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BA

BIBLE ADVOCATE

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Did you miss the last issue on the superiority of Christianity? View selections from it and download the last six BAs at www.cog7.org/BA.

Coming in the October-November BA: Why the church?

In the September issue of *Now What?*: surviving a climbing accident (<http://nowwhat.cog7.org>)



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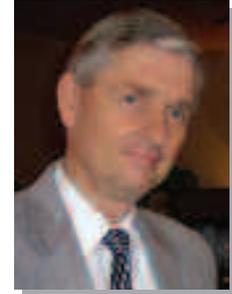
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Convention Treasure



“Every scribe instructed concerning the
 kingdom of heaven is like a householder who
 brings out of his treasure things new and old”
 (Matthew 13:52).

Three days after the G. C. convention as I
 write, my head isn’t quite clear from the rush
 of it. But my heart rejoices in what I saw and
 felt and heard here in Denver last week.

This convention yielded to a fine joining of the Church’s old and
 new. Barbara and I always thrill to see “old friends” from places
 we’ve lived: Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Michigan, etc. The students
 we’ve known through Spring Vale, Summit School, and MTS bring us
 joy as we see them taking their places in the Church and among its
 leadership. Horizontal relations are half the reason people come to
 meetings like this.

Another “old” element of the week now past was the Marriott
 convention facility in Denver, formerly the Sheraton Tech Center. The
 same hotel we used back in ‘87 and ‘89 provided space and comfort
 for us this year also. Here we renewed our commitment to the old,
 old story of Jesus and His love.

So what was new about this convention?

We enjoyed the amenities of a new worship auditorium (for us) at
 Denver First Church of the Nazarene. What a Sabbath we celebrated
 there! The rafters rang with new songs and old.

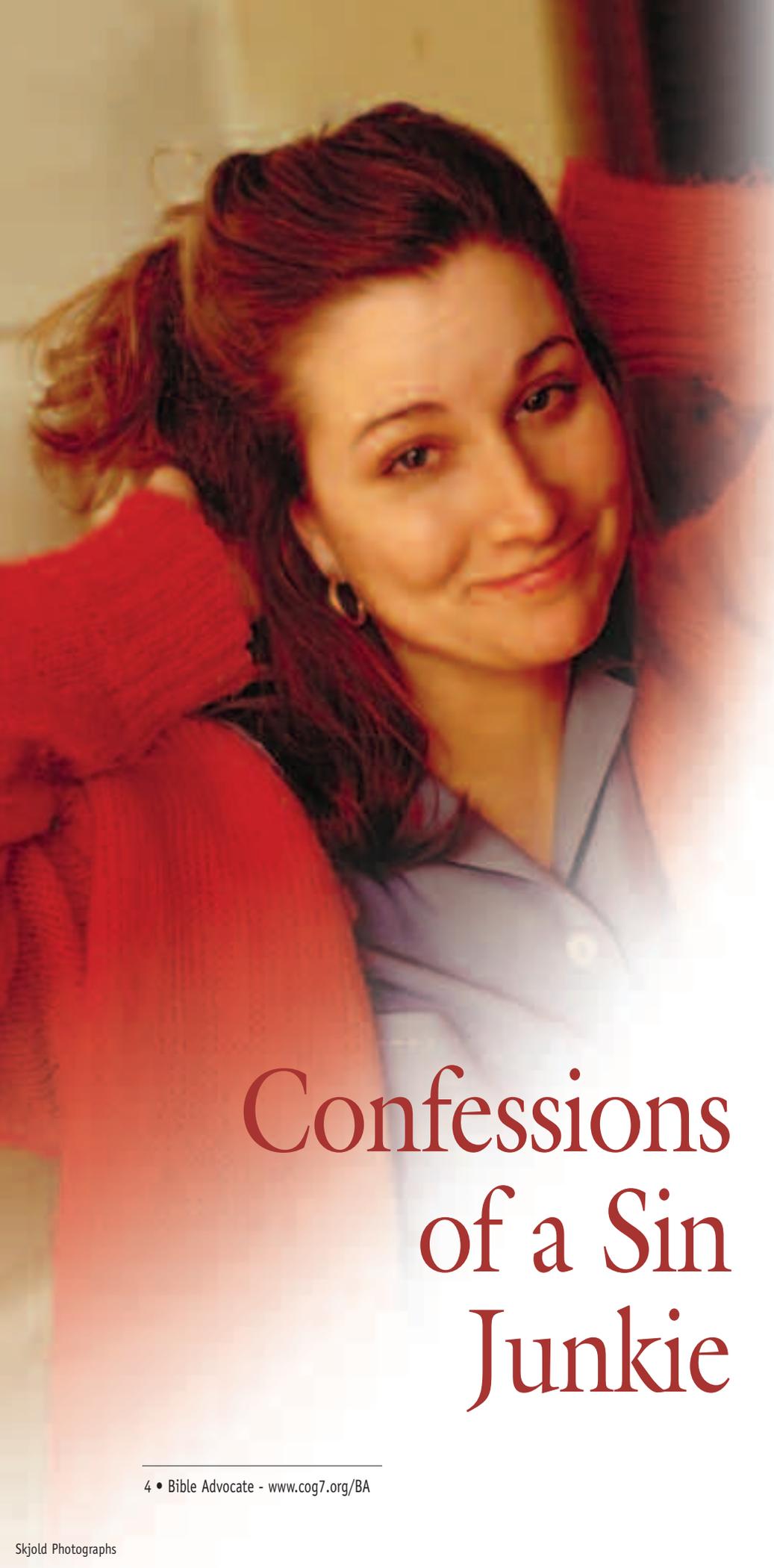
We welcomed new faces — first-time folks from Maine to Malawi.
 Watching people stream into the main hall, I judged the average age
 of attendees to be around 30. There is new life in this church!

We shared new emphases and experiences. The Church’s accent
 on the grace and truth of Jesus Christ was prominent, giving rise to
 remarkable moments of worship, instruction, fellowship, and reconcil-
 iation. As we welcome a fresh wave of God’s Spirit into our fellow-
 ship, can new growth be far behind?

Scripture presents us with many paradoxes, none more intriguing
 than the one that recommends old paths (Jeremiah 6:16) and all
 things new (Revelation 21:5). We thank God for giving us both in the
 latest convention, and we commit ourselves to old and new treasures
 of faith in the years ahead.

*(With sadness, we report the death of Gary Amick, a friend and
 brother who edited ACTS magazine, published in Meridian, Idaho.
 Our condolences to the Amicks and the General Council family.)*

— Calvin Burrell



Overdosing on sin comes naturally, but the Second Adam offers us freedom.
by Vicki L. Hodges

Confessions of a Sin Junkie

I am a . . . a . . . um. . . I am a sinner. Yikes! I actually used the socially-psychologically-intellectually-politically incorrect *s* word.

It's true, though: I am a sinner. I sin morning, noon, and night and have been known to add extra periods of sinning during the switches to and from Daylight Savings Time. Sometimes I enjoy sinning; other times I am repulsed by it. Occasionally, I even feel gratified and justified.

But make no mistake: It's not entirely my fault. I've been a sinner since that wee morning hour I was born. How did the process become skewed? Were my parents at fault?

Parental sin

No and yes. The truth is, I have two sets of parents. My physical parents modeled nearly excellent parenting. However, my spiritual parents, Adam and Eve, share the blame with me. As their offspring, I, along with the entire human race, inherited a natural bent to sin.

When God created all things, He declared everything good. Humanity proved to be the ideal complement to the divine plan: God made the earth for humankind and then made humankind for the earth. Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect communion and intimate fellowship with God. All their needs were met. Life was stellar.

In the Garden of Eden, God gave Adam and Eve instructions for obedience and outlined the consequence for disobedience. However, one day the couple faced temptation and chose to disobey Him. God commanded them not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but the serpent enticed them with the desire for more knowledge. The couple already possessed a huge amount of knowledge but didn't fully realize that what they knew was sufficient. They succumbed to temptation and disobeyed, and their disobedience yielded catastrophic consequences.

Once their eyes were opened, Adam and Eve no longer perceived good and evil from the perspective of righteousness but from the vantage of sin. It distanced their relationship with God. He banished them from the garden, condemned them and their generations of offspring to physical death, and promised them a life of labor and sorrow. The act also established enmity between humankind and Satan.

All human beings, as descendants of Adam, inherited a sin nature at birth. Adam's death-blood courses through our spiritual veins. The most profound codes for living crumble under

the influence of our sin nature. Therefore, God promised a Savior who would not only redeem fallen humanity but also defeat Satan.

Blood sacrifice

Immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, God shed the blood of an animal to cover their sin. It is crucial to note that life is in the blood and that without blood, there is no life. Blood represents life. Physical, earthly blood is a picture of Christ's heavenly blood – spiritual life.

While in the Old Testament

blood covers sin, in the New Testament blood cleanses sin. Animal sacrifices foreshadowed Christ's perfect sacrifice. Atonement could be achieved only through the offering of innocent blood. Because a great chasm developed between the holy God of the universe and sinful man, humanity needed the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the only sinless one, to cleanse sin.

Until the time of Christ's crucifixion, the single means of placating God's wrath against sin was by the offering of innocent blood. People sacrificed animals

Again

*It happened again, Jesus,
and waves of remorse sweep over me in
a tumultuous torrent,
threatening to cast me far away
from Your promises.*

*I know that You forgive me.
Again.*

But this time, I want more.

I want to change.

*The call of repentance offers the only
hope of freedom —
freedom that will let me
release what so ruthlessly grips me.*

Direct me in turning my remorse to repentance.

*Show me the steps; cast out Your light;
open the door;*

*enable me to obtain victory in Your power
so I may live wholeheartedly for You.*

Amen.

Maureen Baird

regularly to ensure cleansing and acceptance by God. Because these sacrifices were temporary “fixes,” people’s sin was merely covered, not cleansed. The process had to be repeated frequently.

Restoration and redemption

Finally, when conditions in the world reached the high watermark, God furnished the good news. The great news, in fact: the gospel of Jesus Christ! God initiated restoration and redemption through the crucifixion of His Son. Christ’s shed blood became the vehicle for moving people from death to life. When one chooses to follow Him, one dies to self and lives to Him, beginning afresh — life that is both abundant and eternal.

In her book *The Life-Changing Power in the Blood of Christ*, Jennifer Kennedy Dean further develops this idea.

