

BA
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Unclean and Undone



Inside

2023: Come and See



ARTICLES

- 4 Satan's Lie | Jody McCoy
- 7 Welcome to Hope | Diana C. Derringer
- 8 Course Correction | Ubong Edet
- 13 Hiding From God | Grace Eggebeen
- 14 The Goodness of Judgment | R. Herbert
- 18 The Heart of the Matter | Whaid Rose
- 20 The Immigration 'Problem' | Robert Stephens
- 22 Once I Was Blind | Bonita Jewel Hele
- 24 A Cross-Shaped Hole | Cindy Arora
- 28 Welcomed and Welcoming | Moises Capetillo

DEPARTMENTS

- 3 First Word — A Father's Gift
- 11 Questions & Answers
- 12 David Discovers Rebellion
- 16 Transgression ... and Confession
- 25 Poetry — Brianna Voltmer
- 26 Call to Convention
- 27 GC Ministries News
- 31 Last Word — Unclean and Undone

Scripture quotations

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A Father's Gift

My first Bible advocate wasn't the magazine. I'd seen it around the house growing up, but I didn't pay it much attention until later in life. No, my first advocate didn't come to me on paper but in a person. My dad.

From my earliest memories, I watched him reading his well-worn Bible at night by lamplight. He wasn't a booklover in general, but he loved that book — *The Book*. He consumed it and it consumed him. Dad not once made me read my Bible. He never lectured me about it. He simply read it and lived it. I watched and somewhere along the line, I started reading and loving it too.

Dad loved the Bible's promises and prophecies best. He took them with the utmost seriousness. He believed every human interest and ambition had to be subordinated to them. Like a "lamp unto my feet" (Psalm 119:105), the Word reveals who God is and where He is taking us. The Word illuminates who we are — and aren't — as well. "Find yourself in the Word, son," Dad would tell me. "Don't flinch at what you see."

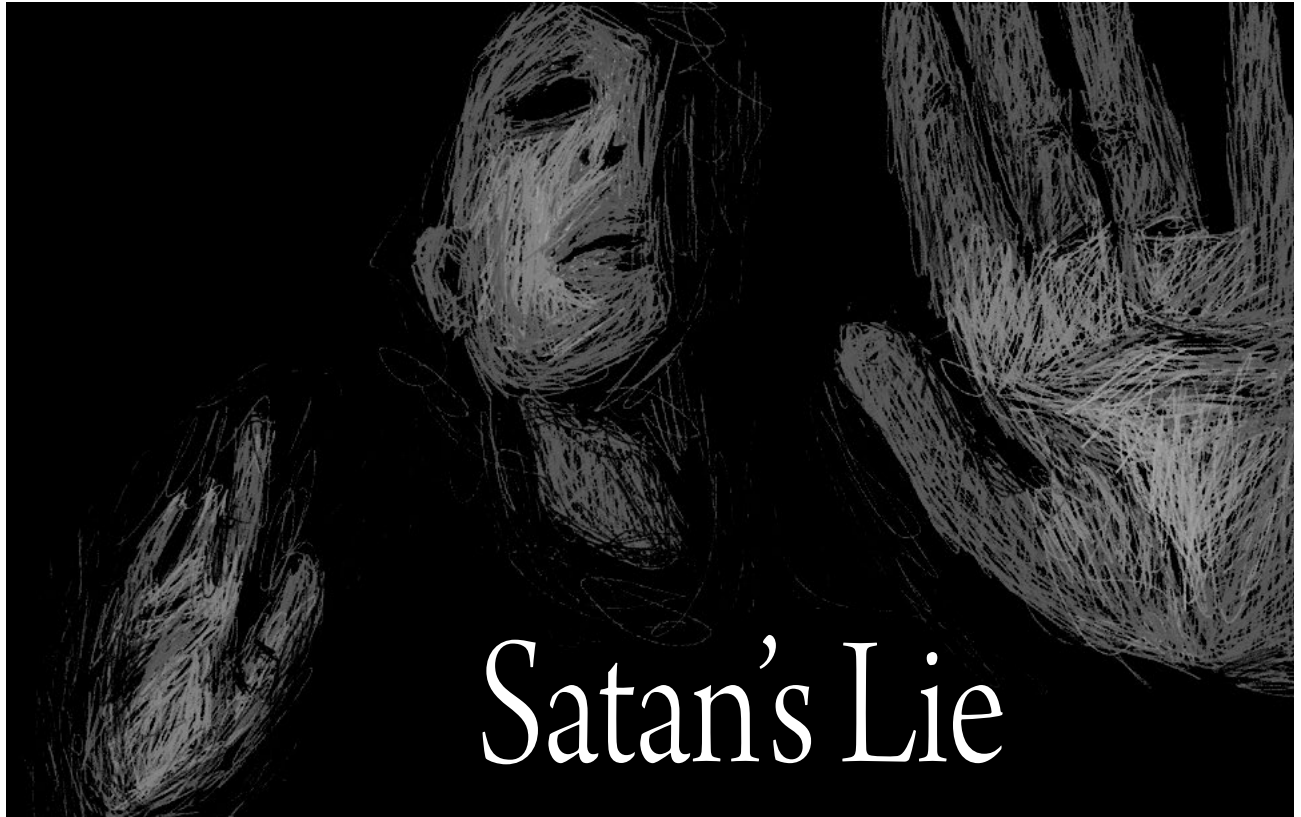
When I came to know Jesus at a young age, Dad told me to wait to be baptized. He didn't doubt that I knew Jesus, but he wanted to make sure I knew myself. I waited, and when I finally made my public confession and was baptized in my teens, I knew my need. Like a two-edged sword, the Word of God had cut deep, exposing every thought and intent of my heart (Hebrews 4:12). Like a mirror, it showed me what manner of man I was: unclean and undone (James 1:22-25). Dad taught me to never forget what I saw and to never stop looking at who I am and where God is taking me.

Dad died and was buried here in Jasper the week of Thanksgiving. I'm writing now only a few weeks later, trying to wrap my mind around our loss. But what is clear to me is how thankful I am to God for my dad, who advocated the Bible so honestly and passionately. I dedicate this BA to him. He knew his Lord, and he knew himself by the light of God's Word. And he gave that gift to me.

I love you, Dad! Thanks!

— Jason Overman





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Satan's Lie

Falsely following something other than the goodness of God.

by Jody McCoy

For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature (Romans 7:18).

In Eden, God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or they'd die. They didn't need to understand the big picture. They just needed to respect God's authority by trusting His word and His judgment.

Later, Satan told Eve that she and Adam wouldn't die if they ate from the tree. Instead, they'd be like gods. Satan said God lied to keep them from becoming gods like Him (Genesis 3:3-5).

To Eve, this satanic fantasy was better than the true paradise God had given her and Adam. Why obey God when you can be your own god? She fell for Satan's lie because she wanted to.

Maybe Eve thought Satan was right. God couldn't be good if He was standing in her way.

Adam and Eve knew it was wrong to disobey God, but they did it anyway. They rejected God's authority so they could become their own authorities as God's equals. They ate from the tree, expecting to become their own gods. But Satan's lie wasn't real. They didn't become gods;

they became corrupted by evil.

When God asked them what happened, Eve blamed the serpent as if she were innocent. Adam blamed God because God gave him the woman. What audacity!

In eating of the fruit, Adam attempted to become his own god, and even tried to elevate himself above God, claiming that he was more righteous than God. Neither Adam nor Eve was willing to admit they were no longer good. This denial of reality is called self-righteousness. We can learn much from their failure and fall into sin.

Only God is good

In His goodness, God created Adam and Eve in His image — not as independent gods but as immortal children of God. God

shared His divine good nature with them in the unity of His Spirit (2 Peter 1:4). But when they disobeyed God, they lost the very thing they hoped to gain on their own.

In Matthew 19:17, Jesus says that God alone is good. In this sense, to be good is to be like God. That's why Adam and Eve were so unwilling to admit that they were not good. They weren't ready to accept the reality that they were not gods.

Many scriptures affirm that God is good and that humans are not:

"Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood" (Genesis 8:21).

"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13).

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me (Psalm 51:5).

For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out (Romans 7:18).

Both Jews and Gentiles . . . are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one. . . . there is none that doeth good, no, not one . . . that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. . . . For all have sinned,

and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:9, 10, 12, 19, 23, KJV).

Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience . . . and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others (Ephesians 2: 2, 3).

Patterns in history

Yet throughout history, we see humanity repeatedly falling in love with Satan's lie that goodness is innate. When we walk in the strength of our perceived goodness, that pride and self-assurance make us feel that we are "gods." But that percep-

ness, which led, not to goodness but to his descent into evil when he murdered his brother.

As the centuries passed, more people drifted away from God. By Noah's day, he was the only one left who hadn't abandoned God. If humans could walk in their own goodness, this would be the moment in human history for thousands of examples of that. Yet not one soul was good. On the contrary, God grieved that humanity had become so depraved, so He destroyed the entire world (Genesis 6:5-7). Only Noah and his family survived.

After God cleansed the world from wickedness with the flood, Noah's family repopulated the earth. With Noah's descendants, surely humanity was destined to realize the lie of their inner good-

“Pride and self-assurance make us feel that we are ‘gods.’”

tion never materializes into true goodness; it's always a descent into evil.

Cain hated his brother for being more righteous than he. Abel's righteousness was an affront to his sense of goodness. God told Cain that there was no reason to be angry. Do what's right, and you'll be accepted. But Cain didn't want to admit he was wrong. He chose self-righteous-

ness. But that was not the case. Noah's descendants disobeyed God and built the tower of Babel to make a name for themselves (11:4), to glorify themselves rather than their Creator. God dealt with their rebellion by scattering the people and confusing their languages.

After Babel, God chose Abraham to father the family through whom Jesus would be born.

God promised Abraham that He would make a great nation of his family and that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him. Through the covenant God made with Abraham, his descendants became the nation of Israel, God's chosen people.

If you believe in the goodness of humans, this must be the right moment. Human goodness will shine forth from this elite group and lead the rest of humanity into realizing their own goodness.

But that's not what happened. God made it clear that He did

Harm of self-righteousness

Despite their sinfulness, the Israelites saw themselves as righteously superior to the Gentiles because they were God's chosen people. When Jesus came to call sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:12, 13), the Jews felt they didn't need a Savior because they believed they were already righteous. They had God's law.

It's true that the law is holy and good. But the law has no power to save; it has the power only to condemn (2 Corinthians 3:6-9). It was never a vehicle for salvation. God gave Israel the law as a schoolmaster to make

“The record of human history confirms that God is good and humans are not.”

not choose the Israelites because of their goodness, for they were a stubborn people (Deuteronomy 9:4-6). Israel's entire history is a compelling testimony to God's goodness in His faithful love, grace, and discipline of His covenant people, despite their unfaithfulness and sins. In the closing book of the Old Testament, we read, "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Malachi 3:6, KJV).

The record of human history confirms that God is good and humans are not.

her aware of her sins and need for a Savior (Galatians 3:17ff; Romans 3:20).

However, the Jews refused to see themselves as sinners. They tried to establish their own righteousness (through the law) and failed to submit to the righteousness of God (Romans 10:3). Jesus warned the Jews that the tax collectors and harlots admitted that they were sinners and were entering the kingdom of God before them (Matthew 21:31, 32). God sent Jesus, not to condemn the world but to save it (John 3:16, 17). The Jews excluded

themselves by embracing Satan's lie that they were good. Hating Jesus for exposing their unrighteousness, they crucified God's only Son.

Continued lie

It's been nearly two thousand years since Jesus was crucified. Most people today believe that if there is a God, He saves good people. They look at the evil in the world and think they're doing OK by comparison. Even many Christians share this belief. It's the same lie that Satan has told from the beginning, the lie that we are good.

Why does Satan do this? Because people who think they're good don't need a Savior. They don't admit guilt or turn away from their sins. Why does Satan's lie still work after six thousand years? Because people want to believe it.

This is the human condition. Christ died for everyone. Salvation is available for everyone. But only the sick need a doctor; only sinners need a Savior (Mark 2:17). God's grace is only for those who admit their guilt, turn from their sins, and turn toward Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Repent and believe! Our response is our responsibility. **BA**

Jody McCoy is the executive director of the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day). He writes from Austin, TX.



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Welcome to Hope

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by **Diana C. Derringer**

Hope. I want it. I search for it. I try to hold on to it when I find it. I sing, teach, greet, write, and listen to pastors speak words of hope. Yet in reality, hope has proven elusive from the beginning of time.

Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and were driven from the Garden of Eden. Cain killed Abel and was banished from his homeland. Joseph's brothers betrayed him and sold him into slavery. The Hebrew people endured years of Egyptian bondage. Old Testament prophets warned God's people time after time about their unfaithfulness to the holy God.

If I read, watch, or listen to current news, the world remains devoid of hope. People destroy one another with whatever weapons they possess, including hate-filled words. Disease, disaster, death, political unrest, and economic upheaval cross our screens in an endless litany of woe. Children live in homes lacking direction, filled instead with addiction, pain, hunger, and distress. People of every age suffer abuse from both strangers and caregivers. Persecution of Christians results in demolished homes and churches, imprisonment, and death.

Hatred, prejudice, greed, and a "me first" attitude dominate the pages of history.

How do I fight this never-ending battle against evil? Where do I find hope, and how do I offer hope to a world in despair?

If I look within, I find no hope. If I trust those in authority, they eventually let me down. My hope first appeared in the most unexpected way and place: through a baby in a feeding trough in Bethlehem. In Jesus I find what I so desperately desire. Jesus left His home in heaven and entered the turmoil of earth as an infant to provide the only genuine hope that lasts. His

gift remains available to all who turn to Him in repentance and faith, including abusers, drug users, murderers, and persecutors. Romans 5:8 reminds me "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

This is not the end. Through every trial, I remember Romans 12:12: "rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer." God gives me the strength I need for my present suffering, and He promises eternity with Him one day. Therefore, as Micah 7:7 declares, "I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; My God will hear me."

A few years ago, as my church's youth mission team approached their destination, a sign greeted them: "Welcome to Hope." What a fitting reminder to share the message of hope made possible by Jesus. Every day offers an opportunity to tell others the source of hope.

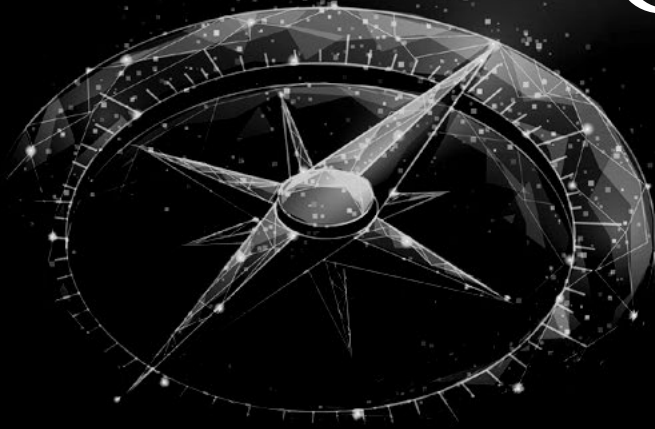
When entertaining friends, especially international university students who have never heard the story of Jesus, I help them understand who Jesus is and why He came. I invite overnight visitors to join our evening devotion as we read the Bible's message of good news through Jesus. In spite of all that's wrong in the world today, I want them to know our Savior holds out hope for all who accept His incomparable gift.

Today and always, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13). **BA**

Diana C. Derringer writes from Campbellsville, KY.



Course Correction



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Man's sin and God's
response in Isaiah and
Romans.

by **Ubong Edet**

Along with Psalms, Isaiah is the Old Testament book most quoted and alluded to in the New Testament. As one of the major prophets, Isaiah is a brilliant literary work full of poetry and imagery. The book revolves around divine accusations of rebellion and unbelief, warnings of national judgment, and calls for repentance. The book also features messages of hope and of the coming messianic King, the day of the Lord — a day of global judgment against God's enemies but of peace and rest for His people.

Because of these themes of sin and salvation, Isaiah is often called the fifth Gospel and the Romans of the Old Testament. Here the plan of God for the world and for His people is clearly revealed.

Context and content

The scope of Isaiah's message spans from the historic city of Jerusalem — corrupt, defiled, and eventually destroyed — to the future eternal city, the New Jerusalem, and the cosmic renewal of all creation (chapters 1-66). Isaiah reveals God to be the Holy One of Israel who is the only true Creator, Judge, and Savior of the world.

