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BIBLE ADVOCATE

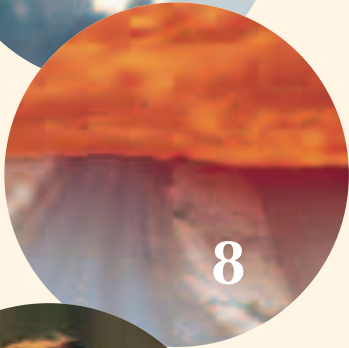
July - August 2005

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In the July and August issues of *Now What?*: battered wives and a failing marriage (<http://nowwhat.cog7.org>)



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A Bible Creed



As your editor, I am pledged to be true to God's Word, to the Church, and to what's commonly believed among us. Here's how that looks from this desk in mid-2005.

We believe in God the Father, in the Lord Jesus Christ — His divine Son — and in the Holy Spirit. All we need to know about God, humanity, and eternity is in the Bible, which, though revealed truly, is not yet fully understood.

We believe that space, time, and everything in them began by the direct creation and purpose of God. We believe that all people are born in sin and that God has acted to redeem this fallen world through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We believe that redemption becomes effective and life-changing in those who believe the gospel, with repentance.

We believe those who turn from their sins to God through Jesus Christ enter the new life of forgiveness and faith through baptism by the Spirit, symbolized in water. Alive in Christ, they are called to grow in grace, in truth, and in obedience to God's Word for a life-time. Evidences of mature faith and love are fellowship at the Lord's house and table, obedience to the moral law of God (in the Decalogue and the life of Christ), and partnership in the Great Commission.

While the majority of Christians is not always right, we believe in the spiritual unity of God's family on earth. God's church includes all who hold the faith of Jesus, keep the commandments of God, and love each other as Christ taught. In its maturity, the church is also God-exalting, Christ-following, gospel-focused, Spirit-filled, Devil-resisting, prayer-offering, Sabbath-observing, others-serving, disciple-making, world-reaching, kingdom-seeking, and glory-bound!

We believe human history will reach its appointed goal when Christ returns from heaven to judge the nations and rule in peace. We believe that human beings, not naturally immortal, have eternal life only as God's gift through Jesus Christ and that our blessed hope is resurrection from the dead to immortality at His coming. We believe the wicked will finally be destroyed, not tormented forever.

We believe people need the Lord now and will surely need Him at death and judgment. Therefore, we will introduce others to Jesus Christ, teach them to obey His Word, and nurture spiritual growth in all believers.

Your responses to this, or anything we publish, are welcome here.

— Calvin Burrell

Why Believe?

Philosophy and faith speak to our nows and our futures. Here's what each says. by Desmond Ford

Frenchman Blaise Pascal was a genius. He invented and sold the first calculating machine, a forerunner of the computer. He also planned the public transportation system for Paris. He was a wonderful man but died at age 39. He wore himself out with thinking, I think.

Pascal had a wager for unbelievers: "Belief in God is rational. That's because if God does not exist, one stands to lose nothing by believing in him anyway; while if God does exist, one stands to lose everything by not believing." Thus, the person who believes has everything to win and nothing to lose. The person who does not believe has everything to lose and nothing to win.

Private thoughts

I remember being worried once when I was living and studying in Michigan. One or two of our children was sick. I was supposed to do several years' study in about a year and a half. One of my teachers was an alcoholic, another was a homosexual. There were various other problems.

I was cycling along one day, worried. Suddenly, I believe the Spirit must have witnessed with my spirit.

If there is a God, came the thought, there's nothing to worry about. God knows all and can do all. He'll make all things work together for good. And if there is no God, again, there's nothing to worry about because nothing has value.

Nothing is worth worrying about unless God is. If there is

no God, there is no meaning. If there is no meaning, there is no value. If there is no value, there is no use getting upset about anything.

So there is no use worrying if there is no God. And if God is, then we don't have to worry, because we are in His care.

Winning and losing

An ancient philosopher was telling his disciples that there is no good reason for doing anything. At that moment, a chariot, out of control, came hurtling toward the philosophical group. The philosopher ran as fast as the others in getting out of the way. The students asked, "Why did you run? You said it doesn't matter what you do."

The philosopher explained, "That's why I ran. It didn't matter."

If God is there, there is nothing to worry about. If God is not there, there's nothing to worry about. That's my paraphrase of Pascal's wager.

The believer has everything to win and nothing to lose by believing. Eternity, joy, meaning, reason — all these glorious things to gain. The unbeliever has everything to lose and nothing to win. All the unbeliever has is hollowness and deadness.

Deadening unbelief

Deadness. That is why some people are so frantically living. That is why they have to keep the radio or TV on all the time. That is why they must fill their lives with noise.

My wife, Gill, calls it static. That's appropriate. People fill their lives with static. They are

madly dashing down this path or that. Their busyness crowds out the great thought *If I am a responsible being, what will happen when I die?*

People don't want to face that. They are afraid to face it. Pascal was right: He knew that keeping ourselves occupied isn't enough. He tried at one point to live a frivolous life. (It is said he laid down the principles of probability theory as he tried to win at gambling.) But frivolity is not enough.

Of course, Pascal's wager is not the reason we become Christians, despite the truth of his wager. The reason we become Christians is that the love of Christ compels us (see 2 Corinthians 5:14). But it doesn't hurt to remember that unbelief has nothing to offer.

Empty philosophy

David Hume, the great Scottish philosopher, had a Christian mother. When she heard of the splendor of her son's genius, she was converted to his atheism.

Years went by. David received a letter from his mother.

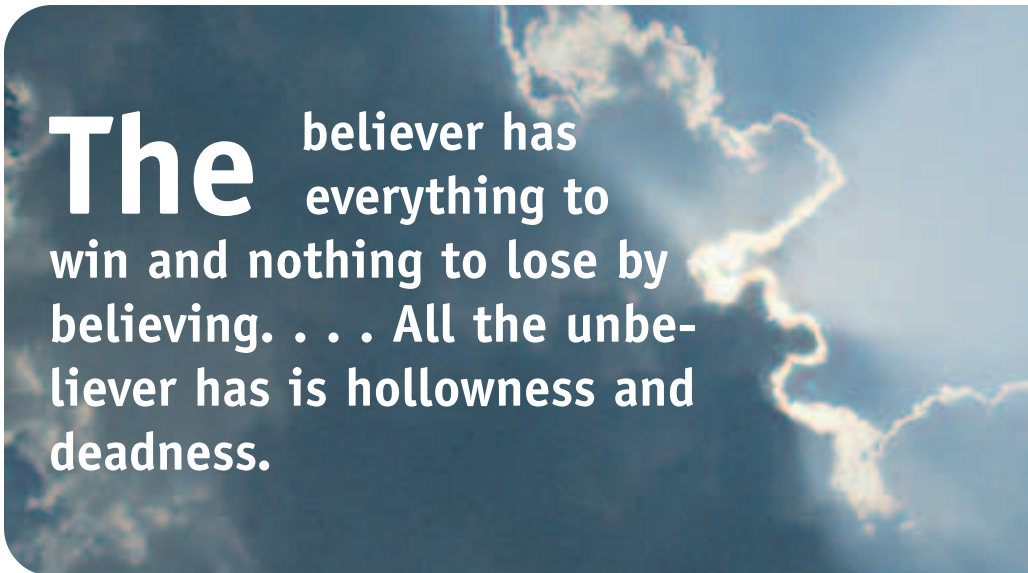
My dear son, my health has failed me. I am in a deep decline. I cannot long survive. My philosophy affords me no comfort in my distress. I am left without the hope and consolations of religion. My mind is sinking into a state of despair.

If you can afford me some substitute for the loss of the hope of religion, I pray you will hasten home to console me. Or at least write to me regarding the consolations that philosophy affords at the dying hour.

The famous philosopher had nothing to say.

Is it not an amazing thing? All the philosophies of the ages have been unable to agree on one single thing.

A philosopher without the Bible is a blind man in a room without windows and with no light on, searching for a black cat — that's not there! Hume's dying mother begged, "Send me the consolations of philosophy in my dying hours, as I'm weak



The believer has everything to win and nothing to lose by believing. . . . All the unbeliever has is hollowness and deadness.

and depressed and despairing. Send me the consolations.”

There aren't any. I've taught philosophy at college; I know. There are no consolations in philosophy.

Sanity through faith

The Spirit of God gives us sanity. You don't have to be a scholar. Victoria, a humble Christian, was worried about her agnostic shoe-repairer friend. She prayed that she might help her friend. She went to the shoe repair shop and asked, “My friend, answer me honestly and live by your answers. What sort of a world would it be if everybody loved Jesus and tried to follow Him?”

