

BA
BIBLE ADVOCATE®

Religion and the Cross

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2011: Year of the Bible

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Annual Renewals

Much about March suggests that it could be the first month of spring, don't you think? And much about springtime, for me, supports this season as the start of a new year. Nature's renewals of the next two months find their echo in human lives and spirits — new leaves more lasting than January's resolutions.

It's no surprise that the religious year of Judaism begins at this season. Scripture lacks the data needed to fully reconstruct the ancient Hebrew calendar, but its first month began near the spring equinox — March 21. Christians are renewed as they recall and celebrate the approximate time their Lord was born (likely early fall) and in which He died and arose (early spring).

Bible chronology can be tricky, as is translating Hebrew dates to modern calendars. It is enough to know that we now enter the season of Jesus' suffering and death for sins — His humiliation — and of His resurrection-ascension to highest heaven — His exaltation. A full-fresh start comes to those who turn their trust toward Him, anytime.

If there were no faith to recognize and worship one God omnipotent and omniscient, spiritual and eternal, infinite and personal, holy and loving, then someone would need to start one. We already have it: the faith once delivered!

If there were no Word to reveal the origin and destiny of all things, to light the way of life, and to assure whosoever believes that he or she may share God's eternal glory, then someone would need to record that. It is already written: the Bible!

If there were no creed proclaiming a Savior-Lord lowly enough to identify and sympathize with us sinners, yet high enough to reign from God's throne and prevail for us there, then someone would need to create one. There already is: the gospel of Christ!

If there were no group calling people to be rescued by grace, buoyed by faith and love, beautified by joy and peace, matured in character and service, and kept by hope, then someone would need to assemble one. It already exists: God's church!

If there were no memorials to remind the church of Jesus' death and resurrection and to illustrate these truths through human drama, then someone would need to fashion them. These invigorating rites are being rehearsed at this very season (see p.13).

— Calvin Burrell





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[Comparative religion]

Judaism vs.

What could be better than the best religion ever? by William C. Hicks

The revelation of Judaism is profound in its significance: It actually lays the groundwork for Christianity. Every word and letter of it in Scripture is pregnant with the truth that comes to birth in Christianity alone. As someone has said, “One cannot truly grasp the import of Mount Calvary without first understanding Mount Sinai.”

My hope is that this article will help us appreciate Judaism for what it reveals but can never deliver. May it cause us to yearn for and accept what Christianity alone delivers: a vital relationship with the Creator God through His Son.

In one sense, our title is inaccurate because Christianity is *not* opposed to Judaism. Rather, it is

based on and shines forth from the shadows of Judaism at every turn.

On the other hand, the title points to the paradox between Judaism’s old covenant that saves no one and the Bible’s new covenant through which all who will be saved must come. When faced with the salvation of the lost, Judaism – with all its miracles, symbols, and shadows – cannot deliver a single soul except the Son of God, who obeyed it perfectly. But He needed no deliverance because He is always holy.

That Messiah Son alone became the sacrifice, both living and dying, that sprang forth from the grave to give life, hope, and eternal rest to all creation. By presenting the exclusive means of salvation through faith in what God alone planned and carried out through His Son, Christianity is opposed to the Judaism that demands perfect conformity for one’s eternal hope.

Judaism: futile religion

By definition, Judaism is the religion and culture of the Jewish people. God uses this national religion to show the rest of humanity the truth about all religion. Judaism presents a hope for

salvation through knowledge of and obedience to God, i.e., human merit and works. The law of the God of Israel, including the Ten Commandments, is at the core of Judaic teaching.

The miracles that accompanied the Decalogue’s delivery and the expanded knowledge of sin given in the entire law only increased the people’s awareness of God’s righteousness and their own sin. Judaism at its core is a covenant of works, a religion demanding perfect obedience. That covenant of works began, and ended, in Eden, where our first parents demonstrated their inability to keep only one simple command.

The hallmark of the fully expounded old covenant is seen at Mount Sinai in God’s revelation and Israel’s agreement to obey:

So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD (Exodus 19:7, 8).

The religion of Judaism did not save because no one could fully obey it except Jesus. The repeti-

Christianity

tive sacrificial system showed this failure.

Judaism represents the best “religion” ever made. It saved no one because it depended on the works of the flesh. It shows that none can be saved by religion, if salvation depends on the creature rather than on the Creator. Though designed by God and revealed through His servant Moses, Judaism can only show the futility of religion and the failure of the flesh to completely obey the Designer and Revelator.

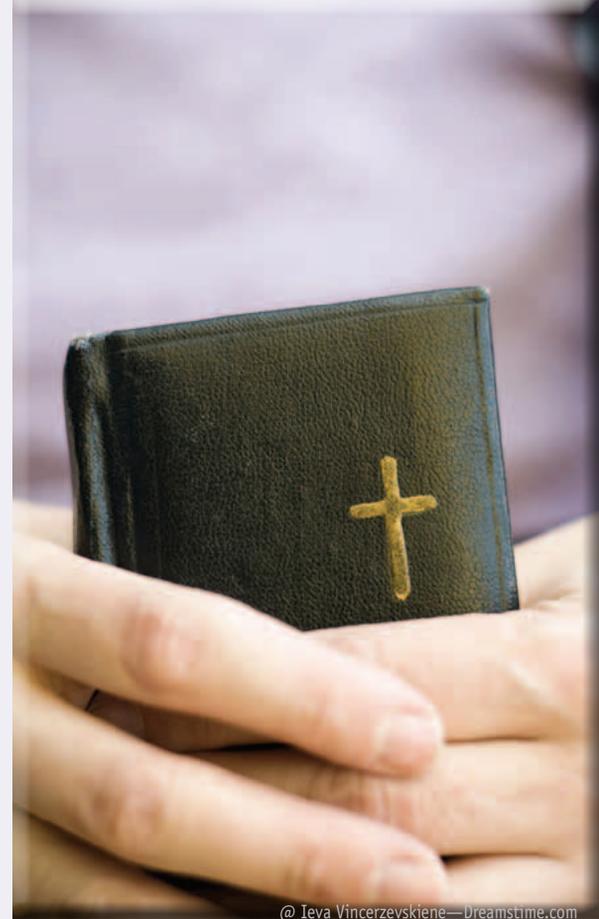
Christianity: finished faith

In contrast, Christianity is based on the life and teachings of Jesus, the Christ. It is faith in the Creator God who ordained and sent His Son to do for His elect and chosen people what they could never do for themselves. This was God’s plan from the foundation of the world.

Christianity draws from all the truths of Judaism to reveal God’s ultimate solution to our sin: the Messiah-Savior, the seed of promise (Genesis 3:15). Any of God’s elect who looked ahead to this salvation to come were saved by faith in that Messiah before the Cross. Now that the reality has come in space and time through Jesus Christ, He has

surpassed and superseded all that was foreshadowed in Judaism. Christianity is a covenant of works only in that it depends exclusively on the finished work of that Christ.

Christianity is a covenant of grace and a relationship of trusting the person of God revealed in Christ. The works that save us are Christ’s works in His perfect life, death, and resurrection, imputed and gifted to us as we simply trust in Him. The sacrifice demanded by our sins is paid for in its entirety by Christ’s sacrifice alone. Righteousness is imputed apart from works by grace upon God’s elect.



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The life of the believer in relation to Christ reflects the power of God to overcome sin. This cooperative process of sanctification starts with the new birth in this life but is not completed until the saints are resurrected and changed into His glory. Thus the holiness demanded by the Holy

According to www.adherents.com, the twelve most populous world religions (belief systems) of our time are

1. Christianity	2.1 billion
2. Islam	1.5 billion
3. Secular/Nonreligious/Agnostic/Atheist	1.1 billion
4. Hinduism	900 million
5. Chinese traditional religion	394 million
6. Buddhism	376 million
7. Primal-indigenous	300 million
8. African traditional and diasporic	100 million
9. Sikhism	23 million
10. Juche	19 million
11. Spiritism	15 million
12. Judaism	14 million

God is supplied by and through Christ. The salvation of God is a faith in God that is manifested by Christ in us, the hope of glory!

Consider that the term *Christian* does not focus as much on information or culture delivered as on what Christ as the ultimate personal plan of God has done, is doing, and will do to bring about His ends.

Superiority of Christianity

Christianity is superior because it is called the everlasting gospel (Revelation 14:6), having preceded Judaism in God's plan. Christianity was ordained before Judaism and even before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:18-21). God personally promised salvation to come through the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15) before Judaism was ever given to the children of Israel.

Christianity is the superior faith because its foundational principles of salvation by God's grace (Genesis 6:8) and righteousness by faith (15:6) are revealed in Scripture long before the institution of the old cov-

enant with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19–24).

The book of Hebrews teaches the superiority of Christianity over Judaism, based entirely on the facts of Christ's preeminence (1:1-3). He is better than the angels (1:4–2:18) and Moses (3:1-19); He provides a better rest (4:1-13) and priesthood (4:14–7:28); a better covenant, sanctuary, and sacrifice (8:1–10:18); and leads to better privileges (10:19–12:21) and responsibilities (13:1-21) for His followers.

Why Judaism, then? If salvation by grace through faith in Christ preceded Judaism, why did God have to send this religion by the hand of angels anyway? Read Apostle Paul's answer in Galatians 3:6-29.