In the spiritual realm, only Jesus is life. Everything else is “flesh” — progressive death. In the spiritual realm, the two classifications are “flesh” or “spirit.” That which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the

Spirit is spirit. Only by dying to our old nature and being born again of the Spirit can we move from flesh to spirit, from death to life. In order to change classifications from death to life, a person has to become an entirely new creation (See 2 Corinthians 5:17). Life is only in the Son, so only the Son can impart life. Life must come from life — Spiritual Biogenesis. Only the person who has the Son has life.

Christ’s atoning death offered humanity the unique means for peace, reconciliation, and fellowship with God. Christ’s sacrifice annulled the power of sin that caused us to be separated from God. The Son of God bridged the gap and became our advocate with the Father.

While the death of Christ reconciles us to God, His life-blood saves us from eternal separation from God. His life-blood also forgives us of the sins we commit and purifies us from the unrighteous, rebellious attitude that causes those sins (1 John 1:7, 9). Christ’s life-blood flows through all who have believed Him and trusted in the work He accomplished on the cross.

Because this blood is His life,

we no longer operate under the power of Adam’s death-blood. The apostle Paul tells us in Romans 5 that through the first Adam, sin and death entered the world but that through the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, righteousness and life entered the world. The Second Adam reversed the processes triggered by the first Adam.

Personal choice

Christ’s crucifixion provides forgiveness of sin. Christ’s resurrection affords victory over sin and death. Without faith in Christ, there is neither salvation nor restoration of our spirits.

We know that when Jesus was raised from the dead it was a signal of the end of death-as-the-end. Never again will death have the last word. When Jesus died, he took sin down with him, but alive he brings God down to us (Romans 6:10, *The Message*).

Even though I still sin, my old Adam death-blood is gradually sloughing off and being replaced by Christ’s life-blood. He offers to do the same for each person, but He doesn’t force Himself upon anyone. We are equipped with a free will; the choice is ours. Will we live in disobedience and separation from God, or will we choose to receive life and victory? **BA**

Even though I still sin, my old Adam death-blood is gradually sloughing off and being replaced by Christ’s life-blood.

Vicki L. Hodges lives in Hotchkiss, CO.

Questions & Answers

I believe that Jesus preexisted and was present with the Father at Creation, but can we know when and how He came into being?

The Church endorses the concept of Christ's deity but has no official answer to the question you raise. Here are some of my personal thoughts.

God the Father is eternal; He has neither beginning nor end. He is the great I AM, which means He always is — without regard to past, present, or future. With Him there is no when or how — just absolute, eternal being.

Regarding Jesus Christ the Son, the biblical evidence points to the fact that, in His divine nature, He is eternal like His Father. Note these:

- He was with the Father “in the beginning” and, with the Father, created all things (John 1:1-3).
- He was “in the form of God” before creation (Phil. 2:6), shared the Father's glory (John 17:5), and perfectly represents the Father's image and person (Heb. 1:1-3).
- The Son's throne, like the Father's, is forever and forever (v. 8), which means it has no beginning or end.
- The One born in Bethlehem, says Micah 5:2, is one “Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting” (or “from the days of eternity,” margin).

Some think Jesus was the first thing God created, before Genesis 1:1. It is more accurate to say that the Son was *begotten* by the Father, not created. We create out of preexisting materials — like when making a cake — but we beget from our own loins — a child.

So when did the Father beget the Son? It is impossible to say. If the Son was already being or existing when time and creation began (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1), then He was begotten in eternity past.

How do we speak of days and dates, before *time* as we know it began? Because the Son was begotten in eternity and not in time, then as far back as we can count, He was already there. We

cannot conceive of a time when the Son was not already with His Father.

Was not the Son begotten on a certain day? “You are My Son, today I have begotten You” (Psa. 2:7). This text is quoted in the New Testament (Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5; Matt. 3:17; etc.). Comparing these quotes, one wonders if “today” refers to Jesus' baptism (Matt. 3:17), resurrection (Acts 13:33), or some other indefinite time. I suspect it refers to some non-literal day when Jesus was crowned and honored around the throne of God. Has there ever been a time when the preexistent Lord and Christ was not God's beloved and honored Son?

Was Jesus first begotten when He was conceived in Mary's womb? None of the texts that speak of Christ as God's “only begotten” relate those words to His birth as a human. The common wording suggests that God had an only begotten Son whom He subsequently sent into the world — not that God sent someone or something that became His only Son in Nazareth or Bethlehem.

Must a father always be older than his son? This makes good sense in the human realm, but the reality between Father and Son in the divine family need not conform to all of our human notions or limits. It is true that the Father stands prior to the Son, but we have no way of quantifying that priority in terms of time.

Other texts that support the idea of the eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ: John 17:24; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 7:3; and Revelation 22:13.

We began by affirming that the Father is the great I AM, which suggests His eternal unchangeableness. We end by noting that the Son also took I AM to Himself in John 8:58 (and see John 6:48; 8:12; 10:9-11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1). If Jesus is the great I AM, then He, like the Father, always is.

— Elder Calvin Burrell



Good News!

by Jerry McClenagan

Everyone loves a good story — one in which good triumphs over evil and wrongs are righted. It's no surprise, then, that hardly anyone likes today's headlines: Evil triumphs, justice isn't served, bad overcomes good.

But good news is still to be had, if we know where to look. The presses were running two thousand years ago, and they published the greatest story ever told: "Jesus Christ, the Son of God, comes to earth to redeem fallen humanity!"

Why on earth would God want to send the world this message? Why do we need it?

God's love

To start with, God published good news because He's always on the offensive. He sends His good message to the world because we're a sinful lot, headed for destruction unless someone shows the way out.

Witness Nineveh. God "repented" when the citizens repented (see Jonah 3:10, KJV). That is, God changed His mind when they changed theirs.

God's "repentance" wasn't an apology, of course; He didn't do anything wrong. In fact, He was being true to Himself by declaring destruction upon Nineveh for its evil practices. When the Ninevites "turned from their evil ways, he . . . did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened."

More to the point, God published the good news because He is love (1 John 4:8b). Therefore, He comes on the scene with compassion for us — even when He is angry because of our sins.

When His creation responds to His love, all is right. In the poetic words of the prophet Isaiah: "Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth" (40:4, NKJV).

So it was in His creation of the world and its inhabitants. God must have felt compelled to love others, so He created humankind, at least in part, to multiply those who would be the objects of His love and to

heap upon them all His goodness.

That love didn't begin *after* God created; He was already love in its purest form. His creation was "very good" (Genesis 1:31); everything He made received His own stamp of approval. Creation was, therefore, the natural byproduct of love.

Paradise deleted, republished

But God's new "family" greatly disappointed Him: Satan duped Adam and Eve. When they rejected God's will, the curse of pain, suffering, and death entered. Then God's great plan of salvation came into play: Jesus would be "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8b, NKJV). That was good news — just what we needed to deliver us from the curse.

But there was a big hook of suspense: Humanity would have to wait for the rest of the story. After centuries had passed, the headline was finally ready in the press room, and angels gathered to announce it.

The story was published to a group of shepherds tending their flocks in the field:

"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10, 11, NKJV).

Thirty years after His birth made the front page, Jesus granted an interview with Nicodemus in which He explained more about the good news:

"For God so loved the

world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16, 17).

Personal news

Human beings were lost in darkness, and God knew they needed to find the way. They were without knowledge of Him, and He introduced Himself to them through His Son, Jesus Christ. Enter the gospel.

Good news was the headline of the day — and of the ages — two thousand years ago. Prophets foretold it. Angels announced it. Shepherds believed it. The masses rejoiced because of it.

God is not just love; He is light and He is the source of light (John 1:1-5). People were lost in deep darkness, and He shined the dazzling light of the gospel upon them (Luke 19:10; 2 Corinthians 4:5). The One who was love and light and life bridged the great chasm between Himself and humanity He had created.

The good news is personal: God loved the world, not in some abstract, impersonal way, but person by person — equally and individually. Paul understood this and stated it: "[The Son of God] loved *me* and gave himself for *me*" (Galatians 2:20).

News you can use

But there's a catch. Now that the good news has been delivered to your door, you must

receive and believe it — not just read it. That's part of the plan. The whole story had a sad beginning of rejection and dejection. But the happy ending is for those who respond with acceptance and action.

Paradise restored is God's gift, for sure. It's called grace. It's free, but you have to reach out and accept it. Paul wrote:

So what exactly was Moses saying? The word that saves is right here, as near as the tongue in your mouth, as close as the heart in your chest. It's the word of faith that welcomes God to go to work and set things right for us. This is the core of our preaching. Say the welcoming word to God — "Jesus is my Master" — embracing, body and soul, God's work of doing in us what he did in raising Jesus from the dead. That's

it. You're not "doing" anything; you're simply calling out to God, trusting him to do it for you. That's salvation. With your whole being you embrace God setting things right, and then you say it, right out loud: "God has set everything right between him and me!" Scripture reassures us, "No one who trusts God like this — heart and soul — will ever regret it" (Romans 10:8-11, *The Message*).

Now *that's* good news! **BA**

Jerry and Martha McClenagan

attend the Christian Church of God, a Sabbath-observing congregation that recently celebrated 25 years of ministry in Amarillo, TX. Scripture quotations were taken from the *New International Version*, except where noted.

What Shall We Do?

The gospel "is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16b). It is a simple message that requires a simple response: belief.

Yet we must not oversimplify, for the gospel entails attention to detail. When Peter preached his first powerful sermon on the Day of Pentecost, the people "were cut to the heart." There was a public outcry to Peter and the other apostles: "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). The people realized that some kind of action was required.

Accepting the good news, responding to the gospel in faith, requires something: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 38).

If you are ready to take this eternal step, help is available. You are invited to request the following tracts from the Bible Advocate Press:

Salvation - Myth or Man's Greatest Need?

The New Birth

What Must I Do to be Saved?

— Jerry McClenagan

The Process of Conversion

by Richard A. Wiedenheft

Many Christians see conversion as a single event: A sinner confesses his sins, accepts Jesus as his Savior, and, at that moment, is destined for eternal life. Another lost soul is saved!

This view is valid in many respects, but coming to know the Lord can also be a process. This was my experience.

Brought up by parents who taught me to love God and respect the Bible, I was confirmed as a Lutheran at about 13. Looking back, I didn't take my relationship with God very seriously. But had you asked me, I would have said Jesus was my Savior. Had I died at 14, would I have been saved?

When I was about 15, I began listening to Herbert Armstrong on the radio and became serious about studying and living the Bible. After high school, I began attending the Worldwide Church of God and was baptized, believing I had found "the truth" and that the vast majority of Christians weren't really saved. My faith was rooted in believing true doctrines, obeying certain laws (while ignoring others), and being part of the true end-time work of God. Had I died at 18, would I have been saved?

