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Keystone **BAPTIST**

Official Paper of the Pennsylvania Association of Regular Baptist Churches



The Need for Boundaries

by Pastor Steve Lyon
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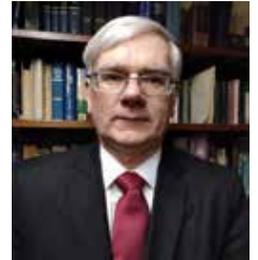
Several years ago, I heard a quote from John Wesley. It was in the context of having a heart to serve others. He said, "Do all the good you can, in all the ways you can, to all the souls you can, in every place you can, at all the times you can, with all the zeal you can, as long as ever you can." Just hearing that quote overwhelmed me. After all, that's what I'd been doing for the past two and a half decades. Is this our lot in life as Christian servants: to go down in a blaze of labor? I know we must be willing to "spend and be spent" (2 Cor. 12:15), but does that mean we need to open ourselves up to being "used and abused?"

I've read so many articles about "pastoral burn out," that I'm burned out! Then there's the Spurgeon quote that many of us are familiar with. He said, "It is our duty and our privilege to exhaust our lives for Jesus. We are not to be living specimens of men in fine

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Are Separatists Survivalists or Soldiers?

by Pastor Randy Boston
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The doctrine of separation is near to the heart of our fundamental Baptist pastors and churches, and I deeply appreciate the struggles of those who have positioned themselves on the frontline of the battle against false doctrine and unbiblical and worldly practices both before and during my lifetime. I am the beneficiary not only of solid teaching about separation but also of firsthand observation of the difficult, often heartbreaking, actions taken for the sake of the purity of the Gospel and of the name and holiness of our precious God and Savior. The cost was often high, but nothing was more valuable to my spiritual mentors than the testimony of Jesus Christ.

In a recent conversation with an evangelist and in an ongoing exchange of ideas with one of our missionaries, I have

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Resolutions?

We often hear of people making resolutions. New Year's resolutions, organizational resolutions and even congressional resolutions. What are they for? And just what

do they do? Well, they are all statements of position and intent. They have the capacity to establish, review and remind self, collective groups and all others of where we are and what to expect because of whom we are in the future.

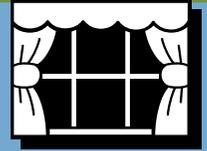
One of the most common resolutions is declared at the beginning of the new year with a determination to lose weight. The resolution usually includes a means of fulfilling the declaration by not eating certain foods and exercising. By the way, this is when there is a flood of advertisements for special diet foods and exercise machines intended to assist in fulfilling the resolution.

The United States Congress seems to pass resolutions from time to time instead of laws. The motivation (usually political) is to obviously make a statement, but it is non-binding – it is not a law.

Spiritual resolutions may include: reading the Bible through in a year and/or spending more time in the prayer closet with the Lord and/or getting more involved in the church and helping wherever I can. It may also be taking time to share the Word of God with others and invite them to accept Christ as their Savior.

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From the Parsonage Window



“Dirty Laundry Parable”

This illustration, written by Thomas S. Monson, is almost as famous as Jesus' parable from Matt. 7:3.

A young couple, Lisa and John, moved into a new neighborhood. One morning while they were eating breakfast, Lisa looked out the window and watched her next-door neighbor hanging out her wash. “That laundry’s not clean!” Lisa exclaimed. “Our neighbor doesn’t know how to get clothes clean!” John looked on but remained silent. Every time her neighbor would hang her wash to dry, Lisa would make the same comments. A few weeks later Lisa was surprised to glance out her window and see nice, clean wash hanging in her neighbor’s yard. She said to her husband, “Look, John—she’s finally learned how to wash correctly! I wonder how she did it.” John replied, “Well, dear, I have the answer for you. You’ll be interested to know that I got up early this morning and washed our windows!”

While few of us hang the wash outside, it was the norm for my grandmother. And she made sure her whites were white and her darks, dark. You could be sure her wash was the cleanest around. I even learned that there was an art to how to hang the articles. The laundry was a source of pride for women of that era. However, the laundry, as you understand, is not the point of the story--the dirty, clouded, windows are.

Someone has said that our eyes are the window by which we judge one another. Jesus said: “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” (Matthew 7:3) Whether or not we know what a mote and beam are, we get the picture. Judging another's actions, life or convictions is wrong.

