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BIBLE ADVOCATE®

Royal Law



## 2018: This We Believe

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## The Royal Law

You aren't aware of it, but the "First Word" for each issue is actually the last words written. Over the course of building the *Bible Advocate*, I review each submission, edit each selection, and ponder the layout of each article. With each part in mind, I write the "First Word," hoping it captures the heart of the whole. Then it's on to Sherri Langton, Keith Michalak, Hope Dais, and Sylvia Corral. They make it good!

This issue covers our seventh and eighth Statements of Faith on the law and the Sabbath. As I write, the question on my mind for this column is this: If you had to sum up the law of God in one word, what would it be?

On our annual trip through the Bible, my family just finished Leviticus. *Holy* is a keyword in that book of the law. So is *offering*. Deuteronomy is coming up. *Command* and *obey* are key there – *blessing* and *cursing*, too. Left to mere opinion, we'd likely debate the point. But we don't have to. Happily, the New Testament is unanimous. The word that sums it all up is *love*.

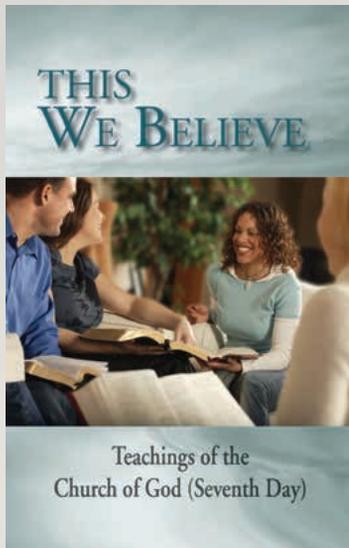
Jesus tells us first. Asked which is the greatest commandment, He quickly quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. On these two love commands – *loving God with our whole self and loving our neighbor as our self* – hang all the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:36-40). Paul agrees. Twice he says that all the law is fulfilled in one word: *love* (Romans 13:8; Galatians 5:14). James says love is the "royal law" and that if we fail to fulfill it, we're guilty of all of it (2:8-10). You can see our big problem: Failure to love alienates us from God and leaves a curse where a blessing should be. And we all fail, don't we?

That's why we begin with Jesus. He is the holy offering of God's love, just as Leviticus prefigured. John summarizes this love-law thus: "God is love. . . . We love Him because He first loved us. . . . if He loved us we ought to love one another" (1 John 4:8, 19, 11). So simple. Jesus' sacrificial love frees us to love and teaches us to love. And being found in God's love, we are blessed and obey His commands, just as Deuteronomy wanted.

There are many parts, but love captures the whole. Read and enjoy. And don't forget: Love one another!

— Jason Overman





# This We Believe

In our third issue this year, we offer excerpts on our teachings regarding the Ten Commandments and the Sabbath, taken from *This We Believe: Teachings of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*.

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## Statement of Faith 7

# The Ten Commandments

This we believe:

The Ten Commandments were known and obeyed by faithful people before the law was given at Sinai. Later incorporated into the new covenant by the example and teaching of Christ, they constitute the basic moral code for humanity and are obeyed to demonstrate the believer's love for God and his fellowman.

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## What's "special" about the Ten?

Before God presented Israel with His codified law at Mount Sinai, He first made an agreement with them (Exodus 19:5-8). This agreement, or covenant, stated that He would be their God and they would be His treasured people and obey His commandments — a holy nation indeed. The first set of laws given in this context were the Ten Commandments (i.e., the Decalogue), which God spoke to the entire congregation of Israel and to the mixed multitude gathered at Sinai (Exodus 19, 20).

Then God called Moses up into the mountain and presented him two tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments had been written with God's own finger (31:18). The Ten are later called "the covenant" (34:28; Deuteronomy 4:13; 9:9, 11, 15), perhaps because they were the first laws God gave Israelites after their mutual agreement and/or because the Ten were the main items God had in mind for the conduct of His chosen people and that of all others. When God finished speaking the Ten Commandments in the people's hearing, "He added no more" (Deuteronomy 5:22), indicating the completeness of the Decalogue as a unique code of moral law.

The two tablets of stone inscribed with the Ten were then placed inside the ark of the covenant in the Hebrew tabernacle (Exodus 25:16; 32:15; Hebrews 9:4), unlike the other laws of the Sinaitic covenant that were placed beside the ark (Deuter-

onomy 31:26). This location of the Ten inside the ark had special significance in that the “mercy seat” was placed atop the ark. It was from there that God met with and spoke to Moses, face to face (Exodus 33:11a).

When God ruled Israel as king (1 Samuel 8:7), the mercy seat was His throne (Exodus 25:22). Israel’s earthly temple, including the ark of the covenant and its contents, was patterned after eternal realities, heavenly things (Hebrews 8:5; Revelation 11:19). God’s will in heaven is also His will for people on earth (Matthew 6:10).

These evidences point to the unique role of the Ten Commandments:

- They were spoken by the Lord as a complete body of law.
- They were written by the finger of God on stone tablets — twice.
- They were the basic constitution by which the Lord ruled Israel.
- They occupied a special place within the ark of the covenant beneath the mercy seat — God’s earthly throne.

The essence of God’s will for human conduct is revealed in the Ten Commandments, in contrast with the other laws given at Mount Sinai that evidently occupied positions of lesser importance in the divine plan. The Ten are simple guides to living and loving (Romans 13:8-10), whereas the book of the law gave warnings and remedies for specific failures to show such love. . . .

## Summary

We began with these premises: “The Ten Commandments were known and obeyed by faithful people before the law was given at Sinai,” that “they later were incorporated into the new covenant by the example and teaching of Christ,” that “they constitute the basic moral code for humanity” and “are obeyed to demonstrate the believer’s love for God and his fellowman.” We have shown the soundness of those beliefs with ample scriptural verification.

That the Ten “constitute the basic moral code for humanity” is further verified by the statements of our Lord, His apostles and prophets, their condemnation of the very conduct that is causing the rapid moral decay evident in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The very calamities that God



predicted would come on His people for violating His commandments have descended upon our post-modern world.

At the same time, those who obey God’s commands — empowered by His Spirit and strengthened by His grace — enjoy the wonderful benefits of a life lived in holy devotion to God. God’s commandments are not burdensome. Rather, they outline ways in which we demonstrate our love for God and our fellowman. Those who choose this way of love will enjoy all the benefits this earthly life can afford as they experience true fellowship with God and His covenant people. Thus we affirm the perpetuity of the Ten Commandments, not as a rigid moral code but as a way of life that embraces Jesus’ high calling to love God and one another!

Giving us His commandments verifies God’s love for us, even more than our imperfect obedience verifies our love for Him and His Son, Jesus Christ!

*From pages 89-91, 99-100*

**The paperback edition of *This We Believe* may be purchased in English or Spanish for \$10. Order through the online store at [publications.cog7.org](http://publications.cog7.org). Call 303-452-7973 for special pricing on bulk orders.**



# The Sabbath

This we believe:

The seventh-day Sabbath is God's gift to humanity from Creation, was written into the Ten Commandments by God's finger, was kept and taught by Jesus, and was observed by the apostolic church. A memorial of both Creation and redemption, the Sabbath should be celebrated faithfully by believers now as a day of rest, worship, and well doing. . . .

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## Observance not just for Jews

The Sabbath was not first anchored in the law. It began as one of the Lord's creative acts at the end of Creation week. It began with man's benefit in mind and continues for that purpose. However, the Sabbath was incorporated in His law and given as a command to a mixed multitude of Gentiles and Israelites. Keeping it is well illustrated in the teachings and practice of Jesus Christ and in the gospel of grace preached by the apostles in His name.

When Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27), "for man" included all humanity on earth. At the time the Sabbath was made and hallowed, no nation of Israel yet existed. Nor would the people later called Jews even be known for at least two thousand years after the Sabbath became God's designated rest day "for man." . . .

## Shorthand summary of the issue

First, the Sabbath was blessed as a memorial to God's handiwork at the end of Creation week (Genesis 2:2, 3; Exodus 20:11). As long as heaven and earth remain, the seventh day will retain this magnificent meaning, and some men, at least, will remember their Creator on it.

Second, the Sabbath was set aside (sanctified) as a day of rest from the labor of the first six days,



by God's own example (Genesis 2:2, 3). As long as men imitate their Maker by engaging in fruitful labor, the need for a weekly rest day will remain.

Third, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" was spoken by God and was written by Him on tables of stone — the heart of the old covenant (Exodus 20:8-11). As long as the moral essence of God's law stands, the seventh day will be sacred time.

Fourth, Sabbath was prescribed as a day for holy assembly for the nation of Israel (Leviticus 23:3). Christ our Master followed this practice, and it can carry the same significance for Christians.

Fifth, Sabbath was observed as a sacred custom by Jesus and His apostles (Luke 4:16; Acts 13:14, 42-44; 17:2). As the last great Day of the Lord nears, the need remains for Christ-followers to assemble for worship and mutual encouragement — as He did (Hebrews 10:25).