Ultimately, Isaiah reveals the glory of God in Jesus Christ, the holy and anointed King who establishes God's kingdom in righteousness (chapters 40-55). The book is the recipe for un-

derstanding the New Testament, who Jesus is, what He came to do, and why. We must heed its message of hope and warning of judgment.

Isaiah is a large book, but this article focuses on just the opening verses. Here we'll learn who God is and who we are. We will learn the character and content of sin, its condition and consequences, and the judgment and mercy of God. Finally, these themes will lead us to Paul and Romans 3, where the themes of Isaiah 1 (and the whole book) are understood in light of God's work in Christ.

Though we're confronted and convicted of sin, God's true purpose is to correct our misguided course. It is not to leave us with guilt and fear but with forgiveness and transformation.

Character and content of sin (Isaiah 1:2-4)

“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth!” (v. 2). Isaiah’s message begins by calling on all creation to bear witness of God’s testimony against His rebellious children, the nation of Judah. Though Isaiah addresses unbelieving nations as well, his message is primarily directed toward his people. The church of God does well to hear this as a message to other nations and, more importantly, as a word of revival that begins by confronting us with our sins.

“The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know . . . [or] consider” (v. 3). As the people of God, they should know God, but they have become willfully ignorant. They act as if they don’t know God or what He’s done for them. The Lord compares them to barnyard animals. They know the master and follow Him to the barn for food and water, but Israel wanders from one false master to another. In these verses, sin is portrayed as contrary to nature. It is mindless and irrational!

“Alas . . . They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel” (v. 4). Isaiah laments with an expression of doom. “Alas” (NKJV) is translated as “woe” in other translations — a word of strong judgment associated with wicked gentile nations (10:5; 18:1). But here first, it is said of God’s own. They are children meant to reflect their Father, but they are corrupted and corrupters.

Isaiah does not spare the truth about Israel; his words cut deep. Rather than determining to be with God and be holy like Him,

Israel has “forsaken . . . the Holy One of Israel,” deliberately turning her back on Him.

“Holy One of Israel” is among Isaiah’s preferred names for God (found twenty-five times, Isaiah 1:4 — 60:14). This divine title describes God’s very nature as completely pure — the total opposite of sin. When Isaiah was confronted with a “Holy, holy, holy” God, he cried out, “Woe is me!” (6:3, 5). These themes — the holy reality of God and our right response to Him — are in the opening chapters of Isaiah.

In this section of Isaiah 1, the holy God graciously gave Himself to Israel, and yet she has

over the people of God continues, we find not only the nature of sin but also its condition and consequences. Isaiah depicts sin as a sickness. Israel is bruised and wounded, but she does not recognize her need. She suffers an all-encompassing inward and outward condition. “The whole heart faints,” Isaiah writes, and from head to foot she is stricken. Worst of all, there is no remedy, no healing for this condition.

Isaiah warns next of sin’s ultimate consequence: God’s judgment of it. The nation is desolate and burned with fire. Strangers have devoured her. Israel is likened to an abandoned garden.

“ ‘Rebellious’ is a good summary of the nature of sin: rebellion against the good and holy God. ”

despised His holiness. She turned away from Him, becoming like the pagan nations to whom she was called into covenant with God to be a light and witness.

Israel is not just corrupted; she is rebellious. That word is a good summary of the nature of sin: rebellion against the good and holy God.

Condition and consequences of sin (Isaiah 1:5-8)

“Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more” (v. 5). As Isaiah’s lament

But thanks to God’s grace, that is not the end of the story.

Judgment and mercy of God (Isaiah 1:9, 18)

“Unless the LORD of hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like Gomorrah” (v. 9).

After exposing Israel’s rebellion and confronting her with the consequence of sin, Isaiah reminds her of God’s mercy. Isaiah is saying, “If God’s people were left on their own to fulfill

their natural and sinful desires, without divine intervention, their fate would have been just like Sodom and Gomorrah's." They would have deserved it! Deliberate rebellion calls for the unmitigated wrath of God and eternal damnation.

This is what every sinner deserves. But here is where the unmerited mercy of God enters for the remnant that will see their sins, and God's grace, and accept it. Like Israel, we are not spared destruction because of our power, merit, or wisdom, but solely because of God's grace.

“Isaiah would admonish us to not focus on the outside world but on the inside — ourselves.”

“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool’” (v. 18).

This is just the first chapter of Isaiah. There is so much more, but we note already in Isaiah's message of sin and judgment, of hope and salvation, the themes that would come to full revelation in Jesus Christ and the New Testament.

Isaiah fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Romans 3)

Take Romans 3, for instance. In this epistle, apostle Paul sets forth the good news that the sin and salvation described in Isaiah has been dealt with and delivered to us through Christ. Two key words in Romans 3 describe what God has done in His Son.

Paul explains that in the sacrificial death of Jesus, God has brought *redemption* and *propitiation* (vv. 24, 25). Redemption is the price paid to cancel the debt, securing freedom from slavery to sin. Propitiation refers to the re-

moval of sin and its stain through atonement. Both of these words explain how God deals with the problem of sin while declaring His gracious love toward those lost in it.

The concepts of redemption and propitiation draw our attention to the justice and love of God. In Christ, He graciously sets sinners free by taking His own demands of holiness upon Himself. The divine penalty for sin — death — was meted out, and the Lord paid that price on the cross (redemption). Divine wrath against sin had to be satisfied, and the Lord bore that

wrath on the cross, satisfying the condemnation of sin in Himself (propitiation).

This is good news for us. We know the debilitating sickness of sin and its ultimate end in death (Romans 6:23), and it's easy to focus on it: lust for possessions, sex, power, selfishness in general. No wonder marriages and families are falling apart; that depression, addiction, and suicide abound; that God's basic design for human sexuality and family is being abandoned. Isaiah would admonish us to not focus on the outside world but on the inside — ourselves.

The same sin sickness is inside the church. Believers! Do we treasure and saturate ourselves in God's Word, or have we turned back? Do we despise God's truth in practice, if not in word? Do we treat each other and our worship together as optional or boring and wonder why our children don't love the church or God's Word? We, too, can suffer the effects of sin.

May we all remember that God does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities (Psalm 103:10). May we return to the Lord, confess our sins, and find the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Death and judgment do not have to be our fate. Jesus gives us a new fate — freedom — if we will accept His gift. **BA**

Ubong Edet is the president of youth ministry in the Church of God (Seventh Day) Calabar District, Cross River State, Nigeria.



Questions & Answers



Did Adam's sin cause him to stop being the "son of God," and thus all descendants of his since?

In a word, no. But that isn't the only word on the topic. Being created by God, the first Adam and his descendants are rightly called God's offspring (Acts 17:28). Adam's sin caused him to lose his full, intimate relationship with his Creator Father. It would require the Only Begotten and last Adam, Jesus, to restore the sonship that had been lost (John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:45).

To be clear on this topic, we first need to better understand the fatherhood of God. Then we need to recognize that God's plan includes all necessary steps to reach His desired will of an intimate relationship with His creation.

The first point is the most obvious: God was Adam's Father. Adam did not come from any human but directly from God himself, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. God is the Father of all that is — a testimony of His eternal nature and identity (Isaiah 63:16; Malachi 2:10). But the temporal nature of the first Adam and his descendants is in stark contrast to the eternal nature of the last Adam and those made the "sons of God" through Him. The first Adam, having the breath of life, is a reflection of the true God, and so a son of God. However, the reflection should not be compared to or confused with what causes the reflection.

This gives us insight into being created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27). It is in some way the reflection of the Father God. But the last Adam as Son of God is different: He is from eternity (Hebrews 8:1-5; 9:23, 24).

Adam's sin cost him his privileged status as a

son of God. He exchanged God's Spirit for "the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2, ESV). Through willful sin, Adam lost his relationship with his true Father, and the devil became his father (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8). This devastation affected not only Adam but, as humanity's representative, his offspring as well.

However, God's plan of salvation predated the creation of the world (1 Peter 1:19, 20). Elements of God's salvation involved the incarnation of the eternal Son of God in order to become the last Adam, humanity's new representative. Most notably, even as the *eternal* Son of God provided the basis for the first Adam to be a son of God, so the *incarnate* Son of God provides the basis for those who believe in Him to become "sons of God" indeed (Galatians 3:26—4:6).