Black hole

I leave you with a warning by way of analogy. Look into the heavens. The planets, stars, solar systems, the Milky Way galaxy, and many others overwhelm our ability to comprehend the greatness of God. In recent years, quasars, pulsars, and other celestial

objects have been discovered, as well as another mystery called the black hole. Astronomers say that its gravity is so powerful that not even light can escape. What goes into it is pushed out the other side somewhere in space and time. Black holes are beautiful to see and study – from a safe distance!

If all the heavenly bodies represent all the religions known or unknown to humanity, Judaism is best represented by the black hole because of its immense gravity, complexity, and power. You could spend a lifetime trying to grasp its complexity; but if you get too close, it will suck you in and spit you out. Nothing except the Creator God is capable of crossing its path and surviving to tell the story.

Christ is the light of the cosmos who preceded all of God's creation. He is the one through whom all things were made and who alone can save us. He alone could traverse all the complexities of Judaism and come away a total victor. The purpose of Judaism was to leave us with no other option than "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).

The battle of all the world's religions is over! On the cross Jesus cried, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit" (John 19:30).

No mere religion can save us. Only the living God through Jesus Christ can! **BA**

William C. Hicks is director of Missions Ministries and lives in Bristol, TN.



You could spend a lifetime trying to grasp Judaism's complexity; but if you get too close, it will suck you in and spit you out. Nothing except the Creator God is capable of crossing its path and surviving to tell the story.

Since 1 John 4:18 says, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear . . .,” how are we to understand the Bible’s frequent advice to fear God, who is love?

This question offers a fine example of the need to rightly divide the Word and balance biblical statements, not all of which harmonize well when read in an absolute sense.

Yes, the Scriptures are replete with counsel urging God’s people to fear Him. My *Thompson Chain Reference Bible* offers lists of 35 or more texts where fear is a positively recommended quality.

For example, Moses taught Israel to fear the Lord — one of His few requirements (Deut. 10:12). The psalmist says that the Lord pities, takes pleasure in, and has great goodness laid up for those who fear Him (103:13; 147:11; 31:19). Both Job (28:28) and Solomon (Prov. 1:7) affirm that wisdom begins with the fear of God. Among the prophets, Isaiah (8:13) and Jonah (1:9) echo the same truth.

Fear as a Christian virtue prevails in the New Testament also. Find it in Luke 1:50 and 23:40; in Acts 2:43; 5:11; 9:31; 10:2; and 10:35; in Romans 3:18 and 11:20; in 1 Peter 1:17 and 2:17; and in Revelation 11:18 and 14:7. More verses could be added to this list.

On the other hand, it is easy enough to compile a second, longer list of texts in which the Word’s counsel is *not* to fear: not man (Deut. 1:17; Ps. 118:6; Prov. 29:25), nor night terrors (Prov. 3:24; Ps. 91:5), nor storms (Matt. 14:30, 31) — not even death (Heb. 2:15).

This half of the truth becomes weighty as we count the occurrences of commands against fear. “Fear not” occurs about 90 times in the King James Version and “be not afraid” more than 30 times, when nearly identical phrases are included.

A good concordance will lead the student to all of these, and more.

The sheer volume of such texts provides a mountain of evidence favoring courage, confidence, and trust as improved responses to “scary” situations, rather than the common human reactions of fear and dread, worry and doubt.

The difference between the two Scripture lists is obvious. The first list recommends only the fear of the Lord, properly understood *not* as cringing terror but as fitting reverence for God’s awesome attributes and an obedient respect for His sovereign authority.

The second list urges that those who rightly fear the Lord according to the first list need fear nothing else.

Scriptural harmony, then, requires that 1 John 4:18’s fear — the kind that “perfect love casts out” — be among the human fears of the second list, not the godly fear of the first. Confirmation of this conclusion is found in the near context.

The preceding text (v. 17) identifies a specific terror — fear of judgment — that the writer wants to assure his readers that God’s perfect love deletes. Because God’s love has been perfected among us in Jesus Christ (see vv. 9-16), we can be bold, not frightened, as we near judgment day. The final verdict — justified and forgiven forever! — has already been declared upon those who remain in Christ by a true and living faith.

As we reverently and obediently fear our loving Father through His Son the Savior, John says we have no more reason to fear the judgment He brings at His return. We no longer fear judgment day nor the many other threats that may terrorize others, but we continue to hold and practice a true fear of the Lord, as Scripture everywhere teaches.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Crosses: His and Ours

What is the core message from Calvary for this sacred season?

Forgiveness and Beyond

by Charles Irwin

“Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward” (John 13:36).

Jesus uttered these words after the Last Supper in response to Peter’s vow to lay down his life for the Master. Where would Peter follow Him afterward? To death (21:18, 19). A similar message echoes down the ages to all believers: “Take up your cross and follow Me” (see pp. 9-11).

Before His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him and His disciples would flee. Still, He comforted them all, saying, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me” (John 14:1). Knowing they would soon forsake Him in the garden, Jesus promised to go and prepare a place for them, to return and receive them unto Himself (vv. 2, 3). What forgiveness and love!

If only people today would forgive others as our Lord did His disciples. We pass through this world but once. How important it will be to depart this life having forgiven others for all wrongs, real or imagined.

Reading John 13:36 through 14:3 without interruption (as these verses were first written) can be instructive here. Before the Eleven sinned by forsaking and denying their Savior, He had already forgiven them. No later recriminations are directed toward them, after the Crucifixion. No discussion is recorded between the Master and the Eleven

about their flight from Gethsemane and Peter's denial. He had forgiven His enemies *and* His friends on the cross (Luke 23:34). Amazing grace!

Only at the cross of Christ do we find forgiveness for all our sins. Without the shed blood and resurrection of Jesus our Lord, we have no remission of sins and no reconciliation with our heavenly Father. The cross is the base of our forgiveness.

And beyond? His death and resurrection were not the end but the beginning of history's greatest movement, so we have much to talk about. Our Lord was intensely concerned about the good news — His life, death, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins — being spread to the uttermost parts of the earth. Before His ascension, Jesus directed His followers to await the Holy Spirit's empowerment (Luke 24:46-50). The book of Acts features the inspired efforts of those early believers.

As interesting as the facts of Acts are, they're not intended as a mere chronicle of events in the church's first century. They're also a record of what God still does today when people serve and pray, empowered by the Spirit. But notice, Acts is an unfinished book. It ends abruptly, stating that Paul lived two years in a rented house.

God intended the book to be unfinished. What took place among the first believers — proclamation of the Messiah's death and resurrection with forgiveness of sins in His name — must continue beyond today, until His Son returns. God expects each of us to write a conclusion by telling our own story of God's grace — the forgiveness of *our* sins. We

must claim our Savior's promise as recorded in John 14:12: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father." The assumption that the awesome works of the Holy Spirit (convict sinners, draw them to Christ's forgiveness, and make them whole) were to cease after the apostles' deaths is unfounded and dangerous.

The book of Acts is like an artist's unfinished landscape painting, and we must carry on the craftsman's work. Each of us will complete the panorama differently — varying colors, shades, brush strokes, details, and skills, but all by the Holy Spirit's leading to the glory of God and His Son, through souls won to Him by forgiveness of sins and ministries of the Holy Spirit. Every finished work will hang in the art gallery of the approving heavenly Father, the Master Artist, the Manager of the gallery.

Peter and the others crafted their own paintings in Acts. Isn't it time we bring our grace stories to life also for all to see?

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Charles and Peggy Irwin

reside in Quartz Hill, CA. Charles' lifelong interests include anthropology, archaeology, school teaching, and hiking in the high Sierras.



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A Cross of Grief

by Deborah Holloway

Oh Lord, today I enter another day of mourning. With You by my side, I am comforted. Yet I am longing for this pain to leave. Any time soon would be great. I hear You say, "This too shall pass."

Today I read in Your Word where You admonished Your disciples, Your earthly friends at the time, to take up their cross and follow You. This was before Your horrible day "on the hill."

People of that day were familiar with what took place at such times. Matthew 16:21 says that You began to tell the disciples what great suffering was ahead

of You. Perhaps You wanted to prepare them so they wouldn't be so surprised at the coming events. Thank You, Lord, for Your preparation.

At times the Lord has prepared me for what was ahead. He gave me just a little glimpse of what was down the road so that when it did happen, I would know it was part of "the plan." This knowing helped me grab onto the grace and mercy that followed me into the darkness.

Jesus tried to clue the disciples in on this preparation. But Peter rose up and declared that such suffering surely would not happen to his friend, his Jesus, his Christ — not if he had anything to do with it. It must have been difficult for Peter or any of the disciples to wrap their heads around

this Jesus, who could do anything, change anything, be anything, yet would suffer all things. Here Jesus, their very dear friend whom they had grown to love, was telling them He would die a terrible death.

Then, while they were still struggling with this concept, the Lord told them, "And by the way, if you love Me (and I know you do), you need to forget about your sorrow over My leaving and the pain this will cause, and take up your cross and follow Me. Forget about the fact that your new best Friend is going to be betrayed, spit on, whipped to shreds, and nailed to the cross. Oh, and because you follow Me, you too will suffer in much the same way."

The recent death of my hus-

band, my friend, has reminded me of this preparation time the Lord tried to give His earthly friends. Prior to my husband's death, the Lord tried to prepare me for things to come. Yet when I found my husband facedown on the floor, I thought, *Oh God, this really did happen.* I can picture the disciples watching afar off as the stone was rolled over the door, saying, "Oh God, this really did happen."

