

# COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS

**Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive**

## Pastor's Paragraph

### DID GOD APPOINT OUR PRESIDENT?

Many of you may not realize that there are numbers of religious people who claim that the president of our country was instituted in office by the direct will of God. The claim is by no means new, but it seems to be experiencing a marked resurgence. According to several news reports and conversations I've had with various people, numbers of people are asserting that God has chosen the current president "to restore moral values and fulfill God's will in America and throughout the world."

As you may know, I do not use sermons or any of my newsletter articles to address partisan political issues—never have and never will; but, since the aforementioned issue is primarily a *spiritual and religious* concern, I feel a responsibility to address it. The contention of those who hold the position I am highlighting usually involves three points: (1) Any person elected to political office is there because it is God's will; (2) the Bible teaches that as a fact; and (3), since a governmental leader is handpicked by God, people should follow and obey the bidding of the president or other high governmental official without question. The reason I feel a need to address this issue is because most church members, no matter *how* dedicated, may not have the in-depth theological and biblical background to be able to assess the *validity* of the aforementioned assumption. Consequently, I hope that this article will provide assistance to people who want to make an *informed* decision about the truth of such a three-point claim.

You may wonder how the issue of a president's divine appointment surfaced, so let me give you some background. Several years ago, a man by the name of Mark Taylor saw Donald Trump being interviewed on TV.

During that program, Taylor, a mentally ill individual, said he heard the voice of God tell him: "You are hearing the voice of the next president." Taylor later wrote a book entitled *The Trump Prophecies*. That little volume was made into a movie which has been shown in thousands of theatres throughout the United States lauding the current president as God's uniquely chosen vessel for our time.

But the book and movie *alone* were not what caused Mark Taylor's claim to spread like a virus among other evangelical Trump supporters nationally. The assertion that Trump's presidency was the divine will greatly proliferated, *primarily* through the work of prominent fundamentalist religious leaders: Kenneth Copeland, Robert Jeffrees, Jerry Falwell, Jr., and, especially, Franklin Graham (son of Billy Graham) who toured the United States claiming that Trump was chosen by God to be our president. Influenced by Graham, hundreds of religiously ultra-conservative ministers of local churches began to

proclaim the same message. Add the influence of politicians such as Rick Perry who personally *told* Trump that he was divinely chosen by God. After that, Trump became his *own* spokesman by proudly tweeting a statement by Wayne Aiken Root (whoever *that* is) who called the president “the second coming of God.” In response, the president, talking to reporters on camera, referred to himself as “the Chosen One,” an assumption that is now being repeated by numbers of his followers.

Some of the people with whom I’ve talked over lunch at Compton’s Kitchen are not gullible. They express reservations about the possibility that God handpicks our presidents—or other world leaders. But they are deeply concerned about *claims* they’ve heard that the *Bible* teaches God *does* handpick our leaders and tells us it is God’s will to follow those leaders without question. What the Bible reportedly says is a *really* big issue for many people, so I want to address it.

*Does* the Bible teach that governmental leaders are *divinely* selected and/or elected? Actually, it does! Paul, in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of his letter to the Romans, wrote these mystifying words:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; because there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been

instituted by God.... The authorities are God’s servants, busily working for that very thing.... Pay respect to whom respect is due.

*In order to interpret Paul’s words accurately, it is important to know what was happening when Paul wrote.* At that time, the Jews were beginning to experience more independence and authority under the prevailing government than they previously had experienced. It is apparent that Paul’s joy over the newly instituted Jewish freedom influenced his belief that God was responsible for it. But his comments were directly related to *his* particular time and *not* to the United States which, of course, did not even *exist* at that time.

But the most *important* issue in interpreting Paul’s words accurately in Chapter 13 is to *pay attention to the context—what Paul said before Chapter 13.* If we do *not* do that, we can get in trouble by drawing conclusions that Paul did not intend. That, I think is the problem that many well-meaning individuals have created for themselves *and* many others.

So, let’s look at the *context* within which Paul wrote Chapter 13. That will help us to get a more *accurate* understanding of his intention.

