

BaptistWay Bible Series for Feb. 26: Every day of Jesus' life focused on the cross

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BaptistWay Bible Series for Feb. 26

Every day of Jesus' life focused on the CROSS

• *Luke 23:32-46*

By Lex Robertson

Logsdon Seminary, Abilene

We Americans are pretty pragmatic. What's the "bottom line"? So what? Those are the questions we so often ask and hear. Let us ask those same questions about the life and work of Jesus.

Strickland, longtime head of CLC, dies at age 64

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Strickland, longtime head of CLC, dies at age 64

By Ken Camp

Managing Editor

Phil Strickland believed his mission was to provide a voice for the powerless in the halls of government and speak prophetically to Texas Baptists on moral and ethical issues.

After a long battle with cancer, resultant pneumonia silenced that prophetic voice Feb. 11 at age 64.

Strickland served 38 years with the Baptist General Convention of Texas' Christian Life Commission, including nearly a quarter-century as director of the public policy and moral concerns agency.

"Phil Strickland helped Texas Baptists to remember and be faithful to their heritage, and he consistently declared the high ethical calling of the Christian life," said BGCT Executive Director Charles Wade.

But while Strickland possessed a well-earned public reputation as a knowledgeable political insider, an outspoken advocate for children and a staunch defender of individual religious freedom and other historic mainstream Baptist principles, people with whom he came into contact individually learned he also was "a man of deep personal faith and prayer," Wade noted.

"Everybody who ever spent any time around him grew in their Christian walk, their faith and their response to the gospel," Wade said.

Strickland was a member of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, where he had served as a deacon, Sunday school teacher and chairman of various

committees. Pastor George Mason noted his church lost “a faithful servant,” Baptists lost a strong and prophetic voice, and “the kingdom of God has lost a skillful and passionate moral advocate for the weak and vulnerable of our world.”

Strickland possessed a rare combination of keen intellect and consistent activism, Mason observed.

“He was always eager to learn the next thing, to read the next book, to measure his position on matters against those who could teach him something new. That curiosity bred creativity. His work for justice in the church and in the world was formed by the gospel and informed by the living Christ within him,” he said.

Strickland’s “never-ending quest” to make life better for children and to improve the lives of the overlooked and under-served energized his life, Mason added.

“The gospel was Phil’s preoccupation, and he occupied his life making sure it penetrated not only human hearts but human systems as well,” he said. “The spiritual and the social were always for him interconnected spheres of life. Since Jesus is Lord of all, Phil believed that society could better reflect the Lordship of Christ if Christians would put the gospel into practice.”

Former Texas Speaker of the House Pete Laney called Strickland “an unwavering advocate” for Texans in need.

“His voice in the policy discussions at the State Capitol has made a significant impact on the lives of the state’s most vulnerable citizens—its children,” Laney said. “He has provided strong ethical leadership and is a reminder to us all that government exists to serve the people. His influence will never fully be recognized, and his presence will be deeply missed in Austin.”

Strickland often recalled that he took a leave of absence from a Fort Worth law firm in December 1967 to help Texas Baptists defeat gambling. And since gambling proved to be a perennial problem, he never returned to fulltime private legal practice.

Instead, he became the first—and for many years the only—registered lobbyist in Austin serving a religious denominational body.

Drawing on contacts made and lessons learned as a law school student when he worked as legislative assistant to Texas Lt. Gov. Preston Smith, Strickland lobbied lawmakers to oppose the spread of gambling, resist attempts to chip away at the wall of separation between church and state, and remember the needs of children—particularly the poor, abused or neglected.

To advance those causes, he built coalitions that spanned the political and religious spectrum.

Strickland became founding chairman of Texans Care for Children, the state's first multi-issue child advocacy group, which brought together more than 50 organizations that address the needs of children.

Gov. Mark White appointed him first chairman of the Texas Council on Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention, a council created to oversee and coordinate distribution of the Children's Trust Fund. He also served on a variety of other governmental advisory committees.

Weston Ware, who worked alongside Strickland at the CLC during nine regular sessions of the Texas Legislature and numerous called special sessions, praised his abilities as a coalition-builder.