Words by Hillsong pierce my heart that in every season, God is still God. I struggle with "in every season." I seem to have a little more energy and step a little higher when the season is full of fun and laughter. My cross is not quite so heavy. During this time, the sun is shining, there is money in the bank, and no one has betrayed me.

But other seasons are dark, cloudy, and full of storms, making it hard for me to carry my cross. As much as I would like to stay in bed during those times, I have learned to trust in the comfort and faithfulness of the Holy Spirit. I pray that, like the disciples of old, regardless of the season, I too will daily take up my cross and follow Him.

Deborah Hollo-
way writes from
Heber Springs,
AR.



Hard Look at Cross-Bearing

The Savior insisted that His followers take up their cross daily, follow Him, and lose their lives for Jesus' sake (Luke 9:23, 24). After all, He was about to literally lay down His life for us on a wooden cross (v. 22).

Denying oneself and taking up the cross daily is not merely putting up with rigors like illness, marital conflicts, financial difficulty, a tough work environment, school challenges, and truculent children. These happen to all people, Christ-followers or not.

Instead, taking up our cross includes the dimensions of personal crucifixion, when the old man of sin is crucified with its affections and lusts, as Paul said in Galatians 2:20; 5:24; and 6:14. It includes unashamedly and openly confessing Him before others by our words and actions (Luke 9:23-27). As it did for Christ, it means laying down our lives for others, which we do by assisting them in their need (1 John 3:16, 17).

Paul exemplified what it means to bear the cross of our Lord (2 Corinthians 6: 4-10). We may never suffer like this, but we will suffer for the name of Christ (2 Timothy 3:12).

— Charles Irwin



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Interceding Savior

by J. Grant Swank Jr.

Salvation was procured by Christ for every repentant believer. After Christ left this planet, He ascended to the right hand of the Father's heavenly throne. There Christ intercedes for His grace children.

The highest mission Christ was set upon while earth-bound was to see His salvation venture through to completion. "It is finished!" In follow-through to that gain, Christ proceeded to intercede for the saved ones. He continues to intercede. It appears from the Word that Christ's chief purpose has been to save and intercede for the saved.

Prior to His crucifixion and ascension, Christ interceded in Gethsemane for His own: "I pray for them" (John 17:9).

Though it is not given much attention in preaching and teaching, study and exposition, Christ's reason for being is to redeem and pray for the redeemed. The redemption aspect is given due attention, but the intercession dimension is not. Nevertheless, to the cross-bearer it is most imperative and likewise encouraging. It is our comfort. In other words, we know then that we are not alone in the Calvary mountain climb. We have our Intercessor yoked to us in the trek.

No matter what occurs on the cross way, nothing can defeat the cross-bearer, for Intercessor/Resurrected One has preceded the event with intercession, sees the struggle through with intercession, and activates climaxing victory by way of intercession. Intercessor has trounced all enemies by defying grave, death, and hell.

No wonder, then, the Word speaks of God laughing at His foes. No wonder the same Word refers to the ransomed mortals not fearing what any enemies can threaten. It is all because of the commission duo: crucifixion price paid and resurrection presence provided. This duo is personalized within one figure — Christ Jesus. This Christ Jesus is none other than the cross-bearer's Intercessor Victor.

"I pray for them."

Amazing! God prays for us! Christ intercedes for us, twenty-four hours every day — without stop. He does not sleep, nap, nor slumber; He is ever attentive to His own. That is divinity fact. It is reality above all realities. Therefore, cross-carrier can count on it, though all hell's fury may attack. The attack is but temporary bogus.

"I pray for them."

Imagine! We are being interceded for when sleeping, shopping, driving, bathing, waiting for a doctor's appointment, going into surgery, studying for an exam, walking into a job interview, burying a loved one, facing the final hour. We are being interceded for by the very One who loved us enough to climb upon the tree in our stead.

Surely we can carry any cross when we know that God himself is praying for us. With this intercession on our behalf, how could we ever lose? **BA**

J. Grant Swank Jr. writes from Windham, ME.



[Lord's Supper]

The Lost Art of Foot Washing



How one woman finds the service of humility more than a ritual. **by Donna Collins Tinsley**

Have you ever washed your brother's or sister's feet? When was the last time? Do you feel it should be done only by the pastor or his wife? I challenge you to think of foot washing in a new way.

Imagine the Lord washing your feet, as He did the disciples' (John 13:1-17). You are refreshed and humbled by His touch. Your soul is restored by His service of love.

The disciples must have been surprised to see their Lord girded with a towel and carrying a basin toward them. He was their Master — doing a servant's work.

Church tradition

Some churches advocate foot washing as a routine part of Christian duty. Many Churches of God include the practice with their communion ordinance. Some Baptist churches and the True Jesus Church (originated 1917 in Beijing, China) observe it.

For widows to be worthy of the church's support, Paul writes that, among other traits, she will have "washed the saints' feet" (1 Timothy 5:10).

Personal love-gift

The Lord has impressed me to serve in this way at various times. In preparing a sister for her wedding day, I washed and perfumed her feet. Another time, a conflict arose in a relationship, and the Lord convicted me to humble myself by foot washing — part

of the restoration of the relationship.

I once had the privilege of washing the feet of a ninety-five-year-old saint whose earthly walk had been hard. She lived through the days of few civil rights and much injustice. We had a wonderful time of fellowship, Scripture reading, prayer, and praise. She said to me when I came in, "Do whatever the Lord told you to do. I know He sent you!" This experience bonded us together in a way that I would not have imagined before she passed on.

New versions

Husbands, have you considered washing the feet of your wife, as Ephesians 5:25-27 might suggest?

Ladies, have you considered washing your husband's feet? Even if it's the last thing in the

world you'd wish for, think about blessing him in that way. This could be a time for him to slow down and reflect.

Burdened for a friend and not knowing what to do, I decided to visit her. As I was leaving my home, I felt I should take my basin, towel, and soaps with me. What my friend needed was someone to spend time with her. She didn't need my words or my trying to "fix her"; she just needed someone to listen and obey the Holy Spirit.

There is also such a thing as spiritually washing your friend's feet just by giving your time and love. One time a friend felt uncomfortable with me washing her feet, but she let me massage soothing lotion on her hands as I prayed a blessing upon her. It is a gift that cannot be purchased.

Tools of the trade

If the Lord is calling you to serve in this way, practical things to keep on hand are special liquid soaps, lotions, and clean towels in a basin or plastic tub. It doesn't have to be anything elaborate; the Lord makes the experience special by His Spirit.

If time and water are limited, I've found that washing with lotion can be refreshing to friends. I wasn't sure if that qualified as foot washing until a sister whispered to me at her wedding reception how renewed she felt after I had washed her feet with lotion several days before the wedding.

Let the Spirit move

Never restrict the Holy Spirit's leading. I witnessed my husband wash the feet of a man he barely

knew in a small group meeting. This man had come to know the Lord while in prison. The joy on his face amidst tears is something I will always remember. In turn, his wife was prompted to wash her mother's feet, a woman who has mentored hundreds of people. Much blessing came that night as the Spirit moved.

When Mary washed Jesus' feet, it was a public display of adoration and preparation for His death. When some criticized, Jesus said:

"Let her alone; why are you troubling her? She has done a good and beautiful thing to Me [praiseworthy and noble] And surely I tell you, wherever the good news (the

Gospel) is proclaimed in the entire world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (Mark 14:6, 9, *Amplified*).

I can't be like Mary and wash Jesus' feet with my tears, but the Lord can use my hands to wash the feet of His people. He can use your hands too. What you do for the least of His brethren, you do for Him. **BA**

Donna Collins Tinsley writes from Port Orange, FL.



Christian Ordinances

Church of God (Seventh Day) practices foot washing as a part of its annual Lord's Supper, open to all those who've been baptized into Jesus Christ. That service will take place this year in every congregation on Sunday evening, April 17, after sunset.

By the Hebrew calendar, this is the anniversary of the evening of the Last (Passover) Supper when Jesus distributed unleavened bread and fruit of the vine among His disciples as emblems of His soon-to-be-broken body and soon-to-be-shed blood. We find much value in observing communion at this common time and in the same season Jesus our Lord began it.

— CAB

Christ prescribed two ordinances that confirm faith in Him: 1) Water baptism, preceded by a confession of faith in Christ and repentance, represents the believer's initial union with Christ by depicting death to sin, burial by immersion in water, and rising to a Spirit-controlled life; and 2) Lord's Supper, a memorial to Christ's atoning death. Believers commemorate Christ's death by eating the bread of communion and drinking from its cup, symbols of His broken body and shed blood, thus demonstrating fellowship with our Savior until He returns. It is accompanied by the washing of feet. We observe this Supper annually in the season it was instituted and are charitable toward those who observe it at other times.

— CoG7 *Statement of Faith, Doctrine #6*

God: The Promise Keeper

Personalizing the assurances of the
Word can help you stand on solid
ground. **by Andy Hassen**

www.comstock.com

My father passed away a few years ago. I struggled for months with the loss and all its emotions. I had lost my mentor and hero. While he lived, my father was like a benevolent buffer between me and the great unknown — death. Now I stared into eternity without this emotional safety net. Unsure and unnerved, I sought the help of friends and a counselor.

