

July - August 2023

BA

BIBLE ADVOCATE®

Repent and Believe



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2023: Come and See



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A publication of the
Church of God (Seventh Day)

This magazine is published to advocate the Bible, represent the Church, and glorify the God of grace and truth.

Volume 157 • Number 4

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The BIBLE ADVOCATE (ISSN 0746-0104) is published bimonthly by Bible Advocate Press, 330 W. 152nd Ave., Broomfield, CO 80023. Periodicals postage is paid at Broomfield, CO, and at additional offices. Subscription is free to any who ask. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Bible Advocate Press, Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233-0677.

Bible Advocate Press

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Subscriptions and Orders

Bible Advocate Press
P.O. Box 33677
Denver, CO 80233-0677
phone: 303/452-7973
fax: 303/452-0657
email: bap.orders@cog7.org

Notice: Send all address changes and other correspondence to the address above.

Publications Agreement No. 40042428

The Bible Advocate Online appears at baonline.org.

My Confession

In the last BA, we focused on Jesus, the Light and Lamb of God. What comes next when we “come and see”? Jesus answered plainly: “Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

This morning, while I mulled over this text, Psalm 116 came up in my daily Bible reading. Verse 10 reads “I believed, therefore I spoke.” Repentance flows from faith in God, who hears and forgives. What the psalmist spoke (four times) from this place of faith and his troubles was “I will call upon the name of the LORD” (vv. 2, 4, 13, 17).

This instantly reminded me of my favorite gospel passage: “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says . . . ‘whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’” (Romans 10:9-11, 13).

From a believing heart comes a confessing mouth, and both are centered on Jesus as LORD! Remarkably, the Lord that the prophet (Joel 2:32) and psalmist called upon, Paul boldly identifies as the Lord Jesus. He is our heart’s faith and our mouth’s confession. The gospel is that in Him alone are righteousness and salvation.

These verses reveal both the Lord we call upon and the nature of confession. With believing hearts, our mouths confess and acknowledge Jesus is Lord and we have sinned. This twofold confession is found throughout Scripture. In Daniel 9, the prophet “made confession,” praising the Lord as great and merciful, while “confessing my sin and the sin of my people” (vv. 4, 20). First John does the same: We’re called to confess our sins and confess Jesus Christ (1:9; 4:2).

That’s my confession. Is it yours? From our hearts to our lips: *Jesus is Lord and we have sinned. Save us!* Believe, repent, and call upon the name of the Lord. Amen.

— Jason Overman





A Whole New You

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Seeking a makeover
by the Master.
by **Bob Hostetler**

My daughter, Aubrey, was ten or eleven years old the time she and I went together to the grocery store. I wore an old Cincinnati Reds t-shirt and a pair of red cotton shorts, white socks, and white tennis shoes. As we got out of the car and started walking side by side, I made my mistake: I asked her advice.

Tugging on the tail of my t-shirt, I asked, "What do you say, Aubrey. Should I tuck in my shirt-tail or leave it out?"

She cocked her head to one side, looked me up and down, and answered, "I say you never wear those clothes again."

Mind you, this was after my wife, Robin, had been diligently working on my personal appearance and style choices for about twenty years. And I still had to be

told what not to wear.

At least I'm not alone. There are enough people in the world like me to provide constant subject material for reality television shows that tell people what to wear, what not to wear, and how to wake up someday to "a whole new you."

Wouldn't that be great? To have a brand new start — out with the old, in with the new? Especially if you're tired of old habits and nagging behaviors. The Bible not only says it's possible but tells us specifically what to wear and what not to wear, better than any reality TV show could teach us. It's in a letter written by Paul, the great first century church planter, to followers of Jesus in the city of Colosse. And just as reality show hosts often give their makeover

subjects a few keys to remember (such as “plaid is bad”), so Paul urges each of us toward “a whole new you” in just three small words.

Word #1: ‘with’

Paul writes:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (Colossians 3:1-4).

Notice: You have been raised *with* Christ, and your life is now hidden *with* Christ in God, and you will someday appear *with* Him in glory. Your reality is not the material world you see all around you — this place C. S. Lewis famously called “the Shadowlands.” This present reality, if you have placed your faith and your life in Jesus Christ, is a dim reflection of your real life. Compared to that vivid reality, “Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life — even though invisible to spectators — is with Christ in God. He is your life” (v. 3, MSG).

Your reality is not this here-and-now matrix of sin and sickness, hatred and heartache. It is a new reality of health and wholeness, love and laughter that can take all of this life and all of the next to fully appreciate and enjoy. That is how Paul could go on to encourage the readers of his letter to embrace a whole new you.

Word #2: ‘off’

Some of us are out of touch with reality. Though we have experienced new life in Christ, we’re not thoroughly conscious of our real life, and we’re not living like people whose lives are with Christ in God. That’s why Paul went on to say to the church in Colosse:

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things

hideous hats, stained shirts, and ugly shoes — especially when they’d just been given a credit card to buy all new clothes, nice clothes, better clothes!

If your real life is with Christ in God, you don’t need your old garments: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language, and lies. Tragically, however, many hold on to them. But if following Christ is not changing you, then you are not following Christ. If your real life is with Christ in God, you’re more likely to be spending time in prayer, saying, “Throw it out. I’m sick of it. I hate it. I want to be rid of it.”

In the life you once lived, you

“If following Christ is not changing you, then you are not following Christ.”

as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices (vv. 5-9).

On one popular makeover show, the makeover candidate was required to bring in all of their clothes and go through the wardrobe, piece by piece, throwing out nearly everything. It was comical to see how some people were so attached to ratty jeans,

did those things because this world, this job, this stuff was all you had, so it was important to you. But now your real life is with Christ in God, so — lying to get a better job? That would be like holding on to that old Grateful Dead sweatshirt that was never in style. Flirting with someone or sleeping with someone or cheating on someone to make yourself feel good? That would be like dressing in old, filthy rags. Paul says, “Put to death the sinful,

earthly things lurking within you” (v. 5, NLT). Toss them, trash them, burn them, “since you have taken off your old self with its practices” (v. 9).

Only then can you be ready for a whole new you.

Word #3: ‘on’

If indeed you have been raised with Christ and your life is hidden with Christ in God, you have a new wardrobe, fit for a whole new you. The soul who has truly come under the influence of Jesus will display a transformed life — a new self, a new reality, a new image:

“If you begin every day in the Word of God, then you will begin to reflect your real life, which is hidden with Christ in God.”

You have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness

and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God

with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (vv. 9b-17).

That would be great, right? But how?

It doesn’t happen by gritting your teeth, trying really hard, and, by sheer force of will, becoming compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, and patient. If

you had it in you to do that, you wouldn’t have needed Jesus and His loving sacrifice for your sins in the first place.

The wardrobe Paul prescribes doesn’t come about by grit, determination, or good intentions. Notice the metaphor he uses: “clothe yourselves” (v. 12). How often do you clothe yourself? Every day? Often first thing in the morning? Before you leave the house, before you go to class, before you conduct business?

So it is with “the new you.” Notice how Paul talks about the word of Christ, about teaching each other, about accepting admonishment, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and giving thanks. If you begin every day in the Word of God, if you learn from Him before learning from anyone, if you sing to Him morning after morning, if you pray and give thanks at the start of every single day — and not only privately but corporately as well, teaching and admonishing one another, worshipping and serving together — then your behavior, character, relationships — your very countenance and posture, your life here on earth — will begin to reflect your *real* life, which is hidden with Christ in God.

That’s real life. That’s *your* life. A whole new you. **BA**

Bob Hostetler writes from Las Vegas, NV. Scripture quotations are taken from the *New International Version*, except where noted.





