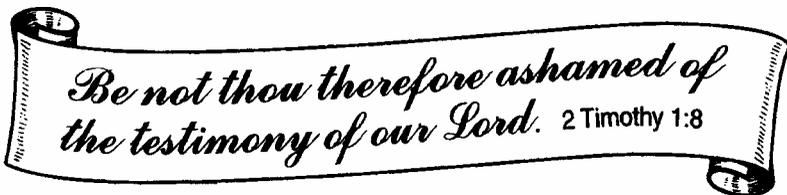


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Editorial.

Keeping Faith in Absolutes

Our generation has seen many changes and more are likely in store. In this climate we need bedrock faith in the absolutes that never have changed and never will change. "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89). Although many today deny that absolutes exist, we believe God. "I am the LORD, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:5).

A century of advancements and inventions has given mankind a mirage of progress. Change has been associated so much with progress that politicians use the cliché to appeal to voters. Even the departure from Christian ethics and restraints has deceptively been cast as liberation. The constant cycle of change in practical things has contributed to the mentality that even moral standards are relative and changeable.

The church has not come through these times without scars. The constant influx of inventions has challenged the church to consistently avoid the world's lusts and vices. Before one innovation is sufficiently analyzed, there is an attack from a new front. Satan has been busy in all ages, but the bombardment of change, coupled with the deception of materialism in our time, seems climactic.

It is a war many have lost. Some inventions like the television and the radio have proven spiritually deadly to those who accepted them. Other inventions like the automobile, computer, fax, cell phone, and various forms of recorded media continue to test our resolve to avoid their pitfalls.

The cycle of warning, cautious testing, and at times accepting some forms of technology may take its toll on our alertness. Some have concluded that it is useless to take any position. Others see the casualties of careless acceptance and are inclined to avoid all change. These times test our faith in an enduring invincible church. "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). The success of our church will hinge on the dedication of each member to collectively guard faith in the absolutes that never will change.

To preserve faith in absolutes, we must keep our teaching principle-based. The truth of God's Word is timeless. It will meet the need of every generation. Every area of practice must be reinforced with the authority of the Scriptures. The applications that our forefathers embraced and that weathered the test of time were based on principle. Knowledge of history will help us to make the connection.

To preserve faith in absolutes, we must differentiate between absolutes and applications. If we resort to teaching our applications as absolutes, we are in danger of destroying faith in God's absolutes. Although church positions are binding, they never take precedence over "the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith" (Matthew 23:23). Administrative direction should inspire and reinforce practical, consistent obedience to the Word. A firm grip on God's Word will also give direction in drawing fellowship lines and relating to others where their application differs from ours. We can appreciate other groups that are conserving the same principles that we treasure.

To preserve faith in absolutes, we must conserve time-proven applications. Stability in administration and practice is an aid in nurturing faith in the principles of Scripture. For example, tampering with the headship veiling style and size destroys faith in the necessity of its observance. Subtle changes to our uniform dress patterns will deteriorate conviction in the importance of separation from the world. Many have lost their moorings and have drifted to destruction when they spurned the security of regulated church life.

To preserve faith in absolutes, we must consistently practice the truth. A profession of faith without a consistent practice will destroy faith. Powerful preaching coupled with lax administration is a recipe for apostasy. Faith in absolutes will encourage us to draw lines for our day even though we do not know the future. Positions that we form by God's grace and aid will become the precedent for the next generation.

We must not allow the changing issues to shake our faith in God's unchanging absolutes. Jesus promised us, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:20). The grace of God for His saints will be magnified in this captivating theater of time. Satan intends to wear out the saints. God has determined to glorify His elect (Matthew 24:22, 31).



Fat Hearts and Heavy Ears.

"Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (Isaiah 6:10).

Dull or unresponsive hearts and heavy ears result from a willful rejection of God's message. This could be our experience, not only by willful rejection but also by default and neglect. We face the danger of complacency and lukewarmness as we are bombarded with many pressures and influences that bear upon our daily lives. What are some causes or indications of fat hearts and heavy ears?