About a year later, during a time of forced quiet (surgery), the Lord led me to rediscover His promises specific to where I was emotionally. I learned that we can cast our cares on Christ because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). I also learned that especially in troubled times, Jesus promises peace — His peace. No matter what tribulations we endure in this life, He has overcome the world (John 14:27; 16:33).

God's love and faithfulness became more apparent with every promise I discovered in the Word. For example, Jesus comforted His disciples by promising to prepare a place for them. He would come again to take them to be with Him, so their hearts need not be troubled (14:1-3). As I personalized these and other promises, I gained a growing assurance in my heart that God was truly in control.

God's love and faithfulness are central to the Christian walk. Because God is who He says and does what He says, and because God's love is never failing, we can trust Him. When we trust Him, we enjoy the contentment and security every child of God should enjoy.

Romans 8:1 provides another example. It promises no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Even in the hard times

when we feel discouraged, this verse assures us that God does not condemn His children in Christ. Nothing, in fact, will stop God from loving His own (vv. 35-39). Not the opinions of others, nor our personal feelings, nor the whispers of the Adversary can change the fact of God's love. This is His promise!

Making it real

Reaping the benefits of God's promises isn't always automatic. We can choose to accept what God offers or reject it and miss the blessing. If you want to put God's promises to work in your life, try these steps:

1. Acquaint yourself with the wide array of God's promises and how they may apply to your life. You do this by hearing and reading the Word. Listen to good sermons. Commit yourself to personal Bible study. Listen to Christian programming and music.

2. Personalize a particular promise that addresses a current need. Think of that promise not as addressing all believers generally but you personally. Try substituting your name to make that promise just for you. For me, Philippians 4:6, 7 would read: "Andy, be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let Andy's requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard Andy's heart and mind through Christ Jesus."

3. Expect God to fulfill that promise in your life; watch and wait patiently to see how He does it. Continuously remind yourself what God has promised above all: "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews

13:5). By concentrating on this promise, you combat doubt and loneliness.

In order to fulfill a promise for us, God often reveals what we must do to make it happen. Psalm 1, for example, says that we can be like a tree that bears fruit and doesn't wither; whatever we do will prosper. That's the promise. Our part, given in the same text, is to delight in God's law and meditate daily on it. Through these times of study and reflection, God will bring strength and prosperity to reality in our lives.

When we claim and appropriate God's promises, we must be careful to not become presumptuous, demanding that He make good on His words. Both Testaments caution us about putting our Lord to the test (Deuteronomy 6:16; Matthew 4:5-7). Keep in mind that God fulfills His promises according to His perfect will and what He knows is best for us. We can trust that God has our best interest at heart.

Close to God

Life comes at us with great intensity at times: loss, uncertainty, disappointment. Questions arise in our minds about God's

faithfulness. Though His promises don't always come easily in these seasons, they can be our road map to guide us through our struggles, moving us closer to God.

As of this writing, I have been unemployed for more than eighteen consecutive months. I'm anxious over the economic uncertainty for my family. Will I ever get a job again? What happens after unemployment? Is there something wrong with me? I take these concerns to God often.

Although I have no clear answers, the anxiety has been replaced by an internal calm as I focus on promises like Philippians 4:6, 7. Unlike the past where I would worry and lose sleep, I have a surprising peace that only God could provide. He promised it! **BA**

Andy and Debbie Hassen

have four children and live in Springfield, MO, where he assists in pastoral service.

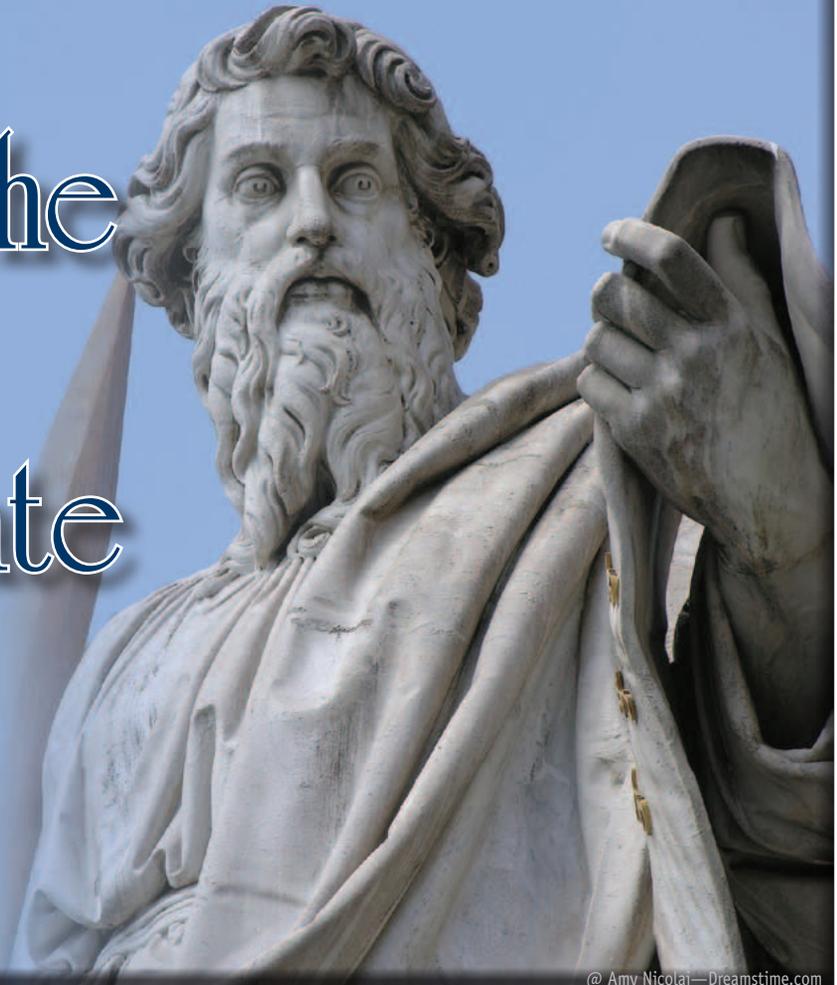


God fulfills His promises according to His perfect will and what He knows is best for us. We can trust that God has our best interest at heart.

Paul: The Bible's Advocate

How Holy Scripture shaped the book of Romans.

by Jason Overman



© Amy Nicolai—Dreamstime.com

The day Saul was blinded on the Damascus road, he lost more than his physical sight; he also lost the eyes to read as he had before. The way he had learned to read Hebrew Scripture left Paul believing that he must hunt and destroy any who took Jesus as the Christ.

We could think that after meeting Jesus, Paul might leave Israel's Bible behind. God was, after all, doing something new in the world — something bigger than Israel. But when the scales fell away, Paul found himself in Christ and also found that the sacred writings he loved must be read anew.

Scripture in Romans

Nothing demonstrates this massive shift of perspective more than the letter to Romans. Here Paul's new eyes are on full display, his dependence on the Old Testament evident throughout. Scripture's centrality is explicit in his greeting and closing:

Paul, a bondservant of *Jesus Christ*, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of *God* which He promised before through His prophets in the *Holy Scriptures* . . . (Romans 1:1, 2).

. . . according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and

by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith — to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen (16:25-27, emphasis mine).

These bookend texts focus and summarize all that Paul will unpack between — Romans in a nutshell. Notice the triple emphasis in each: Jesus, God, and Scripture, with the last text mirroring the first: Scripture, God, and Jesus.

Taking these first and last lines as our cues, one point stands out in Romans: The gospel of God revealed in Jesus Christ is not a door

shutting on the Hebrew Scriptures; rather, it is the key to opening them.

The focus on ancient Scripture is maintained throughout this epistle. Paul employs the Hebrew Bible liberally in Romans. Not counting allusions and echoes, he quotes the Old Testament roughly sixty times.¹

What should we make of this impressive use of the old Bible?

Richard Hays writes:

The insistent echoing voice of Scripture in and behind Paul's letter presses home a single theme relentlessly: the gospel is the fulfillment, not the negation, of God's word to Israel.²

Scripture and prophecy: Romans 1:16-18

It is to Holy Scripture as prophetic witness that Paul appeals, directly and indirectly, in his carefully framed argument in Romans. Consider his keynote at the start:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "*The just shall live by faith*" (1:16, 17).

Here Paul employs Scripture as a grand witness to God's greatest work. First, he explicitly presents his gospel as no mere novelty but "as it is written." Quoting Habakkuk 2:4, Paul shows that faith is a central theme in both testaments and that the old anticipates the coming faith of the new.

Often overlooked in the study of Paul is how his vocabulary allusively echoes the language of Hebrew Scripture. Each of his key

words in 1:16 — *gospel, power, salvation, believe, Gentiles (Greek), righteousness, and reveal* — springs from the Old Testament and cannot be rightly understood apart from it.

The Psalms and Prophets abound with texts where Paul's words and concerns cluster together as promises of God's coming work. For example:

My righteousness draws near speedily, *my salvation* is on the way, and *my arm* [power] will bring justice to the *nations* [Gentiles] The Lord will lay *bare* [reveal] his holy *arm* [power] in the sight of all the *nations* [Gentiles], and all the ends of the earth will see the *salvation* of our God (Isaiah 51:5; 52:10, NIV).³

Paul echoes this prophetic language of Israel's Bible as he describes the gospel to the church in Rome. In this we see how the witness of Scripture and the coming of Christ have converged.

