

In Memoriam

Raymond H. Norris Jr.
(March 24, 1948 – April 5, 2021)

Grace Doctrine Church
1821 South River Road
St. Charles, Missouri
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Ray Norris was a man who grew up among those referred to as Baby Boomers which describes the significant increase in the country's population from the end of World War II in 1945 and ending around 1965. This was a period when many who had put off starting a family until after the war, chose collectively to do so.

The country had done its part in World War I, but then had to endure the Great Depression which lasted from about 1929 through 1939. Almost as soon as that was over, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and Germany, under Hitler, renewed its quest to capture Europe. Thus, off to war we went, this time on two fronts.

Ultimate victory in both theaters insured the continuation of peace and prosperity within our nation. This environment, combined with the Protestant work ethic, produced confidence that our manner of life, its Western European culture, and the protections provided by the Constitution allowed each citizen the freedom to pursue his own destiny.

It was during this time period that Raymond Norris, Jr., was born on Wednesday, March 24, 1948, in Mexico, Missouri. Emerging during this time was the belief that to be successful a person must expand his education beyond high school by getting a college degree. Whether responding to his parents' encouragements or from his own motivation, Ray enrolled in Northeast Missouri State, now named Truman State University, in Kirksville, Missouri.

Ray selected botany and horticulture as his major fields of study with the goal of specializing in all kinds of plant life. Soon after graduation he started his own business, Gamma Road Nursery. Later on, he joined Forest Keeling Nursery in Elsberry, Missouri, and in 1974, he was hired by Bruss Nursery in the Chicago suburb of Lombard, as manager of its operation until 1981.

It was there that Ray's expertise in botany earned him the title of the Plant Doctor. It was also when Ray and his wife entered into divorce when Dennis was age 4. During those early years, Ray was allowed to see Dennis on Tuesdays during school visitation periods. The two saw each other on either Tuesdays or Sundays during the summer months.

When Dennis was age 14, circumstances occurred that allowed him to live permanently with Ray in the St. Louis area. At that time, they lived in a condo, but in 1999, Ray and Dennis bought a house in St. Charles County where they both lived until Ray's death this April.

Dennis not only had inherited the house but also quite a number of very interesting things his father had collected over the years. There is a long list but most of it is memorabilia such as sports "bubblegum" cards, stamps, and other collectables. I have a very close friend that I've known all my life; we both grew up in a small Alabama town. He collected baseball cards, too. So, I know how addictive that hobby can be having been aware of how devoted he was to that area of collectables.

Dennis has been the onsite director of our Media Ministries' Webcasts of our Bible classes to those who log on to either of our two Web sites. One of the interests to which Dennis has devoted a great deal of time is his personal interest in trains. He was a managing partner of the One-Stop Hobby Shop in St. Charles County and among the things he personally added to his inventory were DVDs of engines and cars as well as an annual calendar that presents for each month a photograph of a locomotive and its description.

Ray was a longtime and devoted member of Morning Star Church, a Methodist Church, to which he contributed his time and interests as a volunteer. He was a highly respected member of this congregation.

But as is always the case for all who have gone before and the destiny of all who remain behind, is the issue of the eternal future. A subject which has historically been debated among the living throughout history.

Questions include, "Is there anything else beyond the life we live as humans?" "If so, what?" "Is there a hereafter?" "If so, where does it take place?" "What kind of life does it include?"

All of these and other similar questions are interesting to consider but also challenging to confirm. However, each may be confidently answered when verified by the immutable record found in Scripture. The Bible claims itself to contain absolute truth while human speculations are simply personal opinions.

Here is why I believe Ray is presently absent from the body and in the presence of the Lord:

There are only two kinds of people in world: those who have believed in Jesus Christ for salvation and eternal life and those who have not. Those who have believed in Christ have the potential to become good soldiers for Christ. Those who have not, are part of the problem that presently faces our country. The true patriot is the one with biblical guidance present in his soul and the courage to use it in guiding his thoughts, decisions, and actions.

Because some believe and some do not is why A. P. Carter asked the question, “Will the circle be unbroken?”