Sixth, the Sabbath became a picture of the New Testament gospel in Christ. Just as we lay aside our efforts at self-justification when we trust Jesus the Savior (Ephesians 2:8, 9; Titus 3:5), so does every seventh day call us to cease our labors and enter His divine provision for time and eternity. As long as salvation by grace through faith apart from human work remains true, the Sabbath day will be a true teacher of the gospel.

Seventh, the Sabbath provides a preview of eternal rest in God's coming kingdom (Hebrews 4:1-11). Understanding God's plan for a future filled with righteousness, we affirm the corresponding truth that there remains a *sabbatismos* (Sabbath rest) for the people of God (v. 9).

In these summary points above, note the roles and meanings attached to the biblical seventh day: a memorial, a day of rest and assembly, a command and a custom, a picture, and a preview.

Would it not be wise, then, to embrace and celebrate a gift so replete with divine reflection and benefit as Sabbath is?

From pages 103, 110-113 **BA**

Reprinted from Advocate Files

# A Call to Holiness



by John Kiesz

There should be seen a vast difference between sinners and saints. According to the Scriptures a sinner is one who transgresses the law (1 John 3:4), while a saint is one who keeps the law (Rev. 14:12). Eventually sinners will be punished and consumed out of the earth (Psa. 104:35), but the righteous will be preserved forever (Psa. 97:10).

By nature, we are all sinners (Rom. 3:23), for we have been born that way (Psa. 51:5; John 3:6); therefore a second birth (John 3:3-5), or a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), is necessary in order to free us from condemnation (Rom. 8:1).

This change from a sinful to a saintly life is brought about when one becomes humble and yields, through the Word and the power of the Holy Spirit in such operations as: Conviction—John 16:7, 8; repentance—Matt. 3:1, 2; confession—1 John

1:5-10; conversion—Acts 3:19; faith—Heb. 11:1, 6; baptism—Mark 16:15, 16; and sanctification—1 Thess. 4:3.

The original meaning of the word sanctification is "a state of being set apart for a holy use" (see Genesis 2:3; Exodus 13:2; Exodus 19:10-14). When we surrender our lives to our Creator, we then are set apart for Him. We are no more our own, for we have been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:19, 20).

It is the Father who sanctifies us (Jude 1). He made His Son "...unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30).

According to the Scriptures, there are three phases of sanctification: through the Blood, through the Word, and through the Spirit.

Sanctification through the Blood is an accomplished work of Calvary. "...We are sanctified through the offering of the body

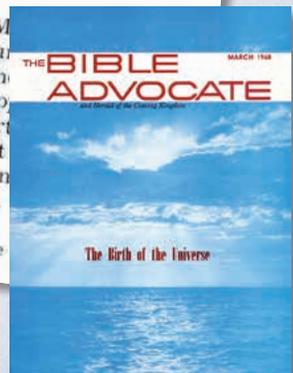
of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). When we accept the shed blood of our Saviour for atonement and obey henceforth, then we are set apart from the world—then we are sanctified for a holy purpose. In ancient times the people were sanctified "to the purifying of the flesh" by the blood of animals, but now sanctification is by the blood of the Messiah (Heb. 9:11-15).

"Whereas Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:12, 13).

"He that despised Me died without mercy unto three witnesses: of his sorer punishment, shall he be thought worthy to be trodden under foot of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant,

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Read this article in its entirety, along with the March 1968 issue, at [baonline.org](http://baonline.org).

What does the CoG7 believe and teach about the Sabbath? Our church historian explains.

by Robert Coulter

In 1664, Stephen Munford introduced the Seventh Day Baptist Church and its observance of the seventh-day Sabbath to North America. Nearly two centuries later, the Sabbath was introduced to, and accepted by, a portion of William Miller's failed Adventist movement.

A member of the Seventh Day Baptist Church named Rachel Oakes convinced Frederick Wheeler, a Millerite Adventist pastor, and his congregation at Washington, New Hampshire, to begin observing the Sabbath in March 1844. T. M. Preble submitted an article supporting Sabbath observance to Joseph Turner's Adventist publication, *The Hope of Israel*, which appeared February 28, 1845. Preble's article caught the attention of Joseph Bates, an activist in William Miller's Adventist movement. After an all-night Bible study with Wheeler, Bates began observing the Sabbath. In 1846, he introduced Sabbath observance to a portion of the Millerite Adventists' defunct movement through James and Ellen White, founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Bates also convinced Gilbert Cranmer and Merritt E. Cornell, both Millerite Adventists, to become Sabbathkeepers in 1852. In March 1858, Cranmer established the Church of Christ, in southwestern Michigan. Cornell,



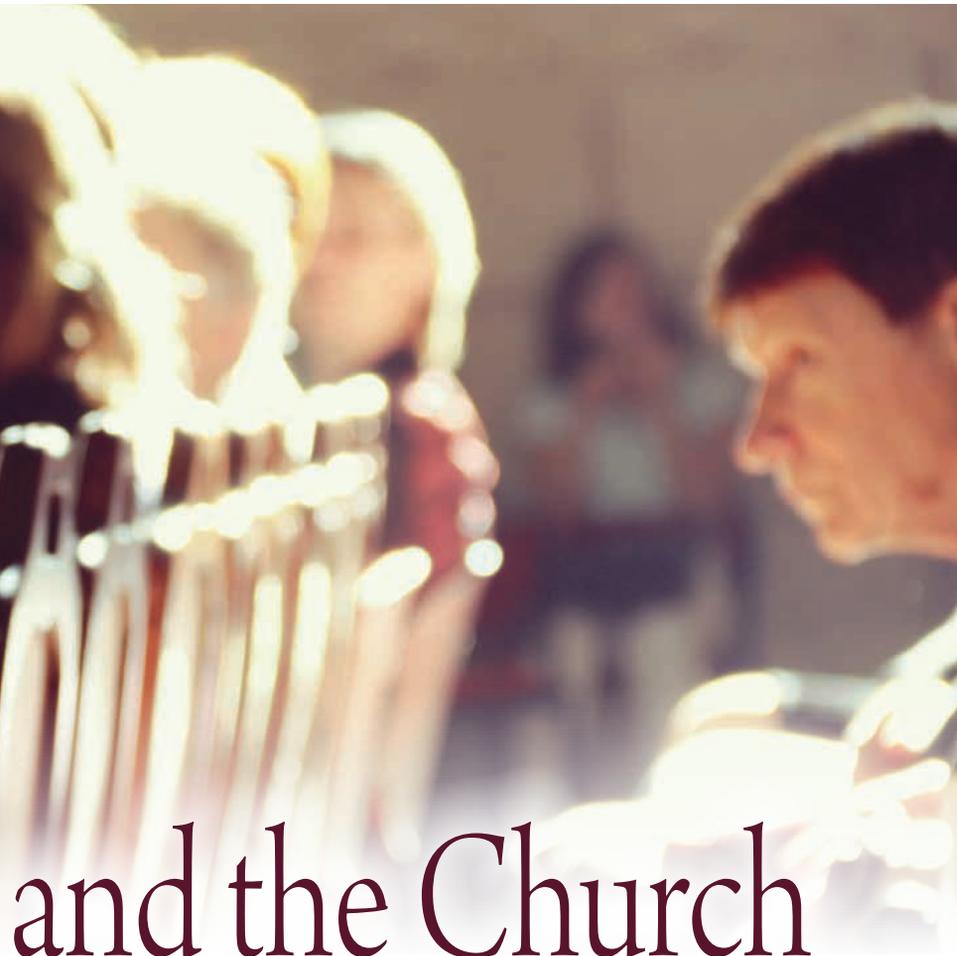
employed by James White as an evangelist, founded the Church of Jesus Christ, Marion, Iowa, in June 1860. These churches were the earliest predecessors to the Church of God (Seventh Day).

Since the observance of the Sabbath is stated in the fourth of the Ten Commandments, Sabbathkeeping became synonymous with the phrase "the observance of the whole law" in the 1850s. Those who worshipped on Sunday were said to be keeping nine-tenths of the law, and their salvation was suspect by many Sabbathkeepers.

The Church of God's position on the law of God in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was addressed by Alexander C. Long. His tract titled *The Two Laws* was published in January

1898 and became a permanent part of the Church's Bible Tract Series. It supported the Church's decades-old position on the nature of God's laws by stating that God gave Israel two laws: one, the Ten Commandments — a universal, eternal, moral, and unchanging law; and the second, the law containing instructions on Judaism's annual Sabbaths, ceremonies, and sacrifices, written by Moses in a book.

Based on Long's concept of the law, the Church of the 1860s through the early 1900s did not teach her members to tithe their increases for the support of her gospel endeavors, nor to abstain from the use of meats that the Bible declared unclean. The Church considered those laws to be a part of Moses' law and,



# and the Church

therefore, no longer in force.

In 1915, Andrew N. Dugger, treasurer of the General Conference, resurrected a resolution that the General Conference had adopted in 1891. It recognized the “tithing system,” not the “law of tithing,” to be its main source of funding. Throughout the 1920s, his implementation of the tithing system resulted in a great increase in the Conference’s tithe receipts and unprecedented growth in the Church’s membership.

However, by the 1930s the tithing system and the distinction between clean and unclean meats were being taught as an obligation of law in some quarters of the Church. The Church’s revision of her doctrinal state-

ment, *What the Church of God Believes, And Why* in 1949, made them an obligation of the law.

