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Coming in the June BA: gay marriage; fathering; men's issues

In the April and May issues of *Now What?*: joblessness, surviving the death of a daughter (<http://nowwhat.cog7.org>)

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Christians in the Culture



Our BA themes for 2006 were selected to look at hot-button issues in this culture and to compare what the Bible says with what's going on here and now. In the first two issues, we've dared to tackle the beast of racism, to take a stand on several sanctity of life issues (including stem cell research), and to enter the debate over public posting of the Ten Commandments. How are we doing so far?

We're hoping to climb out on a few more limbs in future issues, addressing such topics as men's moods, gay marriage, Christians and warfare, church and state, the titanic clash of cultures between Islam and the West, Israel, nutrition, environmentalism, labor and rest, and prophecy.

In this issue, we take a break from topics that garner most of today's headlines to survey the broader landscape we're traversing. Our lead article by former editor Jerry Griffin examines the ways that followers of Christ may relate to the kingdoms of men in which we invariably find ourselves. This is a spiritually swarming world — biblical or not — and most of our articles here deal with a facet of the Christian's role in it.

What was Jesus' approach to the society around Him? Was He for it or against it? Above it or within it? Did He come to redeem culture, denounce it, or transform it? Not simple questions, but reflecting on them will sharpen our focus as we set our sights on the major issues of today.

Hot-button issues come often — and often go as quickly — in every culture. One thing, however, remains the main thing in which the BA will forever be engaged without wavering: The person and work of Jesus is at the center of biblical faith; and His death and resurrection, celebrated daily and annually during Holy Week, are the focal points of all Christ was and did.

We find much grace and truth, great joy and comfort, in remembering the Lord's death and resurrection in their season at an annual memorial service commonly called the Lord's Supper. This event, scheduled for sunset on Tuesday, April 11, this year, is at the crux of our identity as Christians and of our activity in the larger culture the rest of the year. If you are a Jesus follower, you are invited to participate.

— Calvin Burrell



Christ, Culture, and Evangelism

Niebuhr's models can guide us in how to be effective as salt and light.

by Jerry Griffin

How should Christians interact with their surrounding culture? From the first century until now, believers have taken different approaches with varying results. Perhaps the best description of how Jesus' followers have responded to the world is in the book *Christ and Culture*, by H. Richard Niebuhr (1951).

The problem

Before we summarize the five models identified in that book, we will briefly define the "enduring problem" between Christ and culture, as Niebuhr puts it. From the non-Christian perspective, the problem is that the teachings of Christ threaten the heritage of human civilization (that is, humanity's political, economic, social, and religious institutions; its technologies, arts, sciences, language, literature, beliefs, philosophies, traditions, customs, values, and worldview). In other words, Christ's teachings call for change in human systems.

From the Christian perspective, the problem is reversed. The heritage of human civilization threatens the teachings of Christ by either opposing them or diluting them. Yet the struggle is not solely between Christians and non-Christians. It also occurs within the Christian community, and even within the individual believer who struggles to combine his loyalty to Christ with his loyalty to society.

Thus, the claims of these two authorities – Christ and culture – create an inevitable conflict. Christ, in His single-minded devotion to God, leads humanity away from the temporality and pluralism of culture. At the same time, culture, in its concern to

preserve the values of human accomplishments, rejects Christ who bids humanity to rely on faith. Therefore, the interface between any Christian community and the larger culture will inevitably produce conflict.

The solutions

Christians have given a variety of answers to solve the conflict. These answers may be categorized into five models. The first two models represent the opposite ends of the spectrum, while the last three seek to mediate between the extremes.

1 Christ Against Culture. This view, at the right-hand end of the spectrum, is the model of the *separatist*, who vows uncompromising allegiance to Christ and resolutely rejects the claims of culture, which he sees as evil and identifies as Babylon. Therefore, this model advocates complete separation from and total opposition to culture. It takes an either-or position. The Christian must serve either Christ or culture, for one cannot serve both. This model tends toward the ascetic lifestyle of the hermit or monk. Its key verses are 1 John 2:15 and Revelation 18:4.

The strengths of this model are personal piety, ethical lifestyle, and uncompromising commitment to a cause.

Its weaknesses: 1) It denies in action what it affirms in words — namely, the possibility of living entirely apart from culture. 2) It fails to see that the source of sin comes from individual human nature, not just from collective culture. 3) It tends to rely on ascetic works rather than on God's grace. 4) It tends to be guided by

an inner voice, with little need of the Scriptures and their Christ.

2 Christ of Culture. At the left end of the spectrum is the *accommodationist*, who seeks to adapt Christian truth to the best of human culture. It identifies Christ as part of culture — the highest expression that humanity has aspired to or achieved. It identifies Him with the finest ideals, the noblest institutions, the best knowledge, and the highest norms of human behavior.

In human form, Christ participated in culture. He was part of the social heritage that is to be conserved and transmitted. As the great teacher and enlightener, He directs all people to attain wisdom, moral perfection, and peace. The Christ of culture does not call people to leave homes and family for His sake. Rather, He enters into their homes and their associations to give meaning to daily life. The Christian, therefore, must be active in his culture, working for the common good of society by serving his fellow man.

The strengths of this model are its social compassion and concern for human welfare.

Its weaknesses: 1) It has been no more effective in gaining disciples for Christ than Chris-

tian separatism. 2) It presents an incomplete picture of Jesus, emphasizing His humanity to the exclusion of His divinity. 3) It downplays the role of the supernatural. 4) By emphasizing moral knowledge, it tends toward gnosticism and a self-reliant humanism. That is, if people would just be rational, obey the laws, and do what's right, then the kingdom of God would come to earth.

3 Christ Above Culture. This is the model of the *synthesist*, who seeks to combine the physical and spiritual realms. The kingdom of God and the kingdoms of men are complementary, but the former is higher and sanctifies the latter. This view places Christ above and apart from culture. Like the Christ of Culture view, Jesus is the fulfillment of cultural aspirations and the restorer of human institutions.

Yet unlike the Christ of Culture view, a redeemed culture is not possible solely by human achievement. Christ does not arise from within culture as part of it. Rather, He enters into life from above with gifts that human aspiration has not envisioned and human effort cannot attain. Only through His leading can humanity achieve a supernatural society

The solution is not to throw out culture altogether but to convert it as Christ regenerates fallen men and women who, in turn, exercise their influence on society.

and a new value system.

Rather than an “either-or” like the first two views, the Christ Above Culture model is a “both-and” relationship between Christ and culture. Christ is both of this world and of the other as He works through the great social institutions of family, state, and church. The Christian, therefore, must live out his obedience to Christ in the concrete life of human society. The Christian is a good man by the standards of culture, but he must also rise above all that with a Christ-like lifestyle that transcends the best in natural man. The key verses of this view are Matthew 5:20; 22:21; and Romans 13:1-7.

The strengths of this model, from one vantage, are that the

church has, at some stages in history, triumphed over secular society to become its dominant institution. It has served as the guardian of culture, fostering learning, protecting family values, and influencing the arts, sciences, philosophy, law, government, education, and economic institutions.

Its weaknesses are that the attempt to synthesize Christ and culture — God’s work and man’s, the temporal and the eternal — leads to the institutionalization of Christ and the gospel through the state, church, educational system, economy, etc. It suggests that Christians can have “all this and heaven too.”

4 Christ and Culture in Paradox. This is the model of the *dualist*, who recognizes that he is a citizen of two realms. Under the authority of both Christ and culture, he attempts to hold the two in tension. As a citizen of the heavenly realm, he is under God’s grace and lives according to its privileges and freedoms. But as a citizen of the earthly realm, he is under God’s judgment and subject to human laws and institutions — God’s agents to prevent sin from becoming as destructive as it might otherwise be. Only this divine restraint makes cultural life possible. Thus, the dualist must live precariously between two opposing worlds — grace and freedom vs. law and restraint — until the heavenly realm becomes an earthly reality. Key verses for this model are John 17:14, 15; 1 Corinthians 6:12; and 2 Corinthians 5:1-8.

Strengths of this model are a profound sense of human sinfulness and God’s grace and an honest assessment of the actual struggles Christians experience. Recognizing the corruption in all human culture, including the church, it examines its own flaws and speaks prophetically to correct the church.

Its weakness: 1) it leads some Christians into antinomianism. 2) It tends toward cultural conservatism: Since earthly society will eventually disappear, little time is spent on changing bad social institutions or conditions.

5 Christ the Transformer of Culture. This is the model of the *conversionist*, who seeks the about-face of humanity from self-centeredness to Christ-centeredness. Although the human world is fallen and corrupt, it is still

Implications for Evangelism

The **Christ Against Culture** church seeks to isolate itself from society. Judgmental in nature, it tends to reject the positive aspects of culture with the negative. Passive about evangelism, it calls the world to come in, rather than the church going out into the world.

The **Christ of Culture** church seeks to accommodate its message to the culture and may lose its Christian distinctions. Engaging in social reform and humanitarian welfare to meet physical needs, it places less emphasis on the spiritual salvation of humanity.