The sad answer is that rarely will a family circle be unbroken. The God we serve has no desire to be a tyrant, but rather a benevolent monarch. His intent, according to Peter, is “not for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

Yet His plan is so structured that only those who respond to God’s unfailing love are qualified to enter into His heaven. And God’s unfailing love for the entire human race is expressed by His gracious provision of a solution to our universal sin problem.

Condemned at birth by Adam’s original sin, and further indictment by personal sin, every member of the human race must come to the realization that he is spiritually dead, totally depraved, and in need of the Savior. But once , his volition must choose for or against God’s unspeakable gift.

Among the four Gospels, John’s may be categorized as the most evangelistic of the group. His Gospel contains the repeated message that all who believe in Jesus Christ receive the imputation of eternal life and, by definition, that life can never be lost.

The key to understanding the biblical nomenclature essential to the gospel message is found in the noun **πίστις (pístis)** which is always translated *faith*, and the verb **πιστεύω (pisteúō)** which is always translated *to believe*.

In his Gospel, John uses the verb “to believe” 98 times while the other three Synoptic writers use it only 30 times among them. Thirty-eight of John’s references refer to “believing in Christ.”

The verb *to believe* is transitive. Transitive verbs demand a working object. In this case, it indicates that the one who believes has come to accept information about Jesus as being true and the only source for salvation. His positive response to information about the Person and work of Christ results in his belief—the Greek verb, *pisteúō*—that Jesus is the working object that results in salvation.

There are about forty things revealed in Scripture that occur at the moment a person believes in Christ. There are two that the Lord emphasizes as paramount in the third chapter of John.

When the Lord spoke to Nicodemus in John 3, He presented him with a choice that, if made, would result in two things. There is an important word in John 3:16, a conjunction pronounced *hē'-nā*. It is generally translated into English by the word “that.” In this context it introduces both a purpose and result. Let’s take a look at the verse:

John 3:16 - “God loved the world so much He **gave** [*δίδωμι (dídōmī)*]: this is grace, no gift can be a gift that requires anything on the part of the recipient] His **uniquely-born Son**, so **that** [*ἵνα (hína)*]: introduces both purpose and result] **whoever believes in Him** [*πιστεύω (pisteúō)*]: this is **the necessary condition to achieve the purpose and the result**] **shall not perish** [*ἀπόλλυμι (apóllumi)*]: **purpose** of believing: Nicodemus would be delivered from the lake of fire after he dies] **but have eternal life** [*ζωή αἰώνιος (zōé aiōnios)*]: **result of believing: Nicodemus would be imputed eternal life and would go to heaven when he dies**].

Jesus makes it clear to Nicodemus that salvation, which is deliverance from the lake of fire, and the imputation of eternal life, both occur instantly when anyone simply believes in Christ.

This verse and others like it are the sources of the Reformers’ claim of *sola fide*: faith alone.

It must be remembered that both *faith* and *believe* are transitive and therefore demand an object. Jesus is that divinely approved object. The phrase is therefore expanded to read “faith alone in Christ alone.” There are things about Him that must be understood by an unbeliever so that when he places his faith in Christ it is not simply recognition of his historicity but a positive response to His saving work on the cross.

Therefore, the one who evangelizes must understand the difference between the gospel presentation and the divine act of salvation. Here is a summary:

The *gospel* is designed to present Jesus of Nazareth as Savior. Any number of details may be presented to describe His person and His work: He is both perfect God and sinless Man, who was sacrificed on the cross for the sins of the entire human race, after which He died physically, was buried, and three days later, was resurrected from the dead. Regardless of how many details are given, the free will of the unbeliever must be left to consider whether to believe in Jesus as the working object or reject Jesus as not being his Savior.

***Salvation* occurs when the unbeliever responds with nonmeritorious faith alone in Christ alone. This *faith* response has both purpose and result: the *purpose* is deliverance from punishment in the lake of fire. The *result* is the imputation of *eternal life*. Taken together, salvation means that believers *go to heaven when they die*.**

Salvation thus occurs at a moment of time. One second later the believer begins his spiritual life. How he lives it depends upon whether he will devote himself to the task of learning, retaining, and applying biblical principles to his life.