Scripture and doctrine: Romans 3:20-23

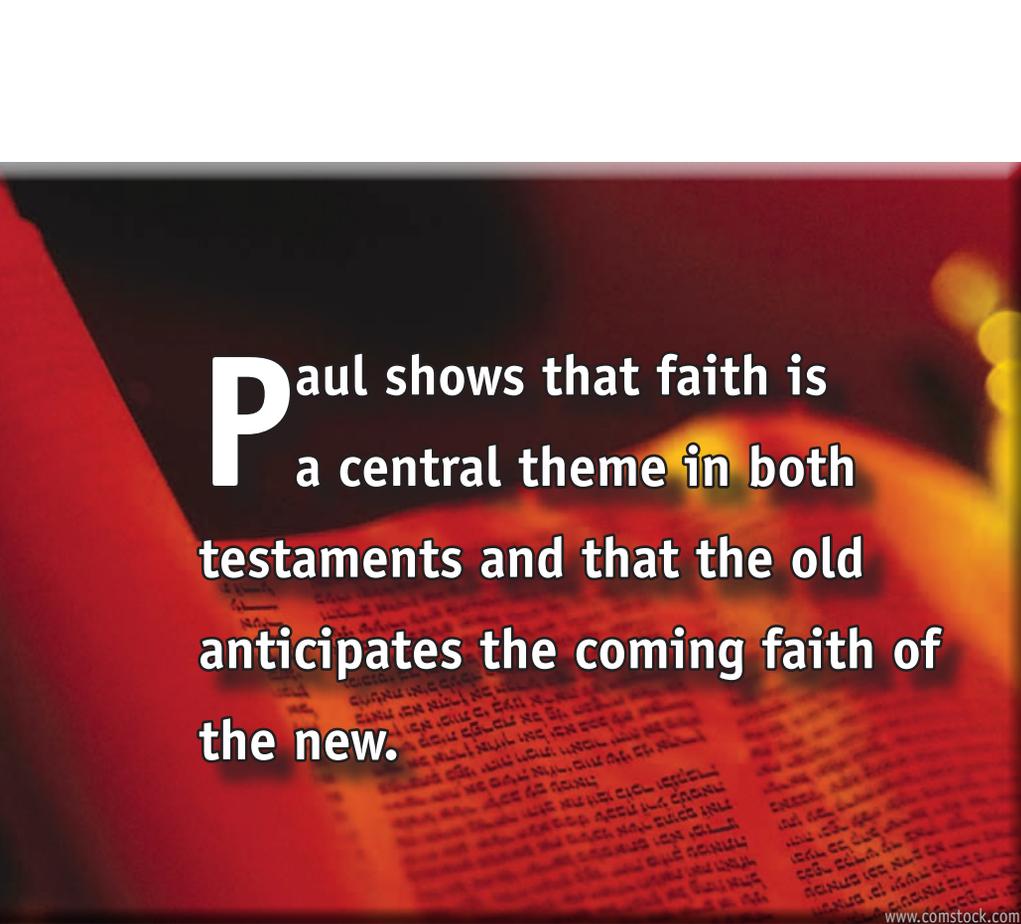
Seeking to establish the fundamental doctrines of Christian faith, Paul repeatedly appeals to Israel's Scriptures as warrant for his message.

Take, for example, the central notion that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23). He arrives at this conclusion only after offering a long litany of texts that drive home the sad truth of the human condition: Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; 36:1; Ecclesiastes 7:20; and Isaiah 59:7, 8 are all quoted in Romans 3:10-18.

The force of this universal indictment allows Paul to draw a more controversial conclusion: If all stand guilty before God, then the law, far from securing our righteousness, only points out our guilt and cannot be the means of our justification before Him. Compare Paul in Romans 3:20 with David's line in Psalm 143:2: "Do not enter

The gospel of God as revealed in Jesus Christ is not a door closing on Israel's Scriptures. Rather, it is the key to opening them.





Paul shows that faith is a central theme in both testaments and that the old anticipates the coming faith of the new.

into judgment with Your servant, for in *Your sight no one living is righteous.*"

A look at the context of these two verses shows that Paul's and David's concerns have more in common than first meets the eye. A verse earlier, David prays, "Hear my prayer, O Lord . . . In Your faithfulness answer me, and in Your righteousness" (v. 1). David appeals not to his own faithfulness and righteousness, but to God's! This is the very same faithfulness and righteousness — God's! — that Paul says is now profoundly declared by the death of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:7, 21-26).

In Romans 3:4 Paul has already quoted Psalm 51:4, David's confession of his sin with Bathsheba, to indicate that God's judgment is just. It is remarkable how Paul's thesis of God's amazing grace toward sinners in Christ (Romans 3:21ff) resonates so deeply with Psalm 51 (vv. 1, 4, 14, etc.). Once

more, Paul's message of the gospel is not at odds with ancient Scripture but is reinforced by it.

Scripture and ethics: Romans 13:8-10

Paul's use of Hebrew Scripture is not limited to its witness to the Messiah, to our fallen human condition, or to God's unmerited mercy toward Jew and Gentile alike. It also extends to ethical and practical guidance for the church.

In Romans, Paul reflects on Old Testament stories like Creation and Fall (chs. 1, 5) and on figures like Abraham (ch. 4) to mine moral principles both general and specific. Poetry and prophecy alike are ripe with ethical implications, i.e., Proverbs 25:21, 22's guidance on treatment of enemies (Romans 12:20) and Isaiah 45:23's word of promise and command (Romans 14:11).

Given the common misconception that Paul has only small use

for the law in Christian ethics, the instances where he quotes Torah for the church's moral guidance are highly important. In Romans 13:8, 9 he draws on the famous command of Leviticus 19:18 to "love your neighbor as yourself" and endorses it as an appropriate summary of the whole law. Twice he states that love fulfills the law (vv. 8, 10).

As if to underscore this, Paul cites several of the Ten Commandments as examples of what love looks like: "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet" (Romans 13:9; Exodus 20:13-17; Deuteronomy 5:7-10).

While Paul can be critical of the law in other contexts, his emphasis on positive use of it here as a witness to God's will for Christian conduct should not be dismissed as an oddity. Though we are not "under law," the commandment remains "holy and just and good" (Romans 6:14; 7:12).

The law's ability to define sin is both its strength and its weakness, a two-edged sword. Our own experience confirms what Paul admits in Romans 7:7-10. In "You shall not covet," two things happen at once. First, God's moral will is declared and we come to know that coveting is sin. Second, we also discover at the same moment that we are covetous people — sinners!

Here the moral and doctrinal voices of Scripture are united in one clear note. We see God's demands for *who we ought to be* and we also discover *who we are* and the good news of what He's done about that. In short we, like Paul, see Jesus.

Oracles of God

We have only begun to explore Paul's advocacy of his Bible — the Hebrew Scriptures — for the life of the church. Reflecting on this legacy, Paul asks, "What advantage then has the Jew . . . ?" (Romans 3:1).

Some might expect Paul to say, "None. No advantage." He doesn't. Rather, he writes, "Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God" (v. 2). Israel's advantage was that she possessed the very words of God. This is our advantage as well.

Nearing the end of Romans, Paul offers a fitting conclusion: "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (15:4).

With this encouragement, let us return to Holy Scripture, including the Old Testament, and learn. Let us recover its prophetic voice and be comforted. Let us remain and rejoice in its blinding light so that we may see anew — and hope. **BA**

Jason Overman serves the CoG7 in Jasper, AR, with his wife, Stephanie, and their children Tabitha and Isaac.



Endnotes

1. *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, editors, p. 607
2. *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, Richard B. Hays, p. 34
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37

Year of the Bible Declaration

Renouncing the biblical illiteracy of our age, the compromise of the call to preach and teach God's Word, and the post-modern spirit whereby Christian churches exchange entertainment for exposition, popular opinion for scriptural authority, and feel-good theology for Bible truth; and

Recognizing that "as the pulpit goes, so goes the church," that history's greatest eras of spiritual awakening and revival are linked to the rediscovery and faithful exposition of God's Word; and

Recalling that defining moment in the mid-1800's, when his conviction concerning the authority and sufficiency of Scripture inspired Church pioneer Gilbert Cranmer to declare, "My Bible and my Bible alone";

The leadership of the Church of God (Seventh Day) hereby reaffirms the commitment of our Michigan pioneers by declaring 2011 "The Year of the Bible" and encouraging Church-wide participation in this emphasis by

1. Daily reading and regularly memorizing God's Word.
2. Promoting Christian education at all Church levels; supporting General Conference efforts to produce Bible-based curriculum for children and youth; and responding to the need for writers, editors, finances, and prayers.
3. Supporting denominational focus on leadership and LifeSpring School of Ministry.

Shape Up!