The **Christ Above Culture** church seeks a holy commonwealth on earth. Utilizing political power to establish a Christian society, it feels less need to be evangelistic.

The **Christ and Culture in Paradox** church stresses spiritual rather than social change. It is evangelistic in that it preaches individual conversion and piety, but its emphasis on personal salvation makes it less interested and involved in cultural and social issues.

The **Christ Transforming Culture** church seeks both the conversion of individuals and the transformation of the larger culture. It uses whatever is of value in the culture as a tool to reach the lost for Christ. It empowers believers to be salt and light in the culture —to be involved in social, political, and economic institutions as a witness for Christ and an influence for godly change.

— Jerry Griffin

within God's reign and remains open to transformation through His restraining and renewing presence. Because of humanity's fallen nature, culture has been misdirected, perverted, and corrupted. The solution, however, is not to throw out culture altogether but to convert it — to put it back on God's intended track. This is done as Christ regenerates fallen men and women who, in turn, exercise their individual and collective influence on society. The kingdom of God on earth is transforming culture through the participation of transformed men and women. Key verses for this model are Matthew 5:13, 14; John 1:29; 3:16,17; 12:32; Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 9:19-22; and Colossians 1:16.

The strengths of this model are its affirmative optimism that God controls human destiny. Christ has already won the victory over the powers of this world in order to save the people of the world. The model is flexible in dealing with cultural obstacles by drawing on the strengths of the above models.

Its weakness is that it must guard against substituting the church — a cultural achievement and institution — for Christ.

To further reflect on the relation of Jesus Christ with contemporary culture, see "WWJD" and the reflections that follow. **BA**

Now a grandfather, former editor **Jerry Griffin** and his wife, Donna, live in Brighton, CO.



WWJD



Corel Photos

What would Jesus do in a culture like this? No one can say for sure, of course, but we can infer His attitude and approach by the things He once said and did in Scripture.

To the non-religious and unspiritual in 2006, Jesus would respond much as He did two thousand years ago:

- He'd go to lunch with them (Matt. 9:10, 11). If someone criticized Jesus for keeping loose company, He'd say something like "Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? . . . I'm here to invite outsiders, not coddle insiders" (vv. 12, 13, *The Message*).
- He'd sow good seed among them (Matt. 13:1-30). If anyone suggested pulling thistles, Jesus might say, "If you weed the thistles, you'll pull up the wheat, too. Let them grow together until harvest time" (vv. 29, 30, *The Message*).
- He'd look for glimmers of faith (Matt. 8:8-10; 15:22-28) and give them opportunity to change their minds about God. To those who said Jesus worked with the wrong group, He'd tell them the Son of Man came to find and restore the lost (18:11).

And to the religious elite of our culture, Jesus would rebuke their hypocrisy in setting their own rules (Matt. 15:1-9) and in their outward show (ch. 23). He'd remind them not to judge others until they had fully dealt with their own sin: "That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging. It's easy to see a smudge on your neighbor's face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own" (7:2, 3, *The Message*).

Reflections

1. Do you agree with the first point, that Jesus would deliberately cultivate friendship with those who reject God, the church, and a righteous lifestyle? Why or why not? If you agree, then how do you understand the scriptures that warn us against keeping company with sinners (Psa. 1:1; Prov. 1:10ff; 1 Cor. 15:33)?
2. From the preceding article "Christ, Culture, and Evangelism," which of the five models do you see as most appropriate for yourself? Why? If you see serious problems in the other models, what are they?



Followers of a narrow gospel must watch their actions toward those in the broad way. **by Israel Steinmetz**

Increasingly surrounded by pluralistic, relativistic, and postmodern notions and worldviews, Christians in America and in other Western societies face a daunting challenge.

Freedom of expression, full rights for all lifestyles, and tolerance have become bywords of this generation, many of whom reject the Bible, absolute truth, and transcendent morality. More and more people believe that all religions teach essentially the same, that no single view of truth is more accurate than another, and that all spiritual paths eventually lead to heaven.

In the midst of this broad way are Christians proclaiming a narrower gospel. It declares all people sinners by nature and choice, and that without God's mercy and grace through Christ,

we are all headed to death and damnation. Religions that deny this mislead people and are devoted to false gods.

It is no surprise, then, that Christians are often perceived as exclusive and offensive to those in the broad way. If our eyes and ears are open, we will bear the brunt of their satire, criticism, and political activism. It must be, said Jesus, that offenses will come.

Christians must be careful, however, that the offenses we cause are acceptable in the Lord's sight. Sadly, we may offend others for all the wrong reasons.

Irrelevant faith

One common offense is when we portray a boring, irrelevant, and detached faith. Although Mark Batterson, pastor of Na-

tional Community Church, may be overstating when he claims, "Irrelevance is Irreverence," and although Char Meredith's book *It's a Sin to Bore a Kid* adds to biblical definitions of sin, they believe that the church's failure to meaningfully transmit the gospel to the world amounts to a grievous offense against God. Point well taken.

Consider Jesus' example. Through imaginative stories and simple lessons, He taught profound truths to common people and attracted those who would seldom enter most of our churches. Or consider Paul, who found a hearing in the Areopagus, a center for philosophical discourse in heady Athens (Acts 17:16-34). The point is that the world's failure to respond to the gospel may be more because

of the offense of a dull, out-of-touch church than it is the true offense of the cross of Christ. The gospel is the most compelling, life-changing message in the world and should arouse either a humbled confession or a jeering laugh — but not a disinterested yawn!

Pride

Another unacceptable offense is Christians' pride toward unbelievers. Many believers — particularly those raised in churches — look down on unbelievers. We forget that we, too, were rescued from sin and rebellion. Were it not for the grace of God and others' help, we would go the same way as the sinners around us.

May the church never forget that we are spiritual beggars who have been given the Bread of Life.

Lack of compassion

Christians also forget Christ's compassion toward them when they tell the bad news about "those sinners" without ever sharing the good news. Make no mistake: The gospel is not the gospel if it doesn't promise condemnation for those who reject it. But neither is it the gospel unless it promises restoration, wholeness, and life to those who accept.

Many have seen signs reading "God hates fags!" at anti-gay rallies. Does this communicate good news to slaves of sin and of sexual immorality? Jesus welcomed prostitutes and sinners, ate with them, and shared with them words of eternal life. The church must do the same if it is to become like Christ and teach His gospel. Failure to practice the

love of Christ toward sinners is to earn the world's offense and invite its curse.

Hypocrisy

Being one type of person around saints, then changing for non-believers, offends both God and men. Jesus commands believers to live so that even the average man or woman would glorify God (Matthew 5:16).

Part of Christians' hypocrisy is their failure to admit wrong and to ask forgiveness from unbelievers. Such acts of honest humility can be powerful in winning the world for Christ.

Isolation

Finally, the church is often offensive in its isolation from the world. Someone has said that rather than being in the world but not of it, the church is oftentimes *of* the world but not *in* it. God's people have too often retreated from their primary mission and become little more than a religious ghetto.

When this happens, unbelievers have a right to be offended. Christians must not retreat into a cloister, under the guise of escaping the sinfulness of the world. Rather, we should participate in business, education, government, medicine, and many other fields that need the light of Christ. We must establish friendships with those who need to hear the gospel. Christ left the church in the world as His witness. True to its calling, the church will shine there until He returns.

Offense of Jesus

What, then, is the acceptable offense that Christians should commit?

It is Jesus himself — the living stone, accepted by God but rejected by men. To those who believe, Jesus is precious; to those who do not believe, He is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense (1 Peter 2:7, 8). True followers of Christ should commit the offense of sharing Jesus with others.

Paul explains further that when Jesus the crucified Christ is proclaimed, He becomes a stumbling block to the sign-seeking Jews and foolishness to the wisdom-seeking Greeks (1 Corinthians 1:21-25). This is, as Paul says in Galatians 5:11, the "offense of the cross," and it is inescapable for all who love the Lord who died thereon.

When Christians follow Jesus faithfully and proclaim the gospel without compromise, they are destined to offend those who reject the gospel. Such offenses stem from unbelievers' rejection of Christ, not from believers' sinfulness.

Christians must not use the gospel as an excuse for offending unbelievers if, in fact, our irrelevance, pride, lack of love, hypocrisy, or isolation is causing the offense. However, if we proclaim the pure and exclusive gospel of Jesus Christ in a pluralistic, hedonistic, relativistic culture, we can rest assured that the offense is acceptable to God. **BA**

Israel Steinmetz is a graduate seminary student living in Chesapeake, VA.



Questions & Answers

What is the meaning of this verse: “Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men’” (Ephesians 4:8)?

Here, Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 to support God’s mighty acts when He exalted Christ to heaven, from the dead. Ephesians 4:9, 10 helps explain the quote of v. 8: “Ascended on high” is used for Jesus’ resurrection and ascension (seen as a single event), just as “descended” signifies His death and burial.

And what did the Lord do at His resurrection-ascension? Two things, according to the quote as Paul has it. First, He entered heaven with the spoils of His victory in procession. Figuratively, He led sin, death, and a destroyed devil captive behind Him as He ascended on high to the sound of all heaven’s applause (see Col. 2:15 for more of this). We know little of this heavenly celebration other than what is recorded in these few verses.

