

Restudying Issues
Of The
'50s And '60s:
*Church Sponsored
Orphan Homes*



A Historical Perspective
By: Bill Hall

INTRODUCTION

The following three lessons were first preached on consecutive Sunday afternoons for the Pepper Road church of Christ in Athens, Alabama. They have been repeated many times. While we have revised the original text somewhat, we have tried to preserve the wording and sentence structure that is characteristic of extemporaneous public speaking. Hopefully the reader will overlook literary flaws.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive study of the problems that created so much division during the '50s and '60s. It is an effort to help people see the real issue in each of the controversies discussed, to briefly point out some of the arguments presented on both sides of the issues, and to do so in a fair and respectful way.

It is our conviction that churches of the 21st century can fulfill their God-given responsibilities in benevolence and evangelism without institutional boards or sponsoring church arrangements. Greater dedication is the need, not centralized oversight; greater sacrifice, not more complex organization.

May the Lord use this material to promote better understanding among Christians to His glory.

Bill Hall

CHURCH-SUPPORTED ORPHAN'S HOMES: WHAT WAS THE ISSUE?

It was a difficult time. I don't know that I could in any way picture for you, if you didn't live then, just how difficult that time was. Back somewhere in the mid-50s, in the pages of the *Gospel Advocate*, a quarantine was called for against all those who preached the gospel who opposed any institutional setup. That was about the time I started preaching. Meetings were canceled, churches were divided, preachers were fired. I see one of Irven Lee's daughters back in the audience; Brother Lee was one of them who was fired. He was one of the best men I ever knew. Families were divided in sentiment. It was such a difficult time.

Oftentimes when we go through issues like that, people are not listening to one another. We're so anxious to know what we're going to say next, or how we're going to answer the person, that we really don't listen. And I really think that what happened when we went through those difficult times was that many people had no idea what the issue was. And so, what I hope to do today, and next Sunday and the following Sunday, is clarify what the issues were. What were some of the arguments back and forth? My purpose is to help us to look back and say, "Is that really what happened?" I'm going to be as fair as I can be in regard to just exactly what happened.

Now this afternoon, we'll talk about the orphan's homes. What was the issue in regard to the orphan's home? I think it just blows a lot of people's minds to even think that any church of Christ would have thought that you ought not to support an orphan's home. What is the issue?

What Was Not The Issue?

Well, let's talk about what the issue is not. The issue is not whether or not orphans should be cared for. That's easily answered. James 1:27: "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." Orphans and widows are to be cared for. That was never one of the issues.

A second thing that was not the issue was whether or not the church ought to take care of orphans. That may surprise some of you, but when these problems first began, very few people ever even questioned whether the church should take care of orphans. That question didn't even arise until quite some time after these things began to be discussed. When these issues first developed and people began to voice objection to the orphan's home, nearly every church thought that it would be all right to support and take care of orphans even from the church treasury. I think that's surprising to a lot of people. Now the issue shifted and we're going to see that this became an issue. But that was not where the issue really lay.

The third thing I think we need to say, and I believe everybody knows this, that this was not a question of who was loving and caring and who wanted to help orphans the most. That's not what it was. Now in the heat of the time there were those who looked at some of us and said, "These people are just uncaring people. They just don't believe in caring for orphans." Well, of course that wasn't true and history has shown that we who objected to orphan's homes supported by churches were just as caring and loving and wanting to help as those who stood in favor of the institution. That's just not where the issue lay.

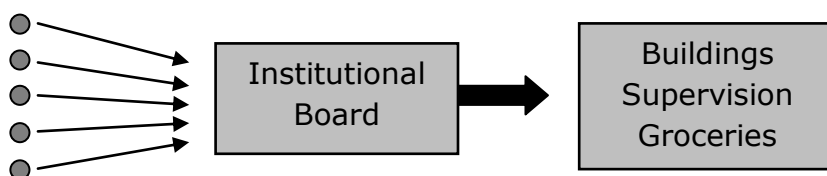
What Was The Issue?