During my first years of college, I prided myself in seeking

God's will and thinking things through. I believed I had greater insight than others and that I made few mistakes. Had I died in this self-righteous state, would I have been saved?

I thank God for a college dorm mate who challenged me, "Have you repented of your self-righteousness yet?" This shocked me into soul-searching, prayer, and fasting. After three months, God revealed that I was a self-centered, fallible human being just like everyone else. And He showed me that, in spite of it all, He loved and accepted me. For the first time, I appreciated Jesus' words "I will give you rest. . . . For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). It was like a second conversion experience. Had I died before this, would I have been saved?

There were more "conversions" to come — important ones. I eventually came to see my arrogance in believing that I was special to God because I was part of the "one true church." He showed me that my standing before Him doesn't depend on overcoming all my weaknesses but on the fact that Jesus' blood, accepted in faith, gives me the "righteousness of faith" (Romans 4:13). Christians are counted as perfectly right before God — not because we are *in fact*, but because we are

in Him. As long as we remain in Him, we are seated with Him in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). What if I had died while I was still laboring under the burden of works righteousness? Would I have been saved?

I've learned that this conversion-as-a-process has been shared by many. In this are, I believe, several lessons.

First, if you can point to a specific time when you became a Christian, wonderful! But God also works in different ways to bring people to Himself.

Second, regardless of how God has worked in your life to this point, are you right now seeing how much more you need His grace and how much He loves you? Are you continually surrendering to Him, allowing Him to change and use you according to His will?

Third, recognize that the sinner's initial prayer of repentance is only one step in a lifelong process. Continue to work with new converts, to encourage and teach them. Connect them with others who can guide them until they are well-grounded in the grace of God and able to share their faith with others.

As long as we breathe, we should be in the process of being converted to know God better and become more like Him.

The Koran proclaims the following promises to its adherents:

And convey good news to those who believe and do good deeds, that they shall have gardens in which rivers flow (The Cow, 2.25).

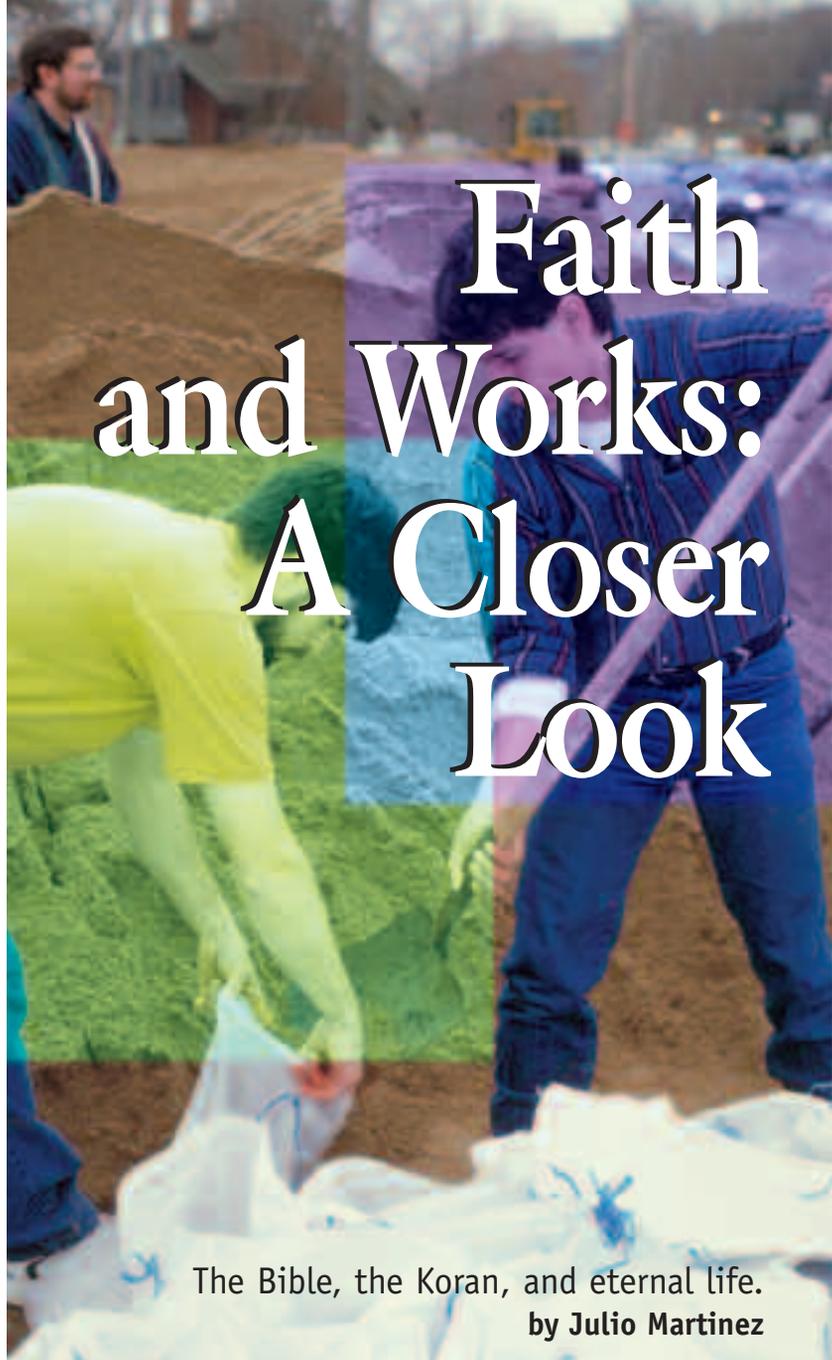
Allah has promised to those who believe and do good deeds (that) they shall have forgiveness and a mighty reward (The Dinner Table, 5.9).

Surely (as for) those who believe and do good deeds, their place of entertainment shall be the gardens of paradise (The Cave, 18.107).

These texts describe an eternal reward and the requirements to obtain it. Although portrayed a bit differently in each passage, eternal life in paradise will be granted to those who believe in God *and* do good deeds — according to the Koran.

We Christians also recognize the validity of faith and good deeds. We believe in God, affirming His existence and trusting Him to reward us (Hebrews 11:6). And as God's children, we are here not only to believe but also to practice good deeds as God has willed (Ephesians 2:10; Titus 3:8).

Up to this point, Christianity seems to share the Koran's commitment to faith and good works. Yet something seems out of place when we hear or read that both belief in God *and* good deeds are required for eternal life. We rightly resist such wording because of the many Bible references that speak of forgiveness and eternal life as gifts of God's grace and as something we sinful humans



Faith and Works: A Closer Look

The Bible, the Koran, and eternal life.
by Julio Martinez

Skjold Photographs

can never merit by our own goodness. But let's take a closer look at this issue.

How many deeds?

Think about the first factor in salvation: faith. It's not enough to say, "I believe." Truly believing involves 100 percent of a person's conviction for God. Either I have faith in God, or I don't.

So if believing and doing good deeds are God's requirements, according to Ephesians

2:10 and Titus 3:8, and if believing means having full faith in Him, then wouldn't it also be required to practice nothing but good deeds — 100 percent faultless — to be saved?

For example, what would be the minimum quota of good deeds to be accepted by God? The closest thing to this in the Koran is

Then as for him whose measure of good deeds is heavy, he shall live a pleasant life. And as for him whose measure of good deeds

is light, his abode shall be the abyss (The Calamity, 101.6-9).

What guarantees that a person has reached the minimum number of good deeds to be saved? If two people are believers of the same faith and are doers of good deeds from the same starting time, but one lives fifteen years longer than the other, wouldn't the deeds of the longer life be "heavier" than those of the other? Or does God require a different quota for each of us?

Christians may get confused regarding this subject, too. Sometimes they incorrectly understand from the Bible that God asks us to believe in the Lord Jesus to be saved from all the previous years we lived in sin without Him, and that once baptized, we must keep ourselves saved by doing good. For these, Jesus Christ *and* God's commandments to do good and not do evil become the requirements of salvation.

Saving grace

The truth is that salvation by belief *and* good deeds is no solid basis on which to build the hope of eternal life. Which one

weighs more: receiving God's grace or doing good deeds? Will they be measured equally on Judgment Day? How many deeds does it take to measure "heavy"? How can a person know he's reached the quota before he dies?

On the contrary, the salvation described in the Bible leaves no doubt: God's grace saves us. No way we can obtain eternal life on our own, because our good deeds in this flesh will never be perfect.

Therefore, God provided our salvation (Romans 3:23-26). He grants everlasting life if we believe in His Son (John 3:16, 17). Only in Jesus' name can we be saved (Acts 4:12), and the only way we lose salvation is if we stop trusting the Savior (Hebrews 10:26-31; Galatians 5:1-4).

Jesus' salvation is unique because, *with only one sacrifice*, He made those who truly believe in His name clean of sin forever (Hebrews 10:10-18). God sees us without sin in His Son, although He still cleanses us of the old nature day by day (1 John 1:7-10). Jesus is our high priest, seated at the right of the Father in heaven, advocating for

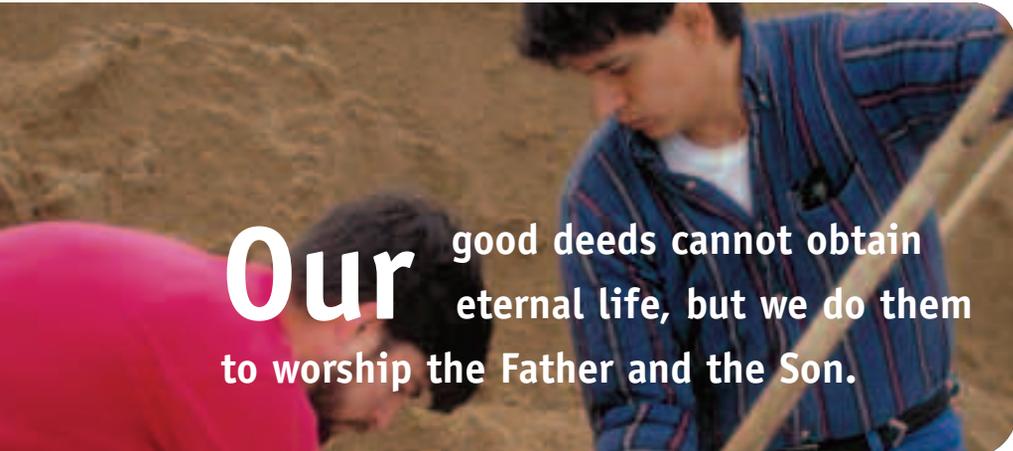
us if we still sin (1 John 2:1, 2). Jesus is our righteousness, higher and greater than the justice we can practice (Matthew 5:20).