To survivors:

To: Dennis Norris

Dennis, you had a wonderful relationship with your father. He made sure you had all the advantages that he felt would benefit you personally and also entertain you including, for example, your love for trains. You took advantage of those opportunities when you ran your own hobby shop where your extensive knowledge of trains was passed on to your customers. Personally, Jo Henra and I always look forward to the gift of your locomotive-themed calendars each year.

I also wish to point out that during the 12-years of time our church has existed at its present site on South River Road, you have primarily been the one who has streamed our live Bible classes on our two Internet Web sites. These have enabled remote believers the resources to study along with us by viewing live Webcasts of our church services.

May the confidence you have in the grace and mercy of our God and of our savior, Jesus Christ comfort you in this time of sorrow.

To: Jane Davis

I have learned from Dennis that you and Ray were regular customers at animal swaps. I had never heard of that practice wrongly assuming a person showed up and swapped his animal for another person's. Dennis informed me that is not what this means. What actually goes on is that you swap your money for another's animal including chickens and guinea hens.

I know you will miss those times together with Ray but maybe you and Dennis may be able to attend some of these things together.

To: Ray's niece, Christina Gottúla and husband Steve:

Christina, you are the daughter of Ray's sister, Cordy Ann Norris Kleinsóрге. She and Steve have served the nation's colors by their years of service in the United States Armed Forces. Steve continues to serve by his duties as an officer in the Goose Creek, South Carolina, Police Department.

The Gottulas have lived in South Carolina for around 20 years, but often visit Christina's father, Clarence Kleinsóрге, who lives in Missouri. Their trips west have consistently included time with Uncle Ray and cousin Dennis. Their absence today is because of an emergency medical issue that required them to remain in South Carolina. Our prayers for complete recovery shall continue. Yet, your absence does not diminish your desire to have been here to offer your comfort to Dennis and salute Uncle Ray.

To Ray's cousins:

I was told by Dennis that Ray's mother had several siblings and several cousins. For those of you who are with us today, Dennis thanks you for attending his dad's memorial service. You, too, have provided him with great comfort by your presence.

Dennis, in addition to these relatives, I also say to you that along with myself and Jo Henra, the members of Grace Doctrine Church extend to you our condolences on the loss of your father. You have fond memories of your time with him that you may cherish forever. You may now, in time, convert your sorrow over to the confident expectation of the promised future reunion. May the grace of God sustain you during the interim.

Shall we close in prayer:

Heavenly Father, we come to your throne of grace today, saddened by the death of a father, uncle, cousin, and friend. Yet we have learned from Your Word that such sorrow is only experienced by those who are left behind. And so, we are encouraged by the knowledge that You rejoice in the death of Your saints and that Raymond Norris is happily in Your presence.

Thus, it is our prayer that Your grace will comfort those of us who now find ourselves missing him. Shower upon us your gracious mercies which will bring tranquility to our souls.

Such tranquility springs from biblical principles which sustain, give strength, and provide the ability to endure. May the Holy Spirit empower each one to draw from this reservoir of confidence, enabling each to keep his eyes focused on the Source of all good and perfect gifts, our Lord Jesus Christ. Raymond was indeed a good gift, now made perfect in Him.

There is no substitute for victory. There can be no victory without Christ, a victory that was won through His substitutionary sacrifice on the cross and made available to all through faith alone in Him.

Raymond, Your child, is victorious. On April 05, 2021, You ushered him into the realm of Your eternal glory about which we are confident and for which we are grateful.

Thank You for Your matchless grace allowing us to have this quintessential gentleman as part of our lives. We rest in the confidence that the sorrow we now endure due to his absence will be soon transformed by the joyous expectation of the promised future reunion.

And we lift our prayer in the name of Your uniquely born Son, namely, Jesus Christ, who is *Yahweh Sevaoth*: the Lord of the Armies.

Amen.

We now welcome to the microphone expressions of remembrances from Raymond's friends and family. As you approach the microphone, please provide your name and your relationship to Ray as a friend or family member. The first to speak is:

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After last speaker: Prayer for the food prepared in the church cafeteria.