Well, somebody asks, just what then was the issue? Well, the issue involved what I'm going to call "A Middleman Organization" standing between the church and the work to be done. You know in business, sometimes we talk about eliminating the middleman. What do we mean by that? Well, by the time a product leaves the factory, you've got to pay the delivery man, you've got to pay the wholesaler, you've got to pay the retailer, and by the time all of them get their money, you have paid too much; so go to the factory, and eliminate the middleman. It doesn't matter about business. But basically, what God did: He did not arrange for any middleman, any middleman organizations.

ORPHAN HOMES: WHAT WAS THE ISSUE?

Local Churches

Needed Work



The issue was basically this: You have the local churches - if I may picture them as being circles here - and then you had a board of directors. We'll just call it an institutional board.

Now, this institutional board is made up of Christians from many different churches. You might have two or three from Birmingham, you might have one or two from Jasper, you might have one or two from Athens. All of these come together as a board. And the money goes from the churches to the institutional board which in turn, then, provides housing, supervision, food, and whatever is needful for the care of these orphans. There's the issue: this institutional board that provides oversight for the work of churches of Christ.

Now somebody will say, "What is wrong with that?" The answer is: There is no authority for this institutional board as an overseeing body for the work of churches. And those of us who objected just raised the question, "Where is the authority for this board that stands between the churches and the work that needs to be done?"

Several passages come to mind when we talk about the necessity of authority. Colossians 3:17: "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." Now, if this has the authority of Jesus Christ behind it, then we can do it in His name. But if Jesus has never authorized this, then we cannot do this in the name of Jesus. We can **say** we're doing it in the name of Jesus, but the only thing we can actually **do** in the name of Jesus is that which He has authorized. You cannot do anything in anybody's name unless that person has authorized that which is to be done. Another passage that was pointed out was 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." Consequently, if this is a good work - to have this board of directors providing oversight for the churches - then you're going to find that it's in the Scriptures. That's what we pointed out. Another passage oftentimes used was 2 John, verse 9: "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son."

So the question we raised was: Is this institutional board in the doctrine of Christ, or is this outside the doctrine of Christ? If it's in the doctrine of Christ, we need it. If it's outside the doctrine of Christ, then we cannot have anything to do with it. So the obligation falls on the shoulders of brethren who support this to show the scriptural authority by which this could be done.

I'd like to correct something that I believe is a misconception. Every once in a while I hear people say, "Well, you know, these people just don't believe that you have to have authority for what you do." I graduated from David Lipscomb College in 1958. I sat in the classes of Batsell Barrett Baxter. Some of the best material I ever heard on how to establish Bible authority came from the classes of Batsell Barrett Baxter at David Lipscomb College. He said the same thing I say. Those people who differed with me on this - most of them believed that you had to have New Testament authority. Now I know that there were those who said that we do a lot of things that we don't have authority for. That didn't come generally from men who were leaders in the institutional movement. Generally, that came from people who just talked off the tops of their heads. Those who were leaders really were looking for authority and they gave their arguments.

The Expediency Argument

Now there were two basic arguments given in order to try to justify this board of directors. The one that probably was given most was: The Bible doesn't say how to do it. People would say, "Now, the Bible tells us to help orphans but the Bible doesn't tell us how to do it. So, it's just like when the Lord told us, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,' He didn't tell us how to go. So we can go by car, we can go by train, we can go by airplane, we can go by whatever means we need to. He didn't say how. Similarly, the Lord told us to care for orphans and he did not tell us how, so this institutional board is just a method by which the church can take care of its needy." That was probably the argument that we heard most and it was put in the realm of expediency.

But it was pointed out: No, we're not talking about *methods*, we're talking about *organization*. Providing food, supervision, etc. has to do with the methods of caring for orphans. The institutional board is the organization. After the money gets to the board of directors, they have to still determine what methods to use in order to take care of the orphan children. So it's not a matter of *how*, it's a matter of whether the *how*, is to be done under the oversight of the elders or whether the how is to be done under the oversight of the board of directors. That was the question. Let me ask all of you: "Which have you read about in your Bibles, a board of directors as overseers of the work of the local church, or elders as overseers of that work?"