Astonished Again

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by **Cindy Arora**

“Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but I will bring the evil upon his house in his son’s days” (1 Kings 21:29).

Today, I am astonished again by God’s grace to the repentant. King Ahab gets my vote as the most evil king in the whole history of Israel (Manasseh is a close second and has a similar story; see 2 Chronicles 33). He followed idols and caused the nation of Israel to do the same. He attempted to kill all God’s prophets and anyone else who spoke against him. King Ahab even had his neighbor murdered because he had refused to sell him his vineyard.

Time and again, God sent King Ahab signs that He alone is God. He sent a drought to demonstrate that He, not idols, controlled the weather (1 Kings 17). In a dramatic showdown on Mount Carmel, God demonstrated His power over the idols by raining fire from heaven (1 Kings 18). And God gave King Ahab two miraculous victories in battle (1 Kings 20).

Still, Ahab did not honor Him as God, nor was he thankful. He continued to worship and serve the created rather than the Creator. In fact, the Scripture says, “there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord” (21:25).

However, when the word of the Lord came to Ahab through Elijah, foretelling the calamity that would befall Ahab and his house because of his sins, the most astonishing thing

happened: “He tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently” (v. 27).

Faced with his sin and God’s just judgment, King Ahab humbled himself before God, and God had mercy on him.

I was touched by God’s response to this king’s repentance. Even though God knew Ahab would revert to his wicked ways after repenting, He still responded with mercy. Don’t worry. King Ahab did not get off without punishment for all the evil he did. But God did delay His judgment — because he repented.

Look how God’s heart is moved by repentance. The vilest person in the world will find mercy — if they repent. I find that astonishing!

I wanted to share God’s astonishing grace, so I began to write a devotion. Halfway through I remembered that I had already written one on this topic. I looked back to find that I even quoted the same verse! Clearly, I am astonished by God’s amazing grace every time I read this story.

Whatever you have done, it cannot be as evil as what King Ahab did. So repent! There is no need for sackcloth and ashes. Just give your heart to God. You, too, will be astonished at the amazing grace God will shower upon you.

BA

Cindy Arora writes from Redmond, WA. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.





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Repent and Believe

Come and see your new
start in Christ.

by Jody McCoy

A Cherokee proverb tells of a grandfather teaching his grandson the ways of life: "Within me rages a terrible fight between two wolves. One wolf is filled with pride, greed, violence, and hate. The other is filled with humility, peace, hope, and love. These two wolves are fighting for my spirit."

The boy eagerly searches his grandfather's eyes and asks, "Which wolf wins?"

His grandfather replies, "The one I feed."

The Bible describes a similar battle we all face. We find it in Romans 7:18-24:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of

sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Sin is a cruel taskmaster. It awakens evil desires that grow stronger the more we feed them. The longer we do this, the more calloused our hearts become. Some people have debased themselves for so long that they've become inhuman (2 Peter 2:12). Their hearts have grown cold and dark, and the desire for what is right no longer dwells within them. As with Sodom, no hope remains that these wayward people will ever turn from sin to God.

Though most of us haven't fully extinguished our God-given desire to do right, we find that we lack the power to overcome

our evil desires when tempted — even though we know our sins will condemn us. This problem leads us to the often-asked question “What must I do to be saved?”

Two religions

Answering this question presents a challenge in our pluralistic society. In his video sermon *The Uniqueness of Christianity*, J. B. Nicholson recalls a story of a street preacher confronted by a bystander: “You Christians are arrogant because you think your way is the only way to God. There are thousands of religions in the world and many paths to God.”

To this, the preacher said, “Sir, there are only two religions in the world, not thousands. The first says that man saves himself, and the second says that man needs a Savior. Christianity alone is that second religion” (my paraphrase).

Those who believe we save ourselves believe God saves good people and condemns the wicked. To be a good person, our good deeds must outweigh our bad ones. In other words, you’re a good person if you’re bad less than half the time. Since that’s an easy standard to meet, most people feel secure in their own righteousness. They also feel a sense of goodness within themselves because of their desire to do right, even though they often choose to do otherwise.

But how can people regard themselves as good if they knowingly choose against these right desires? Since we often overrule them, isn’t it more likely that right desires come from God, while the choices come from us? Thus,

people should judge themselves, not by their desires but by which wolf they choose to feed.

Two steps

Jesus said, “No one is good but One, that is, God” (Luke 18:19). God is perfect and His standard of righteousness is perfection. So to be saved, you must be perfect. But this can’t happen. All sin is rebellion against God, and one sin is enough to condemn us. Christianity alone accepts this terrifying reality from God’s Word. We’ve all overruled the desire to do right and chosen to do wrong, sealing our fate. Having once fallen, we can do nothing to save ourselves. That’s

abide in Christ, His Holy Spirit empowers us to live holy lives. This process of growing in God’s grace and truth, by the power of His Spirit, is called sanctification.

To state it concisely, salvation is a two-step process: We’re first declared righteous through our faith in Jesus (justification), then the Holy Spirit empowers us to grow in righteousness through our faithfulness to Jesus (sanctification).

When we decide to follow Christ and mature in our faith, Satan doesn’t stand idly by. Well acquainted with human nature, he is a master of deception, often masquerading as an angel of light. The Bible refers to Satan

“All sin is rebellion against God, and one sin is enough to condemn us.”

why we need a Savior. Any hope for us must come from God himself, because God alone is good.

God loves us, not because we’re good but because He’s good. In His great love for humanity, God sent His Son that all who believe in Him might be saved. All who place their faith in Jesus are declared righteous by God. This is called justification.

Those justified are born again with a new nature and given the responsibility to put to death the old nature. As we choose to

as a ravenous lion seeking those he can devour. He lures his victims with the same lie he’s used from the beginning with Eve, that we can become our own gods. He offers humanity false hope and false security with counterfeit religions that replace a relationship with Christ with rituals, sacrifices, and spirituality.

Satan subtly reverses the two-step order of justification and sanctification. He gets people to mistakenly believe that they

must first sanctify themselves so that they can justify themselves before God as independent, self-righteous beings — as their own gods. It's a vain attempt to attain immortality while maintaining one's independence from God. In Christianity, both the power to save and the power to sanctify come from God alone through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. We fully depend on Him and trust in His goodness. God shares His divine immortal nature with us when we accept His covenant offer to become His children.

generations, the Jews longed for the Messiah to come. They were God's chosen people, and their entire lives centered on their religion. They revered God's law and worshipped every Sabbath in their synagogues, but they also allowed sin to dwell in their lives. When Jesus came, the Jews were offended at His message of repentance of sins and turning to Him in faith. In their minds, the Gentiles, not the Jews, were unrighteous. Regarding their spiritual condition, Jesus quoted Isaiah: "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate (Luke 13:34, 35, KJV).

Rather than repenting of their sins, the Israelites crucified the Son of God with these terrifying words: "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27:25). This is how blind, deaf, hard-hearted, and self-righteous our sins can make us when we feed the wrong wolf for too long.

Like the Jews before us, we're faced with a choice between two eternal destinies. We can either remain unmoved, unchanged, and unredeemed by the love of God and the blood of Christ, or we can ask God to change our nature by turning from our sins and turning to Jesus.

Religion and rituals are no substitute for a relationship. God is a personal God. By sending His Son to save us from our sins, God has shown that He loves us unconditionally. Thus, the question we must ask ourselves is which wolf we'll feed. Will we repent and believe or follow our own way?

Our response will determine our destiny. **BA**

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



“In Christianity, both the power to save and the power to sanctify come from God alone.”

Two destinies

We all want to be changed. We're eager to better ourselves, and we often pay people to help us develop healthy habits. Yet when it comes to our nature, most people are content with being human. We want to continue the lifestyle we've become addicted to. We rely on our own self-righteousness to assure us that we're okay to stay the way we are.