“Phil not only was a political strategist par excellence, but he also was able to win the hearts and minds of diverse groups, often bringing together the most conservative and most liberal advocates to resolve difficult issues, as

he did with the Religious Freedom Restoration Act,” Ware recalled, pointing to legislation aimed at preventing substantial burdens on the free exercise of religion.

“Few could say ‘no’ when representatives of the religious right and the American Civil Liberties Union or the Texas Freedom Network all came together on the same issues.”

Strickland earned a reputation for integrity, trustworthiness and professionalism among legislators in Austin, and that established credibility for anyone representing the CLC, Ware noted.

“It meant when I went to talk to a legislator, or to give testimony before a legislative committee, that Phil’s good reputation, gained over all the years since 1967, had gone before me,” he said. “It meant that a legislator could trust me, could value what I had to say, could believe that I had done my homework on the issue at hand because I worked for Phil Strickland, and Phil had never let him or her down.”

Nationally, Strickland served on the Inter-religious Task Force on U.S. Food Policy, the Bread for the World board of directors, the Americans United for Separation of Church and State board of trustees and the National Child Abuse Coalition.

He was a past president of the United Way of Texas.

Even though he held some prominent positions, Strickland worked mostly behind the scenes, said James Dunn, his immediate predecessor as director of the Christian Life Commission.

“Texas Baptists as a whole have no idea about the significant contributions Phil Strickland made to Texas Baptist life, to the state of Texas, to children and to a decent and just society,” he said. “His contributions remind me of an iceberg, in which perhaps only one percent of the massive movement is

seen and 99 percent is hidden beneath the surface. That is the way Phil led the fight for truth and righteousness in Texas.”

Dunn, who left the Texas Christian Life Commission to become executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, also noted Strickland’s steadfast commitment to religious liberty and distinctive Baptist beliefs such as the soul competency of every individual.

“In a day when many Baptists seem to have amnesia about our heritage, Phil remained a rock-solid champion of religious freedom and the separation of church and state,” said Dunn, who teaches at Wake Forest Divinity School.

BGCT Executive Director Emeritus Bill Pinson praised Strickland for “his brilliance coupled with his dedication to Christ and his genuine concern for all persons (that) made him extraordinarily successful in Christian ministry.”

Strickland’s influence reached beyond Baptist circles and beyond Texas as he worked with various denominations for causes of social justice, Pinson noted.

“His application of the gospel of Christ to life includes practically every aspect of Christian ethics—family life, race relations, hunger, poverty, neglected children, alcohol abuse, gambling, economics, social justice, religious freedom, separation of church and state,” he said. “His positive impact across a wide spectrum of our world has been enormous. He surely will hear our Lord say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’”

An Abilene native, Strickland studied at Baylor University before transferring to the University of Texas in Austin where he earned both his undergraduate and law degrees.

He also pursued graduate studies at Southwestern Baptist Theological

Seminary.

He is survived by his wife, Carolyn; daughter Delaine Mueller of Tucson, Ariz., her husband, Daniel, and their two children; daughter Shannon Holman of Lonoke, Ark., her husband, Merritt, and their two children; and his mother, Sybil Strickland of Abilene.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.

Wayland to offer degrees in Kenya

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Wayland to offer degrees in Kenya

By Jonathan Petty

Wayland Baptist University

PLAINVIEW—The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools has granted Wayland Baptist University authority to offer an accredited bachelor's degree in religion through its partnership with Kenya Baptist Theological College.

Approval of the degree program comes nearly seven years after Wayland answered a call from the Kenya Baptist Convention to help train pastors.

Pastors of most Baptist churches in Kenya lack formal training or higher education, convention officials noted.

Three Wayland representatives—Vaughn Ross, chairman of the mathematics and sciences division and a former missionary to Kenya; Fred Meeks, chairman of the religion division, and Phil Almes, emeritus mathematics professor—visited Kenya in 1998.

“We went as a result of a true Macedonian call by the Kenya Baptist Convention, saying they have a crisis in leadership training and they needed help,” Ross said.

As a result, Wayland began offering an associate’s degree in 1999, and the first class graduated in 2003. Wayland also began building the resources necessary in Kenya to be accredited to offer a full degree.