The shoe repairer thought for a while and said, “Well, people like that would build up the world in goodness and hope and faith and love.”

“My second question is,” said Victoria, “What sort of world would it be if people who reject Jesus and reject God ruled everything?”

The shoe-repairer thought awhile and said, “Well, that

would break down everything. All that's good and holy and pure and true would be broken down.”

He went on, “I see what you are saying. I see it. You have a faith that builds, and I have a faith that destroys.”

Tragedy and triumph

At the death of his brother, American orator Robert Ingersoll said, “Life is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities. We strive in vain to look beyond the heights, but only an echo answers our wailing cry.”

Ingersoll and Dwight L. Moody died the same year. The contrast was so tremendous that the newspapers noticed it.

Ingersoll's mother and daughter would not allow his corpse to be taken out of the house. Only when the stench was so terrible was the body removed. The cremation service was without one ray of sunshine or hope. Everything was so depressing, the newspapers wrote it up as a tragic end.

Moody died at the same

time. The morning of his death, his son heard him talking to God. He was praying, and it almost sounded as though he were singing. Then Moody said, “Son, this is no dark valley. This is bliss. My coronation is coming. This is no dark valley.”

Moody's son instructed those in charge of the funeral, “Not one sad note. All is to be triumph and all be joy.” And it was.

Remembered

I leave you with the story of the thief, one of the men put to death on a cross on either side of Jesus (see Luke 23:40-43).

Here is a man at his darkest extremity, his life ebbing away, a life that had been filled with evil. Suddenly, he is confronted with God's incarnate love. He calls out to Jesus, “Lord, remember me.”

And Grace answers him, “You shall be remembered. Death is not the end. You will not be forgotten. Those mocking people down there think they are seeing the end of you. No, no, no. You shall be remembered.

“You will outlive the pyramids of Egypt. You will outlive sun and moon and stars. You will be remembered, and you will be with Me in paradise.” **BA**

A philosopher without the Bible is a blind man in a room without windows and with no light on, searching for a black cat — that's not there!

Dr. Desmond Ford is an Australian from Queensland. Taken from an issue of *Good News Unlimited*. Used with permission.

Questions & Answers

I've been hearing a lot about the grace of God without works and being saved by faith alone. Some preachers seem to say that obeying God's law and holy living are no longer important. Am I hearing them right? Is this what the Church teaches?

On the one hand, the Bible does teach that remission of sins today and entrance into God's kingdom tomorrow are both gifts of the Father through His Son Jesus Christ. Neither forgiveness nor eternal life can be earned by human effort or by obedience to God's laws. They are gifts that can be received only by faith. This aspect of salvation (i.e., justification) is taught in John 3:16-18; 5:24; 6:29; Acts 16:31; Romans 3-5; 6:23; 8:1; 10:9, 10; Galatians 2:15, 16; Ephesians 2:8, 9; Philippians 3:3-9; 1 John 5:13; and other texts. We must not devalue God's grace but allow it to fully shape our faith.

On the other hand, the Bible also teaches, with equal emphasis, that those who believe in Christ and receive God's gift of salvation are thereby changed for the better. God's people not only trust Him but also obey Him. This aspect of salvation (i.e., sanctification) is taught in Matthew 7:20-23; John 3:19-21; 8:31; Romans 6; 12-14; Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 3:10-14; James 2:14-26; 1 John 1:6; 2:4; 5:1-5; etc. These texts must also shape our faith and message if we are to preach the whole counsel of God.

The previous two paragraphs, as opposite as they may sound, have always been at the heart of our understanding of Scripture and remain so to this day. They are another way of saying that we hold to "the faith of Jesus" and "the commandments of God" (Rev. 12:17; 14:12).

Law to the proud; grace to the humble: The Church teaches both! We are saved by grace through faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. It is always accompanied by something good (Heb. 6:9). The answer to this question

introduces us to biblical paradox: the case of two apparently contradictory ideas both being true. Any single lesson or sermon may sound closer to one of these ideas than to the other because you can't say all the truth at once. Please keep listening with both ears until all the major truths of Scripture find their biblical balance.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

The Bible says the Sabbath was given only to the Jews and was to last till Christ came. Why put a yoke upon Gentiles that was done away with? Surely you must know the gospel. Why not teach all of it, not just a part? If you are justified by the law (Sabbath), you are fallen from grace.

Could you please provide the text or texts that teach the Sabbath was only for Jews until Christ came? We have never found it.

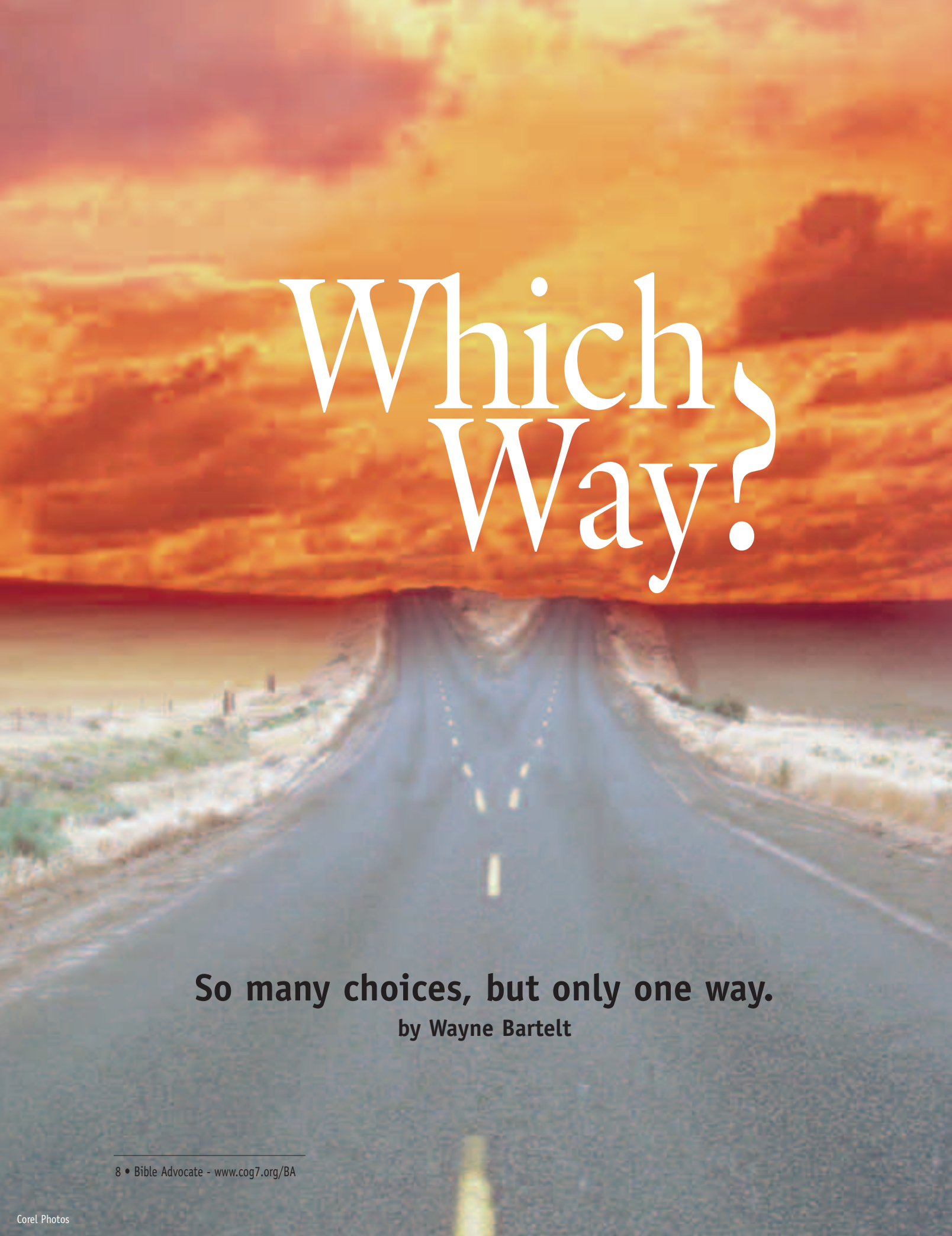
Rather, we read that the Sabbath was hallowed at Creation, long before there were Jews (Gen. 2:2, 3). And Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for man, not just for the Jews (Mark 2:27). Please provide the text that says the Sabbath was a yoke on anyone or was ever done away with.