Second, Jesus celebrated His triumphant exaltation to the throne on high with a great wave of generosity toward the human family on earth, sending the Spirit of God and Christ among us with a flourish of spiritual fruits and gifts suitable to our highest needs. Of these gifts we know much more. Scripture unpacks them in a hundred ways, beginning with the experience of Acts 2 (see v. 38b) and continuing through the epistles – especially Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12–14; Ephesians 4:11; Hebrews 2:4b – and Revelation.

– Elder Calvin Burrell

How do you decide the date of the annual Lord’s Supper? Some people think the Church’s date is wrong.

The date for our annual communion service, the Lord’s Supper, is set from the Hebrew calendar.

Though Jewish almanac calculations are complex, we may simplify by saying that the Hebrew religious year begins with Nisan 1, on the first new moon after the spring equinox.

We observe the Lord’s Supper, then, on Nisan 14 – the anniversary of when Jesus consecrated the bread and cup as He ate Passover with His disciples at the Last Supper. This year Nisan 14 corresponds to April 12, and we meet for the supper the previous evening after sunset.

Scripture gives no clear account of when the Hebrew year begins. Fragments of this calendar are in the Bible but not enough to determine it all. Later, Jewish leaders filled the gaps and decided when Nisan would begin. Either we follow their precedent (see Matt. 23:1-3), or each student decides it himself, resulting in a confusion of dates. The Bible alone does not enable us to locate Nisan 1 in time.

For these and other reasons, we do not insist on an exclusive date for Lord’s Supper. Much more vital is that the Church observes this memorial *together, in the Spirit of Christ*, at the proper season.

– Elder Calvin Burrell

We Ask

What attitude should one take toward the use of the cross as a Christian symbol?

Your brief answers, edited for length and clarity, will be considered for publication in a future issue of the BA. Address them to the editor (see p. 3).

Finding the Middle Path

Spirituality and theology: Does revival of one mean loss of the other? by Alex Ciurana

What does spirituality look like? What does it feel like? Is everyone “spiritual,” or only Christians?

Spirituality can mean different things. To some people, it is being meek and mild. To others, it is primal and instinctive — what we are naturally. To some it is like stoicism — the proverbial “stiff upper lip.” To more, it is close to our emotional nature — related with feelings.

Some see spirituality everywhere in nature. Others believe it resides most fully in sacred times and sacred places. Some look for true spirituality in a moment of crisis — something supernatural. Others insist it is a process, taking a lifetime to cultivate.

In scholarly circles spirituality has been described as our “ultimate concern” (Paul Tillich), a “blind leap into the dark” (Soren Kierkegaard), and “a great instinctive truth” (Joseph Ernest Renan). Interest in this “great instinctive truth” may be seen in the renewed practice of spiritual disciplines. In a *Leadership Journal* interview describing this dynamic within evangelical churches, Phyllis Tickle, author of a best-selling series of books on fixed-hour prayer, *The Divine Hours*, said:

There has been a movement, I think, not only back to the ancient disciplines, but also a kind of instinctive and not yet fully articulated attempt to know what the whole heritage is for Christianity . . . the first [discipline] that I think connects very well is tithing, based on Abraham’s giving of a tenth of all he had

won in battle to Melchizedek. When I speak about the disciplines, that's where I begin. And I find that it connects with younger people. They want spiritual disciplines that cost them something (*Leadership Journal*, October 3, 2005).

According to Tickle, this movement back to ancient disciplines signals a radical shift in the direction of postmodern Christianity and a possible new Reformation. Other disciplines she writes about are observance of the Sabbath and fasting.

Search for spirituality

This resurgence of spiritual practice is a reminder of the influence of mysticism. Mystical traditions emphasize personal religious experience over dogma and are found in every world religion. In Judaism, experience reigns supreme in the Kabbalists. In Islam, it is the Sufis. In Buddhism, mysticism flourishes through Zen. And in Christianity, seeking the divine has for centuries found fertile soil in hermits, monks, wasteland wanderers, and in America, the Quakers and many modern charismatics.

What do these seemingly disparate views all have in com-

mon? They insist that religious faith must come alive in their present experience. They believe that metaphysical entities can be sensed in the here and now and that it isn't necessary to wait for "the sweet by and by" to get intimately acquainted with God.

Such spiritual ambition can leave many of the mainstream faithful feeling uneasy. "Why can't you people just read your Bibles, believe the gospel, and wait for heaven to feel good — like the rest of us?" Perhaps the first of this three-part advice has been taken to heart.

Experience and application

Today's Christian has read the Bible, or at least significant portions of it. The distinction between devoted old Christians and devoted young Christians is not rooted in their reverence for the Bible; their reverence is much the same. Both believe the Scriptures are the Word of God, and both embrace its major themes. The distinction is on what modern devotees draw from the Bible, with emphasis. They read the stories of Abraham, Moses, and Jeremiah and think, *They experienced a great God. I should be able to also!* They read of Paul's travels and say, "What adventure!

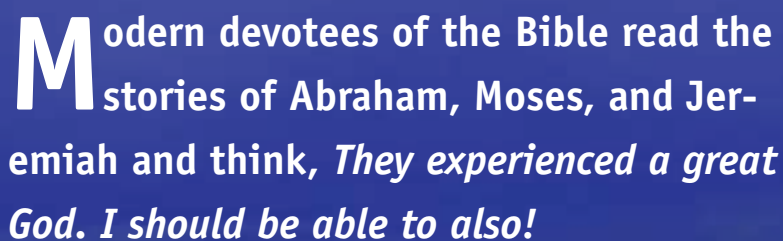
I want some of that!" They read the accounts of Christ's passion, and they resolve, "I'd die for such a Savior." The emphasis is on experience and application to modern life.

This, of course, does not mean that there is no doctrinal deliberation over biblical texts. It does not mean that proper hermeneutics is ignored or that precision in study cannot be achieved. It simply means that a particular biblical truth is, at this time, in the spotlight: experience. Because Bible characters experienced God up close and personal, the spiritual Christian desires to experience Him, too.

Past emphases

Should we think it strange that various emphases shuffle and vie for center place in Christian devotion? From the third to fifth centuries the emphasis was Christological: Who is Jesus? What about His preexistence, His relationship to the Father? Then in the Reformation era the focus was on the priesthood of all believers (Luther), total sovereignty of God (Calvin), and a protest (thus, the title "Protestant") of papal abuses. These hallmarks did not encapsulate every thematic truth of Scripture, but they did represent valid biblical conclusions.

The point is, no one emphasis can accomplish it all. Or as Alan Watts has put it, "No one's mouth is big enough to utter the whole thing." Once a particular emphasis is seen as central, other themes will necessarily be peripheral. That is simply the nature of concentration; it is difficult to focus on two or more things at once.



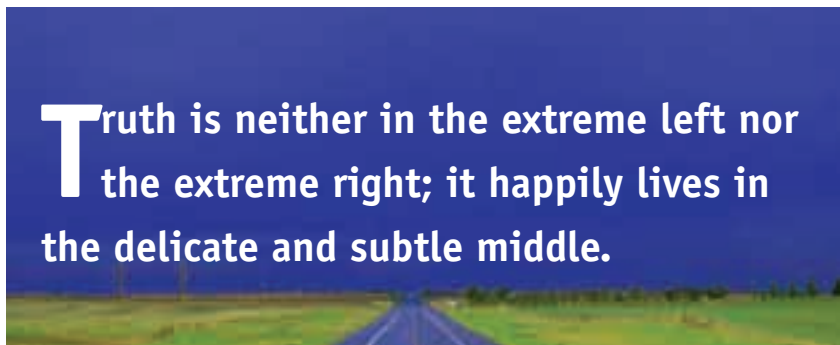
Modern devotees of the Bible read the stories of Abraham, Moses, and Jeremiah and think, *They experienced a great God. I should be able to also!*

Custodians of the Word

It would be good if the various historical emphases of revealed truth came together like individual threads and bold patterns in a grand tapestry. An eclectic approach to spirituality would value the good that was gleaned in the past, yet allow freedom for modern exploration. Must we be tethered to the past so tightly that contemporary expressions of Christian experience are automatically discarded? No, for such would not do justice to those who have gone before.

The church fathers and reformers regarded their duty as custodians of God's Word. That duty has been passed down to us. As custodians, we must value the past — drawing from its good points, being careful to not repeat its ignoble moments — and take our present responsibility seriously by threshing out fresh paths of spiritual and theological travel.

How is this done? By recognizing the limits of spirituality (devotion) and theology (doctrine and dogma) and seeking the middle path between them. Each can serve in ways the other cannot. When one element is made exclusive monarch over the other, imbalance results. The Christian who exalts devotion above all else runs the risk of being like a tree-hugger — a sappy sort who merely craves the next warm fuzzy. At the other end of the spectrum, the Christian who exalts theology above all else may become a crusty curmudgeon — a grumpy, overcritical sourpuss no one wants to be around. Recognizing and appreciating the unique contributions that devo-



tion and theology make will create a balance to the Christian life.