Wayland contributed thousands of volumes to the existing library at the Kenya college and established an Internet link with the library on Wayland’s Plainview campus, making thousands more publications available to students. Wayland has also set up a computer lab with 20 student computers.

First Baptist Church of Plainview helped build a dormitory to house visiting students and faculty. Kenya Baptists have also agreed to build an office building to house the Wayland program.

“In order for SACS to approve us, that campus had to meet all the criteria that any campus anywhere else has to meet,” Meeks said. “Be it faculty credentials, library resources, the whole nine yards ... they are not making any exceptions.”

Courses are set up so a group of students may attend class on the campus at Brakenhurst, just outside of Nairobi, for three weeks, four or five times a year. Wayland faculty from the main campus in Plainview, as well as the

school's other campuses, travel to Kenya to teach the classes.

The program is designed so students may attend class for short periods several times a year, then return home to continue work in their churches and communities, Ross explained.

"The students who are taking these courses are already engaged in ministry," he said. "Many of them have been engaged in ministry for a long time. This is a modified residential program so they can be back home, carrying out their pastoral duties and other ministries in their churches."

Wayland will commit about six professors a year to teaching in Kenya.

This is more than an opportunity to educate the people of Kenya; it is an opportunity to fulfill the Great Commission, Meeks said.

"This is pure, indigenous missions," he said. "This is not where we are sending some American to go over there and be a missionary. This is where we are training a native Kenyan to stay in his country and do ministry. These are students who are not just going to be members of their churches in Kenya, they are going to be the leaders and the pastors."

With the help of Texas Baptists, Wayland Baptist University also is underwriting the program. The average family income in Kenya is around \$1,500 a year—not enough to afford a formal college education. By underwriting the program, those who are truly interested in obtaining a religion degree will be able to enroll without the additional financial burden on their families.

"The financial underwriting is being done by churches, foundations and the university at this point," Ross said. "This is a true partnership between Texas Baptists through Wayland and the Kenya Baptist Convention."

The Kenyan convention asked for this program in order to meet the

demands of the growing church in Kenya, he added. While serving as a missionary to Kenya in 1975, Ross said there were about 400 Baptist churches in the whole country. Now there are more than 3,000 with about 100 churches being added each year. Some of the churches have nearly 5,000 members. Last year, 16 Baptist churches were added in Nairobi alone.

“And other denominations are experiencing that same kind of growth and responding in similar ways,” Ross said. “We are on the edge of what will be a different kind of church growth than what we have experienced in missions before. Before, we sent missionaries to do the primary witnessing, church planting and church beginning. This is an enabling ministry and it is going to produce even greater results.”

Individuals or groups interested in supporting the Kenya project are encouraged to contact Wayland’s Office of Advancement at (806) 291-3425.

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Mac Brunson of Dallas likely to follow Vines as pastor of Jacksonville church

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Mac Brunson of Dallas likely to follow Vines as pastor of Jacksonville church

By Greg Warner

Associated Baptist Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP)—Less than a week after bidding farewell to retiring pastor Jerry Vines, First Baptist Church of Jacksonville—one of the country's largest congregations—is expected to nominate Dallas pastor Mac Brunson as his successor.

The Jacksonville church posted a simple announcement on its website Feb. 9: "Please join us this Sunday, Feb. 12, for an announcement from the pulpit committee." Several well-placed Baptists in Jacksonville said Brunson will be announced as the candidate.

"That's what I've been told," state Sen. Stephen Wise, a prominent member of the church, told Associated Baptist Press Feb. 9. "It's pretty well known. I was told in an e-mail this morning."

Brunson already fills one of Christianity's most legendary pulpits—First Baptist Church of Dallas—where W.A. Criswell and George W. Truett rose to fame. But the Dallas church has lost some of its luster—and membership—in recent years. With about 10,000 total members, it is about a third the size of the Jacksonville church, which counts 28,000 members and occupies nine blocks of downtown.

Brunson has long been mentioned as a candidate for the Jacksonville pastorate. He asked the Dallas congregation Jan. 8 to pray for him concerning a major decision about his future. He declined to tell reporters any details at the time.