We are a gospel-centered group of Christ's followers. We teach that Christians are saved — justified — not by works or the deeds of the law but only by the grace of God through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, who lived, died, and was resurrected for our salvation.

We are not justified by the Sabbath or by any other good we may do in obedience to God's Word. Nonetheless, Christians are called to obedience — the fruit of redemption in our lives. By their fruits you may know them (Matt. 7:20ff).

Thank you for giving us opportunity to share the gift — the grace — of God's Sabbath. It is fully compatible with His greatest gift of salvation!

— Elder Calvin Burrell

A dramatic sunset or sunrise over a desert landscape. The sky is filled with vibrant orange and red clouds. A road with a dashed yellow center line leads towards the horizon, flanked by dry, scrubby vegetation. The overall mood is contemplative and evocative.

Which Way?

So many choices, but only one way.

by Wayne Bartelt

George is the best neighbor I've ever had. When I need a tool, a helping hand, or a word of encouragement, he's right there, no questions asked. If I need a loan, George says, "How much?" More important, he and I are looking for the same things out of life: happiness, meaningful work, and peace with God. What makes us different is how we go about achieving our hopes for the future.

Like many Baby Boomers, George is facing a spiritual crisis. He knows the world needs fixing and that something is missing in his life. Though wary of anything unscientific, he yearns for a deeper understanding of who he is, his place in the world, and what will happen to him after death. Convinced that Judeo-Christian principles are no longer effective, George has launched a study of the world's religions to help him find the God who appeals to him. After all, aren't all respected religions of the world basically the same?

Golden Rule

No, they aren't.

Let's take the Golden Rule as an example. Followers of Confucius sum up their master's philosophy in one word: *benevolence*. In essence, "Do not do to others what you would not like yourself." Isocrates, a fourth century B.C. Greek Sophist, said, "What things make you angry when you suffer them at the hands of others, do not you do to other people."

Then there was the great first century B.C. Jewish Rabbi, Hillel. When asked by a man to teach him the whole law while stand-

ing on one leg, he answered, "What is hateful to you, do not unto your neighbor."

Now compare Jesus' teaching: "Do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

Do you see the similarity? Do you understand the difference? Each religious philosophy states the Golden Rule in the negative. If you don't want others to kill you, don't make murder a habit. If you don't want others to take advantage of you, don't take advantage of them. Call it a Silver Rule and sum it up this way: "I may not be perfect, but I do the best I can."

Ever notice that Jesus never encourages His children to do the best they can but to go the extra mile?

"Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you" (5:39-42).

The Christian ethic does not consist in *not* doing things but

in *doing* them. The essence of Christian conduct lies in actively promoting works of kindness and generosity rather than in refraining from hostile activities. Love conquers hate. Forgiveness overcomes resentment. Generosity trumps selfishness. Service is its own reward. Travel the high road.

That's the distinction between God's children and the rest of the world. A Christian teacher regards her pupils as children of God. A Christian doctor doesn't deal with cases but with people. A Christian workman satisfies his employer with the very best job he can do. Christian employers are concerned about the best of working conditions and the highest possible wages. Jesus never says, "Do the best you can." He says, "Do all you can."

Superior God

Where in the world's religions will you find a God who comes into the lives of men to tell them who He is? Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Where in the world's religions will you find a God who tells them plainly what He has done

Where will you find a God
who takes an interest
in the daily affairs of people?

for them? “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (10:11).

Where in the array of man’s religious concoctions will you find a God who numbers the hairs of your head and cares when a sparrow falls to the ground? Where will you find a God who heals a Canaanite girl because her mother has faith in Him, or a Roman Centurion’s servant because he professes the same faith? Where will you find a God who takes an interest in the daily affairs of people? Where will you find a God who sends His Son into the world to die for a race of sinners? Where will you find a God who humbles Himself before the people He created? Where will you find a God who loves the very humans who insult and reject Him? Where will you find a God who arranges a home for His children with Him for all eternity?

Hard to believe?

What is it that confuses my neighbor about Jesus and His way of salvation? Is it Jesus’

claims to be the Creator of the universe? Is it the Virgin Birth? Is it his assumption that Christianity is an exclusive club where Buddhists, Muslims, Shintoists, Taoists, atheists, and agnostics need not apply? Or is it being asked to believe in a God who cannot be seen, touched, or fully understood?

The greatest hindrance for George is not that God’s plan is too difficult but that it’s too easy.

People like George want their religion to describe what they must do to earn their salvation. They expect their religion to demand sacrifices they can perform to appease their Creator. They delight in a religion that requires a service that will earn a tangible reward. People love a religion that makes them feel good about themselves. They want to do something, be something, accomplish something, that will make God smile with approval. They wince with disbelief when they hear what St. Paul has to say about salvation: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of

God – not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

Isn’t it strange that many people find it difficult to believe that God has provided salvation free and clear through the blood of Jesus but that the devils found it easy? Whenever they tangled with Him, they not only lost but also had to confess that Jesus is the Son of God. They also knew there is a place of eternal destruction and of eternal life.

Journey’s end

Toward the goal of eternal life Jesus guides those He calls His children. Whatever the joys or sorrows of life, He keeps their eyes fixed on a far mountain shining in the light of God’s glory – journey’s end. Safe at last, believers will come face to face with their heavenly Father and dwell in the splendor of His presence. There they will find the family of believers. And with a glorified body, they will joyfully serve the Lamb of God.

Unfortunately, my neighbor is so busy trying to find God that he will not permit God to find him. I live in the hope that someday the Holy Spirit will call George from the darkness of the world into the light of Christ. I also hope that George will learn that God’s way is not just the best way but the only way to find the joy and contentment of peace with God. **BA**

Wayne Bartelt lives in Milwaukee, WI. Scripture quotations were taken from the *New International Version*.

Isn’t it strange that many people find it difficult to believe that God has provided salvation free and clear through the blood of Jesus but that the devils found it easy?

Us and Them

by Alex Ciurana

Here are eight substantial differences between Christianity and other worldviews.

1 Christianity has a *personal* God. Our God doesn't mind getting involved in the messy affairs of human life. He is here for us helping, guiding, comforting, and delivering. This kind of God is not common in other worldviews. Deism, for example, teaches that God set the world in motion and then left it to itself. Such a faith is little more than spiritualized atheism. The concept of God in Hindu and Taoist circles is also impersonal, but our God is different. He became a man just so He could get more personal with us: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . ." (John 1:14a).

2 Christianity has a *historical* God. Our God is so immersed in human affairs that history truly becomes His-story. He delivered Israel from Egypt and led them to conquer strong nations. He set them up in their own land and gave laws or principles for every phase of life. Most of all, He changed the

course of history by sending the Messiah to rescue fallen humanity. Our God is not so transcendent that He doesn't care about life on earth, nor is He so immanent that He's indistinguishable from earthly things.

3 Christianity has a *founder who was God's own Son*. Jesus of Nazareth claimed to be divine and was crucified for that claim. Did Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) ever claim to be divine? No. Did Mohammad make such a claim? Nope. Confucius? Never. Has anyone else ever claimed to be God's only begotten? Sure. You can find plenty of them at your local mental hospital. The fact is that no one ever claiming to come from heaven has affected the world in such positive and paramount ways as Jesus.