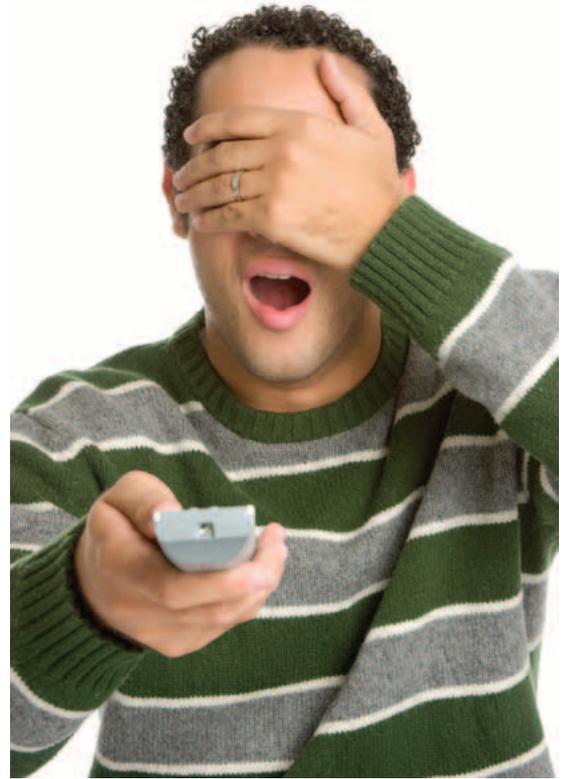
Eight or ten months remaining in 2011 are still plenty to make it God-honoring and Word-searching — a true year of the Bible. This change can be made various ways. Here are suggestions on how you can let Scripture shape you:

- Read the "Last Word" on p. 31 in this issue.
- Read the Year of the Bible Declaration in our January-February issue (p. 19), or read it online at cog7.org. Use the contents of this declaration in shaping your response.
- Follow the Spirit's lead by pledging personal support for this Year of the Bible Declaration and perhaps by sharing your pledge with us at yearofthebible@cog7.org. Thanks to those readers who have taken these steps.
- If your Bible reading lacks structure and discipline, start a reading plan at the same hour daily. If your time is tight, start with just five minutes and a single verse, using those words and quiet moments to grow your faith in Christ.
- Write a short testimony (200-600 words) on "What the Bible Means to Me" and submit it to BA. Those who submit will receive our 60-page booklet *How We Got the Bible*. One published winner will receive a handsome 9-1/2 x 12-inch hardback edition of *The Story of the Bible*, by Larry Stone, with 90 illustrations and 23 pull-out pages from old, treasured Bibles — a fine addition to any home library.
- Consider greater interaction with media sources — like the one in your hands — that honor and teach the words of God. Visit *BA Online* (baonline.org/). Send us your Bible question, or respond to something you read herein for our "Mail Bag" page. What a difference such a year could make in our lives, our homes, our churches!

— BA

How Dirty is Dirty?

Entertainment both reflects and rules culture, but you still have the final say.
by Steven Wilson



@ Jason Stitt—Dreamstime.com

If you fell down and got a smudge of dirt on your arm, what would you do about it? Would you just leave it there, thinking, *Well, it's just a little bit of dirt*, or would you wash it off?

How about when it comes to your entertainment decisions? Most Christians acknowledge that movies and television programs they watch, the music they listen to, and the books they read often have some “dirt” in them. We know that the content of most popular media is not produced by believers and is not honoring to God, yet we still watch, listen to, and read these things — even with abandon.

We make all kinds of excuses for it. “It’s not *that* bad,” we say. Or “It doesn’t affect *me*. I can watch, listen to, and read this stuff all day long and it won’t influence what I believe, say, or do.” Another one is, “It has a good message in the end.” Or “Well, that’s how life really is. We

can’t shelter ourselves from reality, can we?” Or how about “This kind of stuff is all that’s available. I have to watch, listen to, read something.”

Dirty decisions

Some of these are good points. Maybe our media choices aren’t that bad. Maybe they do only have a little bit of dirt in them as opposed to the truckload of dirt that someone else is watching/listening to/reading. But how much dirt does it take to get dirty? The thing is, if you ignore that first smudge on your arm, how long will it be before you get another smudge somewhere else? If you keep ignoring them, you’re going to get dirty quickly! And the same applies to our hearts as to our bodies.

Maybe life does have some dirt in it. People make mistakes and cloud up their lives all the time. But is that something we

need to be constantly exposing ourselves to? We should face the dirt in our lives openly and honestly in a humble spirit of prayer and confession, not offer it for the entertainment of others. And when we see sin, we should be moved by sadness, not by interest in the story surrounding it.

And it may be true that there are not as many clean or Christian media choices. But God never said that we needed to be entertained. We don’t rub dirt all over ourselves for the lack of something better to do. So why would we immerse ourselves in entertainment that does not honor God, simply because it’s available to us?

Walking in the light

The fact is that God’s Word accepts no excuses and makes no exceptions. Dirt in our entertainment, thoughts, and actions should not be tolerated by Chris-

tian men and women. As Psalm 101:3 says, "I will not look with approval on *anything* that is vile. I *hate* what faithless people do; I will have *no part* in it" (emphasis mine).

Those are strong words. There is no room in that statement for even the slightest bit of dirt, because of who God is:

God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin (1 John 1:5-7).

Our God is a holy God. He accepts no dirt into His own life, and He opposes the dirt in His followers' lives. He sent His Son to not only forgive us for that dirt but also purify us from it — to wash and make us clean in Him. For us to deliberately get dirty again by what we watch, listen to, and read would be absurd! Either we are willing to walk in the light with Christ in every aspect of our lives, or we walk in the darkness. We can't have it both ways.

Will you recommit yourself today to walking in the light and letting Christ purify you from all the dirt that surrounds us? **BA**

Steven Wilson writes from Beaver Creek, OH. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



Too Much Tube Time?

April 18-24 is National Turn Off TV Week

Disturbing facts

- Average time children spend watching TV daily: 4 hours
- Children spend more time watching television than in any other activity except sleep (Huston and Wright, University of Kansas, "Television and Socialization of Young Children")
- 54 percent of kids have a TV in their bedroom (Ibid).
- By age 18, US youth will have seen 16,000 simulated murders and 200,000 acts of violence (American Psychiatric Association)

Source: Parents Television Council (www.parentstv.org/ptc/facts/mediafacts.asp)

TV-Free America raises awareness about the harmful effects of excessive TV time and encourages us to replace it with activities that lead to more literate, productive lives and engaged citizenship. Television is generally a passive "non-activity" that often detracts from healthier, more productive activities.

National TV-Turnoff Week asks people to question the role TV plays in their daily lives as entertainer, pacifier, babysitter, time-filler, and background noise. It offers opportunity to rediscover the wide range of alternatives to the sedentary, simplistic, and commercial world of television. Turning off your TV is about having more fun and turning "on" your life.

- Volunteer to teach reading, math, computer skills.
- Learn to play a musical instrument.
- Organize a community clean-up.
- Put together a puzzle.
- Visit the library.
- Listen to the radio.
- Paint a picture, a mural, or a room.
- Volunteer for a community organization or charity.
- Write a card or letter.
- Plant a flower, vegetable or herb garden.
- Read magazines or newspapers.
- Go to a museum.
- Take a nature hike.
- Play table games.
- Research your family history.
- Make crafts to give as gifts.
- Go to a quality movie with your family.

Source: Turn Off TV Network (www.turnoffyourtv.com/turnoffweek/TV.turnoff.week.html)



It's 3:30 in the morning, but my body says it's ten hours earlier. Thinking about events of the previous twenty-four, I'm wide awake.

I hear a mosquito inches away, but I'm separated from it by tightly woven netting hung over my bed to keep us apart — and

prevent malaria. I switch on the light and write, still keenly aware of this creature separated from his life goal by this finely knit mesh. How did something so small become something so big?

I'm thinking of conversations and trivial debates that I've too often heard, even before coming

to this church convention in Nakuru, Kenya. The words echoing in my head consist of questions about the permissibility of preparing food on the Sabbath, and if a woman praying alone and unseen in her car need wear a head covering. Opinions about these and other minutia can erupt for hours, without satisfaction. How did something so small become something so big?

A clearer, stronger message also rings in my heart and head: "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). For me, this single verse written by Jesus' own brother is paramount, not secondary, in our teachings and practice. But for now, the orphans and widows are forgotten among trivial word-speak.

Thousands of children affected by war, AIDS, and sex slavery are living just outside or within the doors of CoG7 members in a dozen or more African countries. Two-thirds of our world experiences poverty daily. Forgotten children, invisible to most, know no other way of life. Yet it seems this gets little mention at church gatherings on any continent. How did something so big become something so small?

The debate of the night before drove me to fresh air and a young pastor named John James. When he was ten, he watched his parents and seven siblings come to their end — by machete — in the 1990s Rwandan genocide. John escaped by taking to the forest, inching a mile or two a day under the secrecy of the fauna. Eventually he found himself in a refugee camp in Malawi,

where the rates of both poverty and AIDS are among Africa's highest.

By God's grace, John did not give up hope. He was sponsored to school to become a teacher. He not only overcame the horrors of war memories from Rwanda but also shares and lives out his faith at every opportunity, unaffected by the death virus in those all around. This articulate and well-dressed man has a bright future.

John has a believing wife who was once trapped in sex trafficking. When a minor in Africa engages in prostitution, she enters this industry, either voluntarily or without her consent. Prostitution is not a profession of choice by those under eighteen. It is sexual abuse — the most common type of slavery in our world today.

Slavery no longer controls John's wife. Now she and John help rescue other underage girls from this lifestyle.