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preservation, but living *sacrifices*, whose lot is to be consumed; we are to spend and to be consequences of our behavior.

The problem comes when someone interrupts the law of sowing and reaping in another's life. A person drinking or abuse *should* have consequences for the drinker or the abuser. "Correction is (meaning *will be*) grievous unto him that forsaketh the way." (Proverbs 15:10). To rescue people from the natural consequences of their behavior is to render them powerless.

Then, they relate the following situation.

"The parents of a twenty-five-year-old man came to see me with a common request: they wanted me to "fix" their son, Bill. When I asked where Bill was, they answered, "Oh, he didn't want to come."

"Why?" I asked. "Well, he doesn't think he has a problem." they replied. "Maybe he's right" I said, to their surprise. "Tell me about it."

They recited a history of problems that had begun at a very young age. Bill had never been "quite up to snuff" in their eyes. In recent years he had exhibited problems with drugs and an inability to stay in school and find a career. It was apparent that they loved their son very much and were heartbroken over the way he was living. They had tried everything they knew to get him to change and live a responsible life, but all had failed. He was still using drugs, avoiding responsibility, and keeping questionable company. They told me that they had always given him everything he needed. He had plenty of money at school so "he wouldn't have to work and he would have plenty of time for study and social life." When he flunked out of one school, or stopped going to classes, they were more than happy to do everything they could to get him into another school, "where it might be better for him." After they talked for a while, I responded, "I think your son is right. He doesn't have a problem." You could have mistaken their expression for a snapshot: they stared at me in disbelief for a full minute. Finally, the father said, "Did I hear you right? You don't think he has a problem?" "That's correct," I said, "He doesn't have a problem. You do. He can do pretty much whatever he wants, no problem. You pay, you fret, you worry, you plan, you exert energy to keep him going. He doesn't have a problem because you have taken it from him. Those things should be his problem, but as it now stands, they are yours. Would you like for me to help him to have some problems?" *Boundaries Pages 29-30*

I absolutely love that last question: *Would you like for me to help him to have some problems?* I can honestly say I have never made that statement to anyone when counseling. Could it be that in our desire to serve others in ministry, we have instead enabled them in their self-destruction? I fear that I may have done that! It gives the phrase, "giving a drunk a drink" a whole new dimension. Perhaps it's time for us to help people have some problems!

While it is true that when we serve Jesus Christ, our labor is never in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58). But that's regarding our rewards *in heaven*. There ARE TIMES when we need to be concerned that we waste efforts on someone who is not benefitting from our

investment in them. I believe that is what Paul was describing when he said to the Galatians, he was afraid for them, lest he had bestowed upon them “labor in vain. (Gal 4:11).” Because of the bad influences those believers were allowing in their lives (Gal 3:1 & 5:12), Paul’s work in them was in danger of being wasted. He would still have received a reward for his labor, but it would not have been profitable from the perspective of the believers in Galatia. Paul’s efforts were wasted on them because they allowed harmful influences into their lives.

The real issue then is knowing when and how to say “No!” It’s such a small and easy word to pronounce, but too many of us in ministry don’t know how to say it. We end up saying “Yes” to everyone else, and without realizing it, saying “No” to the people who need us the most.

Years ago, when starting out in ministry something happened to me. I loved the fact that I got to minister to people and actually get paid for it. People would come to me seeking my counsel, and then they’d come back for more. Before I knew it, my schedule was being filled so rapidly that one day, I received a phone call. The voice on the other end of the line was familiar. It was a lady who asked if she could set up an appointment with me. The unusual aspect of this request was that this person had never called for an appointment before! In fact, she didn’t need to. She lived in the same house as I did. It was my wife. She saw everyone else calling me up to set appointments. They were easily getting my time. But for her, it was well nigh impossible to spend time with me. This was a major rebuke. I got the point. How sad that pastor’s wives often sit patiently in the wings while their husbands are off gallivanting around the world ministering to everyone but their own families. The Scripture actually addresses this very issue.

“But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.”
In 1 Corinthians 7:32-33

This makes it clear that married people CANNOT give as much attention to ministry as unmarried people because they have to “care for the things of the world, how he may please his wife.” This means if you are “in ministry” you better be spending appropriate time with your mate (and family). I fear that too many of us have neglected this.

Have you put yourself so diligently into ministry that you ended allowing others to control your life? Have you neglected to say “No” when you should have? Have you set up the necessary boundaries in your life so that you are putting first things first? Remember, not every leper was healed (either in Elisha’s day or Jesus’ day) Luke 4:27. May God give us wisdom to set parameters and learn when and how to appropriately deny some things to some people!