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12, 13).

This birth is not of physical progeny but of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus told Nicodemus (John 3:1-16). It is also called adoption (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5). Thus, born or adopted, we are being "conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29).

The wonder of God's majesty is unmatched. We worship for many reasons, but His mercy in redeeming children, who first forsook their relationship with their Father, motivates us to worship God in view of His mercy in making us His children again (Romans 12:1).

— Elder Chip Hinds

David Discovers Rebellion



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by **Marcia Sanders**

“Skip! Come back here! SKIP!” David slumped on the porch, dejected. Why wouldn’t that dog ever listen to him? He had tried everything to teach him to mind. It wasn’t because he wanted to be mean to his dog. He loved him! He wanted to keep him safe, but Skip wouldn’t listen.

“What’s all the yelling about?” David’s dad asked, rounding the corner of the house.

“It’s Skip again. He just won’t come when I call him if he’s found a rabbit or something to chase. I’m afraid he’ll go out on the road and get hit by a car, or some larger animal will attack him. How can I protect him when he won’t listen to me?”

“Do you think he just doesn’t care for you? Doesn’t love you anymore?” Dad queried.

David shook his head. “No, I know he loves me. He’s so excited to see me every morning or any time I get back home from being gone somewhere. It’s only when he’s off chasing something that he won’t come back until he’s through running.”

“Hmmm,” Dad mused. “He reminds me of someone else I know.”

“Who’s that?”

“Someone who loves to play basketball, read, and play video games and is slow to obey his mom or dad when he’s asked to stop.”

“Oh, Dad, that’s not the same at all,” David said. “I’m trying to protect Skip and teach him how to be safe. You and Mom just want me to clean my room or do my chores. I can always do those later.”

“David, one of the things that makes me so proud of you is your desire to serve God. Did you know that God values obedience over anything else? He said that He would rather His people obey Him than to give Him great offerings and sacrifices.”

“Seriously? I thought sacrifices were, I don’t

know . . . like the greatest thing you could do for God,” David answered.

“That’s not what God said when He told Saul why he was being fired as king. In 1 Samuel 15, God used His prophet Samuel to tell Saul that obedience is better than sacrifice and that rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft. Can you think of anything further from God than witchcraft?”

“No,” David admitted. “Wow! God is really serious about rebellion, isn’t He?”

“Yes, He is,” replied Dad. “Samuel told King Saul that because he had rejected the word of the Lord, God rejected him as king. Can you imagine how disappointed God was in Saul?”

“I’d never want God to be disappointed in me,” David said. “I’ll always obey God, no matter what.”

“I know you mean that, son. But when you don’t obey your mom and me, you are disobeying God. Remember the fifth commandment? ‘Honor your father and mother.’ Or how about the words of Paul in Ephesians 6:1? ‘Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.’ God is serious about you obeying us.”

Dad continued. “Mom and I are trying to bring you up to be the godly man you want to be. Just like you’re training Skip to be a well-behaved dog and to keep him safe because you love him.”

“Wow. I’d never thought of it like that before,” David said. “I’m going to try a lot harder to mind you and Mom when you first tell me what to do, and not wait for my time.” **BA**

Marcia Sanders writes from Fort Smith, AR, where she attends the Church of God (Seventh Day) with her husband, Randy.





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by Grace Eggebeen

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden (Genesis 3:8).

The Bible tells of people hiding from God at the beginning (in Genesis) and at the end (in Revelation). In Genesis 3:8, Adam and Eve attempt to evade their Maker after listening to a lie and choosing to disobey Him. They hide from the presence of the Lord among the trees, fearing God's wrath. In the same way, Revelation 6:16, 17 tells of men at the end of time hiding among rocks, fearing the wrath of the Lamb.

This hiding from God begins as distance in our relationship with Him. From Adam and Eve to current times, humans have taken steps away from their Maker. We do this through believing lies, allowing pride to inflate egos, and rationalizing attitudes and actions. We evade God through distractions on our cellphones and other media. Human relationships may gain a stronger foothold in our hearts than our love for God, crowding Him out. If we are just going through the motions, even church activities and the routines of our "spiritual" lives can interfere with a deeper relationship with God. We can keep our attention focused on everything except God. This ultimately leads to hiding from Him.

But it doesn't have to be this way. We can expose ourselves to God intentionally or unintentionally. After Jesus' arrest, Peter hoped to go unnoticed as he remained in the vicinity of

Christ's trial (Matthew 26:69-74). However, he stood out to a servant girl and other bystanders. No longer able to blend in, Peter refused to acknowledge his association with Jesus. He didn't want to be pointed out as a Christ-follower.

Peter eventually was transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit and spoke boldly about his Savior. There was no doubt that from then on, he intentionally followed Christ.

Where Peter was unintentional about his exposure to God, we can be intentional. The more connected we are with God every part of the day, the more open and transparent our hearts will be toward Him.

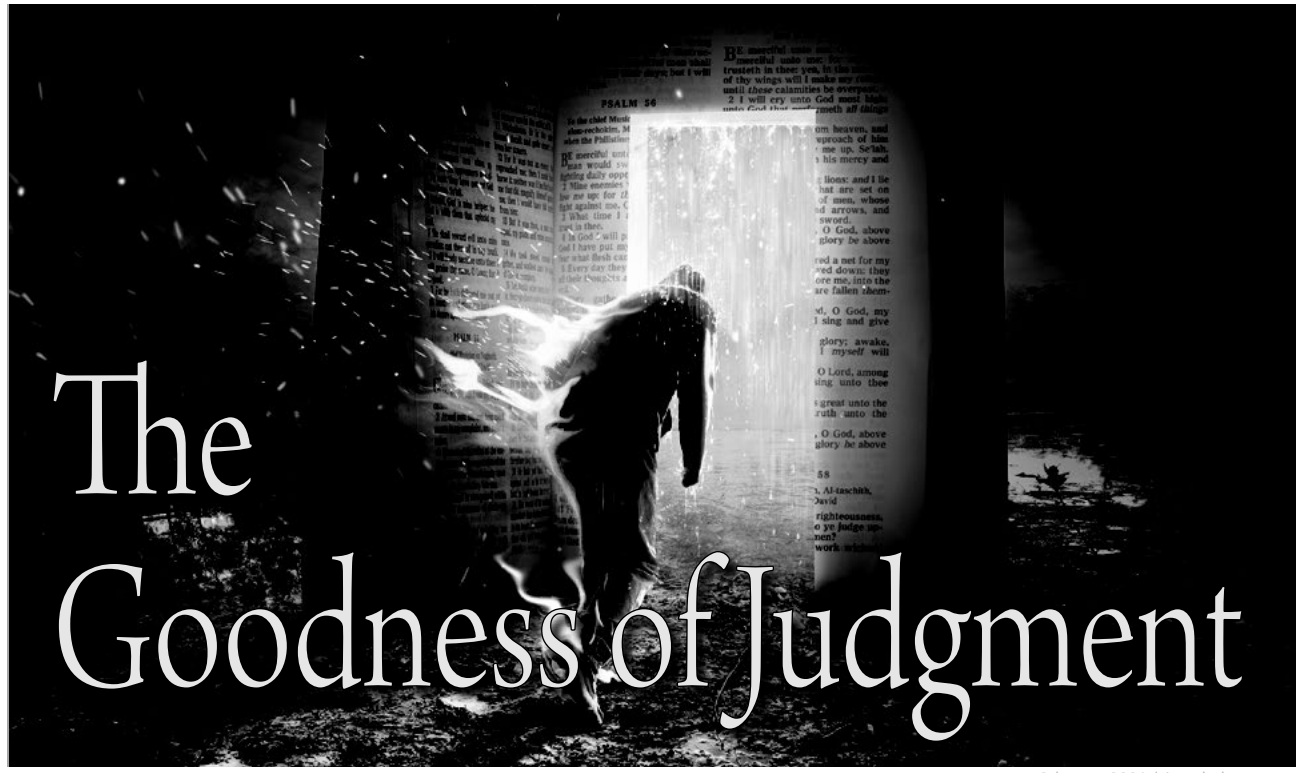
The key is hiding *in* God, not *from* Him. David the psalmist did this. He spoke honestly with God about his enemies, his sins, his fears, his griefs. When our prayers are free and honest, as David's were, without holding back questions, doubts, and negative emotions, we are transparent with God.