Light pours into my hotel room, and my winged companion now lays flat — a victim of my handclap. Today I will stand before my brethren and speak of Scripture's mandate, trying to persuade them that the Church's future lies in the children underfoot. I want to turn something small into something big. Focus must be shifted to our young ones affected by war, AIDS, and slavery. A pesky little mosquito-type intruder may try to distract us from the urgent to the trivial.

Beyond this Kenyan church gathering just ahead, what will those reading this article worldwide do? Will we take James 1:22's mandate seriously to visit the orphan and widow? Will we adopt, will we sponsor, will we work to free the slaves? Or

will we let it pass through one ear and out the other — another concept crowded out, another theological debate, another word spoken, another lesson forgotten? Who will take it to heart?

These children deserve our attention. These kids and ladies were orphaned and abandoned by men not keeping themselves "unspotted from the world" — men who fought their own neighbors because they were of another tribe, often distinguished only by the width of their noses. Other men brought AIDS home to the family after taking a sex slave while away on "business." This is no small matter. Will we stand against this elephant in the room, or will the mosquito distract us?

The verse in James tells us what pure religion looks like. Our worship of God, our love for Him, is well demonstrated by our actions toward orphans and widows. Beyond mere words, songs, and services, true religious worship looks like "visiting" the fatherless and husbandless. Today's version of James 1:27 goes like this: "The essence of our worship in our heavenly Father's eyes is to take care of those abandoned by their earthly fathers and husbands, and to keep untouched by the mosquito."

Mosquitoes take the life-blood out of us, sometimes bringing death. Enough bites from this pesky distraction will give you malaria, the West Nile virus, or another deadly disease. What is your mosquito, the distraction that sucks out your life and keeps you from reaching the victims of poverty, disease, abandonment, and slavery?

We make excuses for not helping: not enough money or time. Would it be more accurate to admit not enough care on the inside to help?

Caring for the orphan and widow is faith in action and an incredible evangelistic opportunity. For less than a dollar a day, you support an orphan and influence a life — for eternity. **BA**

When not traveling for the Orphans and Widows Ministry of Missions Abroad, **Brian Baker** lives part-time in Loveland, CO, and the other part on the Wyoming-Nebraska border.



Beyond mere words, songs, and services, true religious worship looks like "visiting" the fatherless and husbandless.



God in Spring

It's not so hard to think that God is real
When springtime sashays, slow, into my days.
When cherry blossoms spill, God's near. I feel
His presence in the sun's affirming rays.
In every place I look, the earth turns green
Or pink or yellow. Gone is winter's cold.
Bright new beginnings everywhere are seen
As worlds turn, soft, from gray to shining gold.
With scenes of newness bursting everywhere,
It's easy to see God makes all life grow.
Yet when winter once again spreads frigid air,
It's hard to think He's there 'midst winter snow.
But God makes all. And spring wouldn't sparkle so
Had winter not come first with ice and snow.

Mary Harbin Sciascia

G. C. Ministries Emphases

LifeSpring



Richard Jensen

Publications



*Keith Michalak, Director
See page 29*



Rocky Cardwell, LifeSpring's IT specialist

LifeSpring: Hybrid Launch

Richard Jensen

LifeSpring School of Ministry is launching the pilot of its delivery system, fulfilling the promise of many years to genuinely bring education to the people. Our hybrid system employs proprietary, two-way video conferencing developed by our IT specialist Rocky Cardwell, enabling remote sites to view real-time instruction and even to respond and ask questions of the remote instructor in real time. Coupled with the readings and online components like discussion forums, this “hybrid” combination of real-time, real-life instruction and online materials enables us to provide quality “face-to-face” instruction, bringing the “classroom” to any properly equipped remote location.

LifeSpring is currently piloting the new hybrid delivery system with two classes in Spanish (see calendar below). Deadline to apply for the Certificate of Biblical Studies (CBS), our entry-level program, for the 2011-2012 school year is June 15, 2011.

How can you get involved in these exciting developments? First, if you think of someone who can benefit from biblical education or a young man who should be in pastoral ministry, please encourage such a person to contact us and enroll for classes. Second, if someone in your church is taking LifeSpring classes, consider helping by sponsoring that person.

Third, if every member of the Church would contribute merely \$35 per year to LifeSpring, it would totally revolutionize our capacities! That’s just a few trips to Starbucks. This simple fundraising plan asks



To assist with his ministerial training, Jesse Hicks receives a gift from Rick Kiesz representing the John and Katherine Kiesz Memorial Pastoral Scholarship Fund. Jesse's mother, Val Hicks, looks on. Others are Pastors Brian Larson (left) and Carl Palmer (right), all from the Spokane, WA, church.

Giving Back to God

by Val Hicks

Like many young women, I wanted a child after several years of marriage. Feeling old at 25, I thought time was running out. Why hadn't we gotten pregnant?

I had received Christ when I was 15. Though I wasn't yet a churchgoer, the Lord faithfully drew me to Himself. I read the Word a little, was edified by Keith Green's music, repulsed by worldly movies and music, and sensed the Holy Spirit calling me to greater repentance.

But what got my attention was how my son Jesse came to be. After I cried out to God, telling Him I couldn't even conceive, pregnancy symptoms soon appeared. When the doctor confirmed my hopes, I knew God had answered my prayer.

But during a routine ultrasound, the nurse's silence and uneasy manner suggested that something wasn't right. The doctor informed me that I had a tubal pregnancy: The egg (my Jesse) was not where it was supposed to be. He scheduled me for a procedure that would scrape the egg out of the tube and discard it.

just a small amount from each individual, but the cumulative amount is huge to us!

Finally, and most importantly, please pray for this ministry. Our denomination is facing a leadership crisis, and it is critical that educated young men take up the work from our aging ministers. There is no more important task before us than to properly educate the next generation of leaders! Please help us rise to this challenge.

Lifespring Calendar

April 10 - June 5 - COM 341

Expository Preaching (Spanish) pilot. Registration for credit is closed, but observers may still register for simulcast sessions at www.lifespringschool.org.

June 15 - Deadline for Certificate of Bible Studies application for the next school year.



After graduating from Midwest Bible College in Stanberry, MO, Kenneth and Sandra Lawson served CoG7 in pastoral and administrative capacities for 44 years. Their retirement from full-time ministry will be marked in a Sabbath, April 2, celebration at the Redmond, OR, church, where they have served for the past 15 years.

I was devastated. Family and friends said they would pray. A disc jockey on a Christian radio station told the story several times and asked people to pray for a miracle. I told God that if He would just let me have this baby, I would give it to Him for whatever He wanted.

On the way to the appointment I prayed, trusting for a miracle. During another ultrasound to confirm the position of the egg, the nurse, again quiet, moved the wand around trying to find it. My heart-faith said, *I know you've got to be there.*

Just then the nurse exclaimed, "It's there — right where it's supposed to be!" God had answered my prayer again. Jesse was going to have a life!

Fast forward to Jesse, age 15, at a youth retreat, hearing about the great need for pastors in the Church. He called from camp: "Mom, I know what I'm supposed to be and do. The pastor was talking about how there are not enough ministers in CoG7, and many ready to retire. I felt this conviction all over me. I can't explain it — this determined feeling that that's what I'm willing to do!"

Jesse has had a peace with this decision ever since. He's being groomed by wonderful mentors, with opportunities to serve and speak in church and other outlets, and to pursue formal education through Moody Bible Institute - Spokane. Help from the Kiesz Pastoral Scholarship Fund came at just the right time. Praise God!



South of the Border: Success!

More than 25 persons from three countries participated in the tenth annual Pioneer Missionary Training (PMT) event in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, December 19-29, 2010. Direction and instruction for the team came from Pastor Monico Muffley and Martha Molina-Muffley of Nampa, Idaho, and Dr. Erick de la Garza Velázquez of Guadalajara.

Team members included Adrian Crawford (United Kingdom); Kris Tuller (Colorado); Kelli Brophy (Michigan); Chris Iddemili (Minnesota); Gabriela Nuñez (Oklahoma); Joshua Lemley (Washington); Jessica McQueary and Aletea Paulson (Idaho); Rebecca Lundgren, Anna O'Brien, Jonathan Wallace, and Mary Wallace (Oregon); Dulce Garcia, Leah Rodriguez, Andrea and John Henson (Texas); Jedidiah Escareño Alba (Aguascalientes), Edeny Moreno Castañeda, Becky Ruiz Martinez, and Melany López Garcia (Nuevo León); Israel Abraham Medrano Pérez, Diego Jasher Tavera Moya, Ruben Corona Rodriguez, and Ariel Leví Santiago Ramírez, Aldair Santiago Ramírez, and Harim Benjamin Flores Sánchez (Jalisco).

To access personalized PMT reports from Kelli Brophy and Mary Wallace, go to baonline.org.org

Pioneer Missionary Training is a short-term missions trip usually conducted in Mexico the last two weeks of each year. It is an introduction to cross-cultural missions, with the Church's youth and young adults in mind. No upper-age limits are enforced, however; missions-minded persons of age 70 or more have attended with enthusiasm. Days are divided between classroom instruction and actual missions practice in public settings.

How can you apply for the 2011 PMT team? Plans for the trip in late 2011 are not yet final. E-mail the youth (nfyc@cog7.org) or young adult (sword@cog7.org) offices for more information.



Wanna Get Away?