God has given us a warning in the example of Israel. For

with their lips, but their heart is far from Me" (Matthew 15:8).

Jesus healed the blind, deaf, lepers, and crippled, and even raised the dead. Many wondered if Jesus was the Messiah until they faced the choice of believing in Him or believing their religious leaders. A few placed their faith in Jesus, but most felt safer staying with their leaders, blind to their corruption and self-righteousness. Jesus loved His people and lamented their choice to reject Him:

Questions & Answers



Is sanctification essential for salvation?

Salvation is what God does for humanity. Based on His sovereign will, He reconciles those to be redeemed to Himself (Romans 5:6-11; Colossians 1:20-23; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

God's saving plan is grace toward all those who receive Him with faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:15-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:9, 10; Romans 1:16, 17; Ephesians 2:8-10). The Word teaches us that salvation has three stages: justification, sanctification, and glorification (Romans 8:29, 30). Salvation is not complete without the complete plan; every part is essential. Thus, sanctification is indeed essential for salvation.

Sanctification may be the most challenging part of God's plan for many to understand. Often believers can grasp quickly that justification and glorification are both works completely dependent upon God. But that the same is true of sanctification seems harder to accept. It may be because both justification and glorification appear to be implemented in a moment of time. Sanctification, on the other hand, is a process over a lifetime. All the time, it is God working in us.

It is helpful to note the same Greek word *hagiasmos* and its half-dozen related terms are often translated as "sanctification," "holiness," "purification," "holy," or "sanctify." Something sanctified is purified, set apart, and made holy by God for a specific purpose. Objectively, God sets apart those chosen in the Son, Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:9; Psalm 4:3). While the goal of one's sanctification is the pursuit of holiness — that is, becoming Christlike — one's objective holiness is found in Christ alone (Acts 26:18; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 30; 6:11; Hebrews 10:10).

For some, to be holy as God is holy may be a challenge experienced as a felt human responsibility (1 Peter 1:14-16; Romans 12:2; 15:5, 6). But in that responsibility, how will attaining to God's holiness be accomplished? The apostle Paul explains in Romans 7 and Galatians 5 about the frustration between the person's flesh and their new spirit nature in Christ. The felt responsibility is the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in one's conscience (Ephesians 1:13, 14). Only when the believer walks by the Spirit and not by the flesh do they achieve the goal of sanctification, growing more and more like Jesus. The flesh of man will need to be glorified to reach the holiness of our sinless Savior. Becoming like Christ can be and must be done, but only by the Spirit's work in us.

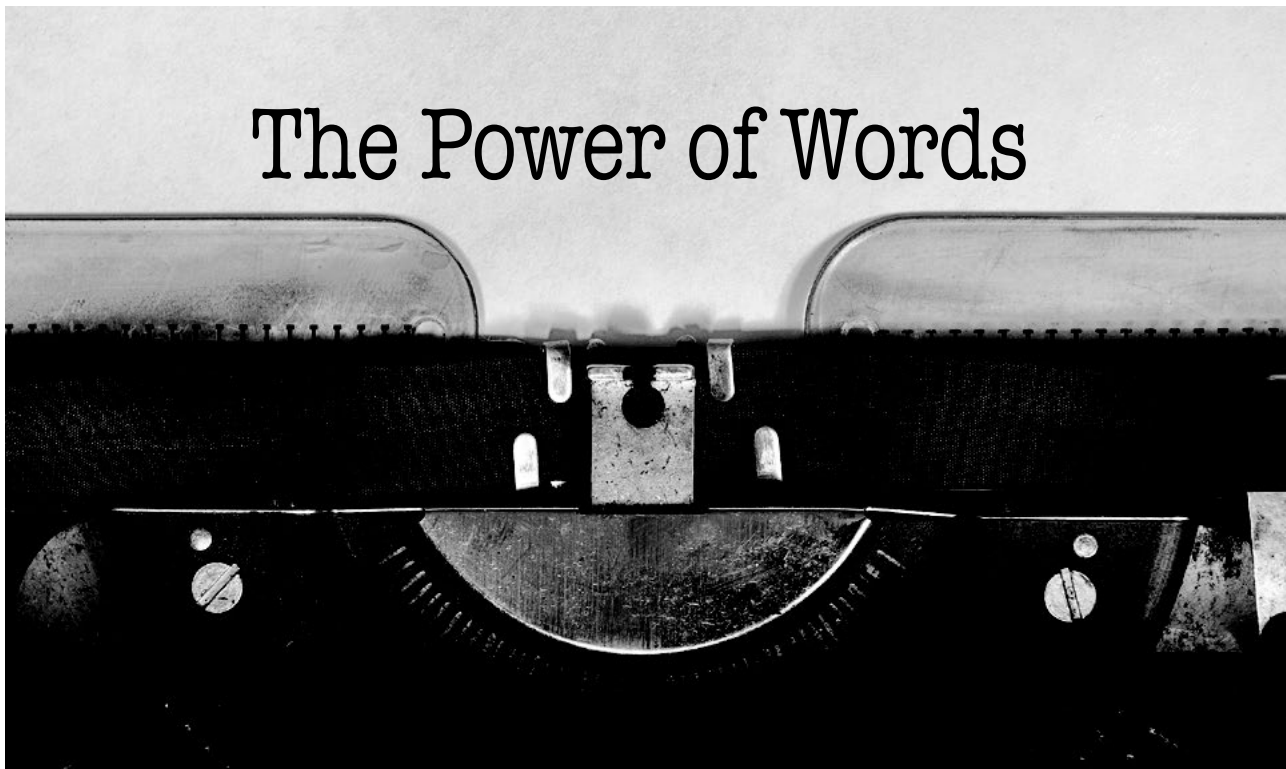
The law, which is good, could not make us like Christ because the flesh is weak (Romans 7:7-12; 8:3). But the Holy Spirit can because He transforms the person, who will ultimately be glorified at Christ's return (8:4; 13:14; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Titus 3:4-7).

The believer's participation is obeying the direction of the Holy Spirit versus following the desires of the flesh. Just as a person grows physically into maturity, so does one grow spiritually. It is the new spirit, the promise of God, that transforms the person. This work may not be completed until that day when the work is finished in glorification (Titus 2:11-14).

The truth is, one cannot receive salvation aside from being a new creation in Jesus Christ. Salvation means one has been justified, is being sanctified, and will be glorified. God's finished work in salvation is a new creation in communion with God eternally.

— Elder Chip Hinds

The Power of Words



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Reflecting the Lord in our language.

by Jonathon Hicks

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth with words. He said, “Let there be,” and there was — and there is. So important were words to God that of all the creatures He created, His image bearers are the only ones to possess language. As we will see, that can be both blessing and curse.

After my wife, Danielle, brought our son into this world, she meditated on reflecting God as a giver of life. I felt a little left out. I still kinda do. But I remind myself that I have my words, and they impart life as well. Women are still unique, of course, but they are not alone in their ability

to reflect God by bringing life into this world.

Words can also bring death. When God created the universe with words, He gave them immense power to both bring life and destroy it. Some words have so much power that they should not be spoken. Every language and culture has different ones, but in United States English we call them “four-letter” words. Although swearing is commonplace in American culture, some profanity, like racial slurs, is widely disapproved of.

Aramaic, too, had a powerful four-letter word that Jesus talked about: “Whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council” (Matthew 5:22).

Because of the power of words doing both good and harm, they will be judged along with our actions (12:36, 37). Having been given language as God’s creation, we must use

words. Even though they are powerful, we cannot remain silent. Proverbs 18:21 makes clear that although “Death and life are in the power of the tongue,” we still must speak because “those who love it will eat its fruit.”