Dialectical tension

Spirituality can deepen our awareness of God's love and grace. It can deepen our love for others. It makes the Spirit-led life an adventure of trust and surrender. Spirituality transforms attitudes; it gives life a sense of purpose.

What can't it do? It cannot understand the historical, cultural, structural, and linguistic forms in Scripture. It cannot provide rational explanations and defenses of religious matters. It is helpless to construct a systematic paradigm from which to understand the themes of Scripture. And spirituality alone cannot show the Christian religion to be substantially different from other religions. But guess what can do these things? Theology!

Spirituality needs theology, and theology needs spirituality. The two can be held in what has been called "dialectical tension" — each one balancing and gently correcting the other. It is a principle described as "harmonious opposition" by the eighteenth century Methodist clergyman John Fletcher. In Asian religions, it has been called "the middle way."

Truth is neither in the extreme

left nor the extreme right; it happily lives in the delicate and subtle middle. It is a place of serenity and understanding. It is where neither doctrine nor devotion reign supreme but where each is perfectly welcome. It is where Jesus' state of mind continually abode: He could argue, but He could also love. And He did both better than anyone ever has.

May the church follow her Messiah's example and trod that middle path to true spirituality and all spiritual truth. ■■

Pastor Alex Ciurana, his wife, Christen, and their four children live in Humble, TX, and attend church in Galena Park. He has written a textbook on Christian apologetics.



Online

Want to read more on this subject? See "Religion and Spirituality," by Dr. Jim DeFrancisco, in the *Bible Advocate Online* (www.cog7.org/BA).



Ambassadors for Christ

It is one thing to preach Christ, and quite another to live by His teachings in the real world. by Brian Knowles

www.designpics.com

The instant someone finds out that you and I are Christians, we become public relations practitioners for the kingdom of God. More importantly, we represent Jesus Christ himself — the King of that kingdom. Paul put it this way: “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us” (2 Corinthians 5:20a).

This is no small responsibility; but, unfortunately, many believers don’t see it that way. They mistakenly think they should represent a Christian denomination, not Christ. Or they allow hypocrisy in their lives, sending a double message to the watching world. They fail to realize that their transformation in Christ should be highly visible to everyone.

Let’s take a closer look at these issues.

Jesus or denominations

At baptism, we are not immersed into the Baptist church, the Church of God, or any other church organization. We are plunged into the larger body of Christ, the one true church that is perfectly known only to Him. Each denomination is merely a way of organizing parts of the true church around ministry emphases or theological distinctives held by that denomination. Each group has its unique truth claims, and other groups dispute them.

Rather than try to resolve this unfortunate situation now, we should remember that Jesus is greater than any denomination. He transcends all doctrinal distinctions and presides over the whole church body. As His ambassadors, we need to represent Him, not a mere denomination.

Who you really are is who you are when no one knows what church you represent. When

you’re an anonymous face in a crowd, do you still champion the cause of Christ and live the faith without regard to religious environment?

Hypocrisy vs. honor

As ambassadors for Christ, we must do our best to represent Him honorably. Paul told the Corinthians that believers should watch their behavior toward those both inside and outside the church:

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God (1 Corinthians 10:31, 32).

This is a working principle for Christians — toward unbelievers and toward the faithful.

Ask yourself, then:

- Is my life bringing honor to God, or am I embarrassing Him?

Do I “sell” Christ in conversation?

- Am I an advocate of pure, biblical faith or merely an inconsistent, occasional practitioner of it?
- Do I personify a way of life that is inviting to others, or is my conduct off-putting to them?
- Do I fudge on my Christian faith so I’m acceptable to non-Christians, or do I practice it wisely and without apology?

When those outside the church view us, they see Christianity as a whole. If they encounter one believer who is hypocritical about his faith, they may assume that the entire Christian faith is full of that same hypocrisy. Many times they use this as their own excuse for not becoming Christians.

In truth, the standards of Christ are disturbingly high, and all believers struggle not to be hypocrites. We don’t always practice perfectly what we preach imperfectly. While those in Christ stand perfectly right with God by His grace, the perfecting of our walk is a process of becoming more like Christ little by little, one step at a time. It is not yet a present reality (Philippians 3:12).

We can make progress in our public walk and talk for the Lord. Paul wrote:

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone (Colossians 4:5, 6, NIV).

Christians live this way only if the Holy Spirit controls them. The Spirit doesn’t depart when we leave the company of family or fellow believers. Yet if we resist, grieve, or counteract the

Holy Spirit’s promptings, others won’t see His influence in our lives. We will fail as Christ’s ambassadors.

Visible transformation

From God’s point of view, it doesn’t matter where we’ve been or what we’ve done in the past; the power of Christ can transform us. Paul lists the past sins of church members in 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10. Then he writes, “But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (v. 11b).


As Christians, we are called to “walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). The watching world should be able to witness our transformation. Our families should see a different person once we are converted. Remember, the instant we become known as Christians, the scrutiny of our lives intensifies.

For several decades now, the entire Christian church has experienced a massive assault on its credibility. Many high-profile sexual and financial scandals have occurred. The divorce rate among Christians is higher than in the secular world. Church organizations endlessly redefine themselves, fire preachers, split into fragments, and otherwise fail to uphold biblical standards of conduct. Sadly, we often suc-

cumb to the influences of the prevailing culture, instead of influencing that culture. Pastor Douglas Webster writes:

For all their dissimilarities, liberal Protestantism and popular evangelicalism are more alike than they realize. Both poles of the Protestant continuum are being evangelized by the world rather than evangelizing the world (*Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, p. 196).

If we are to be true ambassadors for Christ, we must authentically represent His teachings and lifestyle. We should keep in mind what Jesus said to the disciples: “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46, NIV).

Wherever we go, we are a part of something far greater than ourselves. The kingdom of heaven is breaking into the kingdom of darkness; we are its advance guard. As Christ’s ambassadors, let’s do our duty until the Lord returns. 

Brian Knowles writes from his home in Monrovia, CA. He has served as editor and managing editor of several publications and has written hundreds of published articles dating back to 1970.



The kingdom of heaven is breaking into the kingdom of darkness; we are its advance guard.

Personal Relationship

The expression “personal relationship with Christ” is common spiritual jargon these days; it’s popular religious lingo in most evangelical churches. For many devout believers and not a few preachers and evangelists, the essence of what it means to be a Christian is to have this one-on-one connection with the Lord. Nothing else will do.

What does it mean to truly know the Lord and be intimately associated with Him by faith? How do we get this level of personal friendship that we hear others talk about? In what specific ways do we experience it? Is it a warm and fuzzy thing — soft and soothing, but mostly sentimental? Or is it a firm foundation, anchored like a tree, solid as a rock?

The very words “personal relationship with Christ” suggest something positive, with an emotional plus. But this up-phrased has a downside that must be faced.

John’s Gospel in 25 words or less: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (3:16).

For starters, the phrase is not found in Scripture — at least not in most translations. Besides that, it is highly subjective and can easily be misunderstood because it means different things to different people. We need to anchor the phrase with objective and universal meaning. And we can.

It will help us to hear the Bible’s language as we ponder the inspiring possibility of knowing Christ personally. This was Paul’s great goal: “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings . . .” (Philippians 3:10). How do we establish and nurture

such a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in our own experience?

In the Gospel of John, this relational reality is fleshed out in many ways. We have identified 25 of them here. As you read each verse and hear John’s words of truth about Jesus, trust the Holy Spirit of truth to do His work by turning this personal possibility into relational reality for you.

1. **Receive Him** (1:12): Open the door and let Jesus in.
2. **Behold Him** (1:29): Recognize Jesus as sin-bearer.
3. **Find Him** (1:41): Detect that Jesus is true Messiah.
4. **Follow Him** (1:43): Take after Jesus’ words and deeds.
5. **Believe Him** (3:15, 16, 18): Have faith in God and Christ.

100+ Ways to Say It

Complete the following sentence by selecting a word/name from each column. As you experiment with different combinations of words/names, does the meaning change for you?

	individual	association	with Christ	
	intimate	communion	with Jesus	
By faith, I have . . .	my own	connection	with God	. . . according to His Word.
	personal	friendship	with the Lord and Savior	
	special	fellowship		
		relationship		

With Jesus Christ

6. **Drink of His life-water** (4:14): Be satisfied with Jesus.
7. **Eat of His life-bread** (6:51): Be nourished by Christ.
8. **Honor the Son** (5:23) just as you honor the Father.
9. **Hear His words** (5:24): Attend to what Jesus said.
10. **Come to Him** (5:40): Draw near to the Lord.
11. **Decide to do His will** (7:17): Choose Christ's way of life.
12. **Know Christ** (8:19), and you will know His Father, too.
13. **Abide in Him** (8:31; 15:4-9): Dwell with Jesus; remain there.
14. **Keep His words** (8:51): Grasp Jesus' sayings for yourself.
15. **Enter the fold through Him** (10:9): Jesus is the door to abundant and eternal life.
16. **Seek to see Him** (12:21): Make it your goal to meet Jesus face to face.
17. **Serve Him** (12:26) by serving others in Christ's name.
18. **Lift Him up** (12:32): The exalted Christ attracts people.
19. **Accept His continual washing** (13:8): Jesus' blood keeps on cleansing you.
20. **Ask in His name** (14:13, 14): The Lord Jesus Christ has all power.
21. **Keep His commands** (14:15): Obey the law of Christ.
22. **Love Him** (14:21): Cherish the person of Jesus.
23. **Bear witness of Him** (15:27): Give testimony for the Lord.
24. **Unite with others in Him** (17:21): In Christ, you are never alone.
25. **Feed His sheep** (21:15-17): Nourish and nurture Christ's people.