But by the 1970s, the Church of God’s theology was undergoing a dramatic change from her legalisms. It became Christ centered and grace based and abandoned the concept of the two laws. Further, the Church concluded that the new covenant established in Christ’s blood retained only the moral precepts, including the Sabbath, of the Ten Commandments. This change of emphasis was reflected in the revision of her doctrinal statements in 1994.

The Church’s present position on the Sabbath, tithing, and diet are non-legalistic, as stated in her *Statement of Faith*, 2010:

Article 8, The Sabbath:  
The seventh-day Sabbath is God’s gift to humanity from creation, was written into the Ten Commandments . . . kept and taught by Jesus, and observed by the apostolic church. A memorial of both creation and redemption, the Sabbath should be faithfully celebrated by believers now as a day of rest, worship, and well-doing.

Article 10, Christian Living:  
Christians are called to holiness in thought, word, and deed and to express faith in Christ through devotion to God and godly interaction with others. As a result — not a cause — of redemption, believers should . . . observe these Bible principles: give tithe and freewill offerings for the support of the church and its gospel ministry; eat for food only those meats the Bible describes as “clean.” . . .

The Church of God continues to celebrate Sabbath rest as a gift to humanity by the God of creation, among the other moral precepts of the Commandments. She does not observe because they were given as law, as previously taught by the Church, but as a new creation in Christ, devoted to pleasing our God and Savior in love! **BA**

**Robert Coulter** lives with his wife, Ida, in Northglenn, CO. They attend the Denver church.



Read Alexander Long’s extensive list of the two laws in contrast at [baonline.org](http://baonline.org).



# Living from Psalm 1

by **Ralph Filicchia**

When I was a little kid, my mother said at times, “I don’t want you playing with those kids. They’re fresh and you’ll only get into trouble hanging around with them.”

Kids from half-decent families usually hear that warning every once in a while, and it’s probably the first and best advice they will ever hear. When you know who and what to avoid, you have half of life already figured out.

The psalmist knew this and expressed it nicely in Psalm 1: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly. . . .” In other words, don’t listen to those who want to drag you off into a lifestyle that can only bring you trouble. Don’t take their advice. Pay no attention to their ideas. Don’t let them tell you what to do.

As I looked around the world when I got older, I saw that most misery was caused by a minority who unfortunately gained more influence than they were worth. In many instances, this was because well meaning but “Psalm 1 illiterate” people allowed themselves to be swayed by the ideas and opinions of the ungodly. The common complaint we hear so often, “My Johnny is a good boy — he just got mixed up with the wrong crowd,” isn’t always just a poor excuse. It might be true more often than not.

The same verse (v. 1) tells me not to stand in the path of sinners or hang around with those who are always ridiculing what is right and decent. This is also great advice. Be careful about associating with those who do not hold your values — especially if their values run counter to the lifestyle commanded by the Bible, your church, or even your family up-

bringing. This way of living can save you a lot of headaches.

This is just common sense, but it seems that God has made it an imperative. Psalm 1:1 is no longer something that is just a better idea; it has been made a fundamental necessity for sensible, godly living. Yes, you can live and get by without doing this, but you won’t be living and getting by the right way. You’ll be finding your satisfaction in the wrong places, whereas verse 2 says you should be finding it “in the law of the LORD,” or in always doing the right thing. In case there is any doubt on this issue, *there is tremendous inner satisfaction in doing what you know is right.*

Verse 2 goes on to say that God wants me to think about these things constantly. Pick up tomorrow’s paper, and it becomes obvious that not many people are doing this. Most people just don’t seem to care. But if you want to make out good in life, you will! From God’s law (the Scriptures) you can guide your lifestyle and set your everyday standards and values. Most important, you will constantly refine them as you keep them in the forefront of your thoughts. You will gain strength and satisfaction from doing this.

This psalm then tells me (v. 3) that if I faithfully follow this advice, I will prosper. I will be like a fruitful and healthy tree planted by the river. I will be living the kind of life God wants to bless. Even in adversity I will find blessing because my life pleases God. How can you beat that? **BA**

**Ralph Filicchia** writes from Watertown, MA.



# Questions & Answers



**What's** new about the new covenant?

**Among** God's formal agreements with men, the old and new covenants take up the most space in Scripture. Let's compare and contrast them here.

The old covenant was given by God to the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These Israelites were led out of Egypt, through the Red Sea and to Mount Sinai, by Moses, where he (and angels) mediated this covenant to the new nation camped at the foot of the mountain. The old covenant, also called the Mosaic or Sinaitic covenant, was introduced and sealed in Exodus 19-24. Its Levitical tabernacle, laws, and customs are further described from Exodus 25 to Numbers 10.

The new covenant was foretold by the prophet Jeremiah (31:31-34), revealed by God through Jesus Christ in the four Gospels, sealed by His atoning death at Mount Calvary, and confirmed by His resurrection from the dead (Matthew 26-28; Mark 14-16; Luke 22-24; John 18-21). It is further clarified, explained, and illustrated in the ministry of the apostles (Acts) and the New Testament epistles (Romans through Jude, especially Hebrews 8:8-13; 10:15-17).

A careful reading of relevant Bible texts reveals many ways in which the new covenant is truly new and better than the old (Hebrews 7:22).

1. Range: New covenant is offered to all nations (Matthew 28:19), not just one (as in Exodus 19:3-6).
2. Impact: New covenant leads all God's people — not just some — to know Him truly (Jeremiah 31:34).

3. Focus: New covenant's central theme is God's grace, rather than His law (Romans 3:19-28).
4. Priesthood: New covenant is of Melchizedek's priesthood (i.e., Christ), not of the Levites, who served tabernacle and temple (Hebrews 7).
5. Light: New covenant reveals Messiah as personal God-man with us, no longer concealed in misunderstood prophecies (1 Peter 1:10-13).
6. Remedy: Under the new covenant, sins are forgiven by the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the cross, not the oft-shed blood of animals (Hebrews 9:25, 26).
7. Repository: Under the new covenant, God's laws of love and liberty are written on human hearts, not on tablets of stone (Hebrews 8:10; 10:16).
8. Holiness: Under the new covenant, the Holy Spirit is Christ's personal presence in us to make us like Him, a dynamic previously unavailable (John 14:16ff).
9. Assurance: New covenant accents God's intent to save His people to the uttermost through Jesus — not like Israel under Moses, most of whom fell short of the Promised Land (Hebrews 7:25a).
10. Heavenly Mediator: New covenant proclaims Christ, no mere mortal over a temple made by hands, but our present and eternal intercessor and mediator at the right hand of Majesty in heaven (Hebrews 7:25b; 8:1-6).

Further Bible evidence of the new covenant's superiority over the old (or how the two are similar), sent by readers, will be considered for a future BA "Mail Bag."

— Elder Calvin Burrell

# Day of Grace

Most people of faith learn that the Bible's Sabbath day is rooted in its first chapter. We could tell the world, if we would, that God made everything in six days, then ceased His creation work and blessed the seventh as part of His plan from the start (Genesis 2:1-3). The weekly Sabbath was a rest day for the God who never gets tired.

Why did He rest, if not as an example for those created in His image? God invites us still to imitate Him in that rest. Many have, but they are few compared to those who see no need for God's rest — neither His eternal rest nor its weekly token.

## Day of law

First, the Bible Sabbath was a day of rest. Next, the example of Genesis 2 becomes the command of Exodus 20, and Sabbath becomes a day of law: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (v. 8).

This fourth commandment uses many words, but its essence shortens to three: *keep it holy*. They mean, set the seventh apart from other days. Whatever our work and business routines Sunday through Friday, Sabbath is the day to step up, to reset our affections above, to choose the more excellent things that glorify God, and to bless others in ways we couldn't or didn't earlier in the week.

Is Sabbath, then, mostly just a piece of the law, written on stones at Mount Sinai? Consider how God's rest day is honored, not downgraded, by its place on stone tablets. There it joins nine other words of immense value to people at all times and places: Put God first. Don't blaspheme His name. Honor your parents. Respect others' spouses, properties, lives, and reputations (vv. 2-17).

Its location in the moral law, therefore, is no discredit to the seventh day, but a feather in its weekly cap instead. To refuse Sabbath because it's in the Decalogue is to ignore God's purpose for His holy commandments in both old and new covenants (Deuteronomy 6:24, 25; Romans 7:7-12; Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:15-17).

## Pinnacle and climax

Moving past Sabbath as primarily a day of rest and secondarily a day of law, we come to the pinnacle point and our climactic conviction about the seventh day: *Sabbath is, ultimately, a day of grace!*

This bold claim seems counterintuitive at first. After all, doesn't the new covenant insist that people are saved by God's grace through faith in Christ, not by law or the days they keep? Yes, that's true (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16; 4:10, 11; Ephesians 2:8, 9). How, then, can we label Sabbath as a day of grace?