Brunson was one of the featured speakers at the Jacksonville church's pastors' school in early February. He could not be reached by phone or e-mail Feb. 9. No one was answering the phones at First Baptist of Jacksonville that evening either.

Brunson has been senior pastor of the Dallas congregation since 1999. He also serves as chancellor of Criswell College, the undergraduate school founded by members of the church.

Previously Brunson was pastor of Greenstreet Baptist Church in High Point, N.C. He holds degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and Furman University in Greenville, S.C. He and his wife, Debbie, have three children.

First Baptist has been a fixture in downtown Dallas since 1868. Its facilities now occupy six city blocks. It has an average Sunday school attendance of 3,103 and total annual receipts of \$26 million.

Vines, 68, pastor of the Jacksonville church for 23 years, announced his retirement last May. It became official Feb. 7. Like Criswell, he was president of the Southern Baptist Convention and a pivotal figure in the conservative takeover of the SBC. He also was a trustee chairman at Jerry Falwell's Liberty University.

Paige Patterson, one of the architects of the SBC conservative movement, told the *Florida Times-Union* of Jacksonville: "I wouldn't hesitate to say that Dr. Vines and (late Memphis pastor) Dr. Adrian Rogers were the two most important figures in the conservative movement."

Unity marks Baylor regents' meeting

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Unity marks Baylor regents' meeting

By Ken Camp

Managing Editor

WACO—Unity marked John Lilley's first board meeting with the Baylor University regents since becoming the school's president, both he and outgoing Chairman Will Davis of Austin reported.

"Everything passed unanimously," Davis told reporters after the Feb. 3 meeting—including the confirmation of Jim Turner of Dallas as new board chair and the approval of a new residential complex that will replace a campus landmark. Last year, the regents had named Turner chair-elect. He will assume the chairmanship June 1.

Regents authorized construction of a 700-bed residential complex, approved issuing up to \$63.5 million in bonds to finance the project and agreed to raze the Brooks Hall dormitory to make room for the new development.

The Brooks Village residential facility will cost a projected \$42.8 million, and an 800-car parking garage will cost about \$8.3 million. The balance of the bond issue will finance utility upgrades and property acquisitions.

The complex will include a 120-seat chapel, great hall, dining room, library

and resource center and classrooms.

The residential facility will incorporate some external features of Brooks Hall, including its distinctive entry archway.

Brooks Hall—a dormitory built in 1921 that houses 230 students—will be leveled when students move out after the spring semester, and the university will break ground for the new facility soon afterward, Davis said.

“It will be a little tight for one year,” Lilley acknowledged, but he said existing housing will accommodate current Brooks Hall residents.

In other business, regents approved a resolution of appreciation for Bill Underwood, who served as Baylor’s interim president seven months and more than 15 years on the Baylor Law School faculty. Underwood has been named president-elect of Mercer University in Macon, Ga.

During his tenure as interim president, Underwood “began building bridges and restoring unity that paved the way for the 13th president of Baylor University,” the proclamation said. “Many of his successes are evident in the steps he took to begin the rebuilding of the Baylor community through his openness and transparency that fostered healing for the Baylor family.

“He encouraged others at Baylor to focus less on their differences and more on finding common ground with one another. He sought to calm the waters by creating a renewed sense of shared purpose among alumni, faculty, staff and students.”

At the regents meeting, Lilley also announced the appointments of Reagan Ramsower as vice president for finance and administration and Charles Beckenhauer as general counsel. Both had served in their posts on an interim basis.

Explore the Bible Series for Feb. 19: Assist missionaries in every way possible

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Explore the Bible Series for Feb. 19

Assist missionaries in every way possible

- Romans 15:14-20, 22-25, 28-32

By Trey Turner

Canyon Creek Baptist Church, Temple

There is a word gaining wider usage in church literature. It is coming to the forefront because of people's search for purpose. "Missional" answers the question of how to connect the Great Commission with my own Christian walk.

BaptistWay Bible Series for Feb. 19: Repentance requires leaving something behind

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BaptistWay Bible Series for Feb. 19

Repentance requires leaving something behind

• Luke 19:1-10

By Lex Robertson

Logsdon Seminary, Abilene

At the beginning of every year, people resolve to exercise regularly and maintain healthier diets. This is a good idea. I have made these resolutions myself for several years now. "This will be the year," I tell myself annually.