Remember that, in Chapter 13, Paul told us to “pay respect to whom respect is *due*.” Well, to whom is respect due? Chapter 12 outlines the qualifications, the “vital marks” of a leader who *genuinely* is God’s person, not a fake or a pretender. Paul clearly states twelve requirements for a leader who is *truly* God’s person:

- (1) One who is not conformed to the standards of *this* world, but one who has been transformed so that he or she is *able* to discern the will of God;
- (2) One who is aware of his or her human frailty and, therefore, does not think more highly of him or herself than is appropriate (i.e., one that demonstrates humility);

- (3) One who is an example of *genuine love*, who demonstrates *mutual* love for all people;
- (4) One who extends hospitality to immigrants (strangers from another country);
- (5) One who actually *blesses* anyone who opposes him or her, who does not put anyone down verbally;
- (6) One who is able to rejoice with those who are happy and identify with persons who are sad (i.e., take the feelings of *others* seriously);
- (7) One who demonstrates the ability to live in *harmony* with others;
- (8) One who is able to identify with “humble” individuals—persons who do not have wealth or high standing;
- (9) One who refuses to retaliate or “hit back” at others—who does not repay evil for evil;
- (10) One is a demonstrated *peacemaker*;
- (11) One who *eschews* revenge;
- (12) One who regularly responds to dissenters with obvious good will and positively (i.e., who seeks to *overcome* evil with good).

So, from Paul’s own words, we learn that *not* everyone who is elected to office is God’s person—indeed, far from it. He or she may accomplish some worthwhile things; but, when looked at in light of Paul’s criteria, a person may not even come close to incarnating the spiritual qualities that define a leader who *genuinely* is God’s person, one whom Paul believed would deserve such “due respect.”

Therefore, let me summarize. In order to interpret Paul’s words accurately, it is important, *first*, to realize that, when writing Chapter 13, Paul was responding to a governmental gift of new-found freedom for the Jews in *his* own time, not to a situation that might exist two thousand years later. And, *second*, it is critically important not to rip Paul’s words in Chapter 13 from their *context*—particularly the preceding chapter that gives us the qualifications to distinguish between who *genuinely* is a godly leader and who definitely is not. It is obvious that Paul wanted us to use spiritual vision, discernment, letting the chips fall where they may.

Taken as a *whole*, Paul’s words indicate that he had no interest in being involved with partisan politics, giving blind or unquestioning obedience to *any* party or person. His concern was solely *spiritual*. Surely ours should be, too!

With the prayer that we all might be able to interpret scripture more *faithfully*, please remember, always, how much I love and value you.

Your pastor and friend,  
John

# IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

*February, 2020*

*As usual, our fellowship will gather this month on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday. However, if you are a visitor who is planning to join us, we suggest that you call 331-9999 before coming so we can alert you to any unanticipated change in our announced schedule. We look forward to seeing you!*

## **Sunday, February 9<sup>th</sup> (Second Sunday of the Month)**

### **10:00 p.m. WE WORSHIP TOGETHER**

It is ironic that, in our digitally connected age, surveys are indicating that we Americans are experiencing unprecedented levels of loneliness. What we are learning is that it is possible to feel lonely, even in a crowd, even in our own family, if we do not feel *emotionally connected* to one another. We are learning, also, that many people “hide” feelings of loneliness from themselves by keeping busy, busy, busy. We can be lonely if we don't feel understood—or if we feel unloved or underappreciated. Moreover, the more hours we spend looking at television or texting, the *more* lonely and disconnected we feel—despite the fact that we don't always admit it even to ourselves.

During the month of February, with the coming of Valentine's Day and the tendency of some folks to call this time of the year “*love month*,” any existing loneliness often can be accentuated. We may have a sizable number of *acquaintances* but live life with few, if any, truly *deep* relationships. The result, we're learning, is not just a feeling of missing out on something necessary for maximum happiness and fulfillment but, often, less vibrant health and earlier mortality.

Since *all* of us are conscious of feeling lonely, at least at *times*, John will address this important issue in our sermon for today, the title of which is: “HUMAN LONELINESS AND GOD’S EASY SOLUTION.” It’s a great topic, especially for “*love* month.”

As usual, we will have the privilege of engaging in discussion of the topic following worship. (Out by about 12 noon)

### **Sunday, February 23<sup>rd</sup> (Fourth Sunday of the Month)**

#### **10:00 a.m. WE LEARN AND GROW TOGETHER**

Last month, we were scheduled to begin a new series to help us develop an *evolving* faith—one that grows and matures. Since many people do not take time to experience that potential during the week, this series on Sundays should be especially helpful.