Therefore, we don't need to hide from God in fear of judgment, as Adam and Eve did. And we won't have to hide as people will at the end of time. We can have the confidence of David, in communion with God:

You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah (Psalm 32:7, cf. 119:114). **BA**

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The Goodness of Judgment

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Revelation and the righteousness of God.
by R. Herbert

When we consider what the Bible clearly shows regarding God’s promised judgment on sin and unrepentant humans, it is easy to see only the darker tones of the prophetic picture. We miss the highlights of goodness, mercy, and compassion that are also there.

In the messages of the Old Testament prophets, for example, we can overlook the loving God behind the looming punishments. Even in Isaiah, one of the most positive and uplifting of the prophetic books, we might not recognize the love in the graphic words of judgment aimed at Israel, Judah, and their surround-

ing nations. Yet the goodness of God is there.

While Isaiah 13-23 and other chapters consist of dire “burdens,” or pronouncements, on the nations, we should notice the attitude of both the prophet and the God who inspired him. For example, regarding the promised violent destruction of Israel’s enemy, Moab, Isaiah expresses strong emotions: “My heart cries out over Moab” (15:5); “My heart laments for Moab like a harp, my inmost being for Kir Hareseth” (16:11). Here he shows the deep, underlying divine sympathy even for those who must be punished in the extreme.

Righteous and just

But perhaps the clearest place we find God’s attitude toward those who must receive His punishment is in the Bible’s last book. Revelation repeatedly

shows God’s judgment against sin and wrongdoing to be both final and fierce. This leads many skeptics to claim that Revelation shows a “harsh” God, as they claim many of the Old Testament prophetic books do. But Revelation shows that this is not the case.

We can find roots of this in the Old Testament, which acknowledges God’s righteousness in judgment, as when Abraham declares “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25). The psalmist also declares that “righteousness and justice” are the foundation of God’s throne (Psalm 89:14).

In the same way, the Greek word for *righteousness* used throughout Revelation is *dikaio-suné*, which carries the dual connotation of both righteousness and justice. Revelation asserts that this justice is based on the righteousness of God: “You are

just in these judgments, O Holy One . . . Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments!" (16:5, 7, emphasis added). Justice is also based on the righteousness of Christ: "Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and *in righteousness he judges and makes war*" (19:11, ESV, emphases added).

Loving anger

Revelation shows that despite the patience God displays to the wicked, He will eventually judge and destroy evil. This theme underlies chapters 6-20, the bulk of the book. In two passages within those chapters (14:14-20 and 19:11-16) we are given graphic, symbolic summaries of God's judgment. This is one of several indications that a number of scenes in Revelation may be parallel views of the same event, rather than sequential events. And it is not coincidental that both passages speak of God's wrath (14:19; 19:15).

But this wrathful judgment has a purpose. It is loving anger aimed at freeing humanity from sin, rather than vengeful anger intended to simply punish God's mortal children.

To see this, we must look closely at the imagery used in Revelation. The punishments described in its central chapters culminate in the catastrophic plagues poured out on humanity in chapters 15 and 16. The images used in this climactic part of Revelation closely resemble the plagues God brought on Egypt to enable the Exodus. That is why, as the plagues begin, a heavenly chorus is said to sing "the song

of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb" (15:3).

It is sometimes said that this song reflects God's law (Moses) and grace (the Lamb), but this misses a point. Moses oversaw and administered the same kind of plagues on Egypt, to release Israel from slavery, that the Lamb will administer on the powers that hold humanity in sin and on those who will not submit to Him. Notice how the song stresses the justness of this punishment:

"Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Al-

turn to Him — for the specific reason that God's acts have been revealed and recognized as righteous judgment (Revelation 15:4). These are the very same nations that were said to rage against God in 11:18, but God's righteous judgment does not destroy them. It frees them from sin and leads to their eventual salvation (12:10).

This point is nowhere more clearly made than in Revelation, but it is not a new theme in the Bible. The psalmist wrote, "Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes, he comes

“Despite the patience God displays to the wicked, He will eventually judge and destroy evil.”

mighty. *Just and true are your ways, King of the nations. Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed*" (Revelation 15:3, 4, emphasis added).

Greater redemption

Truly, the final plague-punishments of Revelation conclude in a redemption that is far greater than that of Israel's release from Egypt. Now, instead of only Israel coming to worship God (Exodus 8:1, etc.), all nations are said to

to judge the earth. He will judge the world in *righteousness* and the peoples in his faithfulness" (Psalm 96:13, emphasis added).

God's judgment and punishment have always been, and always will be, made in righteousness and love. **BA**

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Transgression . . .

❖ The Epistle of Romans and the Witness of Holy Scripture ❖

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (3:23).

~ ~ ~

For we have proved that all [are] under sin, as it is written . . . (vv. 9, 10).

There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one (vv. 10-12, quoting Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3).

Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness (vv. 13, 14, quoting Psalm 5:9; 140:3; 10:7).

Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known (vv. 15-17, quoting Isaiah 59:7, 8).

There is no fear of God before their eyes (v. 18, quoting Psalm 36:1; 59:7, 8).

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God (v. 19).

... and Confession

❖ The Apostle Paul and King David ❖

Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works . . . (Romans 4:6).

Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin (vv. 7, 8, quoting Psalm 32:1, 2).

David's Great Confession in Psalm 32

When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah (vv. 3-5).

Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written . . . (Romans 3:4)

That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged (v. 4, quoting Psalm 51:4).

David's Great Confession in Psalm 51

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me (vv. 1-3).

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise (Psalm 51:17).

Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version.



The Heart of

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by Whaid Rose

The sign beneath the broken clock reads: *Don't blame the hand – the problem is much deeper.*

Likewise, the brokenness we lament in today's world is symptomatic of a much deeper problem, captured succinctly in this statement: "At the heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart."

It's true, for we live from the heart, from which flows all of life's issues (Proverbs 4:23). The goal of Christian discipleship is to eventually live fully from the new heart Jesus gives us.

Degenerative condition

But the problem goes all the way back to the Fall in Genesis 3. Sin not only caused separation between the creature and the Creator but also set in motion a degenerating condition in the human heart.

Thus, as early as Genesis 4, a homicide results from conflict between brothers. By Genesis 6, the situation is far worse: "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the

thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (v. 5).

This so grieves God's heart that He decides to destroy humankind and start over (vv. 6, 7). This He does through a worldwide flood (chapters 6-10) and gives Noah the same assignment He gave to Adam in the garden: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (9:1).

But though Noah "found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (6:8), sin's root remains in him, which is passed down to his descendants — and, by extension, to all of us. So by Genesis 11, sin is so great in the earth that God must again take action. The people are trying to make a name for themselves by building a great city and a tower tall enough to reach the heavens (v. 4).

God stops the building project by confusing their language, but that doesn't resolve the deeper problem. So He decides to start again, not by a cataclysmic flood but by calling one man to Himself whose heart he would reshape.

Enter Abram (later renamed Abraham) into the redemptive drama (Genesis 12). In our fondness for Father Abraham, we sometimes forget that he wasn't a Jew when God called him. He

was a pagan man from ancient Mesopotamia, where they worshipped the moon god, chief among other idols.

The stark reality is that with the whole human civilization now given to the worship of idols, Abram is the best God can find. He'll eventually end up in Canaan, where pagan idolatry is far worse.

Antidote

How did the human condition get this way so early in human history?

Paul helps us understand in his lengthy exposition in Romans 1, concluding with "they did not glorify [God] as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (v. 21).

Don't miss the weight of Paul's statement. Apart from the light of the gospel, the human heart remains in deep darkness. Hate, violence, frequent mass shootings, senseless wars, a new threat of nuclear conflict, and much more emanate from the darkness of the human heart.

The heart therefore needs to be radically reshaped, which is what God proceeds to do with Abraham and his descendants,

the Matter

Moses, and even the nation of Israel.

God's explanation for leading the people the long route through the wilderness is instructive: "And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart" (Deuteronomy 8:2).