So the money goes to the board of directors - now let me pause to say this: there was this little quibble: it was sometimes said that the board of directors never saw a penny of that money. Well, I suspect; I don't know how you do it - but it is possible that the elders of this church never see any of the money that is contributed; it's counted, there is a treasurer, but the oversight is with the elders. I don't know whether any of these boards of directors ever saw the money, but the money was spent under their oversight. Here's where the oversight was.

Now, money is contributed and they have to decide *how* to provide for these orphan children. Now, suppose that we've got some children here - let's just take it out of the realm of children - let's make it any benevolent work of a local congregation. How is the local congregation going to provide for those that are in need? Well, if the people are mentally capable, then we might just give them a check. Do you know what else we might do? Let's talk about the Pepper Road church. Suppose you, for instance, had five "widows indeed". How would you take care of those widows indeed? Suppose they were not able to take care of themselves. You can give them a check, but they can't take care of themselves. Well, you might buy a house. You might find some good person to provide supervision. You might go to the grocery store and buy food every week. There are a number of methods that might be used. But these are provided under the supervision of the elders of the church. They do not give their money to an institutional board so

that they can provide for these things. Do you see the difference between an organization and methods?

So it's not a matter of method whether it is done under the oversight of elders or whether it's done under the oversight of the board of directors. This is a question of organization. Either way, methods have to be determined. The methods need to be provided under the oversight of the elders, not under the oversight of an institutional board that stands between the churches and the work to be done. I hope that makes that point clear.

The *In Loco Parentis* Argument

Now there's another argument and it is quite an interesting argument, really. It's called the *in loco parentis* argument. Have you ever heard that expression? *In loco* - in place; *parentis* - in the place of the parents. Now, that wasn't just coined in regard to this discussion; that is an expression that you find in your dictionary. *In loco parentis*, in place of the parents. The argument basically went like this: You have an original home, and they say that the church can help that original home. Then the original home is destroyed. Parents were killed in a car wreck. Then you've got these little children. And they say that the orphan's home is a restored home. And the argument is: if the church can help the original home, why can't the church, out of its treasury, help the restored home? That was debated over and over in regard to this question. So that the institutional board becomes the *in loco parentis*. The institutional board becomes the parents, as it were, of this restored home. Do you get the argument?

Now, several things were said about that. First of all, it was pointed out that even those who argued this would not accept the logical conclusion of that argument, because they would say that if there was a Catholic family in the community, and that Catholic family was in need, that the church could help that Catholic family. Whatever you think about that, that was their belief. But now, wait a minute, suppose the Catholic home is destroyed. Mother and Daddy are out one day and an accident occurs and the Catholic home is destroyed. Then the Catholic church's orphan's home would be the restored home of that original Catholic home and therefore, by the very argument that is being made, if the church can help the original Catholic home, then the church can actually be making contributions to a Catholic orphan's home or whatever denominational orphan's home may be out there. Well, no, they were hardly willing to accept that, and you can understand that. The point was made.

Now, the second question that was raised: Is this really a home, or does this institution exist in order to build a home? One of the things that was done in some of this discussion was to read from the charters of some of these homes. For instance, the charter of the Schultz-Lewis Corporation. Here's what the charter says: "The name of the corporation shall be the Schultz-Lewis Children's Home and School." And then

it goes on to say that "the purpose of this corporation is to build, operate, and maintain an orphan's home." Then it's not a home itself. This is not a home, the purpose of the board was to build a home.

Now, the third thing that was pointed out was that if these are really the parents (and many of these are reasonably wealthy men), are not the parents supposed to pretty well exhaust their own resources before they call on churches to provide financial help?