What will you say today? Will you give life and reflect our Creator? Or will you bring death and reflect our Adversary?

Verbal and physical harm

Our culture tends to devalue the power of words. Many say that sticks and stones are the *real* material that can do *real* damage to us, but throughout the Bible, words are treated as real as a physical act of violence.

Take, for example, two laws in Exodus 21. Verse 15 says, “He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.” Verse 17 says, “He who curses his father or his mother

shall surely be put to death.” Here, a verbal curse is treated exactly like a physical punch. Both are powerful, and so their power must be constrained by the same deterrent.

The Old Testament’s concept of violence includes not just physical actions or cursing but also accusations. In Deuteronomy 19:16-19, the law talks about a witness who is *hamas*. The translation of this word varies from “false” to “malicious,” but the Hebrew *hamas* means “violence.” It reads:

If a [hamas] witness comes forward to accuse someone of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days, and the judges shall make a thorough inquiry. If the witness is a false witness, having testified falsely against another, then you shall do to the false witness just as the false witness had meant to do to the other. So you shall purge the evil from your midst (NRSVUE).

If the words of the false testimony will result in physical harm to someone, they will be judged as such. The *hamas* witness will receive physical punishment for their verbal *hamas*.

Justice for verbal violence

Wrong words are worthy of complaining about to God. At my local church, we recently took six weeks to work through the Psalms, and we were all struck by how common it is for the psalmists to pray concerning the speech of others. It is

bothersome to be surrounded by bad words.

Psalm 35 is an example of one such concerned psalmist, David. You will not find in this psalm any physical evil being done. The enemies lay traps that will become David’s grave/pit (v. 7), but their only concrete actions are lying and mocking (vv. 11, 16). David sees this to be as bad as being eaten by lions (v. 17). He writes in verse 20, “For they do not speak peace,

“I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (12:36, 37).

but they devise deceitful matters against the quiet ones in the land.”

David is quiet in the face of false charges and inconsiderate jeers. He simply prays and promises right speech once God resolves the problem.

The promise of good words is sprinkled throughout Psalm 35 in verses 9, 18, and 28. “Then,” David says, he will rejoice, thank God before the congregation,

and tell of God’s righteousness and praise all day long. *Then* refers to when God rescues David by silencing the domestic enemies (v. 25, ESV). If God silences the bad words being spoken, then David promises good words to be spoken about Him.

Furthermore, David desires God to use words to rescue him. He cries out, “You have seen, O Lord; be not silent! O Lord, be not far from me!” (v. 22, ESV). If God will speak into his life, then David will know that the enemies are wrong. Then he will have confidence in God’s care for him and will use his words to show his gratitude.

Psalm 35 is all about words. Used wrongly, they are devastating weapons. Used rightly, they are salvific salve. We speak the best words when we worship corporately, share the good news of God’s salvation, give encouragement, and build others up. In using these words, we are loving God and neighbor with our whole selves, just as Jesus says in Matthew 12:34: “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”

Better vs. less

In Disney’s 1942 film *Bambi*, Thumper’s father missed a nuance in his classic advice. If you recall, the rabbit, Thumper, repeats the counsel of his dad: “If you can’t say somethin’ nice, then don’t say nothin’ at all.”

The Bible doesn’t agree with this, however. We cannot refuse to use what God created to powerfully bring forth life. Instead, when we have nothing nice to say, we must resolve to find the

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A Pastor's Dream

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by **Oscar Mata**

I have a dream of a church without unbiblical legalism that undermines love for our neighbor, and a church without liberalism that tramples on God's commandments just to please everyone.

I have a dream of a church in which the color of your skin, your immigration status, your economic condition, your political party, or the language you speak is not a barrier to worshipping together, and that at the end of every worship service we can embrace, love, and serve one another.

I have a dream of a church where our relationships are more than just seeing each other once a week with a "Hi" and "Bye," but where we are a family that helps one another. I dream of us becoming worshippers and servants, not just people who sing a few praises, say a few prayers, listen to a sermon, and then go home as if there were no more people in need.

I have a dream of a church in which we make Jesus' dream come true "that all of them may be one . . . so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21, NIV).

However, I have never found that church — not even the one I pastor — because for one

reason or another, we keep arguing over minor issues.

But I commit to doing my best to have a church according to Jesus' dream, doing what I can until I have no breath. Jesus deserves to see His dream come true. **BA**

Oscar Mata and his wife, Nancy, live in Sioux Falls, SD where Oscar is a pastor and works as a hospital chaplain.



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Church

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David Discovers Repentance



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by Marcia Sanders

"Hey, Mom!" David shouted. "Look at the cool slingshot Papa brought me. I'm taking it outside to see how well I can hit things."

"Don't aim at birds or animals," Mom warned.

David assured her he wouldn't.

Roaming the woods behind his house with a pocket full of rocks and Skip at his heels, David shot several trees, bushes, and rocks. *How high can I hit something?* he wondered. Forgetting his promise to his mother, he aimed, pulled back as far as he could, and watched the stone sail strong and true — straight to the chest of a bird.

The bird fell to the ground, lifeless. "Oh no," David moaned. "What have I done?" Hearing a noise overhead, he saw a nest and climbed to where it rested. In it three hungry baby birds were squawking. David slowly backed down the tree without touching the nest or the birds. He and Skip hid in a nearby bush, hoping to see another bird return to the babies. None came near. What was he to do?

Hating the thought of admitting what he'd done, David forced himself to return home. Mom saw him and Skip come dragging through the yard, and she instantly knew something was wrong. Stepping onto the back porch, she called out, "David, what's the matter? You look like you lost your best friend."

Guilt overcame him, and he dropped to the ground cross-legged, head in his hands. "Mom, I know I promised not to aim at anything living, but I honestly didn't think the rock would go that high."

"What are you saying?"

"I accidentally hit and killed a robin, and I think she has some babies. I found a nest. I never dreamed disobedience could feel this bad. It makes my heart and my stomach hurt. What can I do?"

Mom smiled, understanding his pain. "David, you are learning an important lesson firsthand."

"What lesson? I already know I shouldn't point my slingshot at animals."

"This is much more important," Mom replied. "You're learning the true meaning of repentance. Remember when you've done something wrong and we tell you to say, 'I'm sorry'? Have you ever said it when you didn't really mean it?"

"Yeah," David confessed. "Lots of times. I remember saying it just so I wouldn't get into more trouble. But that's not like today. I really do feel sorry and wish I could go back and undo what I've done."

"This is more like the repentance that the Bible talks about when we're told to 'Repent and be baptized.' It's not just a fleeting thought of regret or feeling sorry that we got caught. It's a sincere desire to never do those things again, to turn our behavior around and seek to follow God's will fully."

"Yeah, this is really different," David admitted. "I never want to feel like this again. I'll be super careful with my slingshot from now on."

"That's great." Mom smiled. "Now let's see how we can feed three hungry birds." **BA**

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



Keith Michalak: 50 Years



You see his work on every page of printed material churned out by the Bible Advocate Press, but you rarely see him.

That's the way Keith Michalak likes it. As co-director of Publications, he prefers the background, sitting at his Macintosh computer and

quietly finessing type and graphics for just the right look. But in this issue of the BA, we're placing Keith in the spotlight. In June of this year, he celebrated 50 years at the BAP. It's fitting that we recognize his outstanding work and dedication, not just to the Church of God (Seventh Day) but to the kingdom of God.

Here are some of the highlights of Keith's career. For a full version, please visit baonline.org (July-August BA, available July 1).