In claiming Sabbath as a day of grace, we're *not* claiming Sabbath as the source of salvation; God's grace is its source. We're *not* claiming Sabbath as the basis of salvation; Christ's death is its basis. We're certainly not claiming that salvation is received only when we start keeping Sabbath; the sinner's faith validates their salvation. And we're not claiming Sabbath as salvation's sign, God's identifying mark on His people; that's baptism and the Spirit's fruit of love. Rather, we're simply recognizing that Sabbath is linked with Christ's grace and new covenant salvation in at least three ways:

1. Christ, who observed the Sabbath, was full of grace. Jesus regularly assembled on the seventh day for prayers (at the throne of grace),

## Divine links between salvation and Sabbath. by Calvin Burrell

for learning and teaching (to grow in grace and knowledge), and for helping and healing (grace for life and wholeness). He taught that Sabbath was God's gift (His grace) for all people, not just for Jews. He rescued Sabbath from the legalistic clutches of Jewish leaders, restoring it to good purposes. Our Savior's teaching and practice, therefore, link Sabbath with the grace and truth that filled Him (John 1:14-17; Luke 4:16; Mark 2:23-3:4; Matthew 11:28-12:13).

2. Sabbath is rightly observed in much the same way salvation is received. To be saved, we cease all efforts to save ourselves. Instead of working for redemption, we trust and rest in Him who died and rose again to redeem us. Likewise, to observe Sabbath, we cease our labor of six days and trust the One who continues His perfect work for us and in us even on the seventh. Thus Sabbath and salvation are linked – both gifts of God's grace, neither gotten by work at the start nor kept by works along the way (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8, 9; Hebrews 4:1-11).
3. Sabbath reminds us of, and invites us to, eternal rest ahead. In its nature and purpose, every seventh day is a foretaste of the full and final joy to be celebrated by saints when Christ returns at the end of the age. The final link between salvation and Sabbath for the saved is that this weekly Sabbath shadow will someday become the reality of an eternal Sabbath kingdom whose Lamb fills the City of God with His Son-light of grace, truth, rest, and peace (Hebrews 4:1-11; Revelation 21:1-7, 23).

### Amazing grace

We have explored the Bible's truth that Sabbath is much more than a day of rest and of moral law, although it is both. Ultimately, Sabbath is a day of amazing grace in that the God of all grace and the Savior full of grace gave examples and words of its intended observance. In that, it accurately illustrates and previews God's unmerited eternal favor toward us in Christ.

This grace-focused view of Sabbath sets well with a Christ-following people of God who are saved by His grace *for* good works, not *by* them (Ephesians 2:8-10). The Bible's fifty-two days off each year remain available to all who recognize their need for God's rest and receive it by faith in Jesus, with love for all God's people. **BA**

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# Walking in Covenant

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The faith and foibles of King Hezekiah instruct Christians today.

by **Rebecca Irey**

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Some say the Old Testament reads like an adventure novel, full of intrigue, spies, cliff-hangers, and plot twists. Others struggle through the “begats” scattered throughout Genesis, then run headlong into Leviticus, where the sense of adventure is lost completely. The thirty-nine books that constitute the Old Testament can, on a cursory read, seem intimidating at best and at times completely impossible.

However, believers are promised that *every word* of Scripture is provided by a gracious and loving Father for our edification and

training (2 Timothy 3:16). We are challenged to deeply and prayerfully consider the words that God breathed into being, to lovingly mine the Scripture text for insight and example. As we ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the adventure that is life with Jesus, He is faithful to enlighten us.

## Strengths and weaknesses

Part of that enlightenment comes through a story in 2 Kings. Here we are introduced to a man named Hezekiah. He was crowned king of Judah at age 25 after the death of his evil father, King Ahaz, who “did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord,” making his son pass through the fire (16:2, 3). At first glance, it would seem the cards were stacked against the young king. Apparently, he didn’t have a great home life.

And yet, God moved in the

heart of King Hezekiah to trust in the God of Israel (18:5). This is high praise for a descendant of King David, known as a man after God’s own heart. Hezekiah’s mother, Abi, was the daughter of Zechariah, and she likely instructed her son in the ways of the God of Israel.

We are not told that God gave Hezekiah special instruction but that he kept the commandments of Moses by acting on them. He assessed what was in his power to do and took action to accomplish those things, like removing the idols from Israel (v. 4). Lest we think Hezekiah had it easy on his royal path, the Scriptures reveal massive upheaval when the kingdom of Judah came under siege from the king of Assyria. Like so many of us, regardless of time or situation, King Hezekiah attempted to solve this problem on his own. After walking years

with the Lord and prospering in all he did (v. 7), when trials came, this good king initially reacted in a way that may sound familiar to the modern ear: “I can handle this one, Lord” (vv. 15, 16).

But he couldn’t handle it. The king of Assyria sent his servant, the Rabshakeh, to goad Hezekiah from the city gates, taunting the king and asking who this God was who could save Judah. He taunted the people and guards as well in full-scale psychological warfare. The temptation to surrender was real. Having tried to buy off the enemy with the temple treasures, to no avail, King Hezekiah “covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD” (19:1).

Once the Lord sent the prophet Isaiah with comforting words (“Do not be afraid . . .,” v. 6), King Hezekiah prayed for deliverance, and the God of heaven answered. He turned the tide of the battle, not just giving the victory to the king but actually fighting for him. The angel of the Lord killed one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians (v. 35).

### Learning by example

What does Hezekiah’s story have to do with us? Though we are modern believers in the modern world, the apostle Paul reminds us that whatever was written in the Word of God is for our instruction (1 Corinthians 10:11). God, as a good Father, has given us a template to follow so we, too, can walk in the footsteps of Hezekiah.

We are called to take the initiative of active faith. We believe. Therefore, let us walk out our belief in day-to-day service to God

and others. Big or small, every offering of faith matters to God, from a kind smile to prayer with and for other believers to serving in our church community and the community at large. We can act right now, in this moment, to demonstrate living faith in our loving Savior.

Following Hezekiah’s example, when we fail or try to handle life’s problems in our own power, we repent. We seek the face of our Savior with sorrow and faith. King Hezekiah demonstrated his faith in times of strength and in times of confusion and intimidation when there didn’t appear to be any solution to the freight train of trouble bearing down on

prayer. We believe God will fight our battles for us (1 Corinthians 10:13). Like King Hezekiah, we take our trouble and our sorrow to the cross and find our comfort there, knowing we are beloved to our God.

Some may say the Old Testament reads like an adventure novel. Indeed, as we seek God’s leading in the written Word, we find it does. Not only that, but the adventure continues now to include all believers. That’s us! We are the new heroes of the faith, not because we were crowned king in an ancient land but because of the loving sacrifice of our Savior, who welcomed us into a new covenant

“The walk of faith is also the walk of the cross, the walk of transformation.”

him. We may not tear our clothing or don sackcloth, but with tears and humble spirits, we turn to our Father and listen to Him say, just as He did in the days of old, “Do not be afraid.”

### Embracing adventure

Jesus never promised an easy life. The walk of faith is also the walk of the cross, the walk of transformation. When trouble comes, and it will, we enter the battle in the position of power:

with Him. We discover the beautiful rollercoaster that is life in the Spirit as we walk out our ancient faith, demonstrated for us by the ancient kings of God’s chosen people, and now reflected in believers privileged to be called sons and daughters of God. **BA**

Rebecca Irely writes from Hutto, TX.



# Balancing Justice and Mercy

by **R. Herbert**

And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8).

Most of us are familiar with Lady Justice. We may have seen statues and paintings of her holding a sword in one hand and a balance scale in the other. The sword, of course, represents punishment and justice, and the balance scale symbolizes fairness in the justice dispensed. If we look closely at these representations of the figure of Justice, we see she is usually wearing a blindfold, symbolic of total impartiality in judgment.

The Bible stresses the same concepts of justice and fairness (or justice and mercy) as we see in Micah's words "to act justly, to love mercy," as well as the words of Zechariah ("Execute true justice; show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother," 7:9), and the words of Christ himself: "you . . . have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith" (Matthew 23:23).

But we must be careful when it comes to the blindfold. God's Word encourages us to be involved in dispensing justice and mercy, to interact with individuals to whom these principles must be applied in our roles as parents, employers, or whatever. Biblically, we cannot be impartial. We cannot temper justice with mercy if we don't look at the circumstances involved in the situation we are judging. In the same way, we cannot temper mercy with judgment if we do not look at the attitudes involved.

From a biblical perspective, we do need to see clearly what is involved in each instance where we can extend justice or enforce punishment, just as we must see clearly where we might need to grant mercy or forgiveness. Certainly, we must not judge

by appearances, as Christ confirmed: "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24).

Still, we must not judge blindly. We must learn to look below the surface and judge matters of justice and mercy without the blindfold of social pressure that sometimes may lean unduly toward mercy, or conversely, the blindfold of our human nature that may lean unduly toward justice. Either of those blindfolds can obscure what we need to see.

The Word of God encourages us to see situations needing justice or mercy clearly, but through the lens of its teachings, rather than through those of social pressure or human nature. We may understand this and know the importance of applying both justice and mercy, but how well do we know scriptures that apply to doing just that? It's a simple enough study (search *justice* and *mercy* in a concordance or on a Bible website with search capabilities) and one we should all do at some point, preferably before situations arise needing the application of justice or mercy.