Now, the real key to me in all of this is that the church doesn't help "homes" anyway. Here is Jay Ogden down here and Litha; they've got twin boys. Suppose Jay and Litha were in need. They fall into some financial problems. Let me ask you a question: Who has the first obligation toward Jay and Litha? I'll tell you who, it's Jay's father and mother and Litha's parents; that's where the first obligation is. Now, suppose that Jay's parents and Litha's parents - suppose they've done everything they can and the church then has a responsibility to help. What does the church do? The church doesn't make out a check to the Jay Ogden home. The church helps a needy: saint named Jay Ogden. Now Jay Ogden can fulfill whatever his responsibilities are. But the idea of the church helping a home - I don't read anything in the Scriptures about the church helping a home. What I do read is the church helping the needy saints to provide for their responsibilities.

Those were the two major arguments: the Bible just doesn't say how; and we tried to point out that no, it's not a matter of method, it's a matter of organization that we are saying is unscriptural. And the other is that the orphan's home is a restored home; the directors are the *in loco parentis*, and we pointed out, no that won't do. And those were the basic arguments.

The Shift In Issue

Now, in time there came a shift in issue. I do not know exactly when this took place. But somewhere down the way, somebody raised the question: Does the church really have the responsibility to take care of orphans in the first place? Doesn't the Bible talk about the church helping needy saints? Now, that was an issue that arose after the institutional issue had been fought for quite some time.

Now, in answer to that, let's get our Bibles and turn to Acts, chapter 2. I'm going to do this very quickly, but I want to point out how many times it's the needy saints, it's the brethren, it's any among **them**, who were being helped. Look at Acts 2, verse 44 - now, I'm just tracing the benevolent work of the church through the Scriptures. Acts 2:44: "Now all who believed were together, and had all things common." Go to the 4th chapter, look at verse 34: "Nor was there any among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold and laid them at the apostles' feet and they distributed to each as anyone had need." - None among them that lacked. Go on to the 11th chapter of Acts. Read verse 29: "Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in

Judea." Go on to Romans, the 15th chapter. So far we've seen "among them", the "brethren". In Romans 15, look at verses 25 and 26: "But I am going to Jerusalem to minister to saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem." Go on to 1 Corinthians 16:1 and 2: "Now concerning the collection for the saints [incidentally, that's exactly the same collection mentioned over in Romans 15 - BH], as I have given orders to the churches in Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week, let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me." So the very passage that we talk about in our giving on the first day of the week is in reference to the needy saints in Jerusalem. Go to 2 Corinthians, chapter - well, we could go to chapters 8 and 9 - but go to chapter 9, verse 1: "Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you;" And we could just keep on going: it's the saints, it's the brethren, it's any among them. Those are expressions used.

And so the question was raised, "Here we've been discussing all this time about orphan's homes and whether the institutional board is scriptural, and really, does the church have any responsibility for the care of orphans anyway? Let me just say right here that there were differences among those who stood against church support of orphan homes. There were differences about this question. I'm not going to state a name because I don't have anything in writing to prove this and the man I am referring to is dead now. But one of the leading men among those who opposed institutionalism, one of the leading men said to me one time that he believed the church had an obligation to orphans and he made his arguments with me. I didn't agree with it, but at the same time it was interesting that he was in the forefront of the institutional battle, but differed on the other question.

And in some ways, this shift of issue was unfortunate. In other ways, it was fortunate. It was unfortunate in that it took the focus of the people away from the institutional issue and put it on something else. And as you would imagine, from that point on, most of those who were going to debate this question wanted to debate the limited benevolence issue instead of the institutional issue. So all of a sudden there was a shift. We'd had discussion after discussion after discussion over this institutional board, but all of a sudden there's a shift, and most of the discussion then focused on whether the church could help orphan children. But that was a shift in emphasis that a lot of people in this generation do not realize took place. And of course that was a more emotional issue. This shift of issue took the eyes of the people away from the institutional board, an unscriptural organization, and caused them to focus on whom the church should help from its treasury. This left the churches vulnerable to similar institutional arrangements that might arise in the future.