It's not that God didn't know what was in the people's hearts; He wanted them to know. The evil the heart is capable of often escapes us: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

It is helpful to read this as a description of the natural inclinations of the unregenerate heart, but we must be ever mindful, as Robert Murray M'Cheyne says: "The seed of every sin known to man is in my heart." In other words, without the sanctifying work of the Spirit, the heart remains fertile soil for sin and evil.

This is Paul's point in the midsection of Romans. In chapter 6 he tells us how to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ. In chapter 7 he helps us face the reality of the ongoing struggle between our old and

new natures. In chapter 8 he explains how we gain victory over the flesh through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

This is rightly regarded as the most important chapter in the New Testament, if not the entire Bible, for it offers the antidote for the degenerating condition. And because this condition affects not just our bodies but the creative order, Paul offers hope that creation itself will one day be redeemed from its "bondage of corruption" (8:21).

Meanwhile, the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses (v. 26) and transforms us into the image of Jesus (v. 29) so we can live fully and vibrantly from the reshaped heart Jesus gives us.

Darkness to light

Our hearts are formed, deformed, and must be transformed. The good news is that God has made a way to solve the problem of the human heart, a way for its darkness to give way to glorious light, the light that shines in our hearts from the face of Jesus:

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of

the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Sin runs deep, but God's grace runs deeper still — deep enough to reach the problem at the heart of the human problem. So we exclaim with Paul, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24, 25). **BA**

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Read this issue's
Online Extra:
"For the Joy of It,"
by Ken Lawson
Visit baonline.org.



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What should our first priority be as a church in this complex issue?
by Robert Stephens

Twenty years ago I was sitting in a pew when a Mexican man entered our church. He looked out of place in our small Caucasian congregation. The Church of God was his home back in Mexico, and he wanted to be part of our church. But he spoke only Spanish. Someone tried to teach him words in English, using signs to try to talk.

The awkwardness of the situation bothered me so much that I promised myself to learn Spanish. I eventually did. A few years later, I translated for his family at a Super Sabbath service. I've

been active in the Spanish-speaking community ever since.

In recent months, the number of arrivals at our southern border has increased tremendously. Many have no family or friends in the US and are being sent to homeless shelters all over the country. I have visited many local churches, asking for volunteers to help with an organization that meets basic needs in the local immigrant community. Unfortunately, most churches in my area are not aware of the needs and are not interested in getting involved.

A pastor of a local Spanish-speaking congregation told me, "These immigrants are breaking our economy." Many on the political Right fear migrants are stealing jobs and bringing crime. The political Left believes immigration is a humanitarian crisis caused by a breakdown in

society and that everyone should be given welfare assistance. Both want more government intervention, just in different ways. But these generalizations don't adequately address a complex issue.

Showing compassion

Border security is a legitimate job of the government, but it's not the government's job to show compassion; that's our job as the church. As a citizen voter, I support the policy of securing the border and reforming immigration laws. But as a servant of God, I have volunteered giving food, water, and shelter to migrants at the border.

Throughout the Bible we are commanded to be generous to strangers, the poor, widows, and fatherless (Deuteronomy 24:14-21; Psalm 146:9; Jeremiah 22:3; Ezekiel 22:7; Matthew 25:38; 1 Timothy 5:10). It's not

productive to grumble about whether someone deserves to live in our country, to question their motives or critique their contributions to society. Nor is it our place to blame them for the complex problems affecting their countries of origin.

The poor in the Third World have an exaggerated admiration of the United States. It is thought to be a utopia where everyone is wealthy. Many who arrive here are surprised to find that life isn't as easy as they expected. But the US has tremendous economic opportunities compared with most of the world.

This leads them to speculate, "Why is the US such a prosperous nation, while my homeland is in shambles?" They learn about our Constitution and the separation of powers and checks and balances of the judicial, executive, and legislative branches of government. Our Declaration of Independence appeals to God-given rights. We have the best military in the world. The US is not perfect, but superior to most.

Source of greatness

But is this where "American Greatness" comes from? Why is our country different from so many? Deuteronomy says:

"Observe [God's decrees and laws] carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to

him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?" (4:6-8).

When the Queen of Sheba visited King Solomon in Israel, she was awestruck at the magnificence of a nation whose God was the Lord (1 Kings 10).

I pray that when Venezuelan and Haitian migrants arrive in this nation, they will be awestruck by our compassionate and loving church members who welcome them. I hope they will hear us proclaiming the gospel of Jesus and be convicted of sin. When they see *In God We Trust*



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on our currency, I hope they will know that we don't serve money. Like the queen who was overwhelmed by the greatness of Solomon's wisdom, I hope that our generosity will inspire the same.

I have friends who believe that the migration at the southern border is a national invasion. Even if this were true, as servants of God, we are to obey Jesus' call to love our enemies and be generous to them, because "God is good, even to bad people" (Luke 6:35, paraphrase.)

Charge to the church

If I lived in a gang-controlled, impoverished third-world country, I would be doing everything in my power to get to a place like the US. It's hypocritical of me to expect someone in the same situation to act differently. Can we blame them for coveting the abundance and security that we enjoy?

Yes, it's wrong to intentionally break immigration laws, but it doesn't change how we as a church should respond to immigrants. The church should welcome everyone, regardless of legal status. Moreover, how can it be called "illegal immigration" when our government is promoting it, financing it, and making it nearly impossible to follow a legal immigration process? Both political parties have failed to pass immigration reform, when they could have done so.

As I'm writing this, my city has opened a resource center for assisting migrants. There's no easy solution to the immigration "problem," but I think it's unfortunate that government agencies are stepping up to meet needs that many churches aren't even aware of. Instead of thinking of the poor as a "problem," let's be grateful for an opportunity to serve. **BA**

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Seeing the invisible God in Jesus.

by **Bonita Jewel Hele**

Giving thanks unto the Father . . . who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son . . . who is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:12, 13, 15).

When I was eight years old, I was excited at the prospect of a solar eclipse. I had watched a comic TV show that portrayed an eclipse as a sudden shift from light to darkness, as if the sun were a giant light in the sky that could be turned off by a switch.

So that day I waited for a spectacular event like the one

I had seen on TV. The eclipse began, and I watched the sky. Nothing was happening. Everything around me was still bright as day. I peeked at the sun, ignoring my mom's warning that if I looked directly at it, I would go blind.

The solar eclipse was not as exciting as I had hoped. I spent the rest of the day terrified that my vision would start to diminish because I had looked at the sun. I wondered if it would happen all at once or little by little. Thankfully, my fears were unfounded, and I didn't lose my sight.

But I could have. If a person looks directly at the sun for a couple of minutes, it can cause permanent retinal damage and blindness. Even though the sun is nearly 100 million miles away, our eyes cannot take in the intensity of its brightness.

There is another thing we cannot take in, cannot absorb

in its entirety: the raw brilliance of God, the Creator of a billion suns, the one who shines brighter than all the stars in the sky put together. The pure glory of God — the immensity of His purity and righteousness — is too great for our mortal, sinful bodies to look upon.

Visible Creator

In the Old Testament, Moses asked to behold God's glory, yet was told, "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live" (Exodus 33:20). Amazingly, God allowed His goodness to pass before Moses, yet would not let His servant look upon His face.

The story was not always like this.

At the dawn of time, all things were created. The frigid vastness of nothing was moved by the power of a Spirit that hovered

over deep waters. Something burst forth out of nothing at the word of an omnipotent God, and the universe was born.

Light pierced darkness. Color and wonder appeared and expanded. Time began, fluid yet constant, and this world took its first gasping breath. Stars appeared, each known by name. Planets fell into varying orbits. Solar systems stretched into galaxies stretching into a universe vaster than the mind can comprehend.

And on this earth, the sky above of daytime blue and nighttime indigo, and sunsets of every color, were flung along the horizon. Grasses of every shade of green and trees reached high, and creatures began swimming and flying and tromping and stamping.

All things were declared good by their Maker, and that Maker walked upon the earth He formed. He walked in the cool of the day with the man and woman He formed from the dust. What is the implication of this? Man could behold his Creator, face to Face.

Bridging the gap

But then the first man and woman were tempted. They succumbed. They fell and, with them, the earth. Thistles and thorns sprang up among perfection. Malice mingled with innocence in the mind of man.