John and other first disciples knew Christ in a way we do not: "That . . . which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes . . . and our hands have handled . . . concerning the Word of life —" (1 John 1:1). We cannot physically see or hear or touch the Lord Jesus as they did, but a blessing is promised for us that is not available to them: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

Today we say, "Yes, Lord, yes" to the opportunity of knowing God through Jesus Christ, whom He sent; and in this "knowing" we find life eternal (17:3).

Caution: These Bible words may shake a fuzzy, feeling-centered faith. Or they will solidify and stabilize faith by anchoring and confirming it in the written Word.

Reflection

1. It is rare to have a personal relationship with another human being whom you never see, hear, or touch. Is it impossible? How does this rarity work in the realm of faith, where millions of believers give witness to a personal relationship with God, through Jesus Christ?
2. How important is it to know God *and* Jesus Christ (John 17:3)? Are these two different things or the same thing? (In the list of 25 above, see John 13:20 for #1; for #5, see 14:1; for #8, see 5:23; for #10, see 14:6; for #12, see 8:19; 14:7; for #14, see 14:24; for #16, see 14:9; for #'s 21, 22, see 15:10.)
3. Of the 25 ways John's Gospel tells us to connect with Jesus, which have you exercised by faith? Find one that you are unsure of, and move to make it yes.

The New

How to respond when good is evil, and evil good. by **Bob Hostetler**

During the Gulf War, several students at Brown University hung a United States flag outside their dormitory window to show their support for American troops in the Persian Gulf. Before long, however, university officials told the students to take the flag down. They were afraid it might offend some students who did not support U.S. policy in the conflict.

Penn State University adopted a policy forbidding freshmen from refusing to live with homosexual roommates. George Mason University issued a student guide that defined discrimination as “jumping when a homosexual touches you on the arm” or “keeping a physical distance from someone because they [sic] are a known gay or lesbian.”

The inclusive translation of the New Testament and Psalms, published by Oxford University Press, changed the opening words of the Lord’s Prayer to “Our Father-Mother in Heaven” (to include feminists) and reworded Psalm 63:8. “Thy right hand upholds me” was replaced with “Thy strong hand upholds me” — presumably to avoid offending left-handed people.

Many colleges and universities offer some women’s studies that teach marriage as nothing more than legalized rape and that

lesbians make better mothers. Some schools feature courses like Race, Gender, Equity, and Community that require students to sit in a darkened room while obscenities and slurs are hurled at them through the darkness. Today’s campuses may host Queer Pride Week, Dyke Visibility Day, and Lesbutante Balls.

Virtue and vice

Such things are examples of the new morality in Western culture: tolerance. It has arisen as the sole virtue of Western culture and intolerance as the sole vice. Tolerance has become synonymous with goodness and open-mindedness; intolerance has come to connote bigotry.

If a Christian student objects to coed bathrooms, she’s dismissed as intolerant. If a Christian writes a paper on the biblical view of homosexuality, he is labeled intolerant. If a Christian distributes pro-life leaflets at an abortion clinic, she is considered intolerant. If a Christian objects to porn sold in the campus bookstore, she is seen as intolerant.

Difficult doctrine

Though widely accepted, this doctrine of tolerance presents difficulties for any thinking person. First, it tries to create a new

“truth” based on the absence of truth. In his book *The Body*, Chuck Colson describes tolerance as

the modern broadmindedness which purports that any and all values, if sincerely held, are equally valid There are no absolutes except the absolute that there can be no absolutes.

Tolerance has been so cleverly promoted that when anyone advocates moral values in community or school, that person is criticized for opposing personal rights. If there is no truth, however, tolerance is no more a virtue than intolerance, because any appeal to rights is an appeal to an objective standard of justice. If right and wrong are relative, personal rights are also relative. (How can you say I’m wrong to trample your rights if what’s wrong for me isn’t wrong for you?) Those who denounce moral values — even in the name of tolerance — threaten the very principles they stand on.

Second, the doctrine of tolerance is based on the assumption that people have the right not to be offended. But a thing isn’t wrong because it offends people; it’s wrong because it offends God. Racism, for example, isn’t wrong because it hurts people’s feelings; it’s wrong because it

Morality?

offends God, who made us all in His image (Genesis 1:26). Hatred isn't wrong because it makes people angry; it's wrong because it is an affront to the God who is love (1 John 4:8).

Higher law

A third problem with tolerance, says author S. D. Gaede, is that

It . . . requires people like me to be silent about their own convictions. But I cannot be mute about my convictions. In fact, it is precisely those convictions that committed me to truth and justice in the first place, compelling me to try to uphold the value and worth of all human beings.

Christians are subject to a much higher law than the politically correct law of tolerance. We are called to follow the example of Christ, who accepted Samaritans and Phoenicians (see John 4; Mark 7:24-30) and treated even tax collectors and prostitutes with dignity (see Luke 19:1-10; 7:36-50). The Christian imperative goes beyond tolerance, which simply avoids offending someone else. We are commanded to "Do everything in love" (1 Corinthians 16:14, NIV), which actively seeks to promote the good of another person.

Tolerance says, "You must ac-

cept me." Love responds, "I must do something harder: I will love you."

Tolerance says, "You must approve of what I do." Love responds, "I must do something harder: I will treat you respectfully even when your behavior offends me."

Tolerance says, "You must agree with me." Love responds, "I must do something harder: I will tell you the truth because I am convinced that 'the truth will set you free.'"

Tolerance says, "You must allow me to have my way." Love responds, "I must do something harder: I will plead with you to follow God's way, even if it prompts you to get angry with me or say unkind things about me, because I believe you are worth the risk."

Tolerance seeks to be inoffensive; love takes risks. Tolerance glorifies divisions; love seeks unity. Tolerance costs nothing; love costs everything. To be honest, the wide acceptance of "the new morality" may be partly due to the fact that Christians too seldom act in love.

Attitude

Just before the apostle Peter admonished Christians to always be "ready to make a defense"

(1 Peter 3:15), he commanded us to "be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead" (vv. 8, 9, NASB). And just following his endorsement of a ready defense, he advised, "keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame" (v. 16, NASB).

Relativists may attack you and try to diffuse the message by deriding the messenger, but a Christ-like attitude can put them to shame. Ultimately it's not you they argue with; it is the truth. It is not you they reject; it is the Truth, Jesus himself. The opponents of truth should not be the objects of our hate or scorn. We should instead be "sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit" toward them, knowing that they are perishing "because they [refuse] to love the truth and so be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:10, NIV). ■

Bob Hostetler
writes from Ham-
ilton, OH.



When Defeat Spells Victory

by Richard A. Wiedenheft

The hopes of Jesus' disciples were soaring! As they witnessed miracle after miracle, saw the power of Jesus' teachings, and exercised power in His name, they became increasingly excited thinking that this Rabbi could be the long-awaited Messiah, the one who would lead His people to greatness. What expectations they had for Him and for themselves (Mark 10:35-45)!

Then things began to go bad. Jesus spoke about His betrayal, about falling into the hands of His enemies, about suffering and dying. The disciples didn't want to hear it. They wanted to know nothing that would spoil the bright future they envisioned for themselves with Him (Matthew 16:21-23). On the night of His betrayal when Jesus predicted that they would all desert Him, Peter boldly proclaimed his allegiance: "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same" (Matthew 26:35).

Falling apart

But that very night, Jesus — their fearless, miracle-working master — was taken into cus-

tody by the Jewish leaders. The disciples fled in panic. The unthinkable was happening! Their Messiah, appearing to be just as vulnerable as any common criminal, was brought before the Sanhedrin and condemned. He was turned over to the despised Roman governor whose soldiers mocked, beat, and humiliated Him.

Caught up in the unfolding drama was Peter, who vehemently denied even knowing Him. Then the rooster crowed, and he remembered Jesus' prophecy that he would deny Him three times. Not only was his precious Lord helpless in the hands of His enemies, not only had he — the bold one — failed to stand by Him, but he didn't even have the courage to acknowledge their connection. Peter went out and wept bitterly, an utter failure.

Jesus' tragic end was still unfolding. Weakened from beatings, Jesus collapsed under the weight of the wood that was to be the instrument of His execution. Arriving at Calvary, He was nailed to that wood and put to death between a couple of thieves amidst the taunts and jeers of onlookers: "He saved

others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One" (Luke 23:35).

What an ignominious end! How His enemies must have gloated over this "man" who aspired to be King of the Jews, this "son of David" who had claimed to be "I Am" before Abraham (John 8:58).