Now, it's fortunate that it happened in that it forced many of us who never had done it before to say: just whom does the church have a responsibility to help? And I'm glad that I was forced to do that. It forced me to go through the Scriptures, just as I have just now gone through the Scriptures, and to say, "Just who is to be helped by the church?" Anytime we're forced to look into the Scriptures regarding any question, that of course is good. But the issue changed. A lot of people never understood that shift of issues.

Now to the question: Should the church be helping non-Christians? To me, there are only two disputable passages in regards to that. Keep your place here at 2 Corinthians, and go to Galatians, chapter 6. Here's the first of the disputable passages and I want to state again that I want to be as fair as I can be in this discussion. But Galatians 6:10: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." People read this and conclude that the church has an obligation to all people, but especially to those in the house of faith. But if you look back, starting in verse 1, I think it becomes very apparent that we're not talking about what churches do here; we're talking about what individuals do. Verse 1, for instance: "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load. Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." Notice the individual nature of all this down through verse 8. "For **he** who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but **he** who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart." Now, here's a **man**, reaping and sowing, and the exhortation is not to be weary in doing good; in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. **Therefore** - [What does *therefore* do? Sends us back to all that's been said, doesn't it?] "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

To what does the *therefore* point back? - "as a man sows, he shall also reap." A man. We're not talking here about congregational action. But somebody says, "But the pronouns of verse 9 are plural." Well, yes, they are plural, applying to a plurality of individuals. Consider a similar use of a plural pronoun: "we must all appear" (listen to this) "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body according to what he has done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). We're not going to stand before the Lord in judgment as a congregation and yet he said "**we**" must all. We. Individual

application. So it is in Galatians 6:10. The word "we" points back to the individual principle of a man's sowing and reaping. Church action is not under consideration.

The other disputable passage is 2 Corinthians 9:13. Before reading this verse, we need to consider the context. Second Corinthians, chapter 9, is dealing with the contribution that the churches of Macedonia and Achaia are making for the poor saints in Jerusalem (we have already referred to this contribution). Contributions for whom? The poor saints. What poor saints? The poor saints in Jerusalem. Now, with this in mind, let's read verse 13: "While, through the proof of this ministry, they [the Jerusalem saints - BH] glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them [the Jerusalem saints - BH] and all men." But the word "men" in your Bibles is in italics. This means that the word "men" has been supplied by the translators. Several translations have no word there at all. These translations leave it to us to supply any necessary word. Considering this, you fill in the word: "and for your liberal sharing with them [the Jerusalem saints - BH] and all ." Do you not see the likelihood that Paul is thinking of "all saints"?

I was recently given a quote that should help us to see this point. The quote is from R.V.G. Tasher:

"The Corinthians' contribution is for the poor saints at Jerusalem only. But the fellowship which was expressed in it was, the apostle assures, felt for all Christians..." (Tyndale Commentary, p 129)

Pulpit Commentary provides an interesting quote concerning a similar passage, Hebrews 12:14: "All men - that is, as required by the context, with all the brethren -" When one looks at the context of 2 Corinthians 9:13, he will be driven to the same conclusion, that "all men" refers to "all the brethren".

We surely agree that this would be at best a doubtful passage on which to base a practice within the church that does not have the support of any other scripture.

Somebody says, "But this is really more of a historical thing; we don't hear about orphan's homes anymore." I would suspect if I were to ask for a show of hands: how many people have heard anything very much about the church support of orphan's homes in the last ten years, there would be very few hands go up. There are still some churches that do it, but someone might be asking, "why worry about all this?" While the orphan home issue is almost a past issue now, there are other institutions asking churches for help that function under an institutional board. This is true, for instance, of David Lipscomb University, Freed Hardeman, Mars Hill over in Florence, or other schools that we could name. Batsell Barrett Baxter, before his death, wrote a tract called "Questions and Issues of the Day", and here's what he wrote: "Some who will agree that the church can contribute to an orphan's home are not convinced that the church can contribute to a Christian

school. It is difficult to see a significant difference. As far as principle is concerned, the orphan's home and the Christian school must stand or fall together." This tract argues for the church support of schools, based upon acceptance of church support of orphan homes.

