

Times of Services

Sunday

9:00 a.m. Worship
10:00 a.m. Bible Study
11:00 a. m. Worship

Wednesday

7:00 p.m. Bible Study

Other Study and Worship Opportunities

- 2nd Sunday 2:00 p.m. Trinity Care Home Worship Service
- 2nd Saturday 6:30 a.m. Men's Bible Study on Leadership –Ranch House Restaurant
- 3rd Sunday Neighborhood Bible Study on James 6:00 p.m. (TBA)
- Young Bible Scholars monthly meeting (TBA)

News and Notes

- **Home Bound Members:** Mike Butler, Eula Mae Harliss
- **Limited Health:** Joyce Manasco, Willena Woods, Wade & Doris McCrary
- **Baptism** – We rejoice with the angels and saints as we welcome our new sister in Christ, Caroline Cote!
- **Others to remember:** Marion Butler, Steve Coburn, April Green, Kyle Green, Cory Green, Marilyn Lavender, Jim Ratcliff, David Allen Williams, Doris Young (Lynette Coburn's mother), Eldon Barham, Elbert and Virginia Logan, Leo Briggs, grandson of Dan & Carol Briggs, Sara Williams, mother of Ed Williams, and Vickie Stevens (wife of Tim Stevens).
- **Prayer Requests:** The Jerry Green family. Mike Butler is battling lung cancer. Jimmy Logan, Elbert Logan's brother, has late stage cancer. Willena Woods was hospitalized in May and continues to have health problems. Leo Briggs, grandson of Dan and Carol Briggs, will be facing more surgery.
- **Deaths** – Jim King, brother in-law to Vallie Gallop, passed away May 6. Lindsey Villamor's aunt passed away unexpectedly in mid-May.

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East Columbus Bulletin

Blackberries

Our mom raised us on blackberry jelly and wild plums, and it is blackberry season just now, which brings back so many memories of blackberry picking. That such a wonderful berry could grow wild and make such wonderful cobblers is diminished by several factors which seem to have come directly from the Garden of Eden after the Fall.

First, my mom's warning to "watch for snakes" still reverberates in my ears. She explained that snakes would coil up even on the vine waiting for birds to come after the berries, but that the snakes might just bite us instead of the birds. My mother's diligent training brought such carefulness in us, and it has translated over into a healthy respect for another kind of snake - Satan.

"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor 11:3)

My Uncle James was once bitten by a copperhead, and my Uncle Woodroe carried him out from deep in the woods for help. By simple observation my folks knew what damage a snake can do. Christians should look around at the harm done by Satan, and learn. Some folks have snakes living in the houses with them, and some folks invite the devil to be their best friend - they are entertained by him on the TV, they let him sing to them, and they pick out friends from the devil's camp.

Alcoholism, broken families, lost careers, compromised health, broken promises, injustice, abuse, and perversion are the results of sin. These things alone should move a reasonable person to avoid sin, and we have not even mentioned eternal separation from God.

Imagine a world without the things listed above. It is only possible if everyone is "watching for snakes."

We even trained our dogs to sniff out and kill snakes - old Blackie was especially good at it. Christians must get into the fight against sin, training their senses and their response against it. (Heb 5:12-14) It is the enemy.

My brothers once made blackberry wine, which I thought tasted pretty good, but I never allowed myself to like it too much because of my parents' warnings. Noah and Lot are examples of godly men who fell into its allure.

One of the most ingrained memory verses for me is Proverbs 20:1: "*Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.*" Many years ago Jackie Richardson had me simply read that verse aloud in one of those discussions when the devil had an advocate on the subject.

Blackberries made into wine is a good example of one of the Lord's good blessings turned into something evil. I am told that Sudafed, good for sinus colds, is used in the manufacture of methamphetamine. Kids, our most precious human resource, are exploited by scum in the kiddy-porn business. Money is turned into "filthy lucre" by covetous people. And even God-fearing people are exploited by false teachers. (II Pet 2:1-3)

The devil is more than a snake. He is a sinister perverter of God's good blessings. "*Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.*" (Prov 23:31-32)

Many blackberry pickers are deterred by the briars brought about by the curse of God to punish sin. (Gen 3:17-19) Briars, thorns, and thistles are not the only bad brought about by sin, as mentioned above; however, they should be reminders of the consequences of not listening to the Lord.

Our generation is big on giving scientific or sociological explanation for the evils of the world, but school learning is not required to see that adultery, lying, stealing, and violence are sticky and thorny activities. Perhaps genetic engineers can make blackberries without the briars, but making sinful activities without God's wrath is something beyond our control.

"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience." (Col 3:5-6)

If we're careful, blackberries can be gotten without getting pricked, and with similar care, God's other blessings can be had without the thorny consequences of sin. If our conscience is not pricked by the

Word, perhaps our physical senses will remind us that God is watching.

Disregarding the snakes, briars, and chiggers, there is work involved with blackberry picking, and it usually brings sweat to the brow. (Gen 3:19) Like salvation, wild blackberries are free for the taking, but they will only be had by those who are willing to work for them.

The simplicity of this point is scriptural and plain. Salvation is free for everyone and anyone. "*And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*" (Rev 22:17. See also Rom 5:15-18.) As blackberries are provided by God's grace and generosity, so is eternal salvation. Moreover, just as blackberries will go to waste when folks are too lazy to pick them, so will salvation be lost to those who will not do their part in their salvation. (Heb 11:6)

"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." (Phili 2:12)

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Cor 15:58)

Men and women are required to obey the gospel as those in the book of Acts obeyed the gospel; they are required to worship God in an acceptable way (I Cor 11); they are required to turn their backs on fleshly lusts (Gal 5:19-22); they are required to maintain good works (Tit 3:8); and so forth.

Now, this is not salvation by works. Jesus paid the price (Rom 5:8-9), but He expects us to do our part, just as in picking blackberries. I would hope that if your neighbor offers you blackberries you would understand that you will have to pick them - not that he would bring them to your door step, already picked, cleaned, and maybe even made into a cobbler. So it is with God. He gives us the opportunities, the raw materials, and the instructions. The "labor" "obedience," "work" and "faithfulness" are up to us.

Now, if you thought this article was about that little cell phone device called a Blackberry, please consider that the PDA will be forgotten in just a few years, but God's blackberries will continue right on, along with the lessons they teach. And the next time you eat a blackberry cobbler or blackberry jam, consider it a reminder of the spiritual struggles that are going on in the world, in your life, and in the lives of others. Then take a stand for the Lord.

George Hutto