DATES TO REMEMBER

March 27-28, 2020
Youth Retreat & Talents
for Christ
Calvary Baptist Church,
Bloomsburg, PA

See parbc.org for coming details.



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Spring Conference - April 20-21, 2020
First Baptist Church of Ogden, Boothwyn
Hosts: Pastor Dan Hicks and Congregation
Special Speaker: Dr. Marty Marriott
Maranatha Baptist University

Fall Conference - September 14-16, 2020
Calvary Baptist Church, Jersey Shore
Hosts: Pastor Jeff Howell & Congregation

Future Dates for Conferences are on our website parbc.org

Churches Searching for a Pastor

1st Baptist Church--Corry
Garden Heights Baptist Church--Erie
Grace Baptist Church--Hazleton
First Baptist Church--Roulette
Tidioute Baptist Church – Tidioute
Calvary Baptist Church – Union City
Worthington Baptist Church – Worthington



Thank You

Thank you so very, very much for the Christmas gift of money. It was a tremendous encouragement to Judy and me. Your prayers, support, gifts, friendship and love are a great blessing to our hearts. To all the churches of the PARBC we thank you for your wonderful gesture of love.

In Christ's grace.

The Connors

TALENTS FOR CHRIST

COMPETITION CATEGORIES

MARCH 27-28, 2020

- Extemporaneous Writing
- Bible Knowledge: Old & New Testament
- Art: 2-Dimensional, 3-Dimensional
- Photography
- Home Economics: Baking, Needlework/Handiwork, Sewing
- Bible Quizzing Team
- Vocal
 - Male & Female Solos
 - Large & Small Groups
- Instrumental*
 - Brass: Cornet, Trumpet, French Horn, Trombone, Baritone, Tuba, Sousaphone
 - Strings: Violin, Viola, Cello, Bass, Classical Guitar, Folk Strings
 - Woodwinds: Bassoon, Oboe, Clarinet, Bass Clarinet, Alto Saxophone, Tenor Saxophone, Flute
 - Piano
 - Large & Small Group
- Speech
 - Oral Interpretation
 - Public Speaking: Male & Female
 - Visualized Bible Teaching
 - Puppetry
 - Digital Media
 - Digital Presentation

**Exceptions can be made to these categories and instruments with prior approval from the Talents for Christ Committee.*

DEADLINE FOR REGISTRATION IS MARCH 6, 2020

shared my desire that our church would be more faithfully and intentionally reaching into our community to make a broader and more powerful impact for Christ and for the gospel. In the course of our conversation, the observation was made that the broad evangelical camp is often more enthusiastically reaching into their community than we as fundamentalists. While we may be tempted to dismiss their motives and message as being either doctrinally compromising for the sake of numerical impact or more socially oriented than gospel-minded, our critical eye would do well to consider if we as fundamentalists have a tendency to withdraw to the security within our church walls under the guise of or misapplication of the doctrine of separation. We seem to hope that somehow unbelievers will find their way into our church to hear the gospel. In a time when a growing number of those who profess Christ have difficulty making attending church a priority, is it reasonable to expect that the men for whom we are to be fishing are going to “jump into the boat”?

There is a tension in life and ministry today caused by diametrically opposed viewpoints and practices of churches and individual Christians regarding the Scriptural instruction on the believer’s relationship to the world. Pulling one end of the tug-of-war rope is the current trend of worldly practices camouflaged in the doctrine of cultural relevance and attracting the lost. Reacting at the other end, are those whose practice of “separation” causes them to withdraw from contact with the world to the point of isolation. Both cause this separatist pastor concern.

The first is a frequent source of pressure for our fundamental churches as we desire to draw and maintain clear lines of separation from doctrinal error and ungodly practices in today’s religious culture to attract people to the beautiful relevance of Christ rather than to our style. The trend of compromising doctrine and dressing up the Gospel and Christians to look and sound like the ungodly world around us as a pragmatic approach to unity and evangelism is not only a distortion of the life-changing power of the Gospel, but is also in glaring defiance of the biblical call for distinctive Christian living and purity of the body of Christ. This article, however, purposes to look at those who are tempted to join the combatants pulling on the other end of the tug-of-war with truth. It is a more subtle deviation from our calling of the Great Commission to make new disciples of Christ. I wonder to what extent has our proper concern for biblical separation morphed into an unbiblical practice of isolationism which leads to the neglect of the task entrusted to us by our risen Savior?