Many of us are exposed to the world on a daily basis. If we, like Israel, begin to enjoy the ways of those around us, they will draw us away from God. If we begin to adopt an antiauthority spirit or a casual approach to life or a desire for fun, our hearts will be dull and unresponsive to the things of God. The Bible is clear "that the friendship of the world is enmity with God." May we delight ourselves in God's Word and expose ourselves to the influence of the saints lest any of us "be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

We can easily be overcharged with the comforts and cares of this life. Many in the world only dream of the financial opportunities and comfortable lifestyles we enjoy. Are we using these blessings to provide for our needs and to give, or are we wasting them on pleasure that distracts from the true values? Overindulgence with convenience and abundance will make us fat and rob us of our hunger and thirst for the Word of God. We should also beware of the snare of heavy debt and the stifling effect of undue financial stress.

We must be careful that our busy lives and full schedules do not dull our relationship with God. Are we alert in worship services? Is the Word of God fresh and meaningful? Are we taking time for prayer and intercession? God wants our love and devotion before our service.

Parents can become so busy even with legitimate things or so preoccupied with their own problems that their ears become heavy to the needs of their children. Meeting our children's material needs is not enough. They need personal attention from both father and mother. Do we take time to answer their questions, to work and play with them, and simply to talk? We can never do enough kingdom work to compensate for neglect in training our children and guiding our youth. The testimony and the influence that is left

when parents raise a faithful family without a generation gap is beyond estimation.

Fascination with technology such as cell phones and computers can needlessly consume many hours of valuable time. Detrimental communication may dull our ears to truth we should heed. Are we taking our church's guidelines as mere suggestions, or are we willingly accepting and following their direction? Our response to our brethren's concerns reveals the condition of our hearts.

Youth who are more concerned about their peers' opinions than the direction given by parents and church leaders are infected with this very problem of fat hearts and heavy ears. Rehoboam forsook the counsel of the old men and listened to the unwise counsel of his peers. As a result the kingdom was divided. Similar disastrous results will accompany willful resistance to the voice of experience today. Instead, may we all lend positive peer pressure by provoking one another "unto love and good works"

Church leaders face many demands and pressures. No doubt, at times they also face the danger of dullness and heavy ears that may cause them to neglect the needs of their people. The abundance of needs may become discouraging and cause battle weariness. Sometimes dullness is indicated by a tendency toward tolerance.

Could it be that in our churches there is an increased emphasis on getting along and reaching out at the expense of discipleship, self-denial, and decisive church discipline? Why is it that in some of our congregations, things such as casual dress, unacceptable hairstyles, and questionable young people's activities at times appear to be slipping through?

May God bless our leaders with strength and a burden to continue sounding forth the clarion call to vibrant Christian living and discipleship. May they take courage and continue to deal lovingly and decisively with those who deviate from our agreed-upon church standards. May we as laity obey and support our leaders so we can continue to enjoy God's blessing.

God has blessed us abundantly with a concerned spiritual brotherhood. Perhaps we face a subtle tendency to relax and feel we have nearly attained as a group. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion" (Amos 6:1). We should appreciate what we have but remember that it could easily be lost. If we want to know what the church will be like in thirty years, we should observe the caliber of our young people and young families. Are they catching the same vision for a conservative, spiritual brotherhood, or has a generation gap developed? Spiritual drift can happen without us realizing it. Each member must understand the importance of staying back from the

edges of church life and finding fulfillment at the center. We must each sense our personal responsibility to put our shoulder to the wheel and diligently labor in God's kingdom so that the church will be without spot or wrinkle when our Lord returns.

May we not be found guilty of having fat, dull hearts and heavy ears. As we are alert and hear, we will "bring forth fruit with patience."

Brother Virgil



Minutes of the Conferring Fellowship Meeting

April 8, 2010 – edited.

Brother James served as moderator for the morning session. He opened the meeting by reminding the group of God's goodness and gifts. Brother Philip led the singing for this session. We sang two opening songs: "Fresh From the Throne of Glory" and "Hail to the Brightness."