If we lose sight of the institutional issue, and begin to see the whole orphan's home question as a question of whether the church should help orphans or not, then we leave ourselves so vulnerable to this kind of thing happening again. In the mid-1800s, it was a missionary society. How is a missionary society set up? It is with an institutional board providing oversight for the work of churches of Christ. Then we come to the mid-1900s and we go through a battle again and how were the orphan's homes set up? Exactly the same way. And then there's the battle about whether the church can support schools or not. How are the schools set up? In exactly the same way. If we don't keep our attention focused on the institutional board as the primary issue, it leaves us vulnerable to similar institutions that are going to arise. What will be the institution of the mid-2000s? I don't know! But let us understand that there is no authority for churches of Christ to do their work under the oversight of an institutional board. Churches of Christ do their work under the oversight of the elders of each local church.

So let's go back. Is the question of whom the church should support an important question? Yes, that's an important question. Any Bible question is an important question. But let's not allow that question to turn our attention away from this issue of an institutional board standing between churches and the work to be done.

I'm reading a book now (I haven't completed the book) called *Reviving the Ancient Faith*. I don't know whether any of you have seen that book or not. It was written by a man named Richard Hughes who is a professor at Pepperdine University. And this man makes no bones about it. He says the churches of Christ have developed through the years into a denomination. He doesn't question that, and he's a part of that denomination. And he writes from an historical viewpoint as to what has happened in churches of Christ. He refers to the institutional battle that took place (that's in chapter 10 and I have read that). And one quote from it, which is an interesting quote - (No, he's not infallible, but this is a historian who is writing as objectively as anyone could write. He uses terminology that I would never use. But he sure is writing objectively.) - he says, "The mainstream churches of Christ, time and time again, characterized those who opposed institutionalism as unfaithful to the heritage. The truth is that the dissenters [that's us - BH] stood squarely in one set of the footprints in the 19th century Churches of Christ. And by the time the battle over institutions was complete, it was the mainstream, not the dissenters, that had removed itself almost entirely from its 19th century roots." Now, I don't like to think of myself as having 19th century roots. I want to know that my roots are in the Scriptures. But what he is basically saying is, that really it was those who

opposed the institutional arrangements who really stood for the old "speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent" concepts that were preached so thoroughly back in the 19th century. To me that's a very interesting statement from a historian who would say he doesn't agree with me. But that's his analysis of what took place back then and what has taken place since then among churches of Christ.

Well, I hope that clarifies what the issue was. Now, you might not have been able to follow all the argumentation, but at least I think you know what the issue was. I hope so.

Now, next week we're going to look at the sponsoring church arrangement. We will consider the Broadway church in Lubbock that became overseers of all the German work. Also the Herald of Truth - what were the objections to the Herald of Truth? That seems like a strange thing. Wasn't that a great program? Why would churches of Christ, any churches of Christ, have objections to the support of the Herald of Truth? We'll be talking about that next Sunday afternoon at 3:30 and hopefully we can have a good meeting then.

Let's turn in our songbooks to the number that Matt has chosen. Obviously our purpose in all of this has not been to talk about what a sinner needs to do to be saved. And if you ask me, "What kind of preaching do you like to do best?", I like to preach on the atonement; I love to talk about Jesus Christ and His death for us and the atonement He made with His own blood by which we can be saved. We have to get on some of these other things sometimes; but I love to talk about the grace of God extended through Jesus Christ our Lord and His death and suffering on our behalf. And today, you must believe in Christ, you must place your trust totally in Him. You put your faith in Him, repenting of your sins, confessing Him, and when you're buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him, you then are ready to walk in newness of life, forgiven in Jesus Christ with your sins remitted. And you certainly have that opportunity this afternoon as we stand and sing the song.