For clarification, I offer the following definitions for terms utilized in this article. *Separation* is the doctrine of personal and ecclesiastical holiness - drawing lines of distinction in doctrine, association, and conduct - that distinguishes biblical Christian beliefs and practices from the beliefs and practices driven by the desires of the world. *Isolationism* should be understood to refer to the practice of keeping ourselves engaged in the internal workings of the church while avoiding - consciously or subconsciously - interaction with the unsaved world, abandoning those who live around us, leaving them isolated from the truth they so desperately need. The world is used in the limited sense of the community of unbelievers in the specific geographic area surrounding our local church as a subset of the ungodly world system.

The Scriptural teaching is that those unbelievers live as part of an increasingly ungodly world system that Vine properly describes as “in alienation from and in opposition to God.” The recent vandalism on a church structure in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania serves as a timely reminder that whether the attacks are physical or philosophical, our churches stand in the middle of enemy territory. Do we retreat to our safe bunker or take the battle to the enemy as loyal and thoroughly equipped soldiers, unentangled from the cares of this world (II Timothy 2:3,4)? We must examine whether we, as fundamentalists, have withdrawn from the world in an irresponsible manner that is contrary to the desire of the Lord Jesus expressed in His prayer for His disciples in John 17:15-18.

Jesus prayed that His disciples and those that would believe through them would not be taken out of the world, but that they would be set apart from the evil of the world through their confidence in and their adherence to the truth of God’s Word. They were sent into the world to be bold testimonies of the truth of the Gospel. They were truly to be in the world but not of the world. The concept of being in the world as proclaimers of the Truth seems to be echoed in I Corinthians 5, “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, extortioners, or with idolaters; **for then must ye needs go out of the world** “(vv 9-11). The issue of separating from the disciplined church member was not to be confused with the impossible task avoiding interactions with all “sinners.”

Our understanding of the relationship of the followers of Christ to the world is further expanded in I John 2:15-17. We are not to love the world. The godless world system is not to capture our desires through its appeals to our flesh, our eyes, and our pride. As new creatures in Christ, we are to be motivated by His love for us to love Him supremely and to desire that our lives glorify Him through holy living and faithful service. The tension between the prayer of the Lord Jesus and the instruction of I John 2 and the many passages about separation is imaginary. There are two concepts that are not contrary, but complementary. Doctrinal purity and clarity in holiness in practice are the basis for separation, not isolation.

As we witness the breakdown of American culture, there is a temptation to treat our churches as safe havens to express our “trust” in our God while trying to avoid confronting sin and ungodliness which we fear may cause problems outside of the walls of the church. As fundamentalists, our doctrine of separation can be misused as justification for failing to engage those around us with the truth of the Gospel. The temptation to isolate is compounded by the resources available on-line today. How many of us did all our Christmas shopping on-line? I enjoy the convenience of on-line shopping, and I am not suggesting this is sinful, but at a time where Christ’s birth finds its way into the consciousness of many around us, how many opportunities to speak person-to-person of Christ have been snatched away as we all sit in our homes doing the things that used to bring us in contact with the community of the unsaved. We cannot turn the clock back, but have we realized the loss and intentionally considered new opportunities to challenge the unsaved around us?

There is a clear Biblical command for Christians to assemble, fellowship together, and minister to one another. But is there a misunderstanding of or resistance in our current mindset to the purpose for the assembling of the church on the Lord's Day and the mission of the church to carry on the ongoing work of Christ? Biblically, we gather as a church body composed of individual believers and disciples of Christ to be encouraged, empowered, and equipped to be engaged in making an impact for Christ in our community through godly living and witness. We encourage one another in joining in worship and prayer, reminding each other of the greatness of God and His personal care for us. We are equipped through the study of God's Word and the testimonies and examples of maturing Christians. As we read and study Scripture, we are reminded of truths that call us to faithful living and service through the power of a resurrected Savior. We are empowered by responding in obedience to the Spirit of God as He works through the Word to make us more like Christ. Is our expectation that we will leave our Sunday service more encouraged, spiritually empowered, and better equipped to make an impact for the name of Christ or do we take the "good service" and "good sermon" and tuck it away for safe-keeping until we come together again?