New mindset

God doesn't ask us to worry about salvation; He took care of it, in Christ. Our good deeds cannot obtain eternal life, but we do them to worship the Father and the Son (Ephesians 2:8-10). Sincerely believing in Christ as Savior, we learn the mindset to not acquire everlasting life by our good deeds and God's commandments but to offer a new life for the Lord Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20). God has also taken care of this. He has not only saved us in Christ but also given His Holy Spirit to live in us so we can do His will (Romans 8:2-4, 9, 14).

The reward of salvation in Jesus Christ is reliable because of His resurrection. Jesus is the only one so far resurrected for everlasting life, and this guarantees eternal life for His followers (Romans 4:25; 5:10; 1 Corinthians 15:20-22). We have been sealed with God's Spirit for the day of such a gift (Romans 8:11; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). *Thank You, heavenly Father, for carefully planning our salvation in Your Son. You gave us the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6) so we can come to You.* **BA**

Julio and Brenda Martinez and family live and serve the Church in Montreal, Quebec. Quotes from the Koran are from www.hti.umich.edu/k/koran/.



Our good deeds cannot obtain eternal life, but we do them to worship the Father and the Son.



What About the Resurrection?

A Christian response to anti-Resurrection theories. by Alex Ciurana

Corel Photos

The biblical record makes an emphatic claim that sets our faith apart from others: the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This claim immediately steps on some philosophical toes. Those who hold to a naturalistic worldview proclaim, “Bodily resurrection is impossible!” Amen indeed! Within the confines of a worldview that disallows all supernatural activity, resurrection is totally impossible.

And so it is that the naturalistic presupposition has spawned many rebuttals to Jesus’ bodily resurrection. The following is a brief survey of some arguments against the Resurrection and a Christian response to each.

Stolen body

Theory: The oldest of all Resurrection rebuttals, this argument proliferated among the generation at the time Christ was raised (Matthew 28:12-15). It argues that the disciples stole the body of their Master during the dark of night. Then after exhuming and disposing of the body by other means, they publicly declared Jesus risen — with the empty tomb as evidence.

Response: The tomb was guarded by soldiers and with the Roman seal. Potential thieves and the guards themselves would have felt Rome’s wrath had a theft occurred. Moreover, the apostles are described shortly after Jesus’ death and burial as hiding and

fearful of detection (John 20:19) — not exactly the sort of audacious fellows capable of overpowering soldiers, breaking Roman seals, etc. Also, the fate of these apostles must be considered: All of them, save John, were executed for their proclamation of the risen Christ. Would they have promoted a known fabrication to the point of imprisonment and death?

Wrong tomb

Theory: This argument maintains that the disciples *did* visit a tomb and that Jesus’ body was not there. But the reality is, they got the wrong tomb! This case of a mistaken grave led the disciples to believe that Jesus was resurrected, which led, in turn,

to the exuberant spread of the gospel.

Response: If a resurrected Christ were erroneously being preached, surely the religious rulers of Jerusalem could have easily terminated the new sect by pointing to the correct tomb — body and all still inside. The fact that such correction never happened makes this theory highly suspicious. Furthermore, must we say that the very women who helped entomb Jesus could not relocate the site just three days later? The “wrong tomb” theory is more problematic than the issue it attempts to solve.

Swoon

Theory: Jesus did not die on the cross but merely lost consciousness. Once buried in a cool tomb, He revived, exited, and so seemingly rose from the dead.

Response: The Romans had perfected crucifixion as a method of torturous execution. It did not *usually* end in death; it

always ended in death. Also, the other wounds Jesus incurred, especially the spear thrust into His side by the Roman soldier to ensure death, would preclude any form of survival, let alone a convincing resurrection appearance. If a professional Roman executioner was satisfied that Jesus was dead, perhaps modern naysayers should be as well.

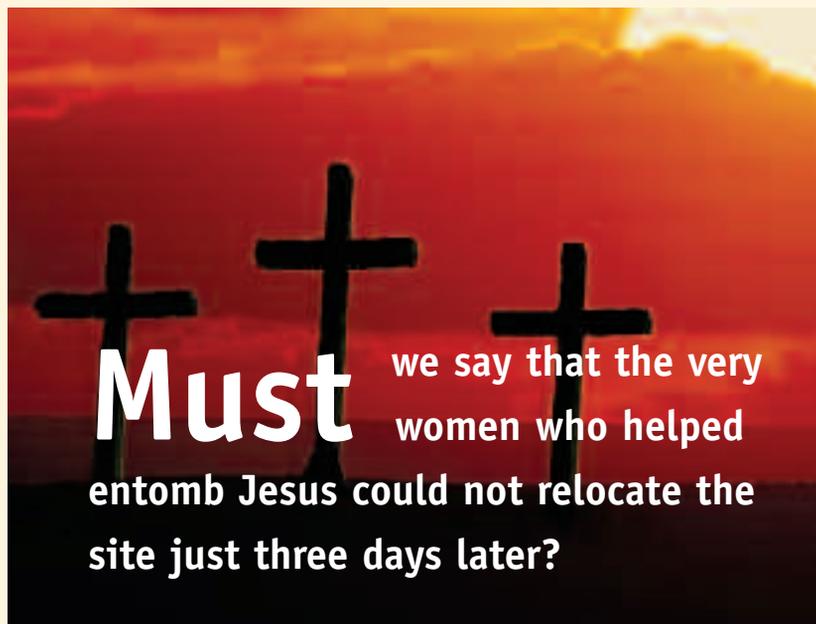
Eaten by dogs

Theory: This hypothesis, made popular by John Dominic Crossan’s book *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, suggests that the best explanation for the absence of Jesus’ corpse is that it was devoured by wild dogs. Instead of being entombed, Jesus’ body was simply left on the cross for carrion crows and wild beasts or was thrown in a shallow ditch to be disposed of by nature. The Gospel accounts of Jesus’ burial and resurrection are, accordingly, mere attempts by Jesus’ followers to provide a respectable and glorious end to an event

that was actually degrading and tragic.

Response: Crossan is correct in his explication of Roman crucifixion being a form of torture and execution designed to bring shame and disgrace upon the accused. A proper burial after crucifixion would be rare and would involve the intercession of a person of prominence. Crossan himself admits that only a person of wealth or influence could arrange for such intervention, but then his bias shows glaringly. All four Gospels state that Jesus’ burial was arranged by Joseph of Arimathea, a man of both influence and wealth. Yet Crossan dismisses Joseph of Arimathea as a mythical interpolation designed to give credence to the burial account. In other words, Crossan isn’t playing fair. To him, Joseph of Arimathea cannot be a real person who secured the burial of Jesus, because such an admission would provide the backdrop for the Resurrection to have really happened, which his philosophy will not allow.

A more basic weakness exists in the “eaten by dogs” theory, however. If the early disciples were merely trying to bestow dignity upon their beloved Rabbi by concocting a narrative of a regal burial and miraculous resurrection, why not leave it at that? Why follow up the fairy tale eulogy with fervent preaching that incurred the wrath of Jerusalem and Rome alike? Why preach an escape from the finality of death when Jesus himself lies mangled and dog-devoured? And most pointedly, why would any of the apostles die for such “good news”? To these salient



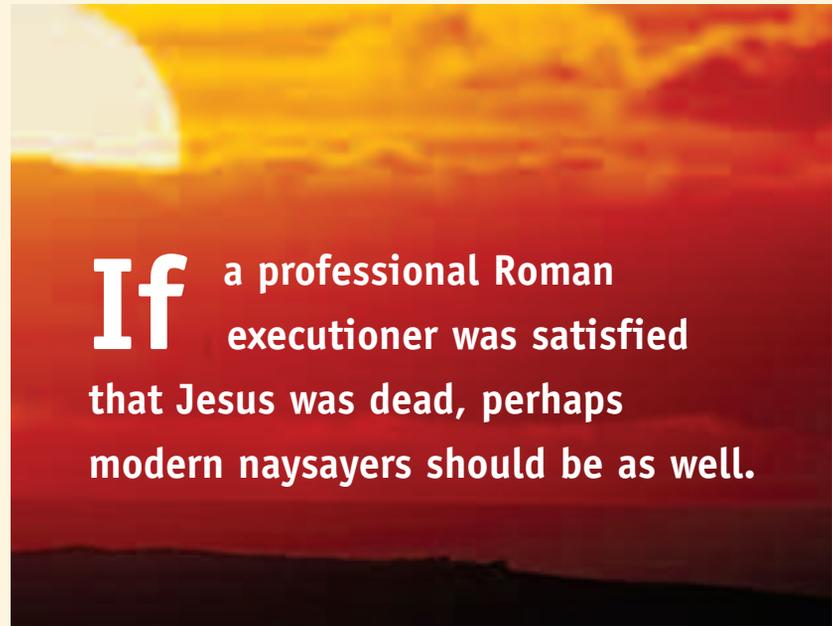
questions the “eaten by dogs” theory has no reasonable answers.

Hallucination

Theory: The apostles truly did believe Jesus rose from the dead, and they even had encounters with the “risen” Lord. But all the so-called appearances of Christ after His burial were only grand hallucinations. This theory attempts to explain the apostles’ radical devotion after Jesus’ supposed resurrection. The loss of their Messiah proved too much for their psyches, and, as a result, they suffered from hallucinations of Jesus back from the dead. These experiences led to the rise of early Christianity.

Response: The hallucination theory has recently placed liberal scholar Gerd Ludemann in the anti-Resurrection spotlight. In *Jesus’ Resurrection: Fact or Figment?* Ludemann debates William Lane Craig, a conservative theologian and philosopher, concerning the nature of Jesus’ resurrection. The book is a good exposition of each thinker’s stance and is recommended reading for those interested in such matters. The thrust of the hallucination theory is psychological or, more specifically, psychoanalytical in nature. The emotional and mental makeup of the apostles is determined to have been one of deep longing, despair, and imbalance, thus inducing hallucinations of what they so desperately wanted to be true: a victorious and ever-living Messiah.

A reliable psychoanalysis of Peter’s or Paul’s mental states to support Ludeman’s theory is not



If a professional Roman executioner was satisfied that Jesus was dead, perhaps modern naysayers should be as well.

possible from the sparse biblical data. (Typically, first century Jews, New Testament authors included, were non-introspective.) Hallucination theories often claim that all 500-plus eyewitnesses of Christ’s appearances (1 Corinthians 15:3-8) were the result of mass hallucinogenic experience. It would seem highly unlikely that such a phenomenon would carry with it the correlation that individual devotees needed to produce a unified faith community.