Brother Leon then led the devotional meditation, reading Titus 2. We are responsible to live godly lives. He noted that this includes speech. The counsel we give needs to be sound in doctrine, and sometimes will be in the form of rebuke. Our speech needs to be plain as well as pure, without idle words. Godly living also involves character and conduct. We are to be "in behaviour as becometh holiness." This means being discreet and having good work habits. We need to be trustworthy. As God's children, we have a different outlook and goal because of our hope for the future. He led in prayer.

The first message of the morning was brought by Brother James. He spoke on The Offense of the Cross, a subject of his own choosing. He referred to Galatians 5:11; 6:12-14. The apostle Paul experienced harsh persecution because of the hostility of the Jews toward the teaching of the Gospel. Had Paul compromised and taught circumcision side by side with the Gospel, he might have avoided persecution. In our situation today, the cross does not seem very offensive. He discussed the subject in three areas.

I. What makes the cross offensive?

A. The simplicity of the cross offends many. To some it is a stumbling block and to others it is foolishness, but to us it is salvation. The cross is beneath the dignity of the worldly-wise, and faith to them is repulsive. But it is at the cross that one truly receives sight.

B. The cross is offensive because of its exclusiveness and intolerance.

There is no other way to be saved; the way of Christ is the only way. This brings us into disfavor with the world. The early church refused the mixture offered by Rome, having Christ and the emperor side by side. True Christianity is misunderstood by the world, and is seen as narrow and intolerant. The exclusiveness of the cross demands total commitment and loyalty.

C. The cross is offensive because it deals with the self-life. Crucifixion is harsh language, but it is necessary to mortify our members. We gain by surrender and dying to self. We need a basic experience at the cross to understand church regulation. Our preaching should hold forth deliverance from the bondage to sin. There must be more than merely singing about the glories of the cross.

II. The power of the cross in daily living

A. The way of the cross delivers from the bondage of the flesh. It is reflected in how we relate to each other.

B. The way of the cross liberates from the lust of the flesh.

111. Where does cross bearing touch church life today?

A. Effective leaders know what it is to die to self. Leaders need to keep their bodies under and bring them into subjection. The cross enables leaders to humble themselves and relate in meekness to fellow leaders. It also helps us to gracefully accept criticism.

B. We need applications that help define worldliness. This helps us benefit from other Spirit-filled leaders. The easy lifestyle of today can cause us to lose the connection to the cross. The cross touches us in areas such as the unequal yoke, insurance, and the technology issue.

C. As leaders, we need to lead the way in our families in bearing the cross. The desire to give children what they want will make them soft. We need to be ready to draw lines on play and organized sports. This may seem narrow, but if we fail to do so, we will feed an appetite the church cannot handle. It is important that we uphold the way of the cross in our generation.

The second message was brought by Brother Glenn on the Dortrecht Confession of Faith, Article XVII, The Shunning of Those Who Are Expelled. On this subject, we tend to confuse the term ban with avoidance or the German word Meidung. He considered the following areas.

1. Some of the Bible passages cited in the article.

Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5:9-11; 2 Thessalonians 3:14, and Titus 3:10-11.

From these Scriptures it was noted that sin brings a change in relationships, and church discipline does as well.

II. The practice of the Dutch Mennonites

A. They discontinued social interchange with the excommunicated person, because "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." It helped the person to repent and was intended to be redemptive rather than ostracizing the individual. This did not exclude the rendering of aid to one in need, because this was to be a spiritual help rather than ruin.

B. The Dutch faced the extremism of the Münsterites and needed to draw a definite line, having nothing to do with them.

C. The Dutch practice included the shunning of marriage partners.

III. The practice of the Swiss Brethren

A. Shunning was not nearly as prominent among the Swiss as it was among the Dutch. Excommunication affected Communion.

B. The Schleithem Confession included an article on excommunication, but none on shunning. Strict avoidance was not practiced. One exception to this among those of Swiss background was the Hutterites. Later on, the Swiss Brethren adopted the Dortrecht Confession, but applied shunning to the ordinances.

C. Jacob Amman saw the Dortrecht as the precedent and considered the Swiss to have departed from the past practice. However, Hans Reist did not understand strict avoidance to have been the old practice.

