grace God gave him for the glory of the Kingdom.

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Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' " "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them." (Revelation 14:13).

The Killer

John Morris

Jeffrey Dahmer drugged and killed 17 men and boys. Before his imprisonment, he came to a point where he was murdering once a week. Driven by a desire to control individuals for his own gratification, Dahmer committed horrifying crimes. I won't relate their details, as Paul's words may well apply: "*For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret*" (**Ephesians 5:14**). But what helped drive Dahmer's desires bears retelling. When asked what motivated him to commit such heinous acts, Dahmer confessed to the FBI in 1992 that, among other things (e.g., heavy drinking), pornography played a part.

Ted Bundy would not have been surprised. Bundy killed at least 28 young women and girls and stated that his own exposure to pornography (first "soft," then eventually violent) had served to fuel his evil thoughts. On the day before his execution, he said to James Dobson: "I've lived in prison for a long time...and I've met a lot of men who were motivated to commit violence just like me. And without exception, every one of them was deeply involved in pornography — deeply influenced by an addiction. There is no question about it. The FBI's own study shows that the most common interest among serial killers is pornography."

Pornography kills. Granted, few of its users will become serial killers. But it kills all the same. It kills respect for other human beings. It kills self-respect. It kills relationships. It kills self-control. It kills the hope of eternal life (**Matthew 5:28; 1 Corinthians 6:9; Hebrews 13:4**). It kills.

And it's a mass killer, to judge from the statistics.

Twelve percent of all internet websites are pornographic. Twenty-five percent of all search engine requests are pornography related. Thirty-seven percent of all internet activity is pornographic. In fact, pornography sites get more visitors each month than Netflix, Amazon, and X (formerly Twitter) combined.

And what do the demographics of these users reveal? That there's a "porndemic," *even among proclaimed Christians*: sixty-four percent of Christian men and 15% of Christian women say they watch porn at least once a month. And in the general population, 57% of teens search out porn at least monthly.

And when is the first exposure occurring? Fifty-one percent of male students and 32% of female students first viewed porn before their teenage years. 12 or before.

The problem of porn has reached staggering proportions. For Christians, it is undeniably a "clear and present danger." For the sake of themselves and those they love, believers must be vigilant (**1 Peter 5:8**) and circumspect (**Ephesians**

5:15). Caution and precaution *must* be exercised.

Is pornography viewing taking place in your home? If you say, "No," *how do you know?* Seventy-one percent of teens hide online behavior from their parents. No family should consider itself out of pornography's reach. Ted Bundy stated: "I think people need to recognize that those of us who have been influenced by...pornographic violence are not some kind of inherent monsters. We are your sons, and we are your husbands....Any pornography can reach out and snatch a kid out of any house today."

What precautions have you taken in your home to protect those you love from pornography? The killer lurks in many corners. Do your children have unfiltered — and, in the case of younger children, *unobserved* — internet access? Do they have such access at their friends' houses? What's on their social media accounts, and those of their friends which they view? What about their phones? Do you know what pictures they are sending and receiving? Have you considered the impact of the pictures filling the pages of magazines and catalogs that are lying around the house, some of which justly qualify as "soft porn"? Is unfiltered television viewable behind closed doors? Can it be viewed when mature family members aren't home? The purveyors of pornography are *aggressively* seeking new customers. They're very interested in your money, not so much in your family's welfare.

These dangers are not imagined. Few children go untouched by pornography in homes where watchful eyes do not prevail. Seventy-nine percent of youth say unwanted exposure to pornography occurs in the home.

And even in homes that are safe, dangers are near. My first exposure occurred just outside my home when my new first-grade friend came to visit. And then, I was introduced to more on the school bus later in grade school. And then again at a church friend's house! And then again at another friend's house. All outside of the home, not far from home, before I ever left home.

And all before the internet.

The opportunities for your children's first exposure are many, readily available and accessible. And that exposure may be so fascinating, so enticing, even addicting. Once exposed to pornography, teens often seek it out again. The dangers of adult exposure are also not to be underestimated.

The time has come — is past, really — that we *must* be countercultural. We must do what others won't if we want different results than they are getting.

Jesus said, "*If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you...*" (**Matthew 5:29**). It is a call to do whatever it takes to cease from sin. What measures could be too extreme to protect, even save, yourself and those you love from "the killer"?

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One Nation Under God

Flint Fenton

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all.

As a teacher I hear these words starting at about 7:52 every morning. In fact, if you attended a public school in America any time from 1892 to the present day, you have probably heard or said those words thousands of times. In the 132 years of the existence of The Pledge of Allegiance, it has ascended to America's top court for ruling at least three times (1942, 1998, 2004) for various rulings concerning its constitutionality. The first challenge predates the most controversial phrase, "under God," which was proposed by President Eisenhower in 1954 and approved by Congress.

There is a persistent myth among American-Christians that our citizenship is placed within a "Christian Nation." The truth is that America has never been a "Christian Nation" (although it has been a historically good nation in which to be a Christian). This distinction is an important one for us to observe. When we believe we are a part of a "Christian Nation," it will have a tendency to disturb us when our nation consistently falls short of biblical standards. We must remember this nation has been a good place to be a Christian (and let us pray that it may continue to be; see **1 Timothy 2:2**), but it is not a "Christian Nation."

