

MercEmail A Weekly Devotional by Steve Higginbotham

It Does Matter What You Believe

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Just yesterday, I learned of the death of Jamie Coots. Jamie died after being bitten by a poisonous snake during a "snake handling church service." Coots could have received medical treatment, but he refused it based on his religious convictions and died.

Coots became a celebrity of sorts by appearing in the National Geographic television series, "Snake Salvation." This television show documented the beliefs and practices of a Pentecostal church in southeast Kentucky that "handles poisonous snakes."

Members of this religious sect believe that Mark 16:17-18 commands them to engage in this practice. However, a more careful study of the Bible will reveal that Jesus wasn't commanding Christians to be involved in a "side show" involving snakes. He was stating that his followers would be given miraculous abilities that would assist them in confirming the message they preached. An example of what Jesus was talking about is found in Acts 28:1-6 when the apostle Paul was bitten by a poisonous viper on the Island of Malta. Instead of dying as the natives surely thought he would, Paul simply shook the snake from his hand, and he was alright. Furthermore, these miraculous gifts were temporary (1 Corinthians 13:8-10; Ephesians 4:8-13) and were never intended to last for all time.

Sadly, Mr. Coots' misguided faith and interpretation of the Bible cost him his life. While, most of us reading this will not make the same mistake that Mr. Coots did, we may make other mistakes that could be just as harmful to our spiritual health? If we don't give great care and attention to reading and studying the word of God, we too can be hurt.

You see, in spite of what you've heard some people say, it does matter what you believe.

By Steve Higginbotham