IV The practice of the American Mennonites

A. They basically continued the Swiss Brethren interpretation and practice, with a mild form of shunning.

B. Three of the groups that left the (Old) Mennonite Church—the Herrites (1811), the Stauffers (1845), and the Holdemans (1859)—all practiced shunning according to the teaching of the Dutch.

V What lessons can we learn?

A. We need to keep the church pure and continue the practice of close Communion.

B. The Bible makes a difference as to how we relate to those who were once brethren compared to the world in general. In this there is a contrast between Anabaptism and Pietism.

C. Parents should help their youth not associate closely to those who are under discipline.

Following this message we sang two verses of "Purer in Heart."

The last message of this session was "Give Ye Them to Eat" (Mark 6:37), by Brother James.

Ministers need to be ready to share the Bread of life with the congregation. Jesus said to Peter, "Feed my sheep," and Paul's word to the elders at Ephesus was, "Feed the church." We may not grow accustomed to the responsibility and lose sight of its seriousness.

I. The minister's Master

Mark portrays Jesus as a servant, one who gave Himself for the good of others. Brother James looked at some examples of Jesus' compassion in the Book of Mark. Jesus was always ready to minister to people's needs. He made full proof of His ministry. The disciples wanted to send the people away, but Jesus told them to give the multitude to eat.

11. The minister's mission

The minister's message needs to grow on him, and he needs the heart and compassion of the Lord Jesus. The minister's mission is to make the people sit down. He needs to speak with authority. He also needs to inspire attendance at the services by giving the Bread of life in a way that satisfies, so the people will want to be there. He should keep the messages simple as he gives the Bread of life and Water of life.

III. The minister's message

A. The message must be blessed by the Master and it needs to be broken by the Master so that it is suitable for the people to receive. The minister cannot use his own ingredients, but needs to take them from the hand of the Master. The people need to be satisfied with the Bread of life so that they will not be looking elsewhere. The message needs to be passionate and carry a burden. It also must be palatable so that all can receive it. What application is there to the fragments that were gathered up? The minister should keep his ear tuned to the congregation's response as he moves among them. His conduct after the message could make it ineffective.

B. The minister needs to preach in light of a coming accountability. If the congregation's spiritual health is poor and they are restless, what is the diet? The preaching today becomes a pattern for the next generation of preachers.

The afternoon session was moderated by Brother James

Brother James P. conducted devotions. He read Mark 8:27-38. How do we confess Christ? Christ calls us to take up the cross daily. True value is certainly not found in this world. We must give ourselves fully to Christ.

The first message of this session, entitled Keeping Our Ministerial Offices Supplied, was assigned to Brother Harold.

The reason for this consideration is the aging of the present ministry and the growth and expansion of the work. In the early years of our movement quite a few young brethren were ordained. While some of that is still happening, the average age has gone up a good bit.

1. Scriptural basis

A. The New Testament emphasizes the place of and need for leadership, and gives examples and direction for meeting those needs.

B. There is the example of the apostles in Acts 6 as they addressed a specific need in the church so that the ministry of the Word would not be hindered.

C. Paul directed Titus (Titus 1:5) to provide leaders in every city. It appears this was part of the administration necessary to set things in order. In every place where there was a church, there was to be leadership.

11. View of ordination

A. It comes by the call of God through the church. It does not rest on a personal call alone.

B. Ordination confers a serious responsibility and accountability. Leadership has a long-term influence on the church and the direction she takes.

C. We have always approached ordination seriously and carefully. Because of our conservative viewpoint, we have been slow to ordain so that there would be a surplus to draw on. And certainly we do not want to become reckless.

D. Likely, there will always be a certain amount of tension between demand and availability.

E. On the other side, if the outlying congregations are not adequately staffed with resident leadership we may actually be communicating that the ministry is not so important after all.

E There is also the example from Anabaptist history, where, because of persecution, there was a rapid turnover in leaders. When one was imprisoned or executed, immediately steps were taken to appoint a successor.

111. Some practical thoughts and applications

A. Traditionally, the call has often come when an older ordained brother called for help, but it need not be limited to that. The ministerial team can also discern when there is need for additional help in the ministry. It should be the goal to have two ministers and one deacon in each congregation.