The General Conference Convention comes to Pheasant Run Resort, St. Charles, Illinois, July 18-23. This biennial church-and-family event features a well-planned program with unique relaxation and recreational opportunities in a semi-rural setting — at a modest cost. To check it out or register early, call 303-452-7973 or visit convention.cog7.org.



Before June 20

Adults: \$50

Youth: \$40

Children: \$20

After June 20

Adults: \$80

Youth: \$65

Children: \$30



Oldest and youngest ordained ministers: Lawrence L. Christenson of Independence, MO, has 100 years to his life credit; Israel Steinmetz of Kansas City has 29. More than half of CoG7 ministers are beyond age 60.

SVA Service Opportunities

Spring Vale Academy, Owosso, Michigan, announces these staff vacancies for the 2011-12 school year: Maintenance Manager, Food Service Manager, Director of Development and Admissions, two Assistant Deans — boys and girls. Contact Mark Caswell, director, at mcaswell@springvale.us or 989-725-2391.

Spring Vale events

Alumni Weekend, March 25-27
Graduation, May 27-29

CoG7 Events

Northwest Super Sabbath

March 5, First Baptist Church,
Jefferson, OR

Southeast Men's Retreat

March 11-13, near Alva, FL
Contact: Ezra Modeste (305-258-0292; zra_m@yahoo.com)

National Youth Week / Hunger Lock-In

April 8-10 or by June 30
Local participation in this Lock-In weekend will support orphans in Myanmar and help build them a new residence. If all groups send \$50 or more, their needs will be covered for the year. Contact Kurt Lang, National Youth director, at nfyc@cog7.org. Info packets at <http://nfyc.cog7.org>.

Southwest Men's Retreat

April 8-10, at Camp Cimarron near Kingfisher, OK
Registration: \$85, includes room, meals, all events; campers bring bedding
Contact: chiphinds@gmail.com or ford_ls@yahoo.com

Lord's Supper - April 17

Northeast Women's Retreat

April 22-24, in Oberlin, OH

Southwest Youth Rally

April 23-24, in Conroe, TX
Contact: Jason and Rose Rodriguez (jandrrodriguez@att.net)

Northwest Spring Youth Rally

May 13-15, in Meridian, ID
Contact: Laura Perez (llperez40@hotmail.com)

Publications

Keith Michalak, Director

Recently, Bible Advocate Press has seen many improvements in the daily process of preparing Church publications for print. The new plate-making system has streamlined our pre-press operations, cutting 75 percent in labor and material previously needed. It's eco-friendly, too, by eliminating camera and plate-developing chemicals.

A new high-end color copier produces full-color business envelopes, reducing the need to outsource some of our printing. Look for one of those envelopes to deliver our annual funding letter to your mailbox in May.

These mass mailings have always been done manually, with staff or volunteers stuffing letters and cards — an archaic and time-consuming effort. Now our new envelope stuffer will reduce days of labor to mere hours.

We thank God for providing these tools to help us honor Him in our work, saving precious time and money. Your gifts to Publications this month will help keep all our machines running, spreading good news to the world.



Editor's Circle

If the *Bible Advocate* has blessed you and if you could give \$60 or more per year (\$5 per month) so the BA can bless others, then we invite you to join Editor's Circle for 2011. Your support will help us reach new BA readers with the grace and truth of Christ.

To join Editor's Circle, please return this coupon or call 303-452-7973.



I want to be an Editor's Circle donor in 2011, as God enables. This is not a legal debt, and I understand I will never be asked for payment.

Please choose one of these options:

- I'll mail bimonthly donations, using reminder coupons provided by the Circle.
- I'll give by electronic fund transfer, with automatic donations at mid-month. Please send an application form.
- I'll give by credit card (call 303-452-7973).
- I enclose my annual donation.
- \$5 \$15 \$30 \$50 per month Annual: \$_____

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Send to: Editor's Circle
P. O. Box 33677
Denver, CO 80233



Africa

Using the theme “Celebrating our Diversity in Christ,” the Church’s first African Regional Conference met in Nakuru, Kenya, December 1-5, 2010.

Delegates from twelve African nations – Benin (two), Burundi (10), DR Congo (three), Ghana (one), Kenya (200+), Malawi (one), Nigeria (24), Rwanda (five), Sudan (one), Tanzania (five), Uganda (two), and Zambia (one) – were joined by visitors from Denmark (one), Germany (two), Jamaica (four), United Kingdom (46), and United States (eight) for the daily preaching, teaching, and dynamic worship music.

A highlight of the week was the attendance of Pastor Emmanuel Kayatare, previously imprisoned in Rwanda for his faith, and his wife. Total attendance ranged from 300 daily to 650 on Sabbath.

Gratitude is in order to the Kenyan pastors – John Njogu, Simon Kamau, Abrahams Odongo, and others – who planned and provided leadership for the conference; to the UK brethren from Deptford and Gloucester churches who prepared food; and to all who helped underwrite this event by their offerings to Missions Abroad.

Pastor Robert Crawford, who serves devotedly as IMC Zone 5 (Africa) representative, reports that several delegates from the UK, the US, Germany, and Jamaica remained in Kenya several days to refurbish, paint, and establish a library at the Chesoen School. Pastors Derrick Coward and Karell Wilson of the Jamaican Conference then accompanied Pastor Crawford on a ten-day mission trip through Kenya.

Thanks to God for all these brethren, for the Church growth He permits us to experience in Africa, and for this historic conference that will be long remembered. The Church in Nigeria plans to host the next African Regional Conference in 2013.

– Calvin Burrell



Rediscovering the Bible

Previously I pointed out that Lincoln's famous line at Gettysburg was adapted from John Wycliffe's handwritten note in the flyleaf of the first English Bible: "This Bible is translated, and shall make possible a Government of the people, by the people, and for the people."

Wycliffe could not have fully envisioned the outcome of his prophecy. Driven by loyalty to the Word, some of his fellow citizens would later leave England for America's shores to make such government possible. Writings and paintings in our nation's capital and language in the founding documents of Ivy League schools are proofs of this. Etched above the gates of Harvard, America's first college, are these words:

After God had carried us safe to New England, and we had built our houses, provided necessities for our livelihood, reared convenient places for God's worship, and led the civil government, one of the next things we longed for and looked after was to advance learning and perpetuate it to posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate ministry to the churches, when our present ministers shall lie in the dust (*Constitution Society, constitution.org*).

Makes sense, then, that 52 percent of Harvard's early graduates became ministers. In addition to academic training, Ivy League schools were established to propagate the gospel and biblical learning.

The climate in today's typical university — a blend of relativism, moral laxity, and anti-biblical bias — would render such language "educational suicide." Looking over a blood-drenched battlefield at Gettysburg, Lincoln could not have imagined how far this nation would drift from its commitment to biblical values.

Even so, my enthusiasm for returning the Bible to the public school classroom is decreasing, while my passion to see it return to homes, personal lives, and church pulpits — where it truly belongs (see Deuteronomy 6:6-9) — increases.

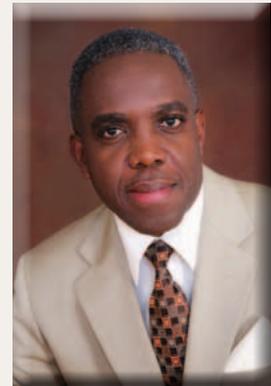
As salt and light, we must not ignore the biblical illiteracy and anti-church sentiment all around. But legislating a Bible onto every teacher's desk could conjure up false notions about the true moral state of our nation.

Greater than my concern for our national moral state is my burden for the spiritual condition of the church. The call to preach and teach God's Word is being compromised. Through the growing influence of post-modernism, entertainment is substituted for exposition, popular opinion for scriptural authority, and feel-good theology for Bible truth.

Accordingly, 2011 has been declared the Year of the Bible — a passionate call to rediscover the Word of God, making it central in our personal lives and in the corporate life of the Church, reading and memorizing it, promoting Christian education, supporting denominational entities dedicated to teaching the Bible (including Spring Vale Academy and LifeSpring School of Ministry), recognizing the gift of teaching, urging greater participation in local Sabbath school programs, making Bible reading central to public worship, and recovering the preacher's call to faithful exposition.

I'm grateful that CoG7 pioneer Gilbert Cranmer's conviction of "My Bible and my Bible alone" is still gladly affirmed among us. But the state of the Church and our culture calls for more than verbal ascent. It requires rediscovering the Bible, as in 2 Kings 22, when during Josiah's reign, the Book of the Law was found while repairing the temple. Its reading and application sparked Israel's greatest revival. May we get into the Bible until the Bible gets into us, sparking renewal in CoG7 in 2011.

— Whaid Guscott Rose
General Conference
President





Amazing Love!

Church officers, ministries directors, superintendents, and district personnel met recently at Pheasant Run Resort near Chicago for annual reports and planning.

They welcome you to CoG7's summer convention at the same location (see p. 28).

Front row (L to R): Richard Jensen, Jeff Endecott, Whaid Rose, Abe Endecott, Israel Steinmetz, Ernesto Frausto

Second row: Christy Lang, Grace Sanchez, Bruce Noble, Mary and Chip Hinds, Larry Zaragoza, Orville Rose, Mark Caswell

Third row: Art and Marie Roche, Cecil Betances, Bruce Chesney, Samuel Holland, Kurt Lang, Tim Endecott, Keith Michalak, Calvin Burrell, Bill Hicks



General Conference
Church of God (Seventh Day)