Ultimately, knowing the Scriptures and being guided by God's Spirit through them is the only way we can properly hold the sword and the scale in our everyday lives as Christians. It's the only way we can express the law of love through a right balance of justice and mercy, and the only way to do it without being blindfolded.

For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13). <sup>BA</sup>

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**R. Herbert** is a pen name. He holds a Ph.D. in ancient Near Eastern languages, biblical studies, and archaeology.

A photograph of a forest with sunlight streaming through the trees, creating a hazy, golden atmosphere. The sun is positioned in the upper right, with rays of light filtering through the dense canopy of green leaves. The ground is covered in fallen leaves and moss.

# Celebration

God worked and then rested —  
He created, then blessed  
A sanctuary in time.  
In life's blur, a quiet clime  
To pause, recalibrate,  
Rejoice, invigorate —  
Weekly re-creation,  
Sabbath celebration.

Helen Heavirland

# Receiving the

by Amber Riggs

**E**xhausted from a long, demanding day, Joseph feels his body begin to release stress and his mind struggle to let go of its seemingly endless list of responsibilities. *It's almost Sunday, he tells himself. Maybe I'll finally get a chance to rest.*

The sad irony is that this is a relatable situation for many pastors, ministry leaders, and members of congregations who meet on Saturday with good intentions of celebrating Sabbath. Unfortunately, the day on which a congregation worships is often the most physically and emotionally taxing day of the week for many pastors and church leaders. It can become a day so devoted to church that even our guests go home exhausted.

Thousands of tiny details go into "doing church" each week in the way that our culture has come to expect. The pastor becomes a manager of these details, ministering and attending to needs often unseen and unsung.

Yet for Sabbath-embracing congregations, this testimony invites an important query: Do our Sabbaths necessitate that their chief celebrants push their rest to another day of the week? If so, *are we truly celebrating a Christian Sabbath?*

## Church leadership

The Christian Sabbath has its roots in the Jewish Sabbath and in the Edenic Sabbath before that. From the beginning, Sabbath has been structured so that *everyone* within God's covenant community could receive the gift of rest. The Jews, however, did have one notable exception. Priests continued to perform their work on the Sabbath with God's blessing (Matthew 12:5).

The Christian tendency is to equate the priesthood with the pastorate, thus exempting pastors from the blessings of Sabbath. This, however, directly contradicts the reality that in Christ, we all constitute a "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

It also fails to note that the New Testament model of church leadership was not one of pastoral hierarchy but of *team* leadership, the pastor being one among many who equip the church for works of service, with neither the equipping nor the works of service primarily taking place on Sabbath (Ephesians 4:11, 12). Paul himself always ministered as part of a team and appointed teams of leaders in each of the churches they planted (Acts 14:23).

Therefore, if Sabbath is indeed a blessing for Christians to enjoy, it stands to reason that our churches should be administered

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# Gift of Rest

in such a way that 1) spreads out the responsibilities of church leadership and 2) allows church leaders to lead their congregation in a *simple* celebration of the rest we have in Christ.

## Communal Sabbath

The church is called to embody in community what it looks like to live under the rule of King Jesus. The mystery of Sabbath is that communal rest reveals truths about God and His relationship with humanity that can best be experienced and understood at a physical level through the very inaction of rest.

Sabbath is a gift Christ offers to His church body as a tangible reality that we don't have to — and *can't* — earn God's favor (Hebrews 4). It is not about actions we take but about letting *God* act on *us*. To celebrate Sabbath as Christ intended is to receive this sacrament, this grace, of the present and future rest we have in Christ.

Failing to recognize the eternal significance of Sabbath, the strongest sect of Pharisees took such an extreme view of Sabbath that it was wielded as a tool against the very members of their community who most needed a tangible expression of God's care. All too often, however, we take Christ's correction to the Jews that "It is lawful to do good

on the Sabbath" and contort it to mean "Do as much good as possible on the Sabbath." In doing so, we can transform Sabbath into an exhausting day driven by intentionally cramming in as many good works as we can. In the process, we both crowd out needs that Sabbath was designed to meet, and downplay how we are to live out the gospel in our communities the other six days of the week.

In contrast, Sabbath as interpreted through the lens of the gospel will be a day devoted to physically experiencing Christ's restorative presence, allowing us space to administer God's mercy to needs that arise in the natural course of the day.

## Christ-centered rest

Sabbath is a natural time to gather as a community to worship; Jesus himself taught in synagogues on the seventh day. However, recognize the temptation to equate Sabbath exclusively with corporate worship services and ministry activities, to believe that the very act of "going to church" means that we've participated in this sacrament of Sabbath rest. We should thoughtfully examine this tendency and make space for additional forms of rest. For example, how might Sabbath change if your congregation met at the start of Sabbath (Friday

evening), instead of on Saturday morning?

Our Sabbath gatherings do not have to carry the weight we have given them. We should be unburdened knowing that the patterns of modern evangelical church gatherings are rooted more in nineteenth century American Revivalism than in worship gatherings of the New Testament. A greater emphasis on reflecting God's image in the context of our daily lives will also take pressure off of leveraging Sabbath for ministry.

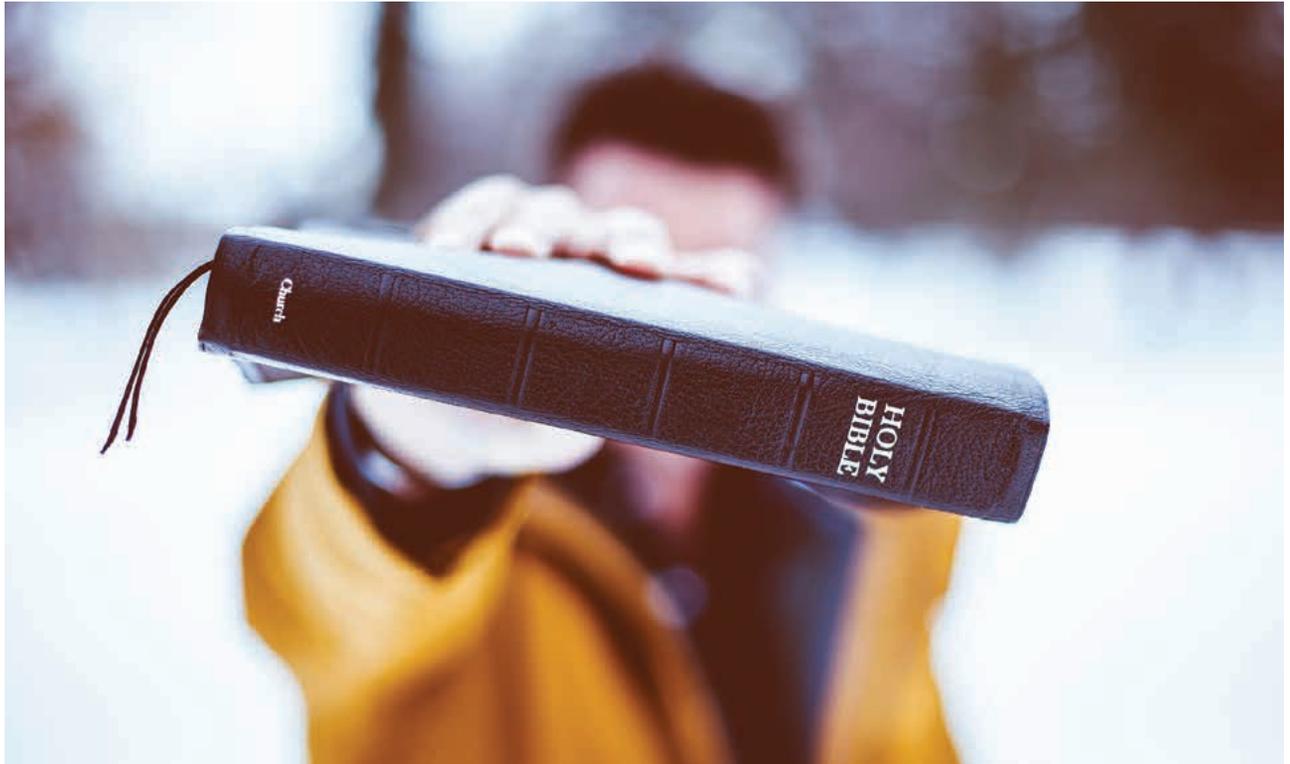
After embracing a more simplified and intentional Sabbath, we should reduce pastoral responsibilities by studying and implementing what the Bible teaches about leadership teams. When more people are involved, the natural inclination will be to try to *accomplish more* on Sabbath. Remember that leadership teams should instead lighten the load.

Let's commit to embracing Sabbath as a day when our entire church community can say, "It's Sabbath. Finally — a chance to rest." **BA**

**Amber Riggs** is dean of administration for Artios Christian College. She lives near Eugene, OR, with her husband, Bryan, and their four daughters.



# The Law of Christ



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Discovering the consummation and  
embodiment of the Torah.