In the summer of 1973, LeRoy Dais, then-director of the BAP, hired Keith right out of high school. He learned all kinds of jobs. Some, he says, stained his hands with ink for many years.

Also in 1973 the BAP acquired new equipment: an offset press, paper cutter, camera, and platemaking equipment. Keith wanted to learn everything, and did. He credits George Tolbert, Gilbert Tuller, and Nolan Rincker for teaching him to run the folder and the cutter and other machines. He also helped Floyd Turner, a master electrician, run an electrical line to the equipment.

Keith learned how to operate other equipment and mastered all publishing processes. The toughest years, he says, were convention years. He often pulled all-nighters to print the needed materials.

In 1988, the BAP purchased its first Mac computer for word processing and page layout. Keith loved it and learned it inside and out. In the 1990s, he was instrumental when the BAP jumped on the Internet, adding its Christian voice to the Worldwide Web.

At the time George and Gina Tolbert left the Conference offices, Keith became shop manager. In 2003 he was promoted to director of Publications.

Keith always looked ahead to needs coming in the future. The Heidelberg press, bought when the Conference offices moved to Denver in 1972, was showing its age and not printing well. Thanks to Keith's research and recommendations, the



board approved a digital press in 2020. It allows the BAP to do print-on-demand and saves costs in paper and waste in consumables.

Keith reached retirement age last year, but he's not ready to go quite yet: "I feel like this is my ministry — not on the front lines but as the support to other people's ministries." Well done, boss!

*Sherri Langton
Associate Editor*

Thanks, Keith!

When BAP Director Leroy Dais hired a local high school student to do odd jobs in the print shop, no one could have known that those odd jobs would turn into a lifetime of ministry. June 2023 marks fifty uninterrupted years of service to Christ and our church by that young man, Keith Michalak, current co-director of the General Conference's Publications Ministry! We are grateful to God for Keith and his faithful service.

*— Loren Stacy
GC President*



George Tolbert (left) and Gilbert Tuller



*Associate Editor Sherri Langton reviewing
a BA layout with Keith, 1990s*



True Revival

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by Loren Gjesdal

Revival has been in the news lately. Stories of college students holding all-night, weeklong services sparked breathless hope for another Great Awakening — a mass move of the Holy Spirit racing like wildfire across the American continent and culture.

But would we know a true revival if we saw it? What hallmarks would we look for? More importantly, how could we usher in a real revival?

Old Testament revivals

Several examples of glorious revival are in Scripture, including thousands expressing a dramatic heart change toward God. One was during King Hezekiah's reign in Judah. We read this beautiful account in 2 Chronicles:

Then the whole assembly decided to celebrate *the feast* another seven days, so they celebrated the seven days with joy. . . . So there was great joy in Jerusalem, because there was nothing like this in Jerusalem since

the days of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel (30:23, 26).

A similar event occurred during Josiah's reign:

There had not been celebrated a Passover like it in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet; nor had any of the kings of Israel celebrated such a Passover as Josiah did with the priests, the Levites, all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem (35:18).

Yet another revival took place in the time of Nehemiah:

The entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in them. The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day. And there was great rejoicing (Nehemiah 8:17).

Each example highlighted was preceded by long periods of flagrant sin against God and man; periods of idolatry, sexual immorality, and violent oppression of the innocent. What turned a culture of sin into a community joyfully worshipping God? The answer is in Josiah's trend-setting response to seeing who he was

in the light God's law: He tore his clothes (2 Chronicles 34:19).

Tearing clothes might seem odd to us, but it expressed the same conviction the people felt in Nehemiah's day that led them to weep and mourn when they heard the words of the law (Nehemiah 8:9).

Repentance

The first work of the Holy Spirit in bringing revival is to enable God's people to see their true condition in light of God's holy standards. Revival starts with repentance, but we find repentance about as appealing as the shock of a defibrillator. Yet without repentance, waning faith will die.

The first step of repentance is to confess the specific ways in which we have personally missed the mark of God's holiness. This confession allowed a holy God to move among sinful people to bring healing, joy, and new life.

Consider John the Baptist's ministry. His purpose was to prepare the way for the greatest work and move of God the world has ever seen. What was his message and method? Mark 1:4 says, "John the Baptist

appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." While he baptized with water, John described the greater work of God to come: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (v. 8).

On the day of Pentecost, when it came time for God to fulfill the promise to baptize with the Holy Spirit, Peter said to the thousands assembled: "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

We pray for revival, but are we willing to follow the biblical template for preparing the way for a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit? Are we willing to review God's law, to examine our own hearts in the light of God's holiness, to confess our sin to God and others?

Revival begins with each one of us asking the Holy Spirit to show us our hearts as God sees them. I must look into the mirror of God's perfection and confess who I really am. I must repent.

To repent is not just to weep over our sin, nor just to admit it. To repent is to allow God to remove that sin and then determine to forsake it. When

Hezekiah and Josiah ushered in revival, they put away idols. Ezra and Nehemiah put away foreign wives. John the Baptist instructed the people to put away greed. Repentance is all about turning our heart away from the love of the world and toward the love of God.

Spreading revival

How will we recognize a true revival? It will certainly involve a work of conviction by the Holy Spirit drawing attention to individual sin. How will we know it's for real? Not necessarily by healings and manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit, but by heartfelt contrition and confession. Confirmation will be transformed hearts expressing a new first love in worship, service, and righteousness.

How can we be a part of preparing the way for a new work of the Holy Spirit in our day? Maybe instead of praying for revival we should pray for a spirit of conviction. Maybe instead of praying for the revival of our nation, we could pray for revival to begin with us, trusting that our spark of conviction, confession, and repentance can pass

to others and spread like wildfire across our nation.

In doing this, we can enter afresh into the kingdom of God by responding to Jesus' invitation: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). **BA**

Loren Gjesdal is co-director of Artios Christian College and co-pastor of the Marion Church of God (Seventh Day) in Oregon. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.



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Seeing the full extent
of Jesus' fourfold Great
Commission.
by R. Herbert

After His resurrection, Jesus' guidance of His disciples changed from "Come and see" (John 1:39) to "Go and show" (Matthew 28:19, 20) — from training His followers to sending them out to fulfill His commission. That Great Commission was to be the chief goal of the church until the end of the age.

Yet today many churchgoers do not even know what the Great Commission is. A Barna Group research study, conducted in 2018, found that 51 percent of churchgoers were

unfamiliar with the term and were unsure what it meant. Only 17 percent of respondents said they knew the term and the Bible verses associated with it. Even within that small 17 percent, few realize the true scope of the commission itself.

This is because the Great Commission is usually associated with Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 28, which gives its longest form. But Jesus' commissioning of His disciples was actually recorded in all four Gospels. We can learn much by putting their accounts together.

Gospel accounts

Matthew. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . . and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (28:19, 20). Jesus had earlier instructed His disciples to baptize and teach

(John 4:2; Luke 9:1, 2), but not specifically to make disciples. The importance of this new command is heightened by the fact that in the Greek text, "make disciples" is the only direct command. The primary thrust of the Great Commission in Matthew is the making of disciples by baptizing and teaching them.

Mark. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (16:15). Mark's version of Jesus' commission is followed by a list of signs that would accompany believers: casting out demons, speaking in languages they did not know, not being hurt by deadly creatures or poisons, and healing the sick (vv. 16-18). But His abbreviated summary of the commission clearly stresses the preaching of the gospel to those who have not heard it.

Luke.

“The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations . . . You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (24:46-49).

While Matthew stressed that the disciples were to go, Luke stresses that they must stay until they were spiritually equipped to perform the commission they were given. It centered on being witnesses (cf. Acts 1:8) and preaching repentance and forgiveness to the world.