Childlike faith

These five theories, constructed by gifted scholars and logicians, are some of the most unintelligent and illogical mental endeavors to proceed from the human mind. And why is this? Because these theories would necessarily lead us to believe that the proliferation of a single lie — namely, the bodily resurrection of Christ — has changed humankind for the better more than all truths combined.

Can this be? Are we not

instinctively driven to believe that truth is good and falsehood is evil? Yes, since childhood we have believed that truth and good prevail over falsehood and evil. Perhaps this is the kind of childlike faith that Jesus validated in saying, “The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14b, NIV).

BA

Alex and Christen Ciurana live in Spring, TX. He serves as pastor in Galena Park.

Online

You can read what Lee Strobel and other scholars believe about the resurrection of Christ on 20/20’s Web site: www.abcnews.go.com/2020/story?id=772399&page=1.

Let's



God are clearly seen – God has shown them to us – yet many people go right on living as if there were no God. Unbelievers are without excuse. It is willful sin in their hearts that causes many atheists, agnostics, and other sinners to go in unbelief (Romans 1:18-32).

What can be done about such people? Will more argumentation and defense of the gospel work? Perhaps not, but we never know when the Spirit of God may be softening a heart through the circumstances of life and preparing him/her for the testimony of a reasoned faith in a believable God.

Others, moreover, are sincerely looking for answers to their tough questions about faith. We should be ready with an answer! The reasons of the mind are among the avenues God uses to draw people to Himself. Let us not ignore this avenue but light it with the best of wisdom and grace as people grapple with the knowledge of God.

And for Christians, a studied defense of what we believe and why may bring stability to a faith that sometimes wavers, as well as bring the joy of mental growth and clarity to our souls.

– BA

Reading the word *apology*, we think first of what one person says to another to set things right. As an expression of regret, the apology may employ words like “I was wrong. Please forgive me.”

But *apology* has a broader meaning also, closer to the words *answer* and *reason*. This sort of apology is what is said or written in defense of something that appears wrong to others. It implies words like “I think I am right. Please understand me.”

An apology, then, is a reasoned answer given in defense of what one believes to be true. The most familiar Bible verse using it is 1 Peter 3:15: “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a *defense* [or *apologia*] to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”

Here the writer urges Christians to be prepared with an apology – a reasoned answer – when a non-believer asks about our faith. “Please understand what we believe and why,” says the defense, “and see if we are not right.” This is an *apology*.

The study of reasoned defenses for Christian faith is the discipline of *apologetics*. Some Christians have little interest in apologetics. They feel it is not really possible to convince anyone of the truth about God and the Bible, that it has to be the Holy Spirit’s work – not our logical answers and appeals – that draws people to Christ.

There is, of course, much truth to this perspective. We can hardly prove anything to anyone who doesn’t want to be shown. The darkness of the human heart and will is such that, although the invisible things of

Hear an Apology!

We are grateful for men and women who have specialized in defending the Bible and Christian faith against the many critics of our time. Here are a few.

Chuck Colson

A former advisor to President Nixon, Chuck Colson served time in prison for his role in the Watergate scandal. Between his White House days and prison days, however, he came to faith in Jesus Christ and devoted himself to serving the cause of God's grace and truth. As founder of Prison Fellowship, Chuck is responsible for ministries that bring true freedom to thousands of inmates in hundreds of prisons around the world. As a writer of many books and a speaker on *Breakpoint*, he addresses the key social and moral issues of our day, urging people to adopt and defend a fully biblical worldview. Visit *Breakpoint*: www.pfm.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=BreakPoint1.

Josh McDowell

Josh once considered himself an agnostic, believing Christianity was worthless. As a college student, he accepted the challenge

to intellectually examine the claims of Christ. Attempting to discredit the Resurrection, Josh discovered compelling historical evidence for the reliability of the Christian faith. Unable to sleep one night, Josh prayed to receive Jesus into his life and forgive his sins. His life changed dramatically in the following months as he experienced the power of God's love. Most noticeable was his renewed relationship with his father — the town drunk — whom he never thought he could love again. Since his conversion in 1959, Josh has been heard by more than ten million students in nearly 100 different countries. As a traveling representative of Campus Crusade for Christ, he has introduced skeptics to Jesus Christ around the world. Among his best-selling books are *Why Wait?*, *More Than A Carpenter*, and the apologetic classic *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. Go to www.josh.org/ and click on "Apologetics."

Ravi Zacharias

Born in India in 1946, Ravi Zacharias heads an international ministry that describes itself as "stirring the imagination and impelling the mind to see the beauty and credibility of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." Ravi is

the author of several books, including *Can Man Live Without God* (1994). His speeches and lectures address issues of faith and philosophy, and his weekly radio program is titled *Let My People Think*. Visit www.rzim.org/.

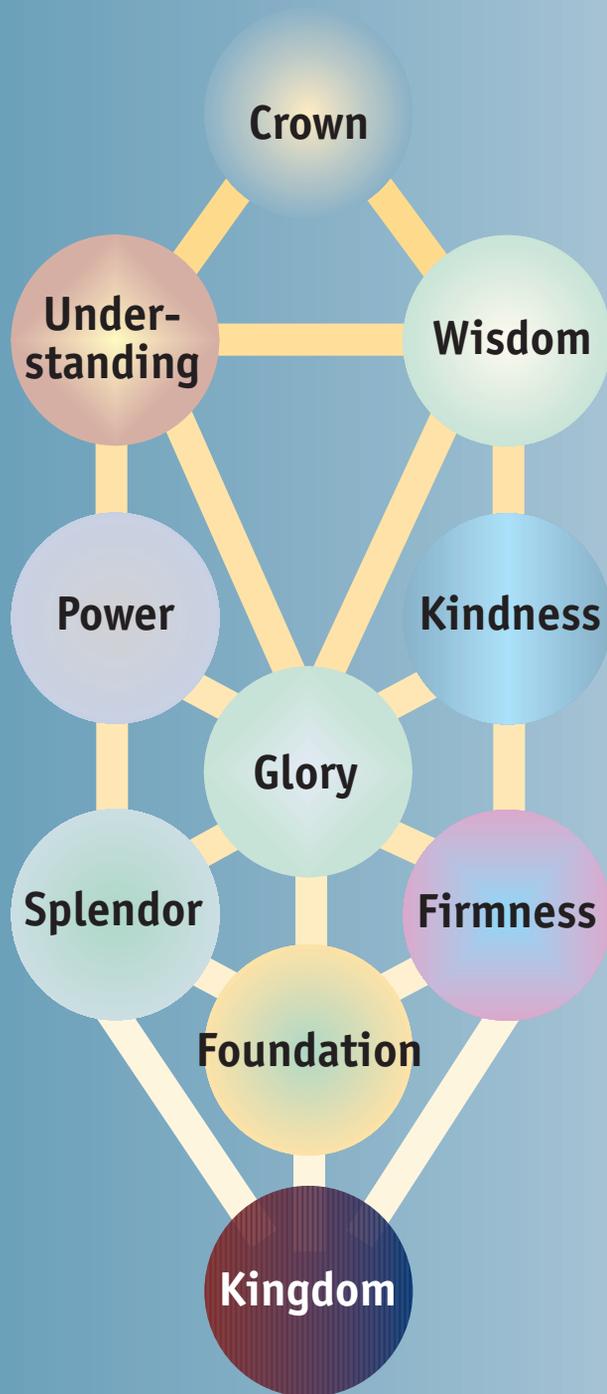
Lee Strobel

A former journalist and investigative reporter turned Christian apologist, Lee takes readers on a remarkable investigation about how the universe began. He interviewed the world's top experts, followed the evidence wherever it led, and reported his findings in his new book *The Case for a Creator*. View the book at www.caseforacreator.com/, and visit Faith Under Fire at www.faithunderfire.com/.

Alex Ciarana

A young Church of God (Seventh Day) pastor, Alex maintains an apologetics Web site (Reasons for Faith) and has written a notebook-style *Basic Apologetics* text for the beginning student. Find out more at www.reasons4faith.org.

— BA



The Truth About Kabbalah

This seemingly innocent spiritual movement could be the next fad to take youth by storm. **by Steven J. Rolfes**

Jewish folk-belief states that if one takes a piece of red string, wraps it seven times around the marker over the grave of Rachel (the pillar that Jacob erected, Genesis 35:20) while reciting Psalm 33, then wears the string on his left wrist, that person will receive a special blessing from God. Somehow this quaint superstition has become the symbol of a trendy religious movement for pop stars and may even be coming soon to a teenager's wrist near you.

In 1966 the Beatles took their famous pilgrimage to India to seek enlightenment at the feet of what turned out to be a

rather lusty guru. Soon afterward, Eastern mysticism and occult beliefs spread like some medieval plague, changing forever the spiritual landscape of America. Apparently, it is happening again.

The red string is just the most visible part of a movement that calls itself Kabbalah. Modeling it on the ancient form of Jewish mysticism, some enterprising folks have marketed Kabbalah for a new generation, with a steady stream of pop stars and actors eager to pay big bucks to embrace the creed.

Complex beliefs

True Kabbalah of the Jewish tradition, said to be the second revelation given to Moses on Mount Sinai, is a secret knowledge to be revealed only to those who have the maturity and wisdom to understand it. This philosophy was eventually compiled into a work called the Zohar, supposedly written and hidden in a cave by Rabbi Shimon in Palestine in the first century.

Forbidden to be studied by those under 35, *true* Kabbalah is an extremely complex school of mystic beliefs based on the Torah, the Talmud, and other sacred writings — especially the prophecies of Ezekiel. The foundations of Kabbalah are the Divine Emanations of God, symbolized by a diamond-shaped image called the Tree of Life (see sidebar). Upon this figure are placed a series of ten points known as sephiroths, or sefirot (from the word *sappir*, meaning “sapphire,” referring to the radiance of God).

Each of these sephiroths are

under the guidance of a particular angel and are represented by a Hebrew word: Kether (crown), Hokhmah (wisdom), Hesed (kindness), and so on. The first three sephiroths reflect thought, the second three emotions, and the third, the natural world. Their combination make up the final sephiroth — Malkut, or “kingdom” — through which the power of God enters the earth. It is the position of these sephiroths and the various interconnecting paths between them that make up the essence of Kabbalah.