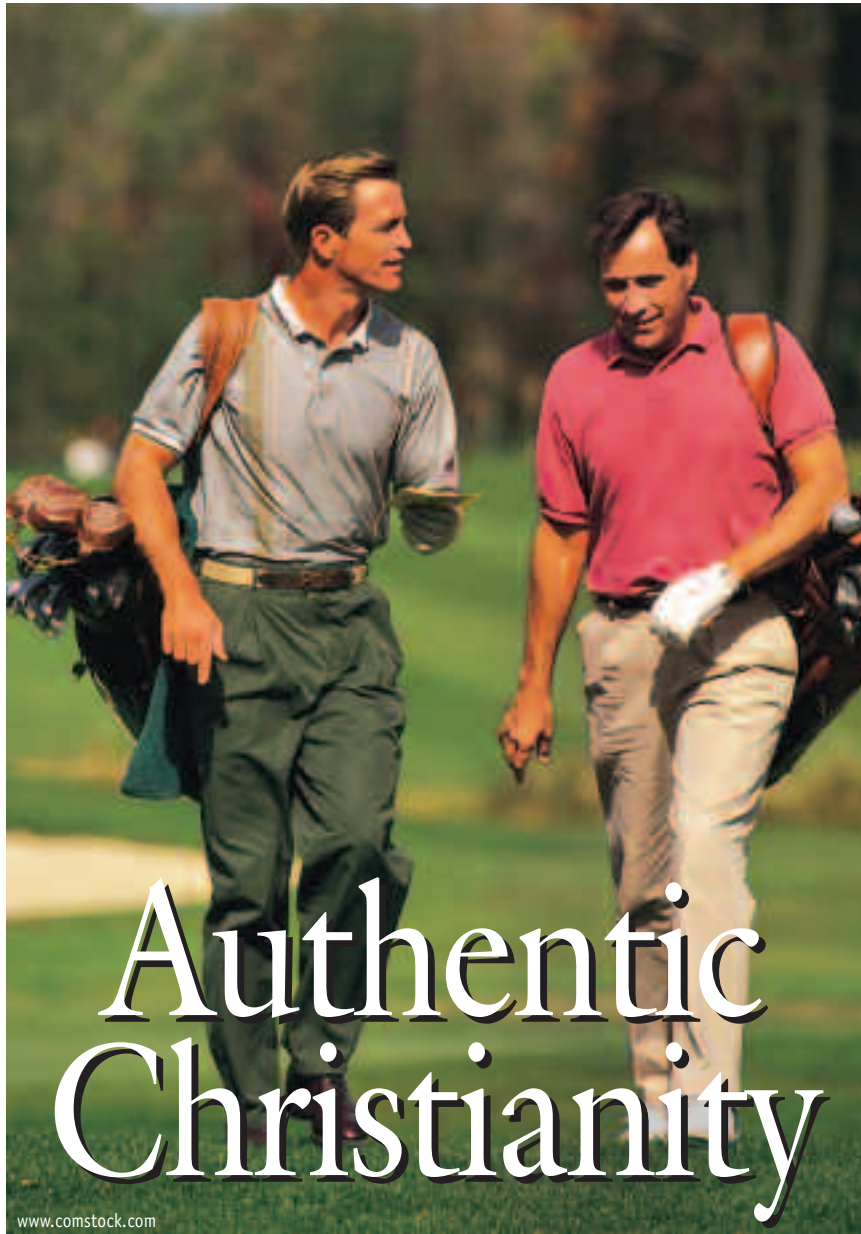
4 Christianity has a *resurrected founder*. Jesus of Nazareth was crucified but rose again three days later. What other fallen stone could explain the ripple effect felt around the world? Timid disciples were transformed into apostles, a few hundred believers evangelized

tens of thousands, and former pagan kingdoms claimed Christianity for themselves.

5 Christianity has *Scripture that stands up to examination*. The Bible's authority and historicity are attested by its canonization, manuscript evidence, fulfilled prophecy, and archaeological finds. These ingredients are never seen together in any other sacred writings. We hold in our hands the Book of books. More than any other religion, Christianity has reliable and accurate Scriptures.

6 Christianity has *changed the world for the better*. Unlike many religions, Christianity is not passive in social dogma. Pastors, missionaries, and laymen have striven to improve life by building orphanages and schools, providing food and clothing, caring for the sick, fighting slavery, and promoting human rights. Nearly every arena of culture has been profoundly blessed by the followers of Christ.

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What is the difference between religion and a relationship with Christ? by **Dr. James J. DeFrancisco**

Christianity means different things to different people. To agnostics and atheists, it may seem to be a foolish belief system based on unproven tenets of faith. To fundamentalist Jews or Muslims, it

may appear as the epitome of pagan concepts blended with twisted truths from Scripture. To those who remember the Holocaust or the Crusades, Christianity may represent persecution and death. Diverse

positions exist even within Christianity: Some groups do not accept others as “true Christians.”

Given the various perspectives on and assorted flavors of our faith, we must ask, “Why Christianity?” What is the essence of our faith that separates it from others? Can we dialogue with other religions without compromising our Christian essentials?

Yes, we can. But to earn the right to speak to those outside our faith, we must first look seriously at ourselves. Is our version of Christianity merely another religion? Or is it a vital, obedient relationship with Jesus Christ? If it’s just religion, how do we move it toward an authentic faith?

Rescue

Let’s begin by thinking about how we project our faith to others and what separates Christianity from other religions. From the perspective of a non-believer, much of our Christian witness may sound like trivial, personal babble, like “I am proud to be a Christian.”

In truth, this is not the best way to represent our faith to others. Pride is a serious sin, a common religious sin. Personally and spiritually, I have nothing to be proud of. I am grateful for a Savior who delivered me from the consequences of my weakness and sin. Would I be proud if, as a non-swimmer, I was rescued from drowning? No, but I would be thankful and forever indebted to the rescuer.

It is that very appreciation and relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ

that separates Christianity from all religions, including the “religion” of Christianity. The Christian faith is more relationship leading to a way of life than it is a religion.

Faces and standards

Before we exalt Christianity, let’s also think about the different faces we display to the world.

There is the “sloppy agape” that says, “I am saved by grace through faith and can do whatever I want.” Opposite this is the self-righteous face that says, “To earn or ensure salvation, you must follow all these rules.”

Viewing Christianity as a diverse religious community, I don’t consider it any better than any other religion that promotes respect for God and high moral standards with a search for truth. Why not?

First, anyone on these paths will likely recognize the true Savior when He is presented to them in the right way. The problem is that the Savior has often been misrepresented by believers. This is particularly the case with Jews and Muslims. The cross was a symbol of death to Christians and Muslims during the Crusades, as was a twisted version of it to six million Jews during the Holocaust. Christian missionaries sometimes covertly infiltrate Muslim and Jewish countries and break their laws in order to make converts. This may not follow the evangelistic model of the early apostles.

Second, adherents to other religions often have higher moral standards than do most moderns who call themselves Christians. It wasn’t always this

way. In other times or places, the church has been known for its standards of morality and strong family values, but that is no longer true, at least not in twenty-first century America.

This moral problem is exemplified by the fact that, according to statistics by the Barna Group, born-again Christians are

just as likely to divorce as are non-Christians. Barna also reports that in a nationwide survey “A minority of born again adults (44%) and an even smaller proportion of born again teenagers (9%) are certain of the existence of absolute moral truth.”

In some mid-Eastern coun-

Christians, Jews, and Muslims

Christianity is one of three monotheistic religions stemming from Abraham. Speaking the truth in love, we can promote desperately needed understanding among Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

All three religions recognize only one God. All respect the Torah; practice faith, prayer, fasting, and charity; and teach that this life is preparation for eternal life.

Islam has much in common with Christianity and Judaism. Muslims accept much of our Gospels and consider Jesus one of their five great prophets. They respect modesty, and many of their practices are more in harmony with scriptural principles than the more worldly “Christian” West.

With enough common ground for dialogue, great differences remain — obviously! There is a radical and militant element in Islam. Muslims reject Jesus as God’s Son and deny the Crucifixion. Our challenge as Christians is to show that the God of Abraham, whom Muslims call Allah, is really the Father of Jesus and that Jesus is the source of salvation and eternal life.

I have learned much about Messiah from studying with Jews. Some of them know our New Testament better than many Christians and are far beyond most ministers in understanding the Old Testament (i.e., the Tanach). When we respect Jews and recognize how much influence paganism has had on Christianity, it is much easier to dialogue and represent the true Messiah.

My Jewish friends relate with God through the Torah, a relationship that becomes much richer when they acknowledge the living Messiah. I have found much continuity from the ancient truths of Judaism with the faith of the New Testament. I have come to understand my own faith better by viewing it through the lens of the religion from which it sprang.

Secure Christians can affirm their faith without negating the faith of others. We can be tolerant and even learn from them, even as we reflect the divine presence of Christ.

— Dr. James J. DeFrancisco

Witnessing to Muslims and Jews

- Remember that we are not called to witness but to “be” witnesses (Acts 1:8). Actions speak louder than words. Make your actions Christ-like, and then your words will be more effective.
- Treat Muslims and Jews with love and respect. Don’t be overly dogmatic, trying to convert them.
- Learn about the other’s religious views. Listen carefully, and do your own research. Obtain firsthand information from a Jewish or Islamic source, as well as an expert Christian apologist.
- Nullify your ego and feelings of superiority. Show gratitude and appreciation for what God has done through Christ, not pride or exclusivity.
- Most people come to know Jesus by His love, rather than by their logic. That is how I came to know Him.
- Share your life experience with Christ in an authentic way, not in a mechanical approach.
- Learn to discern between a true believer, a God-fearing seeker, and a religious or political fanatic. If a person doesn’t accept Christ as such, then pray for him and thank God that at least he seeks the one God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

— *Dr. James J. DeFrancisco*

tries, divorce and immorality are still rare when compared to the “Christianized” West. The path in Buddhism presents a standard of morality in many ways higher than that of most Christians in Europe and the U.S.