John. “‘As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (20:21, 22). The words indicate that the missionary work of the disciples was to be a direct continuation of the mission of Jesus himself. John’s Gospel clarifies Luke’s statement regarding the power with which the disciples would be clothed. This was the Holy Spirit, fully poured out later on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

Fourfold commission

Each Gospel records Jesus commissioning the disciples after His resurrection, but each evangelist stresses a different aspect:

- Matthew - Jesus’ disciples were themselves to make disciples, baptizing and teaching them.

- Mark - The gospel would be proclaimed to the whole world.
- Luke - Repentance for the forgiveness of sins was also to be proclaimed to all nations.
- John - The disciples, empowered by the Holy Spirit, were to do the same work that Jesus was sent to do.

With all Gospel accounts combined, we can see the breadth and richness of the Great Commission often overlooked by believers if they focus only on Matthew’s account. But this best-known statement is incomplete



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by itself. As is so often true with the four Gospels, we must put them together to get the full picture God has made available to us.

Double promise

Having done this, we return to Matthew 28 and Jesus’ unique, double encouragement for His commissioned disciples. This Gospel writer alone records that Jesus told His disciples He had been given all authority in heaven and on earth (v. 18).

This claim helps us understand the nature of Jesus, but it is also important to our understanding of the Great Commission. Jesus emphasized that all authority was His in the context of the commission itself. He tells us, in effect, that He can fulfill the work. No hurdle is too great, and nothing can stop His work being done — if we will let Him work through us.

Jesus also made it clear in Matthew’s Gospel that the Great Commission was not to be just for that generation but for future ones as well: “I am with you always, to the very end of

the age” (v. 20). It is not only a richly multifaceted call to do the work of God but also a twofold promise that the Son of God will always be with us — and with all the power necessary — to accomplish the commission He has given us to “Go and show!” **BA**

R. Herbert (a pen name) holds an earned doctorate in biblical studies and ancient Near Eastern languages and archaeology. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



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A Message of Hope

Discovering the full significance of God's call to repentance.

by **Ubong Edet**

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:1, 2).

John the Baptist was a prophet of the Most High and full of the Holy Spirit. No wonder people were drawn to set aside their jobs and everyday lives and travel into the wilderness to hear and respond to his message of

repentance. They were attracted by the hope of a new beginning that John's message, baptism, and the resulting spiritual formation held forth. Matthew writes, "Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins" (vv. 5, 6).

We don't usually associate repentance with hope, but it is related to it. Repentance is available for all, and God desires for all to repent. That gives us hope! And it's just the beginning. Repentance is the promise of confidence and commission, redemption and transformation, in Jesus Christ and the work of God.

We will see here that John's message of repentance is one of hope because it reminds us that God is for us, God wants to work

in us, and God wants to work through us.

God for us

The Lord used John to remind His people that He was on their side. God wanted them to know that He was breaking into history once again on their behalf: "The kingdom is at hand." God was bringing to pass that new age of salvation that had been spoken of by the prophets Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel. The Holy Spirit worked through John to announce the coming of the Messiah: a time of new birth and the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

At this time in history, God's people were in a mess. Without the clear voice of the prophet, the Israelites had divided themselves into various spiritual

parties and factions. Three of the largest were the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. Each group claimed the high ground of spiritual authority, dismissing the others. Alongside these were the disciples of the rabbinic schools of Hillel and Shammai, who claimed their way was the true and orthodox way. The waters of theology of that day were as muddy as the Jordan River.

Added to all of this was the corruption of the office of the high priest. Shortly after the time of Malachi, it had been bought and sold to whomever could most afford it. The office had lost its spiritual integrity. The Levitical priesthood was seen as fraudulent as the priests interpreted the law for their own personal gain.

In the midst of all this trouble and turmoil, the Lord's message came through John the Baptist. There at the river Jordan, far from the religious confusion of Jerusalem, was a voice anointed with the Holy Spirit. Through John, the Lord called Israel back to Himself, back to the hope that He was on their side and bringing forth His kingdom into the world and into their lives. Apostle Paul summarized the power of this divine work: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31; cf. Psalm 56:9).

God in us

Psalm 51 is sometimes called the great psalm of repentance. After King David was confronted with the truth of his sins, he turned to the Lord for cleansing and forgiveness. David knew all he could do was repent and confess his sins to the Lord.

Psalm 51 captures David's open and honest humility. In

repenting, David did not hold back but confessed his sins. He wasn't concerned about portraying any false image of himself or protecting himself. He acknowledged his sin and brokenness, experienced great sorrow, and vowed to never repeat that same sinful behavior.

What David sought was the same message John the Baptist preached: hope in repentance — the hope that God is not only for us but is at work in us, in our hearts, minds, and souls.

The repentance that John taught was not a stale or static experience. It was not just some mental exercise. By repent, John meant

- acknowledge our powerlessness and brokenness because of our sins;
- decide we no longer want to live under the penalty and power of sin;
- confess our sins to Almighty God, holding nothing back;
- believe that He will forgive

us, cleanse us, and make us white as snow.

The powers of evil are doing their best to convince our world that there is no truth. There is no supernatural being called God, and if there is no God, then everything is relative. People who think like this note that just a few years ago society labeled abortion, fornication, drinking, and drug use as sinful. People caught doing these things were shamed and encouraged to repent. But over time our society has decided that these things and others are not sin or even wrong. They are simply lifestyle choices. We have the right to decide what is right or wrong.

Only *God in us* can break through the pride and rebellion with conviction. Only the Holy Spirit can bring us to confession. That is our message of hope, that God's "Spirit of truth" will reprove the world of sin and that "He dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:17; 16:8; cf. Psalm 51:10, 11).

Repent: The First Word

The call to repentance must not be neglected. It is, in fact, the first word of the gospel.

- In John the Baptist's preaching (Matthew 3:1, 2).
- In Jesus' preaching (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:14, 15).
- In the twelve disciples' preaching (Mark 6:12).
- In Jesus' instructions He gave to His disciples after His resurrection (Luke 24:46, 47).
- In the first Christian sermon (Acts 2:38).
- From the apostle Paul through his ministry (Acts 26:19, 20).

— Ubong Edet

God through us

The message of repentance comes with a message of fruitfulness. John challenged his listeners to bear fruit in keeping with this repentance (Matthew 3:8). He knew that when we repent, we will also change. We are no longer the same person, nor will we live like the person we once were. We are made new!

The hope of repentance is the hope of another way — a new way. In repentance, God begins to redeem, renew, and restore the old us into a new us. The Lord desires that we allow the Spirit to raise up and transform us: body, mind, and emotions.

At this moment, we are no longer earthbound creatures but born-again people, no longer dedicated to or dictated by earthly things from below but focusing on heavenly things that are above where Christ dwells. In Colossians 3, Paul gives a clear description of the old and new, above and below. Put to death sins of sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness; cast off anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene language. We are no longer taken in by sorcery, enmity, strife,

jealousy, dissensions, divisions, and drunkenness.

Instead, the hope of repentance in Christ means that we put on the garments of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. We clothe ourselves in forgiveness and peace. We bear the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We do not, and cannot, do all this of ourselves but only because of God working through us. “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place” (2 Corinthians 2:14).

God for us. God with us. God through us. This message of hope is John’s message of repentance. It is not eternal fire insurance; it is an invitation to walk with God as His holy people. **BA**

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



The Power of Words

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good to say and speak it. Let the words we speak demonstrate that we are God’s unique image bearers.

I think Paul would agree on this point: speak *better*, not less. At the conclusion of his famous summary in Ephesians 4 of the purpose of the gifts to equip the saints, he reminds his readers that this will require “speaking the truth in love” to grow up in every way into Christ (v. 15). Paul reinforces this with the command “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (v. 29).