Death and every hue of sorrow cast a shadow over creation, and purity could no more be found. No man could look upon God because a great chasm stood between humanity and their Creator. That chasm was sin, which could not withstand

the presence of a pure and holy God. It would be consumed, which means anyone beholding the face of God would likewise be consumed.

To bridge this gap that stretches as far as the heavens are from the earth, God made a way. He impressed His image — His likeness, His profile, His representation — upon His Son. Because we could not grasp the immense holiness of the Father, the Son lifted the veil covering the realms and stepped into our humble world.

In the first chapter of his Gospel, John the apostle tells us, “No man hath seen God at any time” (John 1:18). But John, along with Peter and James, beheld something no other had

thousands, millions of miles and illuminate nothing. A rare speck of rock hurtling through the atmosphere between earth and the sun might be lit by the sun’s rays, but the vast expanse of space lies in absolute darkness.

Light remains unseen unless it has an object to shine upon.

Yet when the light of the sun 94 million miles away finally reaches earth, when it rests upon and glances off surfaces around us, we look around. And we see. We see brilliant dawns of spreading gold and pink. We see majestic sunsets of rose and mauve.

We behold everything that the sun illuminates between the brilliance of dawn and the beauty of dusk. Light filtering through the leaves on a tree, shining so

“Jesus became flesh and blood and bone so we could see what an incarnate God looks like.”

ever seen: Christ transfigured on a mountaintop. He saw Christ in His glory and understood that God surpassed that sight and transcended his human comprehension.

Jesus became the image of the invisible God, by whom we can behold God’s glory.

Image of God

A beam of sunlight can travel through space for hundreds,

brightly that the green is almost transparent. Light reflecting off droplets of water in the atmosphere, forming a rainbow that traces the sky. Light dancing on the surface of a lake, skittering across the rippling water.

The sunlight glances off a hundred, a thousand, a million things, and we are blessed with light and color and beauty. We feel warmth and wind and rain

continued on page 30



A Cross-Shaped Hole

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by **Cindy Arora**

“The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:17).

I had the American Dream, yet my heart felt empty. I had a handsome husband, a beautiful baby, and a home of my own, yet peace eluded me. I had everything I thought would make me happy, yet depression nibbled at the edges of my emotions.

Why could I not find contentment? Because I had a cross-shaped hole in my heart that another baby and a bigger house would never fill. Often, we attempt to stuff worldly things (people, addictions, etc.) into that cross-shaped hole in our hearts, but they will never fit. God created that hole for Him and Him alone.

We all have a longing for intimacy that God placed deep within us because He yearns to be in relationship with us. Our heavenly Father longs for us even more than we long for Him. God created this inner hunger to draw us to Himself. We are made for oneness with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet our human nature attempts to fill that cross-shaped hole with other things.

The world’s intimacy is temporary and inferior

— and it comes with shame. Shame drives us into more sin and away from God. It is the Enemy’s tactic to separate us from God. When we settle for the Enemy’s false intimacy, it distances us from closeness with the Lord. Jesus wants to give us a real intimacy that leaves no shame or regret.

Intimacy was God’s idea, His design, His desire. That cross-shaped hole in our hearts is God’s invitation to a deep relationship with Himself.

I finally accepted God’s invitation to this intimacy. I returned to church and rededicated my life to Christ. I formed a Bible study for young mothers like me. I surrounded myself with mothers and fathers in the faith to mentor me. I fixed my eyes on Jesus and stopped grasping for contentment — and it found me. All I did was reach for the cross.

Are you hungering for things that do not satisfy? Reach for the cross instead. God promises to satisfy the longing of your heart with His very presence.

Father, thank You for that cross-shaped hole in my heart that drew me into Your presence. Amen!

BA

Cindy Arora writes from Redmond, WA.





Hope

You don't ask a fish to shed its scales
and take to the sky,
Nor do you ask the flowers to sing a
chorus
Yet you ask me to have hope?

But in my heart of hearts I know
You called blind men to see
And deaf men to hear,
The lame to leap
and me to be one of Yours.

So if you ask me to hope, what can I
do?

I will no longer breathe in the murky
waters of the deep,
But will exchange my scales for wings.
I won't bloom in silence,
But will praise you in every wilting and
floreescence.

I will lay my fears aside
And hope.

Brianna Voltmer



Call to Convention

It is my great pleasure to extend this Call to Convention once again to each member and friend of the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day). After missing our 2021 convention, aren't we all ready for the in-person fellowship and worship our conventions allow us to enjoy? Plan now to attend!

Our 2023 Convention is scheduled Monday evening, July 10, through Saturday night, July 15, in Covington, Kentucky. Most convention events will take place at the Northern Kentucky Convention Center. Three beautiful, newly remodeled hotels are available to those who attend. Marriott and Embassy Suites hotels are just across the street from the Convention Center, and Holiday Inn (the more "kid-friendly" option) is within walking distance or a short shuttle ride away.

Six major worship services are planned! They will include wonderful music, fervent prayer, encouraging personal testimonies, challenging sermons, and more — all focused on our theme "Come and See." Scheduled speakers are Elders Loren Gjesdal, Loren Stacy, Chip Hinds, Ramon Ruiz, Moises Capetillo, and Whaid Rose.

Many seminars will be offered in English or

Spanish. Additional programs and activities will be offered for most every age group — children, teens, young adults, and seniors. General Conference business sessions will be conducted Tuesday through Friday mornings. In these, members will receive up-to-date reports of the State of the Conference, the General Conference Ministries, and the General Conference finances. Qualified voters will elect members to our board of directors and to our Nominating Committee, and voters can debate and decide any bylaw amendments or resolutions that may be proposed.

Covington, Kentucky, also offers many great opportunities for individual or group outings. The world-famous Ark Encounter is less than an hour away. A Monday group outing is planned there for all who wish to come a day early. The Creation Museum is even closer, and a Friday afternoon excursion is available here. The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and a beautiful riverfront park are just across the Ohio River, and a wonderful aquarium is nearby.

Make plans now to attend the 2023 Biennial Convention in Covington. I look forward to seeing you there!

Loren Stacy
General Conference President

Register now for GC Convention '23 by going to cog7.org/convention. Hotel, meal, and outing registration is also available on the website. The early registration discount ends **April 30, so don't miss your opportunity to save!**

Important Convention Dates

Early bird convention registration ends April 30.

Excursion tickets to the Ark Encounter and Creation Museum must be purchased by June 16. Seats are limited, so sign up early!

Hotel reservations must be made by June 19.

Meal tickets need to be purchased by June 30.



Lord's Supper Service

Tuesday Evening, April 4

“Do this in remembrance of Me” — Jesus



The Lord's Supper
29¢ each

Order from our bookstore
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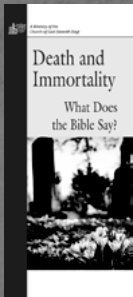
Membership Notice

All members of the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) who will be at least 18 years of age as of July 11, 2023, and who wish to vote during our 2023 convention, should register for convention no later than **May 1, 2023**. They must indicate on the form their intention to vote. Because of the time it may take to validate some memberships, we cannot guarantee that those who register later will be able to vote.

Additionally, because of the time it takes to process membership applications, this deadline also applies to anyone wishing to become a member before our 2023 convention. **No new memberships will be issued the week of convention (July 10-15, 2023).**

Three BAP tracts suitable for this issue's theme:

Will God Punish the Wicked Forever? 29¢ each



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Welcomed and Welcoming

A son remembers his father's example and the Church of God's outreach.
by Moises Capetillo

On May 8, 2021, our father, Pastor Pedro S. Capetillo, was laid to rest to await our Lord and Savior's return. The stories he shared from his testimony and conversion continue to ring during our families' dinners and get togethers. While reflecting on the importance of creating a welcoming culture in our local churches, we realized that Dad's life was a series of opportunities where people, used by God, welcomed him. Here is a summary of highlights.

August 26, 1935 – Dad was welcomed into this world by his family of thirteen siblings in Laredo, Tamaulipas, Mexico.

May 10, 1962 – Twenty-six-year-old Pedro Capetillo immigrated to the United States and was welcomed by his aunt to San Antonio, Texas.

June 5, 1965 – Dad moved to Houston, Texas, where he began working for a fence-building company, welcomed by the owner, Mr. Rutherford.

September 1965 – Dad welcomed a new co-worker (Daniel Sanchez), who told him about the gospel as they loaded pickets, set posts, and shared lunch breaks.