A more authentic version of our faith — an obedient faith-relationship with Christ — says, “Jesus saved me by His life, death, and resurrection. He led me into relationship as a child with a loving Father. I want to please Him and fulfill His purpose in my life.”

Something is wrong with a form of Christianity that doesn’t elevate standards of its adherents above the common culture. If we convert non-believers to this nominal form of Christianity, we may be merely manipulating

them into false religion.

If, on the other hand, we humbly admit our sins, identify their root causes, and repent, we can introduce the world to the living Christ who rescued us and to the life-giving essence of His person and character. Then we’ll have a more profound impact on the world around us.

Responsibilities

Religion is not enough. Authentic Christianity reflects a relationship with the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ. For this to happen, we Christians who are dedicated to truth must humbly put away our false “Christs” that do not produce the fruits of righteousness. These include the religious

imagery of a non-Semitic, Sunday school Jesus who is totally removed from His Jewish culture, false teachers and religious leaders who manipulate people with fear and greed, and overly controlling forms of ecclesiastical hierarchies.

As authentic Christians, we treasure God’s Word and are dedicated in our study of Holy Scripture. We are faithful to our gospel roots in the Hebrew Scriptures. We are aware of influences that adulterate pure Christian faith and practice. We desire to know God better and to share salvation with others. We want to be better disciples of the Way and encourage others to do the same. We demand respect for God in Christ, beginning with what we demand from ourselves. We understand the difference between genuine relationship and mere religion. We don’t just do as we please but affirm that those who are saved must be holy, serving as salt and light to the world.

We accept a tremendous responsibility as disciples of the Savior in appreciating the gift of our salvation and in living a new life through the power of Christ’s resurrection.

That’s what makes true Christianity different from anything else. Accept no substitutes! **BA**

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Superior Sacrifice

by Richard A. Wiedenheft

Most religions have taught that to gain divine favor, one must give up something of significant value. The greater the value of the sacrifice, the greater the likelihood of a positive response from the gods.

The ancient Canaanites worshipped Baal, the storm god, upon whom they relied for sunshine, rain, and fertility for crops, animals, and themselves. Baal's anger could be appeased and his blessings obtained only by offering up something precious, or by self-mutilation (see 1 Kings 18:20-40).

Sometimes the worship of Baal and other pagan deities involved child sacrifice. When threatened by the armies of Israel, Mesha, king of Moab, sacrificed his firstborn son on the wall of the city to gain help from Chemosh, the Moabite god (2 Kings 3:27). Even God's people got involved time and again in pagan religious practices, including sacrificing their own children to Baal (16:3; 17:17; 21:6).

While most ancient and modern religions do not require human sacrifice, many teach some form of self-denial or offering to gain divine favor. From one perspective, this could be said of the Levitical system God gave through

Moses in which animals and grains without blemish or defect were sacrificed.

And in Christianity one finds the idea that God grants His favors to those who deny themselves and do good for others. Some Christians exploit this principle by saying that if you sow seeds of faith by giving money to the preacher, God will grant you a bountiful harvest of physical blessings. What a devious way to get the things you want!

There is a kernel of truth in self-sacrifice to please God. But the essence of true Christianity is not about what we human beings do to get God's attention or gain His favor. Rather, it is about what God has already sacrificed for us. It's about what He has done to pay for the sins of every man, woman, and child ever born.

When God, through Christ, was creating Adam and Eve and placing them in the Garden of Eden, He knew that one day He would have to sacrifice His Son so human beings could be reconciled to Him (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:17-21).

Jesus Christ — the blameless, matchless, unblemished Lamb of God — gave up all the glory, honor, power, and authority He had with the Father. He laid it all aside to walk this earth in

human flesh, to suffer and die so we could be redeemed and spend eternity in fellowship with Him.

We do please God by dedicating the best of what we have to Him. The apostle Paul urges us to offer our whole selves (Romans 12:1). Our entire lives should be dedicated to pleasing God. But it is all based on the fact that we have already received His divine love, demonstrated by the life, death, and resurrection of His Son.

Even under the Old Testament sacrificial system, worship was not about satisfying God's hunger with animal sacrifices or quenching His thirst with drink offerings (Psalm 50:8-15; 51:16, 17). Similarly, true Christianity is not about enriching God with our financial sacrifices or impressing Him with our knowledge or wowing Him with our doctrines or earning His love by our deeds. Rather, it is about recognizing the magnitude of His sacrifice for us, seeing the depth of His concern for us, grasping the greatness of His humility and love for His children — and passing the same on to others!

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

Marriage, Money, Ministry

a BA interview with LeRoy and Hope Dais

Tell us when, where, and how you met, and about family.

Coming from Eureka, South Dakota (LeRoy), and Canton, New York (Hope), we met at Midwest Bible College in Stanberry, Missouri, in September 1954. We married on June 7, 1955, in New York.

Our children are Bryan, Susan, Craig, and Linda. Bryan, Tamara, and family live in Westminster, Colorado. Susan and Dan Payne live in Beaverton, Oregon. Craig, Barb, and family live in Arvada, Colorado. Linda and Steve Stricker and family live in Broomfield, Colorado.

LeRoy, you've served 16 years at the publishing house in Stanberry and more than 33 at BAP in Denver. Talk about 50 years of changes.

This calls for a book! Thanks to God's grace and the generous support of members and friends, changes have been many.

From '56 to '73 we worked with letterpress equipment. That meant producing type from melted lead and using heavy forms with several magazine pages on the printing presses.

Engraving was slow and expensive, so photos were scarce.

In '56 the BA was published weekly. For 25 years we also published *Footprints* for children and *Aim* for youth. *The Harvest Field Messenger* was published for Church news until '92.

Editors were fortunate to receive typewritten copy. Much was handwritten and had to be typed before it could be edited. Then the badly marked-up copy went to the Linotype for typesetting. Correcting a minor error meant resetting an entire line — or a whole paragraph.

We began switching to offset printing in '73 after moving from Stanberry to Denver. All the print shop equipment was replaced. Phototypesetting equipment was used for more than a decade until computers became the main tool for writing, editing, typesetting, layout, design, etc.

Office work also has changed dramatically, from manual typewriters and mimeographs to computers, copiers, fax machines, and the Internet. Keeping subscription lists evolved from making address plates on a noisy Graphotype machine, then stamping them with a troublesome Addressograph, to the modern computer-

ized system.

In '56 all our literature and magazines went for a price. In '59 the price was taken off tracts, and in 1970 the BA became free for the asking — both dependent upon freewill financial support.

Hope, what about the years in Stanberry and your roles in the Church?

We lived in Stanberry the first 16 years of our married life. Early on, I worked as Dr. A. L. Carlin's assistant. Later, as a stay-at-home mom, I helped at the publishing house as editor of *Footprints* and *Aim*, proofreader, etc. Both of us have been active in local church ministries and were blessed by the fellowship of the staff and students of Midwest Bible College. In Denver I've worked as receptionist for the G. C. office and secretary to the Conference presidents.

When, how, and why did you get involved in Crown Financial Ministries?

Growing up in conservative families and learning to be frugal, we observed that many families struggle with finances and a

lack of teaching in this area. Serving as church treasurers, on church boards, and raising funds for BAP also made us more aware of this.

We used books on stewardship for a group study in the eighties but needed something better. We learned of Crown Ministries in '93, with their Bible-based *Student Manual* and *Practical Application Workbook* to help students practice what they learned. We registered for the Crown leader training and led three groups that first year. We have led about 15 groups since — more than 100 students in all. Several of them have become effective group leaders. In addition, we have helped train more than 200 Crown small group leaders in one-day sessions.

We have seen numerous couples and individuals change lifestyle, work toward getting out of debt, and get freed up to serve the Lord. Everyone benefits from the Crown course! It is possible for folks with modest earnings (Church employees, for example) to save and give generously, but we must prioritize use of the resources God gives.

With more teaching on money, like the last Sabbath school quarterly, what potential do you see for Church and gospel ministries?

It has been heartwarming to observe that a properly prioritized view of our possessions



LeRoy and Hope (Caswell) Dais have set standards for reliability at home and in service to the Church.

draws people into a more intimate relationship with Christ. A significant number are led to salvation through the Crown study.

God had a purpose for the more than 2,350 verses in the Bible about money and possessions. As we learn to be better stewards and give Him first place in our lives, we support the gospel more generously.

Crown Financial Ministries has a goal to teach the Bible's financial principles to 300 million people around the world by 2015, with the intent that increased support will help reach the entire world with the gospel in this generation. As our people learn and practice these principles, the church will do its part.