Do not be content with neutrality in your speech; pursue love through your words. When necessary, apologize for any wrongdoing. Just as we desire God to speak life into us as He did in the beginning, so we should strive to speak life into others. With the Holy Spirit’s help, we can. **BA**

Jonathon Hicks pastors the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Lodi, CA, where he lives with his wife, Danielle, and their son, Samuel.

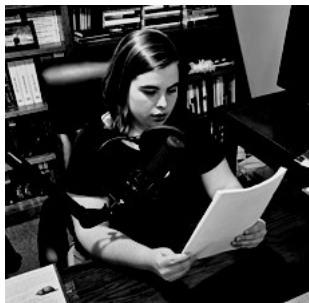



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Seeing *(John 9)*

Born blind. Aren't we all?
Dumb in sin, cursed by the Fall.
We stumble through life
Grappling with strife,
Until the good news seeps in
Jump starting our heart, and then
We come home to Him, seeing.

Stephen R. Clark



Readers Write



The Immigration 'Problem'

I appreciated this article in the [March-April '23] BA. There is a big difference between acknowledging a problem and actually trying to resolve it. Imagine Robert [Stephens] learning Spanish over a few years so that he could help strangers. But they really are not strangers if they are brethren. . . . Reading Robert's testimony was heart-warming.

The USA is blessed to be a magnet for people willing to sneak in and work, producing something for the country. The annual shortfall between the Boomers retiring and the Zoomers entering the workforce is now about 400,000. By the end of the decade, it will be 900,000 per year. We know this because those people already exist. . . . Not only are so many more leaving the workforce than are entering it, but most of them take away far more knowledge than the new entrants are bringing. So you need those immigrants.

G. F.
Victoria, BC

Despite Mr. Stephens' thinly veiled protestations to the contrary, illegal immigration is in fact a big problem. Those who arrive by breaking America's immigration laws should be given shelter, food, clean water, and clothing if necessary. But to further aid and abet their illegal entry is wrong. They should be encouraged (and assisted if necessary) to return to their country of origin. . . .

I am appalled by Mr. Stephens' casual dismissal of the criminal element that is coming across our all too porous border. Do I really have to cite some of the (too) many examples of rape, murder, fentanyl smuggling, and other crimes committed by criminals that have entered illegally? Like all of us, Mr. Stephens vets the people he allows to come into his house with his family. . . . Likewise, the United States has the right and the responsibility to vet those who desire entry into the country. . . .

Lax execution of current immigration law is a slap in the face to those who are willing to be vetted and go through the legal immigration process. It is an insult to the millions who have come here with a desire to become a legitimate part of American society and culture.

To the question of living in a "Gang controlled impoverished third world country," I reiterate they should be encouraged and assisted to improve circum-

stances in the countries they live in. There is a practicality to this. Most of the people who cross our border illegally are males of working age. By aiding and abetting criminal entry into our country, we are impoverishing the place they came from of the very workforce needed to create the social and economic improvements everyone desires for the poor countries they are abandoning. The loss of healthy males in these countries also creates an impoverishment of healthy males who would otherwise be present to lead and provide for families as fathers.

T. H.
Email

Excerpts from Robert Stephens' response: As we look for the undocumented splinter in our neighbor's eye, we must repent for our lack of hospitality! . . . I don't want to diminish the contributions of those serving in our churches, but I know that visitors feel out of place, outsiders have difficulty integrating, and new believers are pushed away . . . Taking selfies at the food bank is not the same as hospitality . . .

Brother T. H., an influx of needy, disconnected people is a huge opportunity for outreach! Do we want to grow our churches? Then let's get to work! Or shall we sit in our closed-door Bible studies and pontificate about the world's problems?



Who is Going?

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19, 20).

The GC Initiatives invites you to **go** and share Jesus Christ. If you don't know where to go and how to share, start with step 1 of the “Come and See” evangelistic initiative that starts your personal journey to fulfill the Great Commission.

- Learn the importance of nurturing relationships among friends, neighbors, and co-workers.
- Understand how to write and share your personal testimony.
- Practice, practice, and practice sharing who Jesus Christ is.

If you want to go and make disciples, plan this workshop in your area or church. Contact your superintendent and join the many churches that have started the process: Jacksonville, Florida; Phoenix, Arizona; Harrisburg, Oregon; Ontario and Lodi, California; Denver, Colorado; Chicago, Illinois (Addison); Dallas, Houston, El Paso, McAllen, and San Antonio, Texas; Jasper, Arkansas; Spring Vale Christian School, Owosso, Michigan.

Personal evangelism: the first journey of your calling. For more information, visit <https://cog7.org/evangelism>.

Want to continue your evangelism journey? You can schedule more workshops:

Small Groups Studies
Welcoming Churches

Asleep in Jesus

Rayvin “Ray” Straub

1931 – 2023

Rayvin Lester Straub (91) was born December 6, 1931, to Emanuel Straub and Albina Weller Straub near Eureka, South Dakota. He died March 26 at his home in West Linn, Oregon.

Ray married Shirley Baker in 1953 and assumed his first pastoral role in Fresno.

He pastored the church in Los Angeles and later in Marion, Oregon. There, in 1962, he organized and directed the first youth camp in the Church, held at Silver Creek Falls, Oregon.

After moving to Sacramento in the mid-1960's, Ray served as pastor, West Coast District superintendent, and national radio speaker on Faith for Our Time. In 1973, he moved to pastor the Lodi church and then helped establish and direct the Church's first post-graduate seminary in Denver (Ministerial Training Center, later renamed Summit School of Theology). Following his service in Denver, he moved back to Marion, Oregon, to pastor that congregation a second time.

During his ministry, Ray served on the executive board (board of directors) as vice chairman for many years. He joined Robert Coulter on trips to Mexico and the Caribbean Islands representing the General Conference.

Please visit our Memorials page (churchright.org) for more on Ray's life and ministry.





On Mission ... in Pakistan

Editor's note: This issue's On Mission pages are devoted to three short stories of what is happening with the CoG7 in Pakistan. They are taken from the Orphans and Widows newsletter, produced by GC Missions.

Surviving in Pakistan

by **Brian Baker**

Pakistan has the fifth largest population in the world; the United States has the third largest. The average household monthly income in urban areas of Pakistan is \$145 (only \$106 in rural areas). The average household monthly income in the US is \$5,900.

I know what you're thinking, because I am thinking the same thing. I don't make anywhere near \$5,900 a month! And the

truth is that our church members in Pakistan don't make anywhere near \$106 a month. It's more like \$60.

We have around 10,000 Church of God (Seventh Day) members in Pakistan. Six or so years ago, we started sewing classes to teach widows a trade that could help them increase their household income. We also spent \$100 for each woman to own a sewing machine. Over 250 women have benefitted.

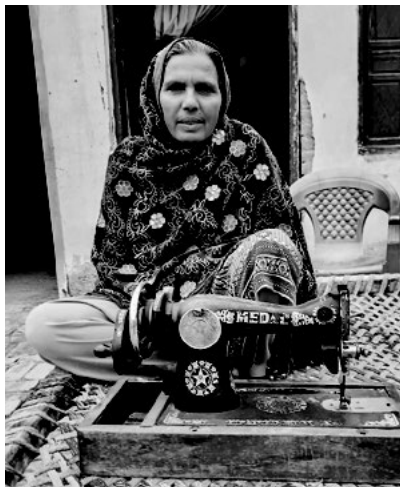
All was going well, with some of our ladies making up to \$125 a month with their new trade. Then COVID hit three years ago. Flooding hit last fall that affected about 70 percent of the nation. Between the two, the economy

tanked and is nowhere near recovering. Our church members are barely existing, and the sewing trade is abysmal with members trying to sell clothing among themselves.