Hollywood hype

Kabbalah is considered a gift from God to make the world a better place, never intended to be used for personal advantage. To learn the mysteries of true Kabbalah would take years of dedicated study, a task to be undertaken only by the wisest

rabbis — certainly not pop stars. However, a group called the Kabbalah Centre in Los Angeles has recently transformed this system into a modern microwave spirituality, an easy-to-do heap of pop psychology, trendy New Age beliefs, and downright hucksterism. They have even found a famous person to endorse it. Complete with red string on her wrist, she is none other than Madonna.

No longer a young beauty, and now even a mother, Madonna began sporting a red string, wearing a T-Shirt proclaiming her as a “Cult Member,” and preaching the gospel of the Kabbalah Centre to her Hollywood friends. Soon the red string was gracing some of the most influential wrists in Tinseltown.

Those folks down at the Kabbalah Centre sure know how to market! They have created a faith just perfect for the

Tree of Life

Loosely based on Genesis 3:22, Kabbalah’s Tree of Life consists of a foundation of two points and branches forming outward to eight more. The sephiroth are . . .

1. Crown (Kether) - highest point
2. Wisdom (Hochmah) - highest masculine
3. Understanding (Binah) or Mother (Ima) - highest feminine
4. Kindness (Hesed) or Greatness (Gedulah) - masculine
5. Power (Geburah) or Justice (Din) - feminine
6. Glory (Tipheret or Rahamin) - male and female
7. Firmness (Netzah) - masculine, parallel to Hod
8. Splendor (Hod) - feminine
9. Foundation (Yesod) - male and female
10. Kingdom (Malkut) - the roots of the tree where God’s energy radiates into the world

— Steven J. Rolfes

Hollywood jet set, requiring the adherent to do little more than send money. The centre holds belief in the power of magic water, string, and words. These words, as a bow to traditional Kabbalah, are Hebrew. There is, apparently, no need to actually understand what one is saying to derive the magical effects. Merely speaking and donating money to the centre are more than sufficient to derive the benefits.

Selfish aims

What do these acolytes wish to achieve? While traditional Kabbalah is devoted to worship and the betterment of humankind, the aims of the Kabbalah Centre are almost entirely selfish, such as staying young, vigorous, and prosperous.

According to the centre, disease is the result of an absence of light. Therefore, being properly attuned to the light can make one healthy. Apparently, medical schools with their emphasis on virus and bacteria are hopelessly outdated.

The famed red string was originally intended to ward off the evil eye, thus putting the trendy practitioners on the level of most primitive tribes. It is also intended to ward off envious

stares. Now why would you want to become famous if you do not want envious stares from mere mortals like us?

This organization declares emphatically that it is not a religion. It sure looks like a religion – but much more like a business! After all, anyone who can sell a common piece of red string for \$26 must have some commercial sense. As Confucius said centuries ago, “The superior man knows what is right, the lesser man knows what will sell.”

Same game, old lie

Besides perverting the true doctrine of Kabbalah, this is, in truth, just the same game we have seen being played by the New Age movement. Among the centre’s bestselling items is a book titled *Becoming Like God*, which espouses the same old lie that has been around since the Garden of Eden: “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of [the tree] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God . . .” (Genesis 3:4, 5).

Parents especially should take note: So far there has been little attempt by the Kabbalah Centre to spread this faith beyond the Hollywood elite, but it is only a matter of time before an even

more influential personality adopts it. Some young people, searching for spiritual meaning in their lives, would be easy prey for this movement.

Serious warnings

If the followers of Kabbalah really wish to live by the laws of the Torah, then here are a few suggestions:

“I am the Lord your God . . . You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:2, 3; repeated in Deuteronomy 5:8).

Since they like the book of Ezekiel:

“Woe to the women who sew bands on all wrists . . .” (Ezekiel 13:18, NRSV).

These are no secret doctrines hidden in caves but rather serious warnings from a God who loved us so much that He sent His Son to die for our sins. What greater mystery could we possibly want? As parents and members of the church, it is our divine obligation to teach the young that there is no shortcut to eternal life, no magic water or string. We need only follow the Good Shepherd and put our faith in Him. **BA**

Steven J. Rolfes writes from Cincinnati, OH.

Resources for this article

Dion Fortune, *The Mystic Qabbalah* (out of print)

J. H. Laenan, *Jewish Mysticism: An Introduction* (2001 Westminster John Knox Press)

Mosheh Halamish, *An Introduction to the Kabbalah* (1999 State University of New York Press)

There is no shortcut to eternal life, no magic water or string.

Discipline Your Body

by Graham Hodge

“Bodily exercise profits a little,” Paul instructed young Timothy. Then the apostle added, “But godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8).

Paul wrote these words in a culture where people typically worked hard and ate a natural diet. The apostle himself probably walked up to 20 miles a day, with no fast-food nearby.

Paul is not saying that we waste our time pursuing physical health and fitness, but he makes a comparison to help us establish right priorities. Our spiritual health and well-being — for eternity — is of far greater importance. What good is it to be the fittest people on the planet if we fail to accept the salvation of Christ? Read Mark 8:36.

On the other hand, bodily exercise and nutrition are of some value; 1 Timothy 4:8 says so! Could a misreading of this verse cause some to disregard physical health altogether? Taking time to maintain our bodies, we will reap the benefits through increased energy and fruit in our ministry and in our families.

We hear much about diet these days and about better food choices: fresh vegetables, fruits, nuts, and grains. Experts

agree, however, that the best natural meals are of limited value without daily exercise.

I knew a pastor who believed in walking after a large meal. He said that exercise aided proper digestion, flushed the lymphatic system, and flooded cells with health-giving oxygen. Walking, stretching, and light exercise can benefit the whole body and help shed excess weight.

Physical exercise is a challenge for me. I’ve never had affection for athletic games, nor am I one for time in a gym, preferring to combine exercise with something useful. I tried many forms over the years — swimming, cycling, snorkeling, running — and found that simple walking serves me best.

Out for a walk in the fresh air with my wife or a friend, I enjoy the fellowship, discussion, sometimes music or sermon tapes, while treating every muscle to life-giving exercise. Walking requires no special facility or equipment and can be done by almost anyone, anywhere. And it’s free!

Every Christian needs discipline. Without it we are moved by the whim of emotions. Physical exercise and a healthy diet increase our discipline. Whether your fitness level allows long mountain hikes or a stroll along the road, why not dedicate yourself to a regular

exercise program by simply walking!

The Bible doesn’t say a lot about diet and exercise, probably because it wasn’t a great problem two or three thousand years ago. All food was organically grown and eaten fresh. Most people walked miles every day. The early church didn’t need cups of black stimulants and sugar-packed donuts to get a meeting going.

If Paul were alive, he might address the problem like this:

My brethren, eating junk is a sin against your body. If you know right and harm yourself instead, you are not good stewards of God’s creation but are living according to fleshly desires. Do not use your body, the temple of the Holy Spirit, for personal indulgence. You belong to God, who bought you with a price. So eat, drink, and walk for Christ’s glory.

Try This!

Play The Longevity Game (www.nmfn.com/tnet/work/longevity_game_popup.html) to see how long you may live. Watch the age prediction on the screen change as you answer the questions.



A Matter of Time

The Bible teaches history, for sure, but memorizing dates is not the main assignment.
by Calvin Burrell

Time – the stuff that life is made of. Seconds and minutes, days and years: When you run out of these, you run out of life. Every wise person learns to treasure time as God’s good gift. Mark it down as primary: Time matters! “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12).

A secondary consideration about time is the stuff this writing is made of. Let’s talk concerning the calibration of time – its measurements, its observances, and its written records – as found in the Bible. Though not the essence of time’s treasure, these issues are nonetheless of interest and import to the serious student of Scripture.

Hours, days, weeks, years

Modern man measures time by seconds, which add up to minutes, hours, weeks, and months – eventually to centuries and millennia. The Bible records most of these above a minute. The division of hours into minutes and seconds is of more recent invention.

Scripture does, however, mention *hour* as a subdivision of *day*, but not with modern precision. “Are there not twelve hours in a day?” Jesus asked. In a land where daylight and dark were present in roughly equal amounts for most of the year, He obviously spoke in common, not scientific, terms. His day was calibrated by the third, sixth, and ninth hours (or “watches” in the night), not by precise numbers of minutes.

The Bible is the source of the seven-day weekly cycle – a near

universal measure of time even in cultures that have no loyalty to the Word of God. This fact deserves more than passing mention.

Consider that our common day is defined by one rotation of the earth on its axis, that the lunar month is defined by one cycle of the moon around the earth, and the solar year by one trip of the earth around the sun. The common week has no such reference in the natural world. Anchored only in Hebrew Scripture (Genesis 1:1–2:3), it has withstood various attempts at reform and remains pristinely unaltered.

While our weekly cycle equates with that of ancient times, the months and years of Scripture are at some variance with today's usage. Those were based on a lunar calendar in which one complete cycle of the moon around the earth (slightly more than 29 days) made one month. In that system, a year would be twelve months (i.e., moons) long but added a "moon" each few years (seven out of 19) to keep the seasons aligned in the system.

This ancient calendar of lunar months always marked the first day of its new year by the observance of a new moon near the time of the spring equinox, in our March or April. The Bible alludes to this calendar but does not permit us to duplicate it, nor does it require us to do so.

Years and observances

Let's consider some days, dates, times, and seasons that are significant in Scripture, as inspired by the Spirit of God.

Our major interest here will be in the timing of each event.

The date (year) for the Creation (Genesis 1). Using a straightforward approach to Bible genealogy, Anglican Archbishop James Ussher (seventeenth century) added up the numbers and concluded that God created the heavens and the earth in 4004 B.C. This date found its way into the margins of many Bibles and was once considered nearly sacrosanct by many conservative readers. It gave impetus to the popular teaching of Christ's coming around A.D. 2000, supposedly taught in 2 Peter 3:8. This theory says that God counts the 6,000 years of Creation history as six days and that we should now expect the seventh day — the millennial rest at our Lord's return.

With the accuracy of the 4004 B.C. date now under question, may we use Bibles and calculators to settle on a better date for the world's creation? Probably not. The Christian community, both conservative and progressive, is awash with dialogue and debate over the fossil record, geological ages, gap theories, and day-age theories that would permit the days of Genesis 1, like some other

biblical days, to be longer than 24 hours. Little has been settled in this current flux, but it is safe to say that most Christians are more comfortable with the view that the earth is still relatively young.

Scripture never compels us to calculate the year that time and space began, but it does provide a weekly reminder of God's creation — a memorial in time. It is . . .

The Sabbath (Genesis 2:2, 3). Modern calendars, dictionaries, languages, and the Jewish people around the world mostly agree: The original seventh-day Sabbath falls on Saturday, the day before the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1). If you're searching for the Bible Sabbath, locate the first day of the week and count forward seven. The best evidence supports the fact that the seven-day weekly cycle with our Saturday at the end has continued uninterrupted since Christ observed the Sabbath in Nazareth according to His custom (Luke 4:16).