For Jesus' followers, this was the end. They knew what everyone knows: Death is final. All their hopes for meaning and triumph in their own lives had come to nothing. All their hopes for the restoration of their nation were replaced with complete frustration and utter despair. They were nothing and had nothing. And their very lives were in danger (20:19).

Apparent defeat

But at their point of deepest despair, the disciples heard reports of an empty tomb. There were more reports of the same and of Jesus being seen alive. Then He appeared to some of them, then to all of them. Could it be true? Could it be possible? Finally, they were forced to believe. Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, giving lie once and for

all to the idea that death is final. Now their fear and frustration gave way to joy and hope.

Now it didn't matter that Peter had denied Jesus in His darkest hour. This was an entirely new day. Jesus was telling him, "Feed my lambs" (21:15-18). It didn't matter that the disciples had fled in fear of the Jewish leaders. Now they were filled with confidence in this Rabbi, whom the grave could not hold. Their dreams for a future for themselves were revived, but in an entirely new way. They knew the Power of the universe was with them, the One who laughed in the face of what men consider the final rest. This One was their Master. Some fifty days after their days of darkness, they stood boldly in the temple, empowered by the Holy Spirit, proclaiming the gospel. Gone was the fear, the frustration, the futility. Now there was power, strength, achievement, and the anointing of God.

Triumph

The very events that had seemed to be the worst of their lives, the very events that appeared to spell the end for all their hopes, the very events that seemed to be victory for His enemies — these spelled triumph for Jesus and for His followers. Now the disciples could see that in subjecting Himself to death, their Teacher, the Giver of life, was conquering sin, death, and the Devil. In laying down His life, Jesus was gaining victory for Himself. And the disciples came to believe that even for them persecution, suffering, and death

would mean victory (Acts 5:41; Romans 8:17, 18; 1 Peter 4:13).

The Jewish leaders thought they were getting rid of a problem by crucifying Jesus, but they were really providing the means whereby they could be saved from eternal death — and not just they, but the whole world. No wonder Jesus could say of His tormentors, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Hope's pattern

To be sure, Jesus' death and resurrection are for us the means to reconciliation with God, forgiveness of sin, and the promise of eternal life. But they also provide a pattern of hope in whatever difficult circumstances we find ourselves.

For if God was able to take the nightmare of Calvary and turn it into triumph, He can do the same for our tragedies. If He was able, through the Resurrection, to turn the disciples' failures, fears, and frustrations into hope, joy, and power, He can do the same for us.

In the providence of God, the very situations in our lives that seem like utter defeat can spell victory. Whatever failures we've experienced in our lives — dissolved marriages, misguided vocations, collapsed businesses,

poor child-rearing, animosity among brethren, rejection from loved ones who despise our religion — can be turned to victory because Jesus is alive. Whatever pain and despair has entered our lives, Romans 8:28 assures us that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

The current chapter of the book of our lives may appear bleak, just like that of the disciples at the time of Jesus' crucifixion. But a new chapter is coming, and it may well bring good things we cannot see now. That's God's specialty: taking what appears like utter defeat in the physical realm and turning it into victory.

And even if this is our final chapter, there's still hope. A whole new sequel is coming! For if the death and resurrection of Jesus prove anything, it is that nothing in this life is final. What is final for believers is being with Jesus in eternity — an eternity wherein all tears and suffering and dying will be completely eclipsed by the exquisite joy of fellowship with Him and His people (Revelation 21:1-4).

Scripture quotations were taken from the *New International Version*.

If God was able to take the nightmare of Calvary and turn it into triumph, He can do the same for our tragedies.



After you read this, the simplest meal with other Christians may never taste the same again. **by Marilyn Current**

In the ancient Middle East, eating a meal together was considered a sacred bonding ritual. A host could not take lightly his responsibility toward a guest sharing a meal in his home. It was the host's duty to protect the guest and see that no harm came to him while under his roof. Therefore, to be invited to eat in a person's home was proof of trust and friendship. To violate that trust was a great betrayal.

Perhaps from that culture's method of serving and eating a meal, such significance developed. All drank from a common cup, all hands dipped into a common bowl to eat. Liquids were sopped from the bowl with pieces broken from a common loaf of bread.

Biblical custom

Understanding this custom gives greater significance to certain Bible stories and practices. Abraham hosted and broke bread with God, disguised as one of three strangers who stopped by Abraham's tent on their way to pass judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. This could be another way that Abraham was considered God's friend (James 2:21-23).

And what do you suppose God was trying to teach when He instructed the king of Israel, through Elisha, to provide a feast for the Aramean army after he led them, blinded, into the city of Samaria (2 Kings 6:8-23)? Probably that serving food is a good

way to treat enemies (see Romans 12:20).

Judas' betrayal of Jesus seems even more diabolical when we recall that he went on to dip bread together with the Lord, whom he had sold (Psalm 41:9; Matthew 26:14-16, 20-25; John 13:2, 18, 21-30).

Jesus raised this age-old custom to even higher significance at His last Passover. He lifted the common cup and unleavened loaf provided for that meal and made them symbols of His own blood and body, about to be offered in sacrifice (Matthew 26:26-28). He replaced the lamb, which had filled the sacrificial role, with bread — an item that all cultures hold basic to any meal.

New meaning

From that day on, each shared meal took on new meaning for the followers of Christ, beyond the mutual bonding this custom had always signified. The staples of all their meals reminded them of the body broken to make them whole – the true Bread of Life (John 6:32-49).

Because of that sacrifice, the communion among participants would reach a level far higher than previously attained in the bread-breaking custom. The first Christians shared a deep fellowship in things spiritual (teaching, prayers) and things physical (breaking bread together, Acts 2:42).

This custom has descended to us in the symbolic agape meal, or love feast – breaking bread in

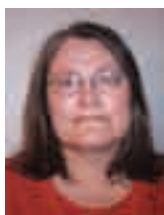
a communal meal – as we celebrate oneness in Christ.

Do in remembrance

We, too, can be friends of God as was Abraham of old – by faith. And we can hope for the day when we will break bread together at Christ's great banquet table (Matthew 26:29).

So the next time you partake of the Lord's Supper, or when you share any meal with other believers, think of the rich levels of meaning this ancient custom holds. ■■■

Marilyn Current
and her husband,
Dan, live in Shel-
byville, IN.



Bread

**“More of You, O living Bread,” I prayed,
and like a gourmand eager for
commencement of a feast,
expected bliss.**

**But expectation twisted into anguish,
for You sent loss that pummeled faith
and turned it back upon itself.**

“I asked for bread,” I cried.

“God gave a stone.”

Yet what is vital to the baker's art?

These:

**blows that make the dough resilient
and a chrysalis of fire to change it into food.**

**Beneath the pain, I found Your grace
and, for my soul,
the honeyed taste
of Bread.**

LaNelle R. Pierce

Mail Bag



Secret murder

You list eight causes for the death of a human [January-February '06, p. 17]. It is my opinion that one of the most devastating, abusive ways of taking someone's life is by character assassination. I have heard of people who died simply because they were devoid of love, where character was so completely destroyed that the person gave up the will to live. Would this fit into the category of secret murder?

*R. K.
Yakima, WA*

Stem cells

I agree with George Angelo's stand on stem cell research [January-February '06, p.18] and I found his article to be very informative, if not thorough. He mentioned only adult and embryonic stem cells. The other type is found in the soft pulp area of baby teeth. Our Creator provided this so that when medical science advances enough, people can be cured of several diseases by their own stem cells, without rejection. When a child loses a baby tooth, it can be cooled on dry ice and transported to a cryogenic stem cell bank, to be preserved for future use. Someday these banks will be in every city, and cures from these stem cells will be a common part of life.

*S. S.
Hickory, NC*

by Israel Steinmetz

Go Against the Flow!

“**M**ay be true for you, but not for me.”
“Jesus is just one of many ways to heaven.”

“The Bible is a good book, but it has many errors.”

“It’s my life; I’ll live how I want.”

Sound familiar? You hear statements like these a lot in our postmodern world. What does *postmodern* mean? It means a whole mindset, a way of looking at life, a worldview. A worldview is like a pair of glasses: It determines how you see what’s around you. People with postmodern views look at life differently than those with the biblical worldview.

Postmoderns say there is no absolute truth. According to one pollster, two-thirds of today’s youth believe this, and even more think that truth is relative to the individual: What’s right for you may be wrong for me. Think about what this means! Killing, child abuse, rape, stealing, lying, and a million other sins may be wrong for some but OK for others. The Bible isn’t true for everybody; nothing is! Truth is what you make it; it’s whatever you choose to believe.

Is this what God says? No way! All through the Bible God expects people to believe what He says is truth. Jesus said, “I am the way, the *truth*, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). This tells us that truth isn’t just accurate statements or even a list of do’s and don’ts. Truth is a person: Jesus Christ. Without that truth, you cannot be saved.

Postmoderns have been tricked into believing that if nothing is true, then nothing is false. But Jesus taught differently. To live like Christians, we’ve got to believe in Christ and that what He said is true.

