

**Schedule of Meeting Times:**

WKAC 1080 AM Sunday 7:30 AM

*Speaker, Robert Emerson*

Study Sunday 10:00 AM

Worship Sunday 11:00 AM

Worship Sunday 5:00 PM

*Singing every 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday evening*

Study Wednesday 7:00 PM

**Preacher / bulletin editor:** Kris Vilander**Phone:** (256) 472-1065; (256) 472-1042**E-mail:** kris@haysmillchurchofchrist.org**Website:** www.haysmillchurchofchrist.orgCome study  
with us!**Servants during May:****Songleader:** Larry (6), David (13),  
Chandler (20), Dwight (27), Stanley (3)**Reading:** Robert**Announcements:** Marty**Communion:** Mike, Buddy, Lakin, David**Wednesday Lesson:** Stanley (2), Kris (9),

Mike (16), Larry (23), Stanley (30)

**Lawn Mowing (week beginning):**Robert (6), Larry (13), Kris (20),  
Billy (27), Marty (3)**Singing:** Vilander (27)**Area Meetings:****Hays Mill church of Christ**

21705 Hays Mill Road

Elkmont, AL 35620

**The Bible .  
Examiner***"Examine everything carefully..." - 1 Thessalonians 5:21 NASB*

Volume 1

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Number 8

***If Christianity were Illegal...***

*Christians found themselves in difficult times even after the Roman Emperor Domitian was assassinated. There were, of course, times of active persecution, but even during times of relative peace, laws that remained "on the books" could be used to deliver them up to the whims of a conscientious magistrate.*

*The emperor Trajan appointed Pliny the Younger as an official over the province of Bithynia; and as Pliny visited the various cities under his authority (AD 111-113), he found himself wondering what to do with these stubborn "Christians."*

*Pliny carried on a good deal of correspondence, much of which has been preserved. The following are two actual letters that were among his official correspondence to the emperor.*

**TO THE EMPEROR TRAJAN**

It is my invariable rule, Sir, to refer to you in all matters where I feel doubtful; for who is more capable of removing my scruples, or informing my ignorance?

Having never been present at any trials concerning those who profess

Christianity, I am unacquainted not only with the nature of their crimes, or the measure of their punishment, but how far it is proper to enter into an examination concerning them. Whether, therefore, any difference is usually made with respect to ages, or no distinction is to be observed between the young and the adult; whether repentance entitles them to a pardon; or if a man has been once a Christian, it avails nothing to desist from his error; whether the very profession of Christianity, unattended with any criminal act, or only the crimes themselves inherent in the profession are punishable; on all these points I am in great doubt.

In the meanwhile, the method I have observed towards those who have been brought before me as Christians is this: I asked them whether they were Christians; if they admitted it, I repeated the question twice, and threatened them with punishment; if they persisted, I ordered them to be at once punished: for I was persuaded, whatever the

nature of their opinions might be, a contumacious [i.e., stubbornly disobedient or rebellious, KV] and inflexible obstinacy certainly deserved correction. There were others also brought before me possessed with the same infatuation, but being Roman citizens, I directed them to be sent to Rome.

But this crime spreading (as is usually the case) while it was actually under prosecution, several instances of the same nature occurred. An anonymous information was laid before me containing a charge against several persons, **who upon examination denied they were Christians, or had ever been so.** They repeated after me an invocation to the gods, and offered religious rites with wine and incense before your statue (which for that purpose I had ordered to be brought, together with those of the gods), and even reviled the name of Christ: **whereas there is no forcing, it is said, those who are really Christians** into any of these compliances: I thought it proper, therefore, to discharge them. Some among those who were accused by a witness in person **at first confessed themselves Christians, but immediately after denied it;** the rest owned indeed that **they had been of that number formerly, but had now** (some above three, others more, and a few above twenty years ago) **renounced that error.** They all worshipped your statue and the images of the gods, uttering imprecations at the same time against the name of Christ. They affirmed the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they met on a stated day before it

was light, and addressed a form of prayer to Christ, as to a divinity, binding themselves by a solemn oath, not for the purposes of any wicked design, but never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble, to eat in common a harmless meal. From this custom, however, **they desisted after the publication of my edict, by which, according to your commands, I forbade the meeting of any assemblies.** After receiving this account, I judged it so much the more necessary to endeavor to extort the real truth, by putting two female slaves to the torture, who were said to officiate' in their religious rites: but all I could discover was evidence of an absurd and extravagant superstition.

I deemed it expedient, therefore, to adjourn all further proceedings, in order to consult you. For it appears to be a matter highly deserving your consideration, more especially as great numbers must be involved in the danger of these prosecutions, which have already extended, and are still likely to extend, to persons of all ranks and ages, and even of both sexes. In fact, this contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread its infection among the neighboring villages and country. Nevertheless, **it still seems possible to restrain its progress.** The temples, at least, which were once almost deserted, begin now to be frequented; and the sacred rites, after a long intermission, are again revived; while there is a general demand for the

victims, which till lately found very few purchasers. From all this **it is easy to conjecture what numbers might be reclaimed if a general pardon were granted to those who shall repent of their error.**

#### TRAJAN TO PLINY

You have adopted the right course, my dearest Secundtis, in investigating the charges against the Christians who were brought before you.

It is not possible to lay down any general rule for all such cases. Do not go out of your way to look for them. If indeed they should be brought before you, and **the crime is proved, they must be punished;** with the restriction, however, that **where the party denies he is a Christian, and shall make it evident that he is not,** by invoking our gods, **let him** (notwithstanding any former


suspicion) **be pardoned upon his repentance.**

Anonymous information ought not to be received in any sort of prosecution. It is introducing a very dangerous precedent, and is quite foreign to the spirit of our age.

*It is interesting to note the "great number" of Christians that he thought likely to be found in the province of all ranks and ages, male and female, both in town and country.*

*Perhaps even more interesting is the ease with which he felt he could "restrain the progress." How would you react, if you faced torture or death, but could be pardoned simply by "repenting of your error..." of serving Christ?*

*Jesus said, "Be faithful until death [and in context, that means even to the point of death, KV], and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev 2:10b).*

*From the Letters of Pliny, numbers 97 and 98, Edited by F. C. T. Bosanquet; translated by William Melmoth* 

## Hear the gospel of Christ!

Invite your friends and neighbors to

 **our meeting May 13-16**

**with Kasey Harbin**

*Remember in Prayer*  

Both the Leopard family and sister Bernice Osburn will be out of town today.

Don't forget those who are unable to meet with us, including... Lois Adams, Ruth Black, Carolyn Dennis,

Dot and Tim Hice, Polly McNatt, and Hazel Teeples.

Please also take this opportunity to visit or write Madelene Britnell, as well: Valley View Health & Rehab, 5968 Wall-Triana Hwy, Madison, AL 35757. She would greatly appreciate it!