Spring 1966 – A Church of God (Seventh Day) baseball team, *Los Tecolotes*, welcomed

Dad as one of their starting pitchers. One of his passions was to throw a diving curve ball after his fastball, which made the batter's knees buckle.

April 1967 – Dad went to his first ever non-Catholic service by invitation of his catcher, Ruben Davila, who was the church's pastor in Houston, Texas. Dad was welcomed to church, despite a box of cigarettes in his front shirt pocket.

December 10, 1968 – After approximately a year of studying the Bible during lunch breaks and asking questions after services, Dad was welcomed into the body of Christ and baptized by Pastor Manuel Solis.

Spring 1969 – The elders welcomed Dad to the group of worship leaders and preachers, mentoring him through his mis-

takes and encouraging him after fumbles at the pulpit.

February 1971 – Dad was welcomed into a select body of lay pastors, where he began working on building a mission in a suburb of Houston named Conroe.

August 1978 – The Licensed and Credentials Committee welcomed Dad as a minister of the Church of God (Seventh Day).

July 1990 – Dad was welcomed to the group of credentialed ministers. He had the opportunity to work in Houston, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Albuquerque, New Mexico; and Midland, Texas.

September 10, 2019 – Dad was welcomed among the retired credentialed ministers, where he served through mentoring and encouraging several young ministers, particularly my brother and me.

April 29, 2021 – Dad was called to rest for a while – just until our Savior returns.

Although Dad's death certificate says April 30, 2021, those in the room saw the peaceful event of someone who trusted in Christ for salvation take his last breath a few minutes before midnight, April 29. The nurse came in approximately fifteen minutes after we knew Dad was resting. The nurse declared the time of death at 12:10 a.m., but no one in the room cared to correct the details. We believed that now this man waited for one more welcoming opportunity – the time when he hears his name, followed by "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

Our turn

We are fully aware that not everyone's testimony follows this path. However, with the same certainty, we realize that our Christian journeys have been decorated through the years with many welcoming opportunities: when we walked into church for the first time or gave our first sermonette; when we participated in the children's play or moved to a new city and joined a new congregation. In all honesty, those welcoming moments have been an integral part of why we are in the church community where we serve today.

Now with the release of *The Art of Being a Welcoming Church* in January, we thank all the brothers and sisters praying for this project and helping us along the way. We also are preparing to release a web page to schedule the Welcoming Church workshops, where we deal with an uncomfortable question: "Are we welcoming to everyone God sends to our community, or are we only welcoming to those in our inner circle?"

Our father was welcomed into a church that provided a nurturing environment. Today, he rests, but his eight children

and their spouses, twenty-seven grandchildren, and thirty-two great-grandchildren continue to worship and serve God in our church. Would your church be the type to welcome the apparent stranger with a box of cigarettes protruding through his front pocket, not knowing what could come of that visit? Would you allow God to use the church to reveal the potential He sees in the newcomer?

Witness of Scripture

The welcoming concept is found repeatedly in the Scriptures, in both the Old and New Testaments. We find it in the early church and want to be known for it even in the twenty-first century church.

Not everyone who walks through our doors will eventually become a pastor or a women's ministry president. However, everyone should be welcomed as a valued person who can make our community deeper, stronger, and more diverse. We want this for our local churches because this is God's design for His church.

James 2:1 teaches us this concept. Let's read it in different versions:



My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory (ESV).

Dear brothers, how can you claim that you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, if you show favoritism to rich people and look down on poor people? (TLB).

My fellow believers, do not practice your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude* of partiality [toward people — show no favoritism, no prejudice, no snobbery] (Amplified).

Our opportunity is at hand. We can be part of a church that shows no favoritism, shares the gospel, and welcomes everyone without partiality. The Church of God (Seventh Day) can impact the world with how we welcome our guests. We can be one more piece in God's perfect plan for anyone seeking a relationship with the Savior. We can be the welcoming church God uses to change people's lives and future generations.

Don't hesitate to contact your superintendent to schedule the Welcoming Church workshops for your local event. May God bless His church and His vision of "Come and See" initiatives. **BA**

Moises Capetillo

serves as senior pastor of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Albuquerque, NM, alongside his wife, Victoria, and six children. Scripture quotations are taken from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.



Once I Was Blind

continued from page 23

— none of these possible without the light of the sun shining on and shining through images, warming them and bringing them to life.

God's glorious, radiant light needed an object to illuminate so that we would not be blinded by looking straight at the sun. Jesus, the image of the invisible God, became flesh and blood and bone so we could see what an incarnate God looks like.

And what is the image we are shown in Scripture, recorded by those who walked with Him, knew Him, and were loved by Him? A portrait of compassion and comfort. Of sacrifice and sorrow. Of peace and prayer. Of healing and heartache. Of friend-

ship and forgiveness. Of love and light.

All that Jesus did, all that He was, serves as an image of the Father. Reaching down to heal, bless, and forgive. To show compassion, speak truth, and sacrifice His life. This is the image of the invisible God.

The Light of the world shone through darkness. The Image brought the light to life. We bask in the warmth, we revel in the color and beauty that we behold, and instead of being blinded, we finally begin to see. **BA**

Bonita Jewel

Hele writes from Fresno, CA. Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

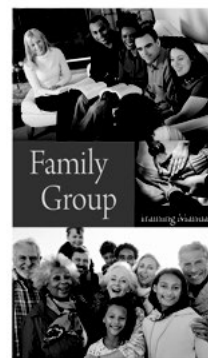


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Join the Capetillo brothers on a journey toward becoming a truly welcoming church. \$11.20





Unclean and Undone

Growing up as a preacher's kid, I sometimes found myself alone at a young age in the sanctuary of our church building. That didn't terrify me, but it did make me apprehensive. On those occasions, I moved in and out of that sacred space as quietly and as quickly as I could. That's where God was! What if He suddenly appeared? In my young mind, that was a real possibility and a fearful thought.

Times have changed, and so have many church sanctuaries. The behaviors of people within those sanctuaries have changed as well. For better or worse, rows of pews facing a formidable pulpit have been replaced by rows of comfortable chairs semi-surrounding a theatrical stage. For better or worse, rather than entering and leaving reverently, worshipers visit and catch up with one another, while children run throughout the room unattended. I wonder: Have we lost our sense of God's presence and of our own appropriate reverence before Him? Have we lost the fear of the Lord that God's Word tells us is the beginning of wisdom?

The prophet Isaiah writes of his famous encounter with God, a vision of the true sanctuary, the very throne room of God. He responded to what he saw by exclaiming, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5, ESV). One glimpse of God's incredible majesty immediately struck Isaiah with the immeasurable difference between God's holiness and his own sinfulness, humanity's own sinfulness. Have we lost our awareness of that difference?

The saying "Familiarity breeds contempt" may be appropriate as we consider contemporary thoughts about God. Many so-called gospel sermons today have moved so far from Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," that they now seem more like the pop-psychology philosophy "I'm OK, You're OK." The pendulum of common thought has swung so far from God's holiness, God's righteousness, and God's sovereignty that many think that God's love for sinners prohibits Him from permanently punishing anyone. People reassure each other, "God hates the sin, but He loves the sinner." Too many, then, come to think of God as a kindly old grandfather who loves them so much that He will allow them to get away with anything.

God's written Word, the Bible, tells a different story. God is presented as being so absolutely holy and righteous that sinful man cannot enter His presence and live. This is why Isaiah exclaimed, "Woe is me!" Humanity is presented as having been so radically corrupted by sin that "There is none righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10, NASB; see also Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3). Apart from Christ, we all are unclean and undone. We all are "children of wrath," doomed to destruction unless God saves us (Ephesians 2:1-3, NASB).

"It has been said that God hates the sin and loves the sinner," said the late R. C. Sproul. "But it's the sinner God sends to hell not just the sin."

— Loren Stacy



Attractions that await your GC Convention 2023 adventure



July 10-15, 2023
Covington, Kentucky



CHURCH OF GOD
(SEVENTH DAY) UNITED STATES & CANADA



Ark Encounter, National Underground Railroad Freedom Center,
Creation Museum, Newport Aquarium, Cincinnati Zoo and
Botanical Gardens, BB Riverboats, Garden of Hope

For more information, visit cog7.org/convention.