**by Dr. David Downey**

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**T**he law of the Old Testament – what we call the Torah – may confuse more people in the church today than any other topic. Some see a disparity between a strict adherence to the law in Moses’ day and a more relaxed understanding in some parts in Jesus’ day (Luke 6:1-11). Church members realize that some laws, though good, are not observed as they were, yet they struggle with the fact that Jesus said the law would in no way pass away. Confusion is common. At best, some people often just do not want to look too closely.

It is not hard to understand that the church does not need animal sacrifice. We realize that this law was fulfilled in Christ's perfect death. But how about those laws that are less clear, in the Old Testament and the New, such as the prohibition of mixing fabrics in clothing, Jubilee, the injunction against short hair for women or long hair for men?

We will have to do the best we can in interpreting the law and its application today. Some areas, such as those above, will end up with sanctified proponents on both sides — all good people. Nevertheless, that should not keep us from confidently applying the law to the new covenant revelations. It does not bother me that others interpret nonessentials differently than I do, but neither does it slow me down from being certain of what I teach. To be uncertain with the law of God is to be disrespectful, or just lazy.

### Beauty and holiness

We agree that the law was given as a guide; it was also prophecy. The first prophecy of the Bible predated the law ratified on Mount Sinai. When Adam and Eve fell by ignoring God's command, God took action. He banished them from the perfect relationship and home. God, who sought them out after their sin, saying, "Where are you?" (when He knew where they were), also gave them the first prophetic promise of the coming Messiah when He said to the serpent, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15).

The law points to the Messiah. It prepared God's people to be ready for the coming of Jesus and to understand they *needed* Jesus. Paul memorably said that it was our tutor to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24).

The law is good. If church members are ever uncertain about that, I suggest they spend time in Psalm 119, which extols the beauty of the law in every verse. If we are not careful, we will minimize — at least in our hearts — what God called beautiful.

So, why is the law beautiful?

The law taught us that holiness is our highest calling (Leviticus 20:7, 8). God's constant provision for those who keep His law, and His righteous indignation toward those who do not, speaks of its value. I might go so far as to say if we do not love righteousness, we may have not read the Old Testament law enough (Psalm 45:7). God's holiness shines in every word, and His desire for His children to be holy is exceedingly plain.

The law also taught us that sin is deadly and results in bloody

death; that we need someone to wipe its stain clean, since we are powerless; that salvation is what all the priests and even the high priest could only represent, but not produce.

The law has disabled all of our arguments, caused us to face a holy God on His terms, and left us bereft of something. We have discovered it was grace.

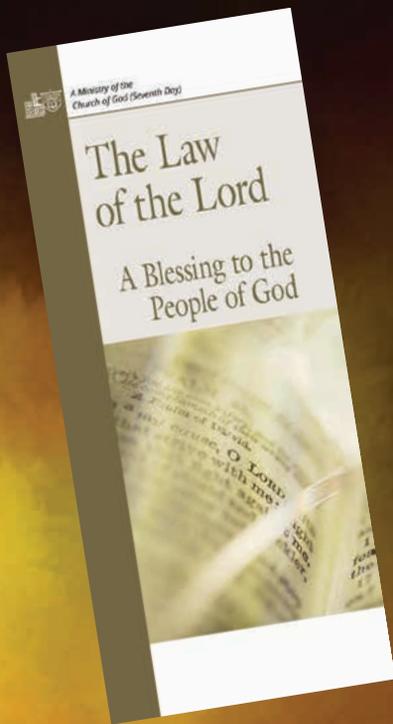
### Revering the law

When I was younger, I watched one of the many movies about Jesus in my church. The facilitator stopped the film and

“The law points to the certainty that Jesus did not come to make us comfortable.”

called attention to part of the movie that is still vivid to me. The scene was of Jesus reading the words of Isaiah's prophecy about the Messiah (Luke 4:18, 19; Isaiah 61:1). In the movie, Jesus carefully handled the scroll when He unrolled it, and when He had finished speaking the prophetic words, He rolled the scroll up gently, raised it to His lips, and kissed it before He set it down.

I believe this is standard protocol for rabbinical use of the Scripture, but the facilitator at my church said, "Did you notice



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how reverently the Lord treated the Word of God?"

God gives grace to every person who approaches His words with reverence and with the necessary honesty. While we need not kiss the Bible, have we allowed it to kiss our hearts?

### What the law definitely says

Looking again at Jesus' use of the words in Isaiah 61:1, He declared the favorable year of the Lord and clearly said, "Today this Scripture is *fulfilled* in your hearing" (Luke 4:21, emphasis added). The listeners missed the clear implication that Jesus was the Messiah, because everyone spoke of how gracious His speech was. A few beats later, Jesus said that Elijah appeared to only the widow of Zarepheth and Naaman the Syrian when the Israelites needed the same care, and the listening crowd drove Him out of the city (vv. 23-30).

The law, as shocking as it is sometimes, points to the certainty that Jesus did not come to make us comfortable. He came to save us, and sometimes, this makes us even more uncomfortable. The Israelites did not like this. They wondered how this man did not understand their heritage, their genetic and national goodness (Matthew 5:17-48)!

Here is the answer for the questions like mixture of fabrics, Jubilee, long and short hair. We should lay aside our personal prejudice and ask, "What was the setting? How was it applied? What was it teaching?" God wants purity; we may have cotton and polyester mixed in our clothes, but our hearts should be pure. He wants us to reject imita-

tions of the world. Whether that is shown in hairstyles, clothing, or adopting the language of the world in blogs, we are to eschew in this day what makes us look to others as though we are part of the compromise. God wants us to hold our possessions lightly (1 Corinthians 7:29-31, 35). We apply the law with reverence and honesty, and we approach it seriously.

### Law's consummation

Since the law was to teach us that we needed to find the Savior in Jesus, then it must assume that we will listen to His words. I remember that tense moment in John 6, when Jesus said He was the bread of life and that people must eat of this bread and drink of His blood in order to see the Father in heaven. Many disciples turned away and stopped following Jesus. He turned to the disciples who remained and asked if they also wanted to go away, to which Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). Peter learned that Jesus did not just teach the law; He was its consummation. He was the embodiment of God's message from the very beginning.

Our response is to show respect for all of the law, learn to apply and obey it, as it is our service of worship in rightly approaching the promised Messiah.

BA

**Dr. David Downey**  
writes from Fort  
Worth, TX.



# Vain and the Name

by Bruce Noble

Recently, I read the Ten Commandments every day for a week. The idea was to see what new insights I could find while reading them over and over, meditatively. I was drawn to the third: “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain” (Exodus 20:7). What does this command really mean?

As a child, I was told it meant not to swear or curse, especially using God’s name, or any reference to God’s name, in an unholy manner. I was told not to make any promises I could not keep or fulfill, or swear to or by anything. I believe this to be a correct teaching, but I think it fails to address part of what I, and maybe other Christians, had not considered.

The Hebrew word translated “vain” is *shav* or *shawv*. It means to do something in a desolating manner, in an evil way; figuratively, in an idolatrous way. But also it means in a false or useless way, which many have interpreted to mean lying or deceiving. Others have concluded that *vain* means simply stating God’s name irreverently.

In looking up the definitions of the words *useless* and *vain*, I found new insight into the idea of taking God’s name in vain. In the English dictionary, *vain* means “without value, worthless, otiose, ineffectual, foolish, or silly.” The word *useless* means “having or being of no use, ineffectual.” This struck me as a meaning I had not considered previously. I had to ask myself, *Do I as a Christian claim and identify with the name of God, or of Jesus, and do so in a worthless manner? What value do I place on, what priority do I give to, associating with His name? Is*

*wearing the name of Jesus ineffectual in my daily life, in my interactions in public and private?*

Taking a name means identifying with it. What do I do that would cause others to identify me with Jesus, the giver and hope of life, the author of salvation, the Lord? I do not want to identify with other things like a clothing brand, a sports brand, a state, or a special interest group or team more than I do with Jesus! I don’t have to wear a T-shirt that has a Christian message to identify with my God, but wearing one certainly should not deter others from identifying me with Him.

Another implication in the definition of the Hebrew term translated “vain” is that of conceit or pride. Some people wear the name of Jesus as a badge or trophy. Doing so is like “name dropping” at an event to gain entrance. Maybe this badge is like using a reference on a résumé: Knowing someone within the company will get you that job you want. Do I wear God’s name in a way that I think I may profit from it?

The idea that I may treat God or Jesus in any circumstance without proper regard is a way of taking God’s name in vain. When I consider the questions “What’s in a name? What does it mean to take God’s name in vain?” the answers are a lot more than I had ever considered. **BA**

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**Bruce Noble**, our guest writer for this month’s column, is the ministerial rep for the Northeast District. He and his wife, Pamela, live in Owosso, MI.





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What does the Bible say about God and His grace toward humanity? Let's take a final look.

by Israel Steinmetz

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Here we come to the end of our three-part discussion of the Calvinist TULIP. Looking back, we see that total depravity was easy to affirm, as the Bible is explicit in describing humankind's inability to merit salvation through works. Conversely, unconditional election was easy to denounce, as receiving the benefit of election in Scripture is always conditioned on faith. And, contrary to Calvinist claims, saving faith is not something predestined by God for a select few to

receive, but a capacity to trust in God for salvation that is granted to all. Limited atonement was perhaps the simplest to refute, as it undermines God's atonement for the entire world in Christ and His will to see all of humanity saved.