Talk to young couples about staying faithful in marriage for the long haul and avoiding financial pitfalls along the way.

Spouses are God's blessing to be cherished and supported for life. The family comes second only to our devotion to God, with Christ at the center.

Commitment is the key ingredient. Face reality: Life will not be one long session of "moonlight and roses." Recognize the ways God made us different. Don't make mountains out of molehills. Don't compare. (For instance, if your spouse is not one who selects gifts for special occasions, the big picture may show that he/she is

more dependable in other ways than many romantic, gift-giving spouses.)

Don't place blame — a major pitfall. No one is eager to come home to a spouse who regularly criticizes, blames, or insinuates responsibility. Be an affirmer, not a critic. Consider the importance of responses: How we respond can make the difference between a major conflict or just a trivial matter to smile at. Pray together often.

Be unselfish toward family in using the resources God provides. Budget for ongoing needs, and plan for major investments. Avoid impulse buying. Learn to ignore intriguing advertising.

Agree on purchases. Talk about differences in philosophy on spending. Big purchases can tie up finances for years, making the tensions of daily life unbearable — not worth it.

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Fingerprints



A biblical investigation of the identity of Jesus Christ.
by Jeff Endecott

“Follow the evidence . . . the evidence never lies.”

Those who enjoy the TV crime drama *CSI* often hear these words spoken by its main character, Gil Grissom. On this program, the science of forensics is employed to connect suspects to crimes. Identification, elimination, or conviction of a suspect is based upon fingerprints; DNA; traces of fiber, pollen, seeds, or soil; or other bits of evidence.

Forensics works because of our individuality. Each of us has his own DNA “signature,” his own fingerprint ridges, etc.

Forensics also works because of commonality. Though we are unique, we all have DNA and fingerprints. Uniqueness and commonality, then, are universal traits of people.

The same traits of uniqueness and commonality are also found in Jesus Christ, the central figure in God’s real-life drama of reconciling estranged humanity. In this leading role, Christ maintained His unique identity with God, yet assumed commonality with us by taking on creature characteristics and weaknesses. Let’s examine Jesus’ “fingerprints” in Scripture and see where the evidence leads.

Uniqueness in tension

Some assert that the central

point of Jesus' uniqueness — His deity — was invented by the church in the third century. (This is a basic premise of Dan Brown's bestseller *The Da Vinci Code*.) The fact is, however, that within only a few decades of His life on earth, statements of faith had arisen that attested to the unique relation of Jesus Christ to His Father.

The most familiar of these early creeds speaks both of Christ's common humanity and His deity. "Being in the form of God" (Philippians 2:6ff, KJV), Jesus humbled Himself as a servant "in the likeness of men" (v. 7), then descended further into the pit of humanity and subjected Himself to the most ignominious of deaths: crucifixion.

"In the form of God" is one clear fingerprint; "in the likeness of men" is another. Both prints came from the same Person. Here is tension, and here is truth.

Let's follow the evidence further by examining a hymn-to-Christ passage written to a first century congregation. Paul employs a creedal hymn to refute the heresy taking root in Colosse and gives us a glimpse of what the early church proclaimed about Jesus Christ. Here again the uniqueness and commonality of Jesus are seen in tension:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation; because by Him everything was created, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and by

Him all things hold together. He is also the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He might come to have first place in everything. For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile everything to Himself by making peace through the blood of His cross — whether things on earth or things in heaven (Colossians 1:15-20).

This hymn lays out for us three areas of Christ's uniqueness:

- In relation to God, Christ is the image (*eichon*).
- In relation to creation, Christ is the firstborn (*prototokos*).
- In relation to the church, Christ is the head, the beginning, and the firstborn from the dead.

Let's look at each of these in more detail.

Image of God

F. F. Bruce writes:

To say that Christ is the image of God is to say that in him the nature and being of God have been perfectly revealed — that in him the invisible has become visible.¹ By virtue of His deity, Jesus

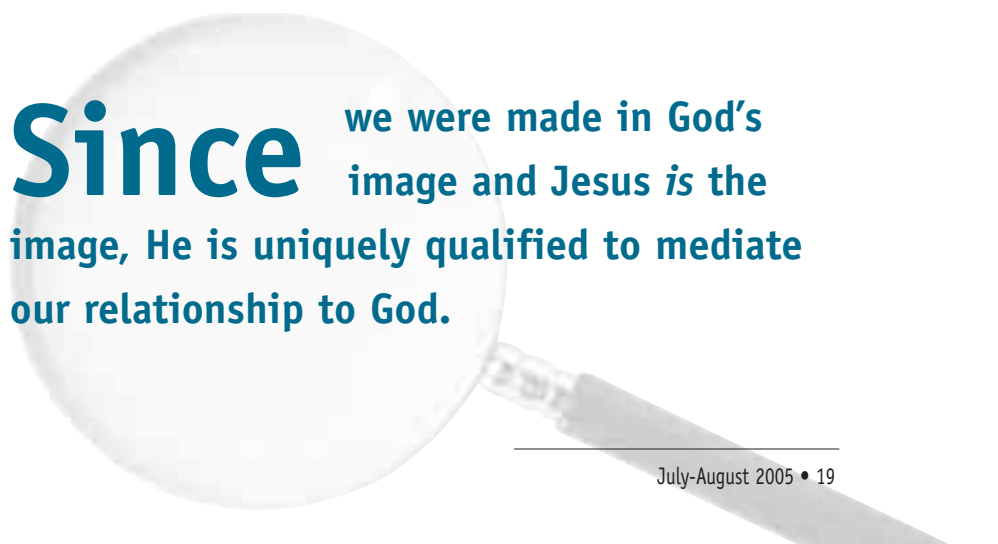
perfectly reflects the Father.

And by virtue of His humanity, Jesus perfectly reflects the Father in a language we can understand. He did not come as a perfect wolf or whale but as one of us. Participating in flesh and blood as the Second Adam, Jesus showed clearly what God is like. Sin did not wreak the havoc on Him that it had on the first Adam.

This "image of God" concept also speaks to why Jesus can restore us to the Father. Since we were made in God's image and Jesus *is* the image, He is uniquely qualified to mediate our relationship to God.

Firstborn over creation

In His relation to the first created order, Jesus is the one by whom, for whom, and through whom "all things" were made and hold together (vv. 16, 17). The term "all things" is a well-known Greek philosophical phrase for "the universe of things."² All of creation owes its existence to Jesus. The *prototokos*, or firstborn, here is not a reference to Jesus being the first thing created but to His place of preeminence over that created order. The *rights* of the firstborn are His alone.



Since we were made in God's image and Jesus is the image, He is uniquely qualified to mediate our relationship to God.

To protect the rights of the inventor, the United States Patent Office offers patents to new or improved products. Jesus is the patent holder for *ta panta* — “the universe of things.” No one else can claim His first-born rights as Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer.

Firstborn over the church

Jesus is again in the position of preeminence over the new created order, of which the church is the first portion. Being firstborn from the dead does not mean Jesus was the first to be raised with regard to time, since He himself raised several from the dead prior to His own resurrection. Rather, it means that in His relationship to this new class of humanity, Jesus stands as *prototokos*. “Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep,” Paul asserts in 1 Corinthians 15:20.

Every religion believes in afterlife, but only Christianity bases its hope upon a historical

event. Jesus’ resurrection is the guarantee of our resurrection.

Similarly, every religion hopes for a better day in which all things will be made new. For the Christian, this hope is also present reality. The old has gone; we are a new creation through relationship with Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Commonality, too

The Bible offers direct evidence of Christ’s humanity as well. Consider these fingerprints: Jesus shared in sorrow, in suffering, in hunger, in thirst, in abandonment, in betrayal, in mockery, in weakness, in trouble, in persecution, in despair — even in death. “I know how you feel” is something only Jesus can genuinely say when we’re hurting and when we’re dying: He was touched by the nature of our infirmity, not insulated from it (Hebrews 4:15).

John 1:14 says it classically: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

Not only that, but Jesus also considers us His children. “Here I am with the children God gave me” is the statement that the author of Hebrews applies to Jesus (2:13). One can scarcely imagine a more ragtag group of humanity than the one stretching out behind our Elder Brother. Even a cursory study of church history reveals factions, feuds, backbiting, bickering, prejudice, and pride. But the testimony — indeed, even the promise of Scripture — is that Jesus stands as *prototokos* and is not ashamed to claim this group as members of His family.