The success of a Bible-preaching church cannot be measured by the number of congregants in the pews or the size of the offering or the busy-ness of its schedule. The church that is to be passionately and compassionately rescuing souls on the path to the gates of hell must have an impact that carries over into daily life and interactions outside the church's meeting (Matthew 16:18). We are instructed both to gather and to go. Through godly living and Christ-like interactions with our neighbors and friends, others should be caused to consider their relationship with the Lord through seeing and hearing of the wonderful working of our Savior who has changed our lives and filled them with eternal purpose. The message will not be popular or even respected, but it must be delivered by clean, separated vessels to our community.

We should not abandon our Biblical and historical position of separation by conforming to the world to attract the world. We should not personally blur lines and standards of association and behavior in the name of being a witness for Christ. Christians must not yoke themselves with unbelievers or disobedient believers in spiritual partnerships. These practices undermine the understanding of the holiness of God that is fundamental to the Gospel message. I am firmly convinced that the Scriptural practice of separation enhances rather than hinders the impact of the local church in its community. I do not believe, as some do, that our "hardline" positions are the cause of the decline of the church. Instead, I would suggest that our timid retreat out of the world is to blame. We must be holy, but we may not be isolationists. My concern is that we, as individuals and as bodies of believers, deliberately seek and buy up opportunities to reach into our communities to confront them with the Gospel of Christ. Will we be survivalists hunkered down in our bunker or will we be soldiers battling with and for the truth on the frontline of the battle?

The Pennsylvania Association of Regular Baptist Churches (PARBC) has taken the opportunity at our Spring and Fall Conferences to present resolutions to the messengers assembled from our churches. The purpose of our resolutions is to educate, clarify, help and encourage the fellowship of the PARBC. Those resolutions have addressed many different issues of the day. Some of the subjects have been on Biblical Inspiration and other doctrines of the faith. Some others have been music in the church, Biblical Marriage, homosexuality, social media, racism and many others. They can be found on the parbc.org website.

This last September at our Fall Conference held at Open Door Baptist Church of Greensburg, PA, the PARBC considered the following resolutions dealing with “Discipleship” and the other “Supporting the Purpose and Value of a Baptist Church Association.” I hope you will appreciate what was expressed and adopted by the messengers at the conference.

Resolution Regarding Discipleship

“WHEREAS the Great Commission as Jesus Christ’s command given to His disciples and His first word to the early church (Matthew 28:18–20), defining the Great Commission’s essence as “teach all nations” (i.e. make disciples) by going to lost people with the gospel of Christ; by baptizing new believers, identifying them publicly with Christ and other disciples in a local church; and where they can be taught to obey the commandments of Jesus Christ, and

WHEREAS many churches are failing to reach their communities with the gospel, contributing to the ignorance of the Bible and God’s only plan of salvation, as well as leaving many vulnerable to cults, compromises and heretical teachings that fail to address the true needs of forgiveness of sins, true righteousness and the blessed hope found only in Jesus Christ, and

WHEREAS while we recognize the multiplying cultures and origins now populating the communities around our churches, we cannot, and will not, change the gospel message and God’s plan of salvation in order to please men but confidently give the gospel message to any and all who will hear and believe, and

WHEREAS true disciples are not only believers in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior but are also indwelt and led by the Holy Spirit to be faithful witnesses for Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8), and

WHEREAS believers are commanded to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (II Peter 3:18; Colossians 1:28), and

WHEREAS Jesus Christ gave men empowered to serve the church as pastor-teachers to equip the saints for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11–16), enabling believers to fulfill the command of making disciples of Jesus Christ,

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that we the messengers of the Pennsylvania Association of Regular Baptist Churches assembled this September 16-18, 2019, at Open Door Baptist Church, Greensburg, Pennsylvania, do hereby acknowledge the weakness of evangelistic fervor resulting from failure to teach and exemplify the commands of Scripture to raise up disciples of Jesus Christ.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we honor our Savior by fulfilling His Great Commission, emphasizing the primacy in the church by preaching, teaching, and putting into practice the whole counsel of God, reflecting our heritage as Regular Baptists (Acts 20:26–32); and we urge all under-shepherds of Christ to lead their churches to make disciples through personal evangelism, by systematic instruction of the Word of God and by daily obedience to His Word (I Peter 5:3; II Timothy 2:2).

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that we exhort pastors to review all church ministries to affirm that discipleship is included and promoted in obedience to Jesus Christ’s command (Matthew 28:19-20) and to be thankful for His abiding presence to enable us to do His will by making disciples of all nations.”