Of the five points in the TULIP, the last two are the most difficult to navigate. *Irresistible grace* and *perseverance of the saints* call for a more delicate handling because they invite us into the mysterious and boundless realms of God's amazing grace. As P. E. Hughes says, "It is important always to remember that the operation of God's grace is a deep mystery that is far beyond our limited human comprehension." Thus, let us tiptoe carefully through the remainder of the TULIP.

### I is for Irresistible

In Calvinism, those who have been elected by God to receive His efficacious and sufficient grace for salvation cannot reject it. Rather, they will in every case receive His grace by the faith predestined for them to exercise. While our fourth statement of faith notes that salvation is by God's grace and received through faith, there is nothing in our statement to indicate that God's grace is "irresistible." What does Scripture say?

As with each topic addressed by the TULIP, proponents and opponents quote proof texts to support their view. However, when it comes to irresistible grace, Calvinists rely more on a series of logical syllogisms than they do on scriptural support. A logical syllogism uses connections between various premises

to reach a conclusion. If A and B are true, then C must be true. The main line of reasoning for irresistible grace is as follows: 1) God has unconditionally elected and predestined some to receive His grace through faith (i.e., limited atonement). 2) The predetermined will of God cannot be resisted or rejected. 3) Therefore, those who have been predestined to receive grace through faith cannot do otherwise.

What is lacking in the Calvinist argument is explicit biblical support for its claims that grace and faith are predestined for a select few and that humans cannot resist or reject the will of God regarding their salvation. Indeed, as we've shown in past articles, Scripture actually indicates that grace and faith have been extended to *all* humanity and that humans can, in fact, *reject* God's desire for them to be saved.

### Resistible grace

This concept of *resistible* grace is evident in Paul's ministry and writing. Paul speaks of God's grace, expressed in Christ's sacrifice, as being something offered to all humanity (Romans 5:15-21; Titus 2:11). This accords nicely with Paul's concept of the atonement being offered to all (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). And yet, as we know, not everyone receives the benefit of God's saving grace expressed in Jesus Christ.

Beyond that, Paul expresses his concern on numerous occasions that those who had already received God's saving grace would make it of no effect in their lives! In Acts 13:43, Paul and Barnabas urged new believers to "continue in the grace of God," and Paul had to plead

with the Corinthian believers not to receive the grace of God in vain (2 Corinthians 6:2). Paul was seriously concerned that some believers in Galatia were turning away from God, who had called them in the grace of Christ, because they were being drawn to a false gospel (Galatians 1:6ff). In his impassioned testimony, Paul stated that he did not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness came through the law, then Christ died in vain (2:21). Sadly, some of the Galatian believers had taken the opposite course and, seeking to be justified by the works of the law, had severed themselves from Christ and thus had "fallen from grace" (5:4).



If Paul believed that God's saving grace was irresistible and effectual in the case of every Christian, then the passages above become nonsensical. This is to say nothing of the various places where Paul and other New Testament authors express concern for their own Christian progress, and the progress of their fellow Christians, without explicitly referring to grace, but certainly having the concept in mind.

### P is for Perseverance

Recognizing that grace is not irresistible leads us to the final point of the TULIP: *perseverance of the saints*. The Calvinist doctrine of perseverance is concisely stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647): "They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved."

Once more, one searches our Statement of Faith in vain for any such assurance. One also searches Scripture in vain. Instead, we find two types of pas-

sages regarding the perseverance of the saints. On one hand, we find those promising that God will remain ever faithful to those who place their faith in Him. On the other hand, we find repeated calls and warnings for those who have placed their faith in Him to continue to believe. If one looks only at the former set of passages, then they could hold to perseverance of the saints. But an honest reading of the latter set

warns us that God's faithfulness to save is promised only to those who *continue to place their faith in Him*.

In the book of Hebrews, we are warned about the hardening and deceiving effects of sin (3:13). Unrepentant sin can eventually lead a person to reject their faith in God and become His enemy instead. The point is not that we can sin so much that God will reject us, but that there is the risk that we will go on sinning in such a way that we will reject God (3:12-19; 6:4-8; 10:26-31).

We have already mentioned



the state of some of the brethren in Galatia. They had "fallen from grace," not by virtue of unrepentant sin but by placing their faith in their own righteous deeds, rather than in the sacrificial death of Christ. Their acceptance of a false gospel, built on their obedience to the law, severed them from Christ and thus resulted in apostasy.

## Faithful Father

The biblical doctrine, then, is that God is ever faithful to save those who trust Him. For those who love and believe in Him, nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:31-39), and no one can snatch us from His hand (John 10:25-30). We can have full assurance of our salvation. Our assurance is not based on completely avoiding sin or on perfect adherence to the law, but on the reception and knowledge of the Son, in whom we have eternal life (17:3; 1 John 5:11-13). God will not go back on His promise, and He is ever faithful. However,

His promise of salvation is for those who believe — indeed, for those who *persevere in believing*. This perseverance is not an automatic, predestined response to God's grace, as Calvinists would have it. Rather, it is a daily call to place our trust in God's amazing grace.

And yet, we cannot end with this. We are touching on a great mystery when we speak of God's grace. By God's grace we are invited to place our faith in Him, and by God's grace we continue

to place our faith in Him. Scripture does not present this grace as irresistible, but it does present it as persistent, persuasive, and winsome. R. E. O. White shares wise words regarding the relationship between faith and grace:

Every devout Christian knows that he would not have continued in the faith (as also he would never have begun) but for the unmerited, invasive grace of God, shown to him in innumerable ways. . . . If we fall, we know that is our fault; if we are upheld, we know it is thanks to God's grace. The warnings, exhortations, and tragic examples of the NT do still speak directly to our hearts; had it depended upon us, our waywardness would long ago have snatched us out of God's hands, separated us from God's love. But it has not depended upon anything in us, *except our desire to be saved* (italics mine).

We work out our salvation in fear and trembling, knowing all the while that it is God who is working in us, both to will, and to do, according to His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13, 14). By trusting in God's grace, we believe, and by trusting in His grace, we persevere. **BA**

**Israel Steinmetz** is dean of Academic Affairs for Artios Christian College. He lives in San Antonio, TX, with his wife, Anna, and their eight young children. Scripture quotations are from *New American Standard Bible*.



## Publications announces . . .

### the re-launch of Seekers!



Started years ago by the Women's Ministry (NAWM), Seekers is primarily designed for the 9- to 12-year-old age group. Children can be involved either at church or in a family setting with activities that are Christ centered and Bible based.

Publications (BAP) staff member, Dana Jensen, has been diligently working on updating and providing links to the already rich material the Women's Ministry provided. As part of this effort, the BAP is making all Seekers documents free for downloading: <https://publications.cog7.org/seekers/>.

So get involved! Your church and your family will be glad you did.



## Looking for something?

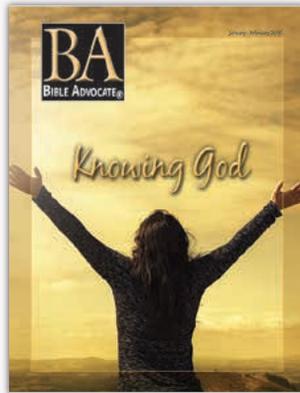
If you are looking for this issue's article in the Biblical Authority series, fear not! You can read Gordon Feil's entire article, "Biblical Inspiration," at [baonline.org](http://baonline.org). Here's a portion of it:

"Many Christians do not believe that God literally caused the words of the Bible to be written in the way they were. Some hold the *intuition theory* of inspiration: The writers were people gifted with more than usual insight in much the same way as Buddha and Socrates were. In short, these writers had a talent for theology and expressing their ideas. Others hold to the *illumination theory*. This view says that inspiration was accomplished as God expanded the writers' natural abilities. A third view, held by some conservative Christian scholars, is that God put the thoughts into the writers' minds and that the writers expressed these thoughts in their own way. It's known as the *dynamic theory of inspiration*. . . ."

What else is in [baonline.org](http://baonline.org) this month? An article about worship patterns in the book of Acts, by Kim Papaioannou, as well as "A Call to Holiness," by John Kiesz, taken from our April 1968 issue. Let us know what you think of the BA – then and now!



# Mail Bag



## Progressive revelation

I have some comments on Calvin Burrell's answer concerning progressive revelation ["Q & A," p. 11, January-February '18].

• Mr. Burrell's answer was off base in one critical aspect: While both covenants are equal in truth, they are intended for different dispensations. The old covenant was for the physical nation of Israel, a people not given the Holy Spirit. Its 613 laws may make us better husbands, wives, children, citizens, and neighbors, but they can never make us Spirit-led, new-creature Christians (John 5:39, 40; Romans 7:1-6; Galatians 3:12, 24-28; 4:21-31; 5:1-4 and 18).

• When we take the old covenant given without the Holy Spirit and try to make it equally applicable to Spirit-led, new-creature Christians under the new covenant, it will always lead to confusion of Bible truths. It will also lead to trying to explain which of the 613 laws are no longer applicable today — as my friend did in his answer. Picking and choosing which laws to obey or ignore only leads to confusion and the same old questions.