Unfortunately, however, our pastor’s hospitalization necessitated canceling our planned gathering on January 26<sup>th</sup>. But, fear not: We’ve *rescheduled* the canceled gathering for *this* month, so you won’t have to miss anything important. Our topic will be: “DOES GOD ‘TALK’ TO US?” If not, *why* not? And, if so, *how* might God communicate? This session could hold the key to any future spiritual growth that might be possible for us.

Most churches simply provide their people with a set of beliefs that often are woefully outdated. Ironically, Jesus *never* did that. The gospels tell us that Jesus *grew* in his relationship to God and called *us* to do likewise. This series will enable us to take our faith seriously by *responding* to his call to greater maturity! (Out by about 11:30 a.m.)

# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## *FUTURE GATHERINGS*

Since our pastor has been undergoing some unanticipated health-related issues and ended up by being taken by ambulance to the Emergency Room at Providence Hospital (an event which took place on a Saturday before a scheduled CCM gathering), that time for meaningful togetherness necessarily had to be canceled. He attempted to notify our “regulars” up until the ambulance arrived, missing only one or two persons before having to leave. Except for one Sunday when we were iced and “snowed in,” the recent cancellation was the only other gathering we have experienced in over twenty years! We do hope that another emergency will not occur any time soon; but, if it does, please know that we’ll do our best to contact you in order to save you an unnecessary trip to our gathering place.

## *A THANK YOU FROM JOHN*

I am so grateful to each of you for your calls, your offers to be of help with virtually any need, the care with which you kept me supplied with nourishing food, and for providing transportation from the hospital and to doctor’s appointments. Years ago, one of my friends told me that “when you are sick or unable to function, you find out who truly cares about you.” So, I cannot thank you enough for your every expression of love and caring. Even Marti Fritz, who, at the time of my incapacity was extremely ill with a fever of 102 and 1/5 F., went above and beyond the call of duty to be helpful. To all of you whose love and concern I experienced so keenly, with all my heart—thank you!

***HAPPY, HAPPY BIRTHDAY!***

We have three known birthday celebrants during the month of February: Norma Sessions (2/4), John Whatley (2/7), and Tim Wertz (2/26). Our best wishes to each of you!

# **CCM: SEEKING TO MEET THE UNACKNOWLEDGED SPIRITUAL HUNGER OF OUR TIMES**

**WHOEVER YOU ARE, WELCOME!**

**AS FOLLOWERS OF THE PATHWAY OF JESUS, WE ARE A SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP IN WHICH WE SEEK TO GROW IN LOVE FOR GOD, SELF, AND OTHER PEOPLE IN A WAY THAT AFFECTS ALL OF OUR RELATIONSHIPS, ACTIONS, AND DECISION MAKING, THEREBY HELPING TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE IN WHICH TO LIVE. WE WELCOME WITH OPEN ARMS, MINDS, AND HEARTS ALL WHO DESIRE TO CONNECT WITH US.**

***WHEREVER YOU ARE, THE DIFFERENCE AT  
CCM IS WORTH ANY DISTANCE!***



**Our Telephone:**

Senior Pastor: (803) 331-9999. Our mobile cell phone is more reliable than our landline phone, because it is on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If no one answers, it usually means that our pastor is in a meeting, in a counseling session, doing regular spiritual mentoring, or is involved in some other form of ministry; but he will return your call as soon as possible, so please be sure to leave a message.

**Our Websites:**

**CommunityChurchMidlands.com (Also .net, .info and .org)**

*or*

**CommunityChurchOfTheMidlands.com (Also .net, .info and .org)**

**Our Mailing Address: P.O. Box 6946, Columbia, S.C. 29260-6946**

**Our Location:** CCM usually gathers on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of each month, and any changes will be noted in our monthly newsletter. Please join us at the gorgeous Seven Oaks Community Center in beautiful Seven Oaks Park, 200 Leisure Lane (between St. Andrews and Piney Grove roads, just off I-26 West). When you enter the spacious parking lot, you'll see the main entrance to our newly renovated building on your right. Once you are inside the Reception Area, our meeting locality is on your left. For updates on our programming, to verify meeting times, to learn about changes in scheduling, or for any pastoral need, please feel free to call 331-9999, night or day.

***ALWAYS, WE'RE HERE FOR YOU!***