B. An ordained brother should not feel threatened by the addition of younger, more capable brethren. Rather we ought to be glad for the gifts that God adds to the church. This is the Lord's work, not ours. An older

brother should not wait to ask for assistance until he does not see the need for it. Sometimes there can be an insecurity that develops when he feels he is no longer needed.

C. Sometimes there is a lack of confidence, or a fearfulness to move ahead with ordination. This may be because of sonic apprehension as to what change will mean. It could also be because one does not see the necessary qualifications in Younger brethren. We need to avoid a pessimistic outlook about the work of the church.

D. The work of ordination is a work of faith. God will honor such faith. He is very interested in the church, and wants the best for her. We need to move ahead with trust in the Lord and a certain amount of confidence in the group. As the Lord chooses, He knows not only what a person is but also what he can become.

If the work will go on, then more leaders must be brought into the ranks.

Following the message was a period of open discussion. There were some questions related to the messages, along with expressions of appreciation for the teaching we received. There was a question about leadership having been passed from Moses to Joshua and if Joshua could have done more to avoid the difficulties that followed him. There was discussion on how we are relating to shunning today. There was also a question about how to move ahead if one member of the ministerial team is blocking an ordination. Also, how can we be sure we are preaching the Scriptures, not only church positions?

The last message of the day was brought by Brother Mast on the subject "Striving Together for the Faith of the Gospel" (Philippians 1:27).

1. We are at war and we must strive. Defense does not just happen, but takes effort and planning. Defense alone does not win a war; there must also be offense.

11. We must strive together. Or can we strive alone? We should be glad for the brotherhood in meeting challenges and tests. "In the multitude of counsellors there is safety."

111. We may not strive with each other. We cannot be in conflict with each other and win the war. When we do this, there is tremendous loss of resources, and it gives the enemy a great advantage. Our Captain does not provide for us when we strive with each other, but we must rather encourage each other.

IV How do we strive together?

A. We need to have a fear that will produce carefulness, but we may not be

terrified. We need a trust in God and a trust in each other.

B. There needs to be good communication. We need to speak our hearts.

C. We need to purpose to work together. There may be no competition in leadership.

D. We must maintain clear lines of fellowship and have a strong identify.

E. There must be love and appreciation for each other, realizing that a person's weaknesses cannot all be changed. We should look for the strengths, and exercise confidence.

F. There must be rejoicing in God and in the success of others as they are victorious in our Captain.

G. We need to strive together in our prayers for each other.

The closing song was "Christ's Everlasting Gospel."



SHAPING THE MENTALITY OF OUR YOUTH

A person's thought processes, life patterns, and value system begin to be shaped in infancy, life is shaped by his environment. What children and youth see, feel, and hear has a profound effect on the adult they will become.

The apostle Paul observed a three-generation family that was successfully shaping its youth. "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also" (2 Timothy 1:5). Timothy was an alert youth with a burden for God's cause. He became a marvelous asset to Paul in promoting the Gospel message.

The home is the environment that predominantly shapes a child's life. Christian schools assist parents in shaping a godly mentality. The church is also a strong influence in the youthful years, as well as throughout life. Consider the following factors that contribute to positive mental shaping.

The haven of home minimizes the myriad pressures of a decadent society. Youth should enjoy the security of home rather than running regularly with a group of peers. Home life should be interesting and filled with mutual love for each other. Proper manners and common courtesies need to be taught and practiced. Reasonable orderliness needs to be realized in spite of the abundance of activity. A positive, respectful atmosphere will bless each family member.

Amiable parent-child relationships enhance parental influence. A child's best friends should be his parents. Mother's perception and care, coupled with Father's strength and courage, will qualify them to be the best possible counselors for their children. Every family must have its own standards and boundaries. Youth who learn by admonition can avoid many miserable mistakes. It takes parental alertness to prevent a generation gap from developing with youth.