One of a kind

The evidence is in, and it is compelling. Examining the fingerprints, we conclude that Jesus was both deity and humanity. It is a mystery that we cannot comprehend with our present minds, but with our spirits we can rejoice over it. Perhaps the wisest thing we can say, along with John the apostle, is that Jesus truly is *monogenes*, the only begotten Son — one of a kind.

The evidence of Scripture leads us irresistibly to affirm both the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in His relation to God and His commonality in relation to us. In Him we see our own fingerprint, except for sin. And in Him we find the unmistakable fingerprint of God.

Follow the evidence of the sacred text: It never lies. **BA**

Jeff Endecott serves as pastor in Farmville, NC, and as superintendent of the Southeast District. He and his wife, Rita, have six children. Scripture quotations were taken from the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*, unless otherwise noted.

References

1. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, pp. 57-58. See especially the footnotes on pp. 55, 56.
2. Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. See Note on Colossians 1:16.

Online

Want to read more on Christ? Visit the July-August *Bible Advocate Online* (www.cog7.org/BA) and read Martin Bledsoe’s “The Divinity of Jesus Christ.”

The Pauline doctrines of sin and salvation are given full expression in . . .

Romans and Galatians

These two epistles of the apostle go under the banner of *soteriology*, meaning they are letters of salvation. Nowhere in Paul's writings do his convictions about sin, the grace of God in Jesus Christ, our justification by faith without human works, and our response of holy living and walking by the Spirit come through so loud and clear as in these two books.

While the central messages of Romans and Galatians are much alike, the settings and situations under which these two were written are very different.

Romans is a systematic treatise on sin (chs. 1—3) and the way of salvation through Christ (chs. 3—8). Even the casual reader may sense the broad outline of the book and note Paul's advance as he walks the reader through his understanding of sin, justification, sanctification, and glorification for the believer. Written in cool reflection, this letter also includes sections on God's dealings with Israel (chs. 9—11) and the practical outworking of God's grace in the Christian's lifestyle (chs. 12—15).

The letter to the Romans contains a minimum of personal material connecting Paul to the church in Rome — until chapter 16, seen by some as an addendum. Because of its appeal and application to all Christians, Paul may have intended the letter to be circulated beyond the capital city of the empire.

Galatians, on the other hand, is shorter, more turbulent, less structured. Written in the heat of controversy, it was prompted by

news from churches Paul had founded in Asia Minor. A group of false teachers (called Judaizers because they were more Jewish than Christian) had followed Paul's missionary march through the regions of Galatia, undermining his message of salvation by grace through faith in Christ apart from the deeds of the law. They taught that it was necessary for Gentiles to be circumcised and to keep the laws of Moses before they could truly be Christian. Paul was furious, and the language of Galatians gives vent to his intensity in all six chapters.

The letter to the Galatians, unlike Romans, is aimed at a specific problem and is narrow in its focus. Its appeal and application are primarily to those who wrestle with the relationship of the old covenant laws — circumcision in particular — to the new covenant in Jesus. In this historical setting that plagued the apostle in the first century, Paul applies the universal principles that he had earlier systematized in Romans.

Although these two letters differ markedly in their form and style, they are united in substance. The boldface outline of Paul's salvation theology (i.e., soteriology) in both books goes like this:

1. Man is naturally prone to sin and is unable to save himself (Rom. 1:17—3:23; Gal. 3:22a; 4:3; 5:19-21).
2. God has acted to rescue humanity from the dilemma of sin, guilt, and judgment through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is grace (Rom. 1:16; 3:24, 25; 5:6-8; 10:9; Gal. 2:20 to 3:13; 6:14).
3. This salvation in Christ is received in human experience, not by works of the law or by good deeds, but by faith (Rom. 3:20-31; 4:1-25; 5:1, 2; Gal. 2:15—3:9; 5:1-5).
4. Saving faith is demonstrated, confirmed, and verified by the new life and spiritual walk of the believer (Rom. 6, 12, and 13; Gal. 5 and 6).



Real History

by Monique Acosta

Last summer I spent six weeks in Jordan on an archaeological dig sponsored by the Christian college I attend. Digging up pottery from the time of Samson inspired the other college students and me to talk about our beliefs. One student, a recent theology graduate, believed that Old Testament stories are similar to Jesus' parables in the New Testament. They are not to be taken as historical reality.

Growing up in the Church, I never questioned my beliefs — until last summer. Hearing this guy equate the Old Testament stories with *The Chronicles of Narnia* disturbed me.

My best friend on the dig also discredited Old Testament stories, especially the one about Creation. She described some discrepancies she found in the Creation account and how they support her view that the Old Scriptures are mere myths of the Hebrew people. I shared with her my beliefs about the Bible's historicity, but I had few facts to support my view.

When I heard such beliefs

tossed around by my co-volunteers and some of the staff, my mind filled with questions. I doubted the support for Old Testament authenticity and the evidence for believing that the Bible is historical fact.

One verse kept running through my head: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Then I wondered, *Why couldn't parables "breathed" by God and expressing His magnificence and mercy be useful?* I spent a confusing six weeks, spiritually and intellectually. Something deep inside kept whispering that these ideas were not right and that if I threw out the Old Testament, I threw out the whole Bible. If I yielded to this first step of doubt, would it be the first of many in a wrong direction?

I returned to Egypt, where I'd taught the previous year as a student missionary, full of questions and doubts. Sally, a wonderful Christian mentor and friend, confronted the notions

that had seeped into my head.

As I shared my struggle, Sally set me straight. She pointed out that nowhere does the Bible uphold a view of the Old Testament as a set of parables. She shared how she believed that God created the world just as He recorded — not in some mindless evolutionary process, but by the Word of God. She affirmed my concern that if you disregard the Old Testament, you take the longest step toward disregarding the whole Bible.

I came away from our discussion believing in the truth of the Old Scriptures. Returning to the States, however, I realized I still did not have good biblical proof, so decided to study the issue for myself.

The strongest argument for the authority of Old Testament history is how the New Testament treats it. Neither Jesus nor His followers treat their Jewish Scriptures as parables. Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus, citing a well-known Old Testament list of heroes like Abraham, Jacob, Rahab, Ruth, and David. Why would Matthew record parable heroes to support the lineage of Christ? He was tracing the line of Jesus' ancestry straight through the ages, from the famous patriarchs to King David.

The clincher for me, however, is in Hebrews 11, where the author speaks of Old Testament heroes as real people, not characters from parables. He speaks of the "ancients" and extols them for their faith in the promises of God. He goes through the renowned stories of the Old Testament, explaining how each hero was commend-

ed as a righteous man by faith, living in hope of the promise. In Hebrews, Old Testament stories are true: People really did build arks, cross the Red Sea on dry ground, and flatten the walls of Jericho through God's mighty power.

Finally, the writer of Hebrews states, "God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect" (v. 40). I don't believe we will join a bunch of parable characters but genuine people who lived by the power of God and performed great acts of faith, even if those acts are incomprehensible to us.

Recently, I met my friend from the dig, this time in a class on the ancient Near East. We were discussing the Exodus, and our teacher was explaining possible dates when it might have occurred. As he outlined different views, my friend leaned over and whispered that the story of the Exodus is not meant to be taken as a historical account.

She then looked at me, waiting for agreement. I looked her in the eye and said with confidence, "No, it is true" and that our teacher's attempt to place a biblical event on the timeline of history was valid.

With conviction, I believe God's Word is what He set it out to be — real history and eternal salvation. **BA**

Monique Acosta, an '02 graduate of Spring Vale Academy, is currently attending Walla Walla College in College Place, WA. She is working on her history major and archaeology minor. Scripture quotations were taken from the *New International Version*.

Us and Them

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7 Christianity has a *painfully correct view of people*. The Bible's diagnosis of humanity is a grim one. Humanity is seen as fallen, incapable of restoring the former glory of Eden. This description is a far cry from those of eastern religions, New Age, and many cults. They teach that humanity is, deep down, divine — that a person needs only to "awaken" to the fact that he is god. Such teachings eerily resemble Satan's deception to Eve (Genesis 3:4b, 5). Christianity's teaching of human sinfulness, while not naturally appealing, is evidence of its divine origin. If our faith were manmade, why not invent a more friendly assessment of us? God knows what we really are, and His view of us is painful because it is totally true.

8 Christianity has *grace*. This distinctive feature is the most glorious of them all. Despite the seemingly hopeless scenario described so far, God invites, God atones, God justifies, God sanctifies, and God glorifies all who receive Him by faith. Oh, that the world would know the sweetness of God's saving grace! **BA**

Alex Ciurana is pastor of the Church in Galena Park, TX. Adapted from his *Basic Apologetics*, Lesson 7. ©2003 Reasons For Faith. Used with permission.