In the postmodern worldview, reality is whatever you can touch, taste, smell, hear, feel, or even imagine (the sixth sense of postmodernism). Therefore, reality is different for everybody, and no one’s sense of it is more accurate than another’s. In our high-tech world where computers can generate sounds, sights, feelings, and other sensations, the lines are often blurred between what is real and what is not.

But the Bible presents a different picture. God created the world “very good” and entrusted it to humans. The world around us is real, not an imaginary one like in the movie *The Matrix*. What God says is true and real: We *are* made in His image; nature *is* His handiwork and glorifies Him.

God defines reality in the Bible and in the words of Jesus. What is real goes beyond our senses and imagination. We can get a grip on reality by letting God’s Word tell us what is real and what is not.

What about you? Have you figured out your purpose in life? Is it personal enjoyment, prestige, success, pleasure? Or is it living sold-out to God and enjoying the fulfillment that only He can bring?

One thing the postmoderns have right is that human beings are not getting better and can’t turn the earth into utopia. Christians don’t despair over this, because we know Jesus changes us into new people now (2 Corinthians 5:17) and that He will soon return to create perfect new heavens and a new earth (Revelation 21–22).

Not everything about postmodernism is bad, but the philosophies I’ve shared here conflict with the Bible and can destroy you if you believe them. So go against the flow. Stand up for the truth (Jesus), for reality (what God says), and for the hope of a better future (found only in Christ).

For those — and that's all — who suffer and fall
'Neath the breaking blows of life,
Hope from your depths for your rising day
When ends this racking strife.

For not always will pain bolt and tear
through flesh and soul alike.
Not always will your eyes regret
their opening at first light.
Not always the fear of the forward fall
through the pit of time: Who will catch us?
Not always death, with pruning hook drawn
to slice from our arms the tightest bound blood.

Not always endings,
Not always partings,
Not always failure,
Not always shame.

For He came
and He felt and He knows and He shares,
and His promise to us is "Not always."

Tim Morgan



What's new with . . .



SWORD

- "Under the Sun" retreat
May 26-29, Near Jasper, AR

National FYC

- National Youth Week/
Hunger Lock-In, April
20-22

Spring Vale Academy

- Graduation Weekend,
May 26-28

Ministries Training System

- Summer Session in Denver,
June 12-22

Publications

- New quarterly: *Living by
God's Design*

North American Women's Ministries

- National Women's Retreat
in Springfield, MO,
April 14-16

SWORD: Sharing the Word and Offering a Real Difference

Christy Lang, Director

About SWORD, the young adult ministry of our church, did you know . . .

- that most Pioneer Missionary Training participants (<http://home.cog7.org/ministries/pmt/>) are drawn from SWORD?
- that LITES team members (<http://lites.cog7.org/>) and the G. C. Web team are mostly of SWORD age?
- that the Link @ Ministries Training Institute (<http://journeylink.org/>) is raising SWORD for college and university students?

Most young adults (ages 18-35, single or married) also serve the Lord in congregations, in districts, and even at the Conference level. Your donations support them in many ways, including retreats, convention programs, and service projects. Visit our Web site at <http://sword.cog7.org>.

Had you heard?

The weekend of February 18 featured a SWORD retreat in Eugene, Oregon, and a SWORD rally in San Antonio, Texas. Another retreat is scheduled for May in Arkansas, and SWORD activities are planned for the West Coast Family Conference, July 4-8.

If you knew about these events, you are probably subscribed to the SWORD e-Newsletter. Hadn't heard, but wish you had? Go to www.cog7.org, select "E-Newsletters," then choose the "SwordALL" list to subscribe to SWORD e-Newsletter.

"Under the Sun – A *knew* perspective on life . . ."

Information about the May 26-29 SWORD retreat at the CoG7 campground near Jasper, Arkansas, is available at http://sword.cog7.org/retreats/retreat06_email/default.html. Or contact Dan and Jacqui Melgoza at sword-southwest@cog7.org or 210-723-5950.





**Jesus Martinez
(1934-2006)**

Jesus Martinez, a career minister of the gospel in Mexico and the United States, entered eternal rest on Sabbath, January 14. He was one of an extended family of preachers and pastors in northern Mexico, and he and his wife, Emilia, raised a large family of their own. Most of their nine

children are in gospel ministry and/or have married ministers.

Elder Martinez's service in the Church of God (Seventh Day) spanned more than 40 years, including long tenures in the cities of Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, and San Antonio, Texas. He served two years in Mexico City as secretary of the Mexican Conference and in other administrative positions.

Brother and Sister Martinez would have celebrated a golden wedding anniversary this summer. For a family tribute and more details of his lifelong service, visit www.cog7.org/BA.

License and Credentials Report

These men were recently approved by the North American Ministerial Council for pastoral service and other ordained ministry:

For ministerial license: Reuben Marquez of Shawnee, Oklahoma; Larry Marrs of Stanberry, Missouri; James Sawyer of Topeka, Kansas; and Eduardo Villalba of Denver, Colorado.

For ministerial credentials: Jose Antonio Hinojosa of Chicago, Illinois; Jose Luis Ramirez of Dallas, Texas; and Richard A. Wiedenheft of Falls, Pennsylvania.

SVA Seniors '06

Slated to graduate in May 27-28 ceremonies at Spring Vale Academy are

Mark Acosta, Texas
Katie Bland, Oklahoma
Greg Buechner, Texas
Hannah Chesney, Pennsylvania

West Coast District Family Conference

The Life-Giving Church

Empowering Believers to be Jesus' Hands in the World

July 4-8, 2006
Sacramento, California

Conference highlights

- A variety of workshops on personal growth, church leadership, and discipleship are planned. The Family Life organization will present three workshops on building strong Christian homes and families.
- Health fair: screenings and information from CoG7 health care professionals
- Round-table discussions for children's and youth workers
- Women's Luncheon, Men's Prayer Breakfast
- Leadership Appreciation Luncheon
- Activities for children, NFYC, and SWORD

Hotel: The rate is \$75 per night (plus tax). For reservations, call the Radisson Sacramento (916-922-2020; 800-333-3333) and ask for Church of God conference rate. Or to reserve online, visit www.radisson.com and use promotional code "FAMILY."

Registration: Brochures will be mailed to the West Coast District. Or contact the district office: P.O. Box 3819, Salem, OR 97302; 503-588-2223 or e-mail wcd.office@cog7.org for information.

Visit www.cog7.org and click on the "WCD Family Conference" link, or visit the West Coast District section of the site.

Jared Ciavarella, South Dakota
Melissa Klopfenstein, Texas
Stacy Kuryluk, Oregon
Chad Miller, Michigan
James Noble, Michigan

Congratulations to these young men and women
— Spring Vale's 57th consecutive graduating class!

National Youth Week/Hunger Lock-In

The National Youth Week/Hunger Lock-In centers on ministry and missions. Each year we highlight the ministry of a different sister church around the world. Youth Week uses various events and tools: Culture Night, Bible Study Night, and Sabbath worship, to get a fresh perspective on life in that country. The 24-hour Hunger Lock-In emphasizes the need of those not so blessed as we.

National Youth Week is an opportunity to build community within your group and to build global worldviews. Participants are asked to consider how their contribution, great or small, can affect folks now and for eternity. Here is our chance to give of ourselves, to experience life as others know it, and to serve with our whole lives.

The Youth Week program uses skits, songs, object lessons, and other activities to provide opportunity for youth to serve in leadership



Jessica Severance uses her talents to make a VBS door hanger during a Harrisburg, OR Lock-In.

positions in your worship services. The Hunger Lock-In is an excellent way to involve your church in foreign missions, without the travel!

Suggested dates for participation are April 20-22. More information is on our Web site at <http://fyc.cog7.org>. Contact Kurt and Kristi Lang, 541-517-1079 or nfyc@cog7.org.

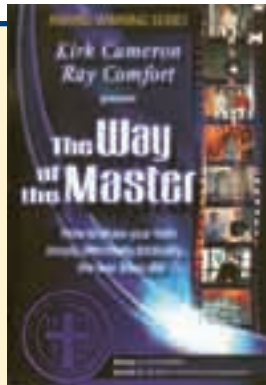
— Kurt Lang
NYFC Director

From Home Missions

Learn to share your faith and help grow your church by using . . .

The Way of the Master

This personal evangelism training program is a natural for a church like ours that believes it is important to “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12b). The program uses the Ten Commandments to bring people to Christ and help them understand that they must stay there. This award-winning DVD, featuring Kirk Cameron and Ray Comfort, will guide you step-by-step in conquering your fears about sharing faith. John MacArthur, Ravi Zacharias, David Jeremiah, Joni Eareckson Tada, Josh McDowell, and many others recommend it. Home Missions can help your church get this resource at a discount. Contact William C. Hicks, director of G. C. Missions, at carlylehix@aol.com or 423-323-7191. Or learn more at www.livingwaters.com.



DRF Thanks and Needs

This message from Pastor Abrahams Wanda Odongo of Kenya:

“We are one beneficiary in your Disaster Relief program. I extend our heartfelt thanks for your love and consideration for suffering brethren here. From South Nyanza we say may God bless you and all those who donated thru DRF. As much as we have been relieved for now, the struggles and difficulties continue. With your prayers, we shall overcome because His grace is sufficient!”