One problem with the notion of America being a Christian nation is that the church is incompatible with being merged with any government. When Jesus was on trial, he told Pilate, "My Kingdom is **not of this world**. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." With the exception of his servant Peter (see **John 18:10**), the disciples were not fighting those in power and Peter was corrected for his actions. Jesus was not in competition with Caesar.

If the Kingdom of Christ was of this world, Jesus had the resources, power, and authority to fight back instead of going to the cross. It was actually him going to the cross that transfers Christians out of the kingdom of darkness into his kingdom (**Colossians 1:13**). As followers of Christ, we are a kingdom of priests (see **1 Peter 2:9**, **Revelation 1:6-7**), and this kingdom has no particular location on earth (**Daniel 2:34-35**). Although Christians can be found in any nation, no physical nation is synonymous with the Kingdom of Christ, and no physical nation contains all Christians.

God has given considerable influence to the devil concerning

the nations of this world. While it is true that all authority ultimately comes from God (see **Romans 13:1-2**), God has apparently granted Satan a fair amount of sway over the kingdoms of this world. Satan was able to offer the Kingdoms of this world to Jesus in exchange for worship (**Matthew 4:8-10**). A condition for him being in bondage is so he can no longer deceive the nations (**Revelation 20:1-3**). He is even referred to as "the god of this world" (**ESV 2 Corinthians 4:4**, **John 12:31**). It's important to remember that when we see the nations, we often see Kingdoms under the sway of the devil rather than God, and when we view the Kingdom of God, it is not a nation in the world, nor can it be.

The other issue with considering our nation as a "Christian Nation" is this nation (for the most part) was not established by people who share a faith most of us would recognize. Benjamin Franklin wrote,

As to Jesus of Nazareth, my Opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think the System of Morals and his Religion, as he left them to us, the best the World ever saw or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting Changes, and I have, with most of the present Dissenters in England, some Doubts as to his Divinity...

Even near the end of Franklin's life, he has a somewhat dismissive attitude to the identity of Jesus of Nazareth.

Thomas Jefferson penned the famous introduction to the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson also distilled his own version of the Bible down to the moral teachings of Jesus, eliminating his miracles and claims to divinity.

John Adams, in a letter to Thomas Jefferson, said: "But I believe that the Gospel, in the proper sense of the word, is nothing more than a moral philosophy; and I believe that the whole of it is as much the work of the apostles as it is of Christ himself." While many of the Founding Fathers may have identified as "Christian," they often demonstrated little faith that God was at work in the world where they lived and practiced a form of Enlightenment Era deism.

The purpose of this article is not to disparage the United States of America. There is perhaps no sovereign nation that has provided more opportunity for sowing God's word. However, it's important to keep in mind that America is not God's Nation. The church is God's nation. This is an especially timely message as we approach the selection process in our country. No matter who occupies the oval office, who sits on the Throne of David remains the same. Let us give the appropriate honor to those elected (**Romans 13:7**) and offer up prayers on their behalf (**1 Timothy 2:1-3**), even if they did not receive our vote.

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Please check your expiration date!

Glory to God!

The **Chapel Glen Church of Christ, Indianapolis, IN** rejoiced when **Chelsea Schrader** and **Preston Schrader** received Christ in baptism on July 20.

The church in **Blue Springs, MO** rejoiced when **Nora Garbi** was baptized for the remission of her sins on July 20.

The church in **Excelsior Springs, MO** praised God when **Zoie Morris** was buried with Christ on July 21.

Anna-Larie McWilliams acted upon her faith and became a part of the one body through baptism on July 25. Her mother, **Cynthia**, placed membership with the church in **Carrollton, MO** on July 28.

Josiah Pritchard confessed Jesus as the Son of God and was clothed with Christ in baptism on July 26. **Taylor Ingle** was baptized into Christ the next day, giving the church in **Pleasant Hill, IA** two reasons to glorify God.

The church which meets on **Smart Road, Greenwood, MO**, rejoiced when **William Stanley** was baptized for the remission of his sins on July 28.

August 11 was a special day for the church which meets on **Prince Road, Alton, IL**. **Isaiah Cooper**, **Phoebe Range**, and **Colton Harvey** were united with Jesus in baptism.

Special Meetings



The schedule for the annual **Labor Day Meeting** in **Pleasant Hill, IA** has been released. You can find the schedule using the QR code to the left.

The church in **Braymer, MO** is holding a special one day meeting on September 29. The church has asked **John Morris**, **Flint Fenton**, **Louis Garbi**, and **Wade Stanley** to speak. Please make plans to join them for a morning worship service at 10:00 a.m., lunch at noon, and a second service beginning at 2:00 p.m.

The third annual **Northern Missouri Fall Campout** is **scheduled** for October 4-6 in Unionville, MO. The QR code to the right will lead you to the theme,



topics, schedule, and accommodations for the weekend.

The **Church of Christ in Nixa, MO** has released the schedule for their annual fall meeting. It can be found using the QR code to the right.



2024 Meetings

August 31-September 1.....Pleasant Hill, IA
September 29.....Braymer, MO
October 4-6.....Fall Campout, Unionville, MO
October 19-20.....Nixa, MO

The Gospel Message

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