Simplicity and frugality continue to be beautiful and attractive. Contentment is taught by practice. This quality comes only with diligent effort. Bigger and newer is not necessarily better. Simple joys are for anyone who takes time to stop and observe. Gazing at the starry heavens, observing spring flowers, and admiring autumn leaves will inspire almost anyone.

The clothing and vehicles of youth reveal much about the owner and his parents. What is allowed and tolerated will shape the mentality of youth. Intuition and wisdom are needed to discern affluent tendencies that confront the family.

A sure steppingstone to learn the joy of simplicity and giving is to give time in service, whether it is a day, a month, or a year. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Spiritual sensitivity must be felt in the family for godly shaping to develop. An eagerness for spiritual food will be evident. Taking notes of worship services and commenting on sermons and midweek topics convey an interest in truth. Discussion of the Sunday school lesson before and after class gives the benefit of sharing class discussions. Maturity can be fostered by inquiring into fresh insights and truth your youth may have learned.

Family worship provides a unique opportunity to inspire children and youth. A pattern should be established to provide developing children with the opportunity to direct the singing, read the Bible passage, and lead in prayer. Family faith needs to be strong so that children feel comfortable expressing themselves spiritually.

A parental burden for the lost and a passion for spreading the Gospel certainly shape the values of youth. The tendency to be enveloped in the cares and duties of family life, to the neglect of the pressing needs of lost neighbors and acquaintances, is a daily challenge. Sharing Gospel tracts and having a ready personal testimony communicate proper priorities to our family.

An eagerness to participate in organized outreach will serve any family well. Street meetings, prison ministries, cottage meetings, and nursing

home programs call for our involvement. Communicating the Gospel is a Christian duty that returns many blessings.

A concept of voluntary church membership and loyalty is needful. The church is more than merely an organization. The body of Christ deserves our commitment and zeal. Parents who help their youth submit and obey foster a godly mentality. A high respect for church leaders and an eager support and promotion of church practice will yield tenfold blessings. Despising other church groups will cause great loss.

May we all take courage as we implore God's help and direction to shape our youth for His glory.

Brother Elvin



Keys to Healthy Interpersonal Relationships (Part 5)

Brotherly Correction

With concerned hearts, Aquila and Priscilla approached their brother who was diligently teaching a partial Gospel. They felt responsible to bring to his attention a deeper understanding of the Scriptures. The zeal and ability of Apollos was directed through their effective brotherly admonition. Had they neglected their duty, the church may not have benefited from his labor. Do we sense our responsibility to help one another understand "the way of God more perfectly?"

Brotherly correction requires a right view of self. Pride will stifle open communication. Humility qualifies us to share and prepares us to receive correction. '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). We have clearer vision to help our brother if we first examine ourselves. What is my motive for exhorting another? Is it to shield him from danger, or is it an opportunity to vent a personal grievance?

When we are the recipient of correction, we should ask God for grace to benefit from the admonition. It is human to feel mistreated and to think that it is not true, it is biased, or it was not shared properly. While this may be true at times, we should be open to any truth and allow God to refine us.

Brotherly correction requires a right attitude toward others. "And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another" (Romans

15:14). We should have confidence in our brethren's desire to do what is right. "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him" (Leviticus 19:17). Healthy relationships are maintained when we share our concern rather than harboring ill will. Open communication may satisfy our concern when we understand the other's perspective.

Brotherly correction requires skill. The word admonish means to warn or reprove gently. "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children" (1 Thessalonians 2:7). It is important to spend time in prayer before we approach another so we can share in this way. There is a wrong way to do a right thing. We should be close enough to understand and challenge each other yet not so close that we critique every move.

Brotherly correction requires diligence. We may fear being misunderstood, labeled, or rejected. Our love for the truth must exceed our desire for acceptance so that we will obey the commands of Matthew 18.

Let us rise to the challenge to help each other stay on the path to heaven. "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Brother Mark.



PRAYER POINT

*"The effectual fervent prayer
of a righteous man availeth much"*

Thank God for Christian fathers who faithfully
take their place in the home.

Pray for those who have recently begun the Christian life
and for their instruction from the Word.

Pray for the summer Bible schools and for
the community children that will attend.

Pray for the strength to live holy lives in these evil days.