Family Bible Series for Feb. 19: Push through the doubts to find God's blessing

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Family Bible Series for Feb. 19

Push through the doubts to find God's blessing

• Jeremiah 20:1-13

By Donald Raney

North Carolina paper moves to preserve freedom

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North Carolina paper moves to preserve freedom

By Greg Warner

Associated Baptist Press

CARY, N.C. (ABP)—The *Biblical Recorder*, newspaper of North Carolina Baptists, will choose some of its own directors in a move to preserve its journalistic freedom, the newspaper's leaders said.

Beginning this fall, the 172-year-old newspaper will nominate four people to open seats on its 16-member board, bypassing a convention nominating committee the leaders fear is stacking the board with "agenda-bearing conservatives."

The cost will be significant, however. The *Recorder*, with an annual budget of about \$900,000, will likely lose a total of \$400,000 in funding from the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina over the next four years.

The move—invoking an unusual option in the convention's bylaws—will not negate the newspaper's relationship with the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, which still can elect or reject the newspaper's nominees. But it will give the *Recorder* some insulation against censorship in the theologically diverse but deeply divided convention, its leaders said.

"In most other state conventions where agenda-bearing conservatives have gained control of the state paper's board, they have either muzzled the editor through censorship, or replaced him with someone who could be counted on to promote the party line," said Editor Tony Cartledge. "A free Baptist press was lost in those conventions."

Baptist newspapers and news services have been a frequent battleground

in the Southern Baptist Convention's 27-year-old controversy between fundamentalists and moderates, which now has migrated to the state conventions.

Cartledge informed the convention's committee on nominations in late January of the *Recorder's* December decision. The newspaper's directors took advantage of a 1992 amendment to the convention's governing documents that allow its 12 affiliated agencies to nominate up to 50 percent of its directors. In return, the entity gives up a similar percentage of its funding from the convention during the time those directors serve—four years in the *Recorder's* case.

The newspaper is the first North Carolina agency to exercise the option. But in a similar action, the Baptist Retirement Homes of North Carolina recently voted to start naming its own trustees. Meanwhile, a convention committee is studying its relationships with five affiliated colleges.

"We exercise this option with deep regret, not only for the loss of funding but for the increasing polarization in BSC life that has led us to believe that, for the time being, this decision is necessary in order to safeguard and preserve the charter principles of a free press for the future. We have no agenda for changing our relationship to the BSC," said Joe Babb, chairman of the *Biblical Recorder* board.

Mike Cummings, the convention's acting executive director, said he is not troubled by the *Recorder's* decision. "I hope it doesn't give the impression that the *Recorder* doesn't need the money because I know it does and deserves Cooperative Program support," he said, adding he would prefer the *Recorder* invoke the trustee-nomination provision rather than face more difficult issues the other agencies could face.

Typically, each president of a North Carolina Baptist entity gives the nominating committee a list of potential trustees—generally twice as many

as the number of vacancies—and the committee usually nominates people from that list.

Last year, however, the committee nominated people from those lists for every entity except the *Recorder*, Cartledge said.

“The committee accepted only two of the eight names submitted by the *Recorder* and excluded the other six without providing any rationale for doing so,” he said.

“As for why these good people were excluded, all we have to go on is the chairman’s statement to Conservative Carolina Baptists (Oct. 20) that the committee wanted to put more conservatives on the *Biblical Recorder* board.” Several other agency presidents were surprised when the committee rejected some of their nominees as well. The committee said some were excluded because they belonged to churches affiliated with the Alliance of Baptists, which has an open policy toward homosexuals. But none of the *Recorder’s* excluded nominees were members of Alliance churches, Cartledge said.

If the North Carolina Baptists vote this fall to reject the *Recorder’s* nominees, convention bylaws require their replacements come from the newspaper’s list of other recommended directors.

Cartledge said having conservative directors for the newspaper is not the issue.

“I have recommended a number of conservative candidates in past requests, and they have served well,” he said. “But when presenting potential candidates, I have always told the nominating committee that whether a board member favors conservative or moderate theological positions is not an issue to me. What is important is that the person appreciates traditional Baptist distinctives and is committed to the mission of the *Biblical Recorder*.”