• If we are guided by God's Holy

Spirit, we do not need a law to tell us not to commit murder or adultery, because we will be walking in the glorious love of God, the glorious light of God, as well as His will, His purpose, and His overall plan.

J. W.  
Email

*Calvin Burrell's point-by-point reply, in the same order:*

• *This paragraph seems to say that the old covenant laws including the Decalogue, are powerless to produce the new birth. The only spiritual dynamic that can make us new creatures in Christ is the new covenant gospel of His life, death, and resurrection, empowered by the Holy Spirit. If this is your point here, then we agree completely.*

• *Here, I think you misunderstand my answer to progressive revelation. Rather than trying to make the old covenant "equally applicable" to Christians under the new covenant, I pointed out several ways in which the new covenant is superior to the old. Although that idea was repeated in my answer, the first two sentences in my next-to-last paragraph may have confused you. In saying that all 613 Old Testament laws remain God's Word and stand written for our learning, I did not mean to suggest that we busy ourselves with a study of all those laws or compile a list of those that remain relevant for Christians. Decisions about the new covenant applicability of old covenant laws are better made by focusing on the example and teachings of Christ (and His disciples) than by combing the books of Moses for one or more laws we may have missed.*

• *My strongest difference with you arises here. If we have the Holy Spirit, you say, if we walk in God's love and light, His will, His purpose, and His overall plan, then we have no need of His law or any moral commands in particular. To refute this wishful thinking, we recall the dozens of texts in which Jesus or His apostles made positive reference to individual moral commands of the Decalogue or to the conduct championed in them (as examples, see Matthew 19:18, 19; John 14:21; 15:10; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Ephesians 6:2, 3; James 2:10-12; 1 John 2:4; 5:2, 3; Revelation 12:17; 14:12). It is true that love fulfills the law (Romans 13:8-10) and that the commands to love God and love others are the law's greatest summary (Matthew 22:36-40), but it is not true that we would know how to love God generally without the specific applications of love in the Decalogue's first table. Nor would we know how to love our neighbors if we did not have the second table — or at the least the specific teachings of Christ and the apostles that directly relate to the second table.*

## Source of blessing

The Bible Advocate has been a great blessing for my family and me as we are avid Sabbath school goers and really appreciate the time and energy devoted to the class and study programs. We thank you for the ongoing words of encouragement as well, and may God continue to use the Bible Advocate to advance His kingdom!

F. P.  
BA Online



# G. C. Ministries News

ARTIOS • MISSIONS • PUBLICATIONS

## Children's Curriculum

### Summer quarter

**Intermediate.** In *The Sermon on the Mount*, students will learn that Jesus gave an overview and summary about what life as a follower of Christ should be. It is a life directed by internal motivation, rather than by outward works for show, a life influenced by the Holy Spirit, rather than by the letter of the law.

**Primary.** *The Parables of Jesus* will show students that parables were not just interesting stories. Each one contained vital gems of truth for people back then and for us as well. Through them we come to understand God's great love toward sinners, His mercy and forgiveness, our desperate need for Him, and His invitation to the greatest wedding celebration of all time.

**Preschool.** Lessons in *Jesus' Parables: Special Stories with Special Messages* introduce students to some of Jesus' important parables. As they learn about these familiar stories, they will come to understand the meanings within them.



## Attention: Foreign Readers

In recent years, Publications and G. C. Missions have struggled financially to send literature to foreign countries. The high cost of postage is taking an increasingly larger portion of our operating budgets. For example, the postage required to mail a single copy of the *Bible Advocate* to a foreign reader is ten times more expensive than to a reader in the US.



Therefore, starting with the July-August issue, we'll reduce the number of *Bible Advocate* magazines sent to foreign readers, except for those in financially contributing regions. To ensure the magazine remains at your fingertips, we encourage you to visit our website to read or download the latest issue, or one from our extensive archive. We will offer two versions of the current BA for download: full color and gray scale. Go to [baonline.org](http://baonline.org) to obtain your issue, then print a copy or two to share in your community.

The BA is not the only publication affected by higher costs over the last few years. Quarterlies and tracts have been as well. Using a high resolution PDF that Publications provides, a number of countries, like Nigeria, Jamaica, and England, print their own quarterlies. Thank you! Regional printing and distribution are being explored for the BA, too. We hope more countries will take advantage of this option in the future.

We want to exercise good stewardship of our funds while making the BA as widely available as possible. But we need to hear from you! If you have questions about your *Bible Advocate*, please contact Bryan Cleeton ([bryan.cleeton@cog7.org](mailto:bryan.cleeton@cog7.org)).

— Keith Michalak, Director of Publications  
Bryan Cleeton, Director of G. C. Missions





## Ministry Through the IMC

Zone 2

**Guatemala:** It was a great blessing to celebrate 107 baptisms on Sabbath, March 3, in congregations within the fourteenth district in Panajachel, Guatemala. Welcome to Christ's body, beloved brothers!



Zone 3

**Peru:** Originally from Cuernavaca, Mexico, Cristo Viene missionary Pastor Orlando Romero and his wife, Lucy, officially began their work in Lima, Peru, on February 22. They are following up with contacts from the recent SHINE mission, and counseling families, seeking to reach the neighborhood of La Campiña with the good news.



**Venezuela:** In early February, Pastor Jose Caballero visited this new group of believers in Caracas. Several are interested in baptism, and a return visit will be made in mid-March. Pray for these brothers and sisters as this country experiences a severe political and economic crisis.



Zone 4

**Myanmar:** Pastors from different areas joined with the Yangon congregation on Sabbath, February 24, during our recent pastoral conference. Also, the Myanmar Conference gave a certificate of honor to Lal Nun Mawi, who passed her university exam and received some financial assistance for her education in medicine. — *Tluang Kung*



**Pakistan:** In Rawalpindi, a sewing school was started for 25 widows. Their current employment is hard labor, and they receive little compensation. After they train, the funds these widows make from sewing will allow them and their families to become self-supporting.



Zone 5

**Nigeria:** Our Lagos for Christ Crusade, February 28 - March 3, received the blessing of heaven. A new place of worship was opened in Tedi Town – Lagos, where new brethren will worship the Lord in this city. To God be the glory! — *Joseph Alexander*



Zone 6

**Indonesia:** Many people would like to hear from us about the truth in this area (Jakarta). Our CoG7 pastor who converted from Islam several years ago teaches Muslims by comparing verses in the Quran with the Bible, introducing them to Isa Almasih, who in the Bible is called Jesus. — *Alfred Ander*





## The New Prophet

My wife, Karen, and I are midway through the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy in our annual reading of the Bible. Deuteronomy largely consists of Moses' last words to the children of Israel before his death and their entrance into the Promised Land. Because of their lack of faith in God, most of the adults who participated in Israel's great exodus out of Egypt died in the wilderness. So those to whom Moses spoke his last words were either very young or yet to be born at the beginning of Israel's great journey.

In Deuteronomy, therefore, Moses retells the entire adventure. He reminds these wilderness wanderers of all that had happened. He reminds them of the great covenant God had made with them and of the covenant law God had given them. And Moses promises them blessings if they obey God, but curses if they disobey Him.

I am astounded by the extent of the promised blessings! Consider those of Deuteronomy 7:12-15 alone:

"And because you listen to these rules and keep and do them, the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love that he swore to your fathers. He will love you, bless you, and multiply you. He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock, in the land that he swore to your fathers to give you. You shall be blessed above all peoples. There shall not be male or female barren among you or among your livestock. And the LORD will take away from you all sickness, and none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which you knew, will he inflict on you, but he will lay them on all who hate you" (ESV throughout).

Wow! Surely such blessings would be worth any sacrifice of one's own passing desires for anything else. Surely such blessings would make faithfulness to God one's greatest priority at all times. And if the blessings alone were not motivation enough to be faithful to God, the curses would be. They are the reverse of the blessings. Surely, the promised blessings and curses would inspire Israel to be faithful to God.

Unfortunately, they did not, and in Deuteronomy 31:16 God tells Moses in advance that they would not: "And the LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers. Then this people will rise and whore after the foreign gods . . . and they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them.'"

There is something dark and hard within the heart of fallen man, something evil that no amount or degree of external blessings or curses can change, something selfish and rebellious that the law is powerless to overcome. In the midst of the last book of the Torah, this sad situation is addressed with gospel hope. Moses tells the people, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers — it is to him you shall listen" (Deuteronomy 18:15). Peter the apostle and Stephen the martyr both understood this new prophet to be Jesus Christ (Acts 3:22, 23; 7:37).

What Moses and the law of the old covenant could not accomplish, this new Prophet now has. Hard and darkened hearts can be transformed! But only by the new Prophet, our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ.

— Loren Stacy



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# A New Home for Publications

Have you seen *publications.cog7.org*? This website features CoG7's tracts, quarterlies, and the Seekers program, re-launched in February. You can also find quick links to *BA Online*, *Now What?*, *Churchright*, and other G. C. Ministries, and you can place orders in the online bookstore.

We're still under construction, but if you like what you see so far, be sure to click on the Donate button. We can always use your support.