A Resolution Supporting the Purpose and Value of Baptist Church Associations

“**Whereas** Baptists have had a long history of forming voluntary associations between churches, dating back at least to 1654, with the formation of the Western Association in Somerset, England, and more recently and closer to home, the Philadelphia Baptist Association, organized in 1707, demonstrating that forming associations of Baptist churches was a growing practice following after the example of the first century churches interactions with one another in the exchange of apostolic epistles and the mutual encouragement of believers (II Corinthians 8:1) as recorded in the New Testament, and

Whereas a number of independent Baptist pastors in Pennsylvania met together to consider the formation of an Association in 1949, setting the groundwork for what became the Pennsylvania Association of Regular Baptist Churches, which has continued to serve fellowshiping churches from 1949 to the present, and

Whereas associations have served well to support local Baptist church ministries in the fulfillment of the Great Commission, by accomplishing works together with other Baptist churches that a single Baptist church might not be able to carry out on its own, such as sharing support of missionaries, starting new Baptist churches, conducting ordination examinations, helping struggling churches, developing camp ministries, ministry training and addressing issues that would undermine the cause of Christ with a larger, united voice to those in authority, all of which have been the roles served by Baptist Church Associations for centuries, and

Whereas, associationalism is a voluntary relationship between churches seeking to be in fellowship with an Association and the messengers of the churches within the Association voting upon their application, and

Whereas an association or its leaders cannot exercise authority over affiliated churches except to remove a church from fellowship for not abiding by the doctrinal statement of the association,

Be It Therefore Resolved that we, the messengers of the Pennsylvania Association of Regular Baptist Churches assembled this September 16-18, 2019, at Open Door Bap-

tist Church in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, do hereby praise and thank the Lord for the inherited wisdom to form associations of Baptist Churches to better lead the people in every affiliated church in edification, evangelism and service whether by conferences, publications, inter-church activities, starting new Baptist churches, helping with building programs or by support in times of damage and loss. We have a cause that is greater than any one of our ministries. Baptist Distinctives are being challenged more than ever. May the Lord find us faithful and help us to stand together more than ever before, as we withstand the evils of our day.”

So, you see, resolutions can be very effective in establishing a position, making a point and even encouraging one to consider commitment and involvement in an issue. I hope you will visit the PARBC website (parbc.org) and peruse the resolutions posted. It will help you to better understand just where this association stands on issues of the day with a biblical basis and reasoning.

Laundry, Continued

If we go back to the illustration, I noticed some things:.

1. The young couple had not met their neighbor.
2. The criticism went on for more than one wash.
3. The criticism wasn't really about laundry.
4. She criticized from behind closed doors. Who else did she share her concern with?

Maybe these conjectures sound silly, but so often the window we look through is figuratively clouded and smeared by elevating ourselves.

One of the things that we, so all too often today, is to isolate ourselves from neighbors. We're afraid to get to know people. You could say, we refuse to wash our windows.

I've thought a lot about neighbors lately and especially one special neighbor. We lived in a townhome development several years ago. Only a wall divided our homes. A couple moved in two doors down from us on a cold, stormy night. My husband went over to see if we could help them in any way. They were mostly moved in by then but it gave us chance to meet them. From then on, we got to know them little by little and a special friendship happened. Little did we know how the Lord would use that friendship.

One cold December night, a knock came to our door. It was a family member coming to tell us that our friend's husband had died quite suddenly from a heart attack. We had often invited them to church that but it never

seemed to happen. And, now they had no church to turn to, only us. Our church rallied around these people that they didn't know with gift cards, food and a pastor conducted a memorial service for our friend's husband.

I tell you this not to make us look good. We weren't. My windows aren't always clean either and this couple didn't look, talk or act like us at all. It would have been easy to keep our distance.

Ultimately, after the husband died, she began coming every night for coffee and comfort. Then, she began coming to church with us, but only after asking if she'd be an embarrassment to be seen with me. Her best clothes were her jeans and her tattoos were many. And, yes, I had some people ask, "Who was that?" I smiled and said, "Someone very special that the Lord brought into our life."

In total, Jesus said: 1 Judge not, that ye be not judged. 2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. 3 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

I can only add: The laundry story is not really a parable about laundry, it's about keeping our windows clean. Clean windows allow us to see clearly and judge less by what we "think" we see.