Rejecting nominees without cause could lead the committee to nominate people “antagonistic” to an organization’s mission, Cartledge said.

According to the *Recorder’s* charter, the publication is “to maintain and safeguard the inalienable rights and privileges of a free press, these rights and privileges being consistent with the traditional Baptist emphasis upon the freedom, under Christ, of both the human spirit and Baptist churches.”

“One cannot overestimate the importance of a free press that covers the news objectively rather than serving as a controlling body’s public relations tool,” Babb said. “Often in the face of unwarranted criticism, the *Biblical Recorder* has provided that valuable service to North Carolina Baptists since 1833, and we hope to continue that tradition for many years to come.”

Last year, Louisiana Baptists were asked to dissolve its 119-year-old newspaper, the *Baptist Message*, and merge it into the convention’s public relations department. Messengers to the November state convention defeated the plan after opponents complained the newspaper would lose its journalistic freedom.

In other states, fundamentalists have restricted editorial freedom, elected sympathetic editors or established new publications to compete with the convention’s newspapers.

This article is based on reporting by Tony Cartledge and Steve DeVane of the *Biblical Recorder*.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.

Texas Baptist Forum

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Texas Baptist Forum

Worshipping worship

Baptists, do some discerning. We've left our first love and followed after the things of the world. More of our churches are worshipping the worship, entertaining the eyes, the flesh, and allowing Hollywood to dictate how sinners are drawn into the church.

- [Jump to online-only letters below](#)

Letters are welcomed. Send them to marvknox@baptiststandard.com; 250 words maximum.



“If as a film company we could only work with people who were completely sanctified, then the film would never have been made.”

Producers of End of the Spear

The new movie about American missionaries and tribesmen of Ecuador received criticism from some Christians because lead actor Chad Allen is gay. (ABP)

“Faith in Christ isn’t just about waiting for him to take you to the promised land at the end of time. It’s also about being his steward on Earth during your life until such time.”

Susan Pace Hamill

Tax expert at the University of Alabama law school, who wrote a biblical interpretation of Alabama’s tax code during her studies at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham. (*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution/RNS*)

“A multilingual church is harder than work. Sometimes, it’s pure hell. Everybody walks around offended sometime. (And) I wouldn’t trade it for anything.”

Ramiro Peña

Pastor of Christ the King Baptist Church in Waco, whose composition is 35 percent Anglo, 50 percent Hispanic, 15 percent African-American “and some wonderful Asians,” testifying on behalf of multiracial churches at a workshop sponsored by Mission Waco

We're to go into the world and share the gospel of Jesus Christ. We're not to conform our worship services to worldliness in order to entertain the sinner into heaven or satisfy the converted into a lifestyle of compromise, lazily allowing a Hollywood movie to somehow bring people to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

If Disney has made inroads into the Baptists through a fable of pagan creatures, witches and a four-footed beast and has modern Christian culture going ga-ga over the fact that "its" movie has made it to the big screen and churches can celebrate "Narnia Nights" in the holy place of God, built for a Holy God's worship, then, indeed, we are in the last days.

Cybercolumn by John Duncan: Reflection on tears

February 15, 2006

Posted: 2/04/06

CYBER COLUMN: Reflection on tears

By John Duncan

I'm sitting here under the old oak tree, thinking of a family from Lake Butler, Fla.—Barbara and Terry Mann, who lost five children and two nieces in a fiery car crash when their car was sandwiched between a school

bus and a tractor-trailer. The grandfather of the children grieved so hard that he died when he received the horrible news. Friends lit candles, and flowers with wreaths decorated the town, and memorial services followed. Residents of the town marched the streets and sang “Amazing Grace.”

The parents weep and grieve.

John Duncan

RIGHT OR WRONG?: Friends with a pot of gold

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RIGHT OR WRONG?: Friends with a pot of gold

A friend approached me the other day with what he called “a tremendous money-making opportunity.” To participate, I needed to give him \$1,000 up front, and my part would be to find people who would put up \$1,000 to me. He’s my friend, so how should I respond?

Previous Columns