They need to export. A quick search taught me that six of the top ten exports in Pakistan have something to do with textiles. I have met with a woman here in America who specializes in clothing design and sales. She owns her own boutique and markets products online.

I have been communicating with this woman for several years. I went to school with her mother and father at Spring Vale some thirty-five years ago. We are meeting about some specific designs of a needed product in America. I don't want to tell you too much too soon, but I'm excited to brainstorm and come up with an exporting plan that our Church of God (Seventh Day) women of Pakistan can produce and ship.

For the next several months, I will be raising funds to help our women and widows, some of whom have been rescued from brick kilns, to start clothing exporting. This will be our sustainability project for Pakistan.



Please consider giving to our church members in Pakistan so they can make their own way.

Brian Baker is GC Missions Orphans and Widows Ministry director.

Converted Through Kindness

**by Sehrish Shamas as told to
Abrahams Odongo**

Thirteen-year-old Roshni is a good and bright student. Though her parents didn't get a chance to acquire formal learning, they were committed to ensuring that Roshni and her two sisters received a high-quality education. Truth Academy offered that. These three girls came from an extremely poor family and were among some of the first students to be recruited by Pastor Pervaiz Shamas to join Truth Academy as pioneer students. Roshni is currently in her fourth class and is doing well in her studies.

Roshni and her family were members of the Catholic church before they heard preaching, were converted and baptized. They are now active members of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Pakistan. When Truth Academy started, Roshni's father, Goga, hesitated to let his children join this school, fearing he couldn't afford the fees. He was soon surprised that Pastor Shamas, because of his heart and



compassion for the Christian children in Pakistan, greatly reduced the fees so these children could go to school.

This gesture of kindness touched Brother Goga and even Roshni. Pastor Shamas believes that, being a brilliant and hard-working student and through good education, this young girl will be able to help herself and probably alleviate the poverty in their family.

In years past, Roshni's parents had to work in brick kilns and even do chores in houses belonging to Muslims. Now they believe that someday this cycle of poverty will be broken.

Transformed to Impact Others

**by Sehrish Shamas as told to
Abrahams Odongo**

Sister Irum, a thirty-two-year-old teacher at Truth Academy in Pakistan, has known the difference between the Islamic, Catholic, and Protestant Christian faiths. Unlike many young people who know just one religion,



Sister Irum (right) sits with Sehrish Shamas, daughter of Pervaiz Shamas

Irum started her journey of life as a Catholic. Her birth in a strong Catholic family and subsequent education in a Catholic school might have shaped her into a staunch Catholic who could even later be the youth leader of the same faith.

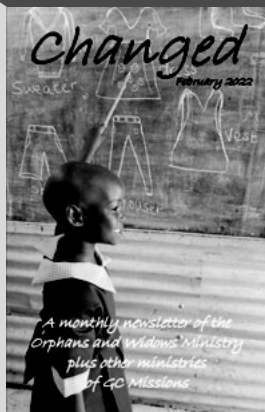
One day during a united convention she attended, Irum heard preaching from Pastor Shamas Pervaiz that touched her and aroused new interest in the things of God. Upon hearing and

being convicted, she gathered courage to ask Pastor Shamas for his mobile phone number so that they could stay in touch. Even though she was a Catholic, Irum desired to know more about the Bible. This contact allowed Pastor Shamas to help her understand the Bible through his audio messages he shared with her. She learned about topics such as Sabbath, immersion baptism, and other biblical topics. Soon Irum decided to convert from

Catholicism, be fully baptized, and become a member of the Church of God (Seventh Day).

Sister Irum's teaching career has stretched for twelve years. She taught her first seven years in a Muslim school. Once she switched to the Church of God, she requested that Pastor Shamas consider her for employment at Truth Academy, and he granted it. According to Sister Irum, her engagement at Truth Academy as a teacher has not been her single biggest motivation. Rather, it is the equal opportunity that this school provides for all students, even children from brick kilns. To her, Truth Academy offers to educate all students with the highest quality education but, more importantly, a spiritual education.

This uniqueness of the poor affording what only the rich could afford fills Sister Irum with joy. Her journey started as a Catholic. She taught in a Muslim school. But now she has learned to read the Bible for herself and help other students follow her on this journey.



Subscribe to the Orphans and Widows newsletter by contacting Brian Baker
brian.baker@cog7.org

Truth Academy

Truth Academy is a CoG7 primary school in Faisalabad, Pakistan, founded in 2018. The school currently has 140 students and eight teachers, serving many underprivileged families and helping students



grow in their Christian faith. Their goal is to build their own school facilities and have more than 1,000 students within the next few years.



You Must Be Born Again

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:1-3, NASB throughout).

In John’s telling of this famous conversation (John 3:1-21), Nicodemus opens with a somewhat tentative statement. But Jesus gets straight to the heart of the matter: You must be born again. This conversation suggests that Nicodemus needed to be born again in at least two ways: spiritually and theologically.

Why spiritually? Because Nicodemus was dead, spiritually. Like every other fallen human, he was conceived and born in sin. What the apostle Paul said of the Ephesian believers’ condition before they accepted Christ (Ephesians 2) was also true of Nicodemus. He was dead in his trespasses and sins, by nature a child of wrath. He had “a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge” (Romans 10:2). He was a “natural man” and, therefore, could not understand the things of the Spirit of God, because those things are “spiritually appraised” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Dead people cannot understand or learn. Dead people cannot exercise faith. They cannot choose not to be dead. Their only hope is that

God may regenerate them and give them life — spiritual life. You must be born again.

Nicodemus also needed to be born again theologically. He was a ruler of the Jews (John 3:1), a leader among the Pharisees. His entire life was focused on old covenant law. He had been born and raised in a dead-end religion of good works. As he met with Jesus in the dark of that night, Nicodemus was confronted by the One who was both the end of the old covenant and the beginning of the new. But Nicodemus was immersed in the old covenant Judaism of his time. It was his life! How could he start over and embrace a new covenant? You must be born again.

What was true of Nicodemus is also true of us. We must be born again spiritually. We desperately need the abundant life that Jesus came to give His own (John 10). And we must be born again theologically. If we are claiming any personal credit for our faith and obedience, we may yet be dead in our sins. We haven’t understood the gospel.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) . . . For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:4, 5, 8, 9).

— Loren Stacy



Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit

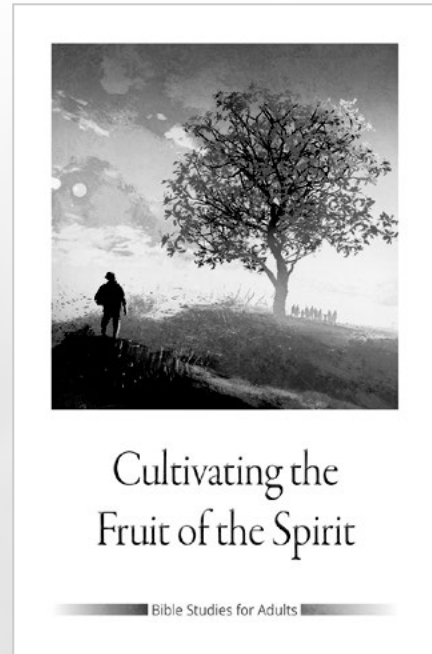
2023 Third Quarter Lessons

**Love, joy, peace, longsuffering,
kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
gentleness, and self-control.**

Which fruit are we producing? Are we, as individuals and churches, thriving in Christ, or are we dying on the vine?

Challenge yourself with these lessons and let God produce His fruit in you!

To set up a standing order for Sabbath school curriculum, go to <https://cog7.org/online-store/>.



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