The Disaster Relief Fund needs your help as we support our churches in drought-ravaged East Africa, despite some recent rains there. A little help from a lot of us will replenish the funds we have advanced in response to the urgent needs of these brethren.

— Bill Hicks, Director
Disaster Relief Fund, Missions Ministries

LITES Update

Four new students joined LITES Ministries this winter: Caleb Cortez from San Antonio, Texas; Timothy Howell from Maryville, Missouri; Vivian



LITES First Year students (L-R): Timothy Howell, Vivian Huerta (holding picture of Seth Privacky), and Caleb Cortez

Huerta from Las Vegas, Nevada; and Seth Privacky from prison in Michigan (first in our pilot prison correspondence program). This marks the first time LITES has both new and returning students together. Pray for us: We have a busy term ahead and will be visiting churches in Michigan, North Dakota, and the West Coast this spring.

Contact LITES Ministries, P.O. Box 172, Stanberry, MO 64489; 660-783-9544; lites@cog7.org; <http://lites.cog7.org/>.

– Caleb Noble
Second-year student

MTS Down Under!

A Ministries Training System satellite classroom in Australia has completed its first course. Pastor Phil Kordahi of the Adelaide church served as instructor, and four students met for fifteen Tuesday evenings to complete three credits in New Testament Survey. A fifth student from an adjoining state completed the course by correspondence.

News and Notes

The annual observance of the Lord's Supper service is scheduled in every congregation for Tuesday evening, April 11.

Meghan Fauth has been appointed as SWORD rep for the West Coast District, north area, replacing her dad, Tim Fauth.

TV-Turnoff Week is April 24-30 this year. Check it out at www.tvturnoff.org/.

The Jasper, Arkansas church will host a **Singles Retreat** on "Contentment" at its campground May 5-7. Singles of age 18+ are invited: pre-married couples, never-marrieds, and those who've lost their spouse through divorce or death. Send \$20 deposit or full \$55 payment to Tracy Walker, 517 B Anderson, Warrensburg, MO 64093; 660-909-4314; hitracer@yahoo.com.

The annual Dover Family Camp, near Kingfisher, Oklahoma, is scheduled for June 11-17 this year. For information, contact Clarence Ullrich at 918-695-6036.

Next quarterly meeting of the Oklahoma State Conference is scheduled for Sabbath, April 22, at the Ft. Smith, Arkansas church facility.

From Church Planting

WANTED:

Missionaries to America

Qualifications

- Must be a believer in Jesus and willing to work in fulfilling the Great Commission, even though you may not be a pastor or preacher. We are looking for willing **members** to serve as missionaries to America.
- Must have a trade or profession that would enable you to live and work in a number of areas in the U.S. or Canada.
- Must be willing to relocate as part of a team to plant new CoG7 congregations somewhere in the U.S. or Canada.
- Must possess the greatest ability of any true missionary: **availability**.
- Must provide proof of current participation in a CoG7 congregation and a pastor's statement of maturity in Christ.

For more information, contact William C. Hicks, director of G. C. Missions, at carlylehix@aol.com or 423-323-7191.

Please don't forget your G. C. Missions Ministries. We're working for you around the corner and around the world sharing the good news of Jesus Christ!

International Tour

Guyana, South America

In 1975 a Guyanese couple, John and Beryl Eversley, re-migrated to Guyana with the unique gospel message of the Church. After years in Brooklyn, attending Sabbaths at Church Avenue, they did not think it burdensome to give up New York luxury and move to a third-world nation in obedience to God's leading.

In Guyana, the Church had humble beginnings in the Eversley home. Brother John taught Sabbath class and Sister Beryl ministered in the Word, with three grandchildren. The work grew steadily in a village called BV/Triumph and in Ann's Grove, ten miles away.

Elder Lael Tikili came from New York to train officers in church administration. The team included Marian Ward, Janet October, Steason Collins, and Ransford Ricketts (from Jamaica). The work soon spread to places like Pomeroun River, Parica, Queen's Town, Essequibo Coast, Bartica,

Linden, and Georgetown. During Pastor Tikili's second four-year stay, he continued equipping the saints for ministry, with a steady supply of literature, quarterlies, song-books, and other material coming from the Denver offices. Men like Leon Dennis, Joseph Otto, Carl Damon, Carlton Decunha, and Christopher Benjamin assisted, and a group of energetic youths was always available.

We first represented the Church to the International Ministerial Congress (Corpus Christi, Texas, 1994), where our request for membership was approved. We also founded Faith Rebuilders, consisting of training for workers, computer training for youths, and a television program that aired 1997-2001. A dozen students are now enrolled in this two-year training.

The greatest challenges we face are constant migration of members and scarce resources. Nevertheless, the Church works extensively among Hindus, Muslims, and others, and in charitable work. New and used clothing was imported or collected for distribution, and the Church teamed with Food



for the Poor to bring further relief. After a 2005 flood disaster, we teamed with the Guyanese government and

Disaster Relief Fund to assist and sustain numerous families.

The Eversleys dedicated the ground floor of their home for meetings but always hoped for a separate place of worship. A building committee was formed, block-making begun, and a 39 x 85-foot structure started in 1996. The IMC designated Guyana for a world missions project in 1998, and a generous gift was received from the international body. The sanctuary is now in use. Eventually, the structure will house a studio, offices, a library-training room, and a balcony.

Guyana is known as the land of many waters. In some areas, the only means of transportation is by boat. In other areas, brethren walk to church or take a "mini." Currently, we have four active congregations and six pastors (plus deacons, evangelists, and lay pastors) serving a membership of about 300. We covet the earnest prayers of saints around the world.

— Pastor Terry Slowe





The Cross and the Tomb

Christian, the central character in John Bunyan's classic allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*, has never known relief from the heavy burden he carries on his back. Then he finds the path to salvation and takes it. Though weighed down by his load, Christian makes it to the top of the hill. There he sees a wooden cross and, just below it, an empty sepulcher.

As Christian nears the cross, a miracle happens: The straps that bind the massive weight to his body loosen, and his load tumbles into the sepulcher's open mouth. Overwhelmed by his new freedom, Christian sings:

Thus far did I come laden with my sin,
 Nor could aught ease the grief that I was in,
 Till I came hither. What a place is this!
 Must here be the beginning of my bliss?
 Must here the burden fall off from my back?
 Must here the strings that bound it to me crack?
 Blest Cross! blest Sepulchre! blest, rather, be
 The Man that there was put to shame for me!

This scene beautifully illustrates the importance of both the cross and the empty tomb in the plan of salvation. We are all pilgrims on the journey of life. Without Christ, we carry our load of sin on our backs. But something marvelous happens when we stumble our way to the cross: Our burden of sin is taken away.

But there's more. With our sins forgiven, we are given newness of life whereby we can live above sin's control. Because He rose from the dead, Jesus is both a promise of our future resurrection from physical death and a promise of power to live the godly life free from sin. Through His resurrection, Jesus demonstrates His power over death and offers that sort of life-power to people held captive by the shackles of sin.

The cross of Christ without His empty tomb would be only tragedy. That is Paul's point in his

discourse on the subject in 1 Corinthians 15. He points out that if Christ is not raised from the dead, we preach an empty gospel, and our faith is futile; it has no reality, and life is merely a miserable existence (vv. 14-19).

During this season of the year when we focus on Christ's sacrifice on the cross, let us remember that the story doesn't end there. After being buried in a borrowed tomb, Jesus rose triumphantly from the dead! Therefore, we are a people of both the cross and the tomb — crucifixion and resurrection. A solemn service around the Lord's table that is not complemented by a celebration of our Lord's resurrection life ignores an important aspect of redemption's story.

So let us gather not only to remember His death but also to celebrate His life. Let's not leave Him in the grave: He is a risen Savior and lives forevermore! This is a call neither to wear an ornamental cross nor to celebrate Easter but to gain new appreciation for all that Christ did for us through His cross and empty tomb.

These twin symbols of our faith bring to a climax the greatest story ever told, about the greatest life ever lived. The cross demonstrates the greatest love ever shown, and the empty tomb manifests the greatest victory ever won. Standing at the soon-to-be-vacated grave of Lazarus, Jesus declared: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25, 26, NIV).

This is the greatest promise in all of Scripture. It sets Jesus apart from every other religious leader and distinguishes Christianity from all other faiths. Most important, it is God's gift to us through Jesus Christ — and a good reason to celebrate!

— Whaid Guscott Rose
 General Conference President

Spring Vale Academy



If something hinders your relationship with God, get rid of it. Many people today are faced with the same situation as was the rich young ruler who came to Jesus, except now they don't go away *grieving*. Too many pleasures to indulge in, too many ways to get lost in self. This is precisely why we are to be content with whatever God has given. A discontent Christian is an oxymoron. If we aren't content, then we are lacking, which doesn't match our Christian faith because those who have God have all things.

– Jared Ciavarella
SVA Student Body President



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