Those who oppose a Saturday Sabbath usually do so on grounds other than the uncertainty of its timing. The biblical evidence for observing a weekly rest day, as well as for finding it in today's time, is not

The biblical evidence for observing a weekly rest day, as well as for finding it in today's time, is not ambiguous.

ambiguous, nor does it depend upon reconstruction of the ancient Hebrew calendar.

Hebrew holy days: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Leviticus 23). In addition to the weekly Sabbath, ancient Israel was given several annual Sabbaths to observe unto the Lord, with their associated days. Not related to the seven-day solar cycle, these “high days” were directly tied to a Jewish lunar calendar that, as we have seen, is not clarified in Scripture.

Determining the first day of the first Jewish month (Nisan, or Abib) requires either visual sightings in Bible lands or a lot of Bible guesswork — or both. Even if the Jewish new year could be established with certainty (which it cannot), dating the Jewish holy days would still give rise to several more thorny problems. It is no surprise that those who insist on precise dates for these old covenant observances often find themselves in debate and division over calendar issues.

The modern Jewish calendar does not derive merely from the ancient Hebrew Scriptures. Of more recent vintage, it owes much to the extra-biblical reasoning and opinions of later rabbis. Because Jewish observances

of the old covenant are no longer obligatory for Christians, determining the original Jewish calendar is not a crucial issue.

Christ’s birth (Matthew 1; Luke 1, 2). The issue of what timed New Testament observances are expected of Christians — and when — is intriguing, if not always clear. Take the birth of Jesus, for example. Not only are we left without precise information on the date of that marvelous event in Bethlehem, but also its year is in dispute — somewhere between 8 B.C. and A.D. 4.

Is there a connection between this uncertainty and the fact that Scripture nowhere bids us celebrate His birth in a specific manner?

Many students find favor with lines of reasoning that place the birth of Christ, not on a specific date, but early in the fall — September or October. This position will be presented in the next BA.

Jesus’ passion week (Matthew 26–28; Mark 14–16; Luke 22–24; John 18–20). For Jesus’ birth, both the date and year are clouded. For His death and resurrection, it is the days of the week that raise questions. Ash Wednesday, Good Friday,

and Easter Sunday are familiar to many, but few carefully study the chronology they convey. Readers are invited to request the Bible Advocate Press study on this topic titled *The Time Element in the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ*.

In the spring of 2005, many Christians celebrated Christ’s resurrection on Easter Sunday nearly a month before the Jewish Passover, a memorial that typifies His death. Several readers inquired about this anomaly, and a response to these inquiries was prepared by Elder Jerry Griffin. The text of that response is available online at www.cog7.org/BA.

We who celebrate communion service (the Lord’s Supper) on the anniversary of Hebrew Passover, when Jesus instituted it, use the modern Jewish calendar to assign that date. Rather than claiming precise correlation with the biblical Nisan 14, we are content to know that we observe this new covenant memorial, rich with Hebrew symbolism, as an anniversary in its original season.

* * * *

The Bible is a book of God’s mighty works and the words He gave to explain them. All His works and words were done in history, even though few of them can be dated with historical precision.

Aware of Paul’s warning that observing days and months, seasons and years, can lead to bondage (Galatians 4:9-11), we rejoice in the few timed memorials that remain near the heart of Christian faith and practice.

BA

Those who insist on precise dates for these old covenant observances often find themselves in debate and division over calendar issues.

The Pauline literature of our Bible is complete with the . . .

Prison Epistles, Pastoral Epistles

More than half of Paul's letters fall into one of these two categories. Totalling only 28 chapters, each carries a major impact. All seven were written late in the apostle's ministry. The prison letters were penned while he was in chains, probably in Rome. The pastorals were written not to churches but to young leaders. The masterful little Philemon fits both categories.

Prison epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians

These three are among Paul's most beloved letters due to their beauty, brevity, and brilliance. Focusing on the Lord Jesus Christ and His church, they are described as both Christological and ecclesiological.

All three contain classic passages about our Savior and God's salvation through the Spirit. In **Ephesians** these marvelous riches embrace the first three chapters. In **Colossians** the first two chapters contain some of the most astounding statements about Jesus in all the Bible. All of **Philippians** glows with the warmth of Christ, but see 2:5-11 and 3:7-14 for its highest peaks.

Of the three, **Philippians** is tied closest to one congregation.

Founded by Paul, this church receives the warmest letter we have from the apostle's pen. As Paul recounts their faith, love, and support in gospel service, his joy spills out all over this bright epistle.

Colossians also addresses one church in a historical setting. This congregation was being troubled by false teachers who drew others away from gospel truth and its focus on Christ. Paul writes to correct the error, which was an early form of Gnosticism.

Ephesians, on the other hand, has few ties to a historical situation. Undoubtedly read first in Ephesus, it may have circulated to other churches in Asia Minor and Greece as well because of its lofty content and general appeal. **Ephesians** and **Colossians** share many parallel verses and similar concepts.

Postcard to Philemon

This single chapter is an elegant example of the aged apostle's mind and heart. Paul beseeches his friend, Philemon, for a full measure of God's grace toward the runaway slave Onesimus, who has come to faith in Christ.

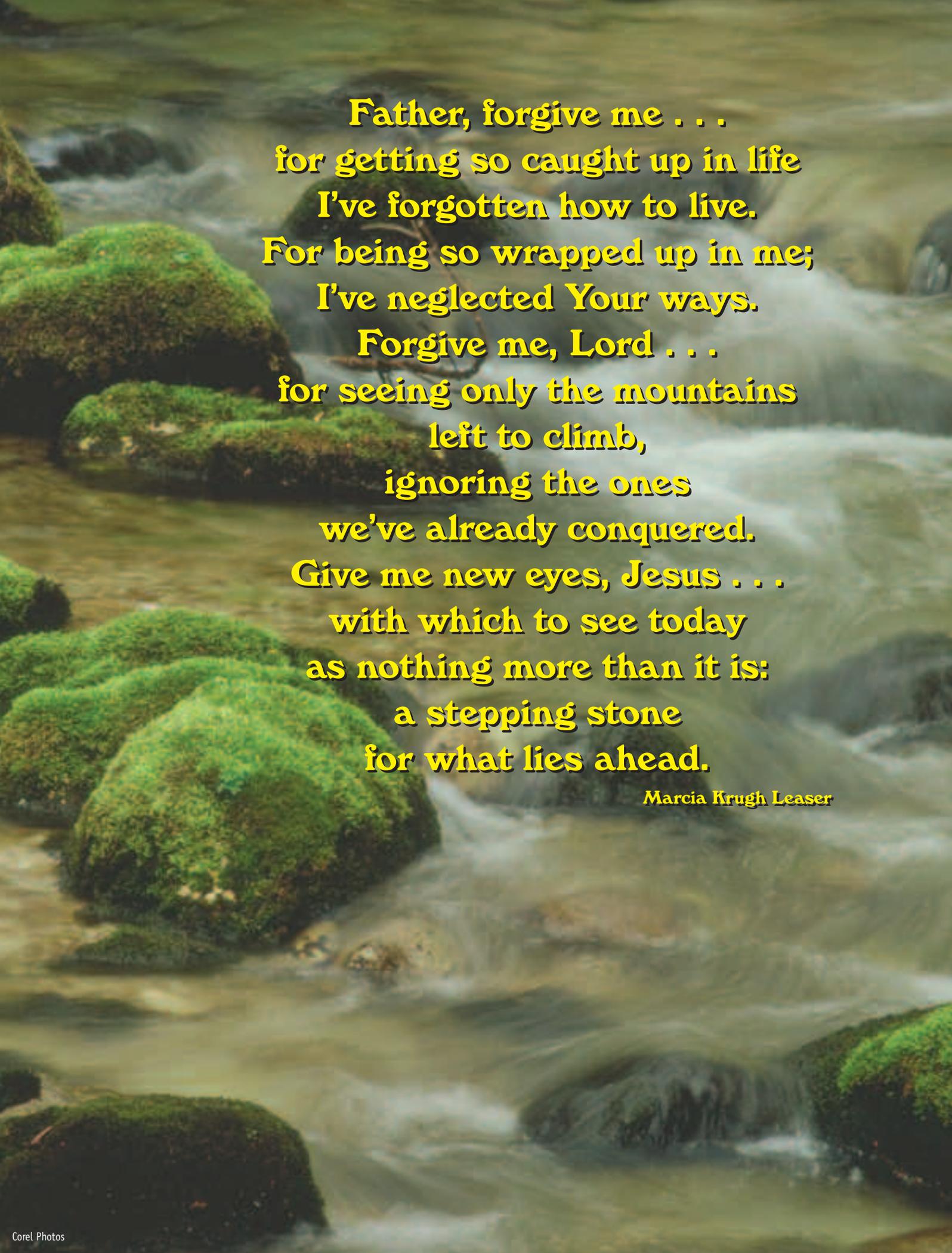
Pastoral epistles: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus

Following Christ's example, Paul invested a great deal of time and effort in developing the faith and works of a few men who would follow him in ministry. Barnabas, Silas, John Mark, Luke, Gaius, Epaphroditus, Aristarchus, Trophimus, Tychicus, Aquila, and Priscilla are among his co-workers — beyond Timothy and Titus, whom Paul appointed to serve and develop churches in key areas.

Timothy, of mixed parentage in southern Turkey, joined Silas to accompany Paul on his second missionary journey from Asia into Europe. On the third journey, Paul and Timothy built, through trials and tears, a strong bond with Christ's people in Ephesus. It is there that Paul appointed Timothy as pastor and wrote him the two letters under that name.

The first letter to **Timothy** has broad teachings about church leaders and older men and women (widows), as well as instruction against false teachers. The second letter is similar, but its tone is more personal as Paul draws on the depth of his character and experience to charge young Timothy to stay true in the faith of the Lord Jesus that he has been taught, come what may.

Of **Titus** less is known. He accompanied Paul to the council of elders in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:1-3; Acts 15), was known by the church in Corinth, and was assigned to set in order the difficult work in Crete (Titus 1:5). Paul's letter to Titus admonishes the young pastor to stay in Crete and stand strong against error by teaching sound doctrine, i.e., God's grace in Christ and the good works that must always follow in its wake.