Marriage, Money, Ministry

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Compare prices. Quality is important, but it doesn't always mean a higher price. Don't be too proud to buy used. Sometimes you can buy a quality, longer-lasting item (furniture, for instance) at a much lower price. (Be cautious with used appliances.)

Avoid the mind-set of impressing others with your new car, nice house, etc.

What plans do you have for the next 50 years?

We don't expect to live as long as Moses, but we are willing to serve the Lord and people in some way as long as He gives us health, strength, and ability. Beyond that, our confidence is in the Lord's return to establish His kingdom. If that doesn't occur in our lifetime, our hope is in the resurrection of the righteous (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

Our hope for the Church is for members to experience a daily refreshing in the Holy Spirit and a renewed commitment to faithfully serve Christ. Our prayer for the Church is that the resources and laborers will multiply, enabling the ministries and members to reach vast multitudes for Christ. Let's all keep focused on Christ and those things that matter for eternity (1 Corinthians 15:58). **BA**

Mail Bag



Dinosaurs

After reading responses to your dinosaur question [April-May '05, p. 11], I was disappointed that I didn't respond. Scripture is what we must use to validate what we believe about creation. It is backward to try to validate Scripture with science.

Dinosaurs were created before man on the sixth day (Gen. 1:24-26). Man and dinosaur probably walked the earth together until the Flood, after which the dinosaurs died off because of changes in the atmosphere (8:22). In the riverbed at Glenrose, TX, archaeological diggings show a human footprint in a dinosaur footprint — impossible if dinosaurs became extinct before the creation of man. Also, they couldn't have died off before man, since death didn't enter the world until Adam sinned (Rom. 5:12).

Day in Gen. 1 means a solar day of 24 hours, not eons of time. Creation week was six literal days plus the Sabbath on which God rested. Exodus 20:8-11 supports this, giving God's creation rest as

the reason for Israel to work six days and keep Sabbath holy.

There is no such thing as "pre-historic" time. Gen. 1:1 is the beginning of time and of history in respect to the universe. According to the Bible, this is when it all began, though we don't have the details. The first day of time (vv. 1-3) is when God began to create the physical universe from nothing. He created it with the appearance of age. Adam wasn't created from the dust of the ground as an infant but as a grown man from the start. The inanimate universe seems to have been created with instant maturity as well. And it all took place approximately 6,000 years ago.

R. Z.
Newalla, OK

The word *dinosaur* couldn't be used in Scripture, as the word wasn't used prior to 1842. The Bible uses *behemoth*, descriptive of the apatosaurus, camarasaurus, or the brachiosaurus — all of which have tails like the cedar tree (Job 40:15-24). Leviathan was a terrible animal that breathed fire. No one could capture it (Job 41), so it could not be a crocodile.

For evolution to be possible, you need millions and billions of years. Just because something is a fossil does not mean it is millions of years old. To become a fossil, you need quick burial, water, and minerals — something that could occur with Noah's flood. My kids explain, "You need a lot of water and a lot of mud, but not a lot of time."

Romans 5:12ff and 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22 show that millions of years of death and destruction could not have occurred prior to Adam. These verses mean that there was no death, no decay before Adam's sin. Why not believe what God said in His Holy Word? He mentions the "evening and the morning" to indicate six 24-hour days in creation. And He gave the eternal example of resting on the seventh day. Don't make excuses; just believe it, and He will bless you for it.

L. N.
Lawton, ND

Spiritual strength

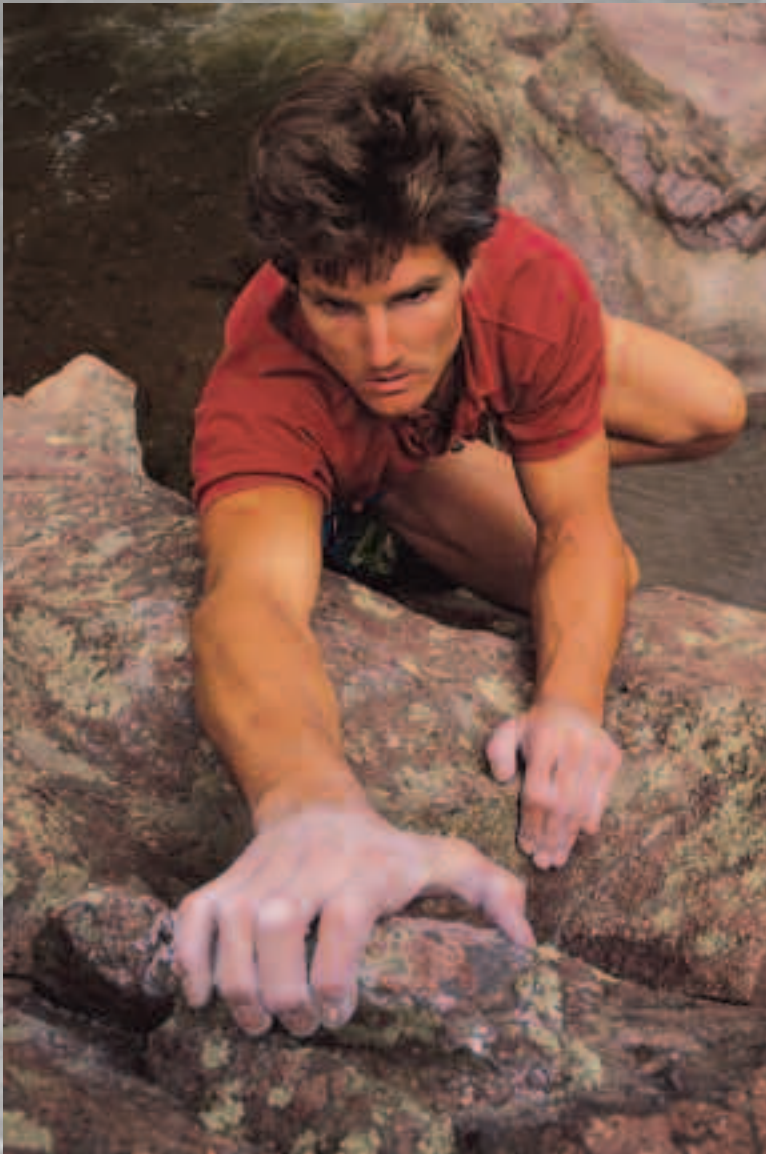
I'm so glad that I have now the BA in my hand. It adds to my daily spiritual strength, especially in this chaotic world. Thanks, and more power.

E. S.
Philippines

Prison ministry

Would you be so kind as to consider sending me a subscription to your fine magazine? I have no way of remunerating you while incarcerated, but in Acts it tells about Paul, Silas, and supernatural opening of the jail doors, and the whole church gathered for an all-night prayer vigil for Simon Peter.

J. D.
Zephyrhills, FL



**We cannot in a moment reach
Perfection, but we may
Be certain we shall scale the heights
If we rise a bit each day.
The tallest mount we climb
One step at a time.**

Grace Brasse Pannell

CoG7 in Action



What's new with . . .

➔ Missions

- Change for Your World

SWORD

- New district representatives, p. 27

Spring Vale Academy

- Fall enrollment August 14-15

Ministries Training System

- Intensives, p. 27

Did YOU remember to
save your pocket change for

Change for Your World?

Every July, Missions Abroad asks for a special offering to help with our annual world missions project. Because of the growth of our global church, we decided to ask everyone who could to save their pocket change throughout the year and give it to missions in July. (Of course, if you want to add some paper money to it, that's OK, too!)

This offering provides funds for the day-to-day operations of the International Ministerial Congress (IMC) administration that coordinates evangelistic mission efforts in our member conferences and international churches or missions. It is a growing part of the way dedicated servants like IMC President Ramon Ruiz are provided for as they travel to distant lands working in the harvest.

This offering is vital to the growth of our global church! Please, don't forget the Change for Your World offering this year. Your pocket change can make a needed change through the world mission outreach of IMC, coordinating our efforts in preaching the good news of the only hope for this world: Jesus Christ and His coming kingdom!



**This July, PLEASE don't forget!
Every cent counts when
it is dedicated to . . .
CHANGE FOR YOUR WORLD —
our world missions offering
in support of the IMC.**

Serving Young Adults

SWORD welcomes new representatives to its staff:

Emily Smith from Missouri – Central District

Rebekah Lawson from North Carolina – Southeast District

Ana Renteria from California – southern West Coast District

Tim Fauth from Washington continues serving the northern West Coast District, and Jacqueline Melgoza serves the Southwest District.

Openings for SWORD representatives exist in the Northeast and