**Father, forgive me . . .
for getting so caught up in life
I've forgotten how to live.
For being so wrapped up in me;
I've neglected Your ways.
Forgive me, Lord . . .
for seeing only the mountains
left to climb,
ignoring the ones
we've already conquered.
Give me new eyes, Jesus . . .
with which to see today
as nothing more than it is:
a stepping stone
for what lies ahead.**

Marcia Krugh Leaser

CoG7 in Action



What's new with . . .

Ministries Training System

- For fall classrooms, visit www.cog7.org/MTS

Spring Vale Academy

- Fall semester just underway; 989-725-2391

NAWM

- Regional retreats ahead

NFYC

- Surf's Up Challenge
October 22

Missions Ministries

- Pioneer Missionary Training
in December



*MTS intensive classroom, Owosso, MI
May 29 - June 2*

New Appointment

Elder Orville Rose of Calgary, Alberta, has been appointed acting superintendent in the Western Canada District.

Retreats, Etc.

September 9-11 - Northeast Women's Retreat, Gladwin, MI; 989-274-0104 or 989-791-1996; winchell1973@charter.net

September 9-11 - Southwest Women's Retreat, Jasper, AR; 870-446-5736 or 870-577-3647

September 23-25 - Missouri Women's Retreat, Amsterdam, MO; cost: \$40; contact Ruth Reynolds: ruthmusic@yahoo.com

September 20-25 - Mid-states Senior Adult Retreat at Dover Campgrounds, Kingfisher, OK; contact Karen Riggs (918-344-0958)

PMT to South America

A ten-day Pioneer Missionary Training trip to Argentina is available to those who have completed the "level one" training of the past several years in Mexico. Applications must be received

by October 30, and the team will be selected by November 15. For more information, contact Kurt Lang (541-995-8678, nfyc@cog7.org) or Bill Hicks (423-323-7191, carlylehix@aol.com).

The Church in Argentina experienced 25 percent growth in the last year and recently graduated 24 men in its first-ever seminary class.

A Gift That Gives

Considering a major gift that increases retirement income? Contact the Church's Office of Planned Giving, P. O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233; e-mail: plannedgiving@cog7.org

More Long Marriages!

Adding to our list of couples married 50 years or more, BA congratulates Richard and Helen Chatfield of Florissant, Missouri, married in June 1941; Ora and Genny Haskell of Marion, Iowa, married February 28, 1948; and Jesus and Reyne Diez of Cicero, Illinois, married June 28, 1949.



2005 General Conference Convention Report

Site: Tech Center Marriott Hotel in Denver, Colorado—same location as '87 and '89 conventions; evening and Sabbath services at the commodious Denver First Church of the Nazarene.

Theme: “Pursuing the Heart of Jesus” was developed in sermons by Elders Al Haynes, Lynn Taylor, Antonio Vega, Dale Lawson, and Loren Stacy. Saturday night Elder Whaid Rose led the crowd in a singing-sermon exalting the name of Jesus Christ.

Program Committee: Mike and Deborah Vlad; Nauldy and Maisie Henry; Ken and Elizabeth Keim; Dennis and Kathy O'Banion; Harold and Vona Ogren; Lynn Taylor.

Attendance:
1,400 worshipers on Sabbath morning
440 adults registered for business
125 for children’s program, led by Leah McGlochlin
225 NFYC and 173 SWORD (some overlap)
62 enrolled in Ministries Training System courses

International and fraternal guests:
Terry and Nisan Slowe, from Guyana

Henry and Ruth Harley, from Jamaica
Elder A. A. (Nehemiah) Tembo, from Malawi, Africa
Raul and Rebekah Ruiz, Carlos Ceron from Mexico
Gray and Leslie Hodge, from Tasmania, Australia
Samuel Carson of Shiloh Church of God 7th Day, Washington D.C.
Bill Harwell of Church of God Body of Christ, Randleman, North Carolina
Victor Kubik of United Church of God and LifeNet, Indianapolis, Indiana



Honors:

- to LeRoy and Hope Dais of Denver, Colorado: the G. C. Churchmanship Award
- a plaque, in memory of Elder John and Katherine Kiesz, that will hang in the General Conference offices
- to Lynn Taylor and Phyllis Tuller for work in convention planning and registration



Business: The conference-in-session heard the “State of the Church”

address by President Whaid Rose; amended the Articles of Incorporation to include a dissolution clause; amended the bylaws to require that all nominees to the board of directors come through the Nominating Committee; reaffirmed its commitment to marriage as a permanent union between one woman and one man; and elected four men – including first-time member Samuel Holland – to the board.

General Conference board:

Loren Stacy, chairman; Larry Zaragoza, vice-chairman; Dennis O'Banion, secretary; Charles Carr, treasurer; Jose Hernandez, Chip Hinds, Samuel Holland, Brian Larson, Larry Marrs, Carl Palmer, Melvin Sweet, and Michael Vlad

Nominating

Committee: June Bobcombe, Sylvia Corral, Jody McCoy, and Gustavo Salcido

Amendments

Committee: Robert Coulter, Andrew Burnett, Monico Muffley

Distributed: Biennial report, outlining two years of G. C. work. Look for extra copies at your local church.

Available: Videos and DVDs of "Church at the Crossroads" ple-

nary sessions by Whaid Rose and of convention sermons. To obtain copies, contact the G. C. offices by phone (303-452-7973) or e-mail (offices@cog7.org).

Extra-curricular: Outings to Six Flags, the Rockies-Dodgers game, the General Conference offices, and the nearby mountain majesty.

Family highlight: All six siblings in the Philip and Alice Ling family of Wisconsin attended part or all of convention: Naomi Kiesz of Bloomer, Wisconsin; Lavern Ling and Melba Cushing of Meridian, Idaho; Jeanette Hendershott of Commerce City, Colorado; Erwin Ling of Machesney Park, Illinois; and Clareta Boese of Bloomer, Wisconsin. All are active in church, as are many third and fourth generation Lings.



International Tour

United Kingdom

The message of the Church of God (Seventh Day) was carried from Jamaica to England by Elders Smith and Barnett around 1950. Many members from the West Indies were migrating there.

In 1957 a young Jamaican couple, Erlo and Eileen Hendricks, moved to England intending to assist, for three years, the growing number of brethren there. Forty-eight years later, the Hendrickses remain near London as overseers of the British church.

The British Conference was established in the early 1960s and currently comprises over 500 members in 17 branches, with head offices at Derby Road, West Croydon, Surrey. President E. S. Hendricks serves with a team of nine executive board members. There are 15 ordained ministers, plus deacons and missionaries.

Services in the local branches generally include Sabbath school, divine worship, and a missionary meeting on each Sabbath day; a gospel meeting on Sunday evening; and prayer and Bible study at midweek.

The main ministries within the conference are

Evangelism

- developing strategies for outreach and growth
- developing friends and family networks
- equipping members to share the tasks

Children and youth ministries (NCYM)

Catering to the spiritual, educational, and recreational needs of the Church's youth, these ministries include Faithful Youth Challengers (FYC), young adults, and Seekers. Each department is supported by teams working in performing arts, education, finance, events, and marketing.

Women's Association (WA)

With this ministry established in local churches for many years, a national committee was formed

in 2002 to coordinate women working with pastors and local leaders. A national women's conference is held in alternate years, the most recent being in May 2005 on the theme "Running With the Vision."

Men's Ministry

The national men's ministry was organized in 2002 after it existed in one branch. Its first retreat was in February 2004, with men attending from around the country. Currently four branches have active men's ministry for prayer and worship, mentoring, etc.

Learning and Development

The aim of the Learning and Development Department is to develop training programs that accurately reflect the needs of the conference, deliver training across all departments of the Church, and ensure that training becomes an integral part of the business of the conference. The courses covered include leadership, doctrinal issues, constitutional issues, evangelism, and outreach.

Editor's note: On behalf of BA readers around the world, we express our support for the British people and church as they recover from the terrorist attacks in early July and as they continue sharing the solution to such abject violence: Jesus Christ.





Church at the Crossroads

Crossroads: places along the way where we decide which way to go. We come to them often – literally and figuratively, individually and corporately – and our decisions make all the difference for us and for others, now and forever.

Throughout its history, the Church of God (Seventh Day) has come to many crossroads. Actually, it began at a crossroads: Will it be the Bible and the Bible alone or the Bible plus other writings? Early on came the crossroads of the Sabbath: Will our day of worship be the first day of the week, as is commonly practiced, or will it be the seventh day as prescribed in the Word of God? More recently we have come to the crossroads of Jesus and the gospel: Will we be primarily a people of God's commandments, or will we also be the people of Jesus?

Because of decisions made at critical points in our journey, "Bible-based," "Sabbath-observing," and "Christ-centered" are among the identifying marks and emphases of this organization.

Crossroads will continue to come. To remain a vibrant twenty-first century church, we must continue to decide who we are and what we do as ministry. Thus, "Church at the Crossroads" was the overarching theme of my presentations during convention week.

First, we are a church at the crossroads of **culture**. What is our role and responsibility to a culture that has lost its way? The mission of the Church is to love God and people, and love's most tangible evidence is our lifting the bruised, broken, and abandoned, regardless of their racial and socio-economic status.

Second, we are a church at the crossroads of **life**. Early in Genesis humanity came to a crossroads. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life represent different ways of living. Prior to Adam and Eve's eating from the tree of knowledge, their lives were marked by innocence and intimate fellowship with God. Afterward came the loss of innocence, cover up, fear, separation, blame, and shame.

These two trees speak of more than Bible history; they represent two approaches to our relationship with God. Surrounded by people who lived under the tree of knowledge (their relationship with God was based on what they knew), Jesus admonished: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:39, 40, NIV).

Real spiritual life is not found in how much we know but in whom we know: Jesus Christ, whom to know is eternal life (17:3).

Third, we are a church at the crossroads of **identity**. Will our identity be based on distinctive doctrines or on relationship with Christ? On being different or on being in Christ? When Christ is the primary source of our identity, we can think outside the box of tradition, recognizing the reality of change in the culture and the impact of that change on our traditions. We can learn to be distinct without being exclusive – to cooperate without compromise.

Fourth, we are a church at the crossroads of **significance**. Will we settle for mediocrity and maintain the status quo, or will we rise up and become the vibrant twenty-first century church we envision? Psychologists say that the need for significance is common to all humans, and I believe it is also a need in the Church. The yearning within us to see the Church become all that God designed it to be is the quest for significance.

At the crossroads of culture, life, identity, and significance, may our decisions make all the difference.

– Whaid Guscott Rose
General Conference President

G.C. Ministries

**Working
hard to
spread the
gospel**



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- ◆ **Missions Ministries**
- ◆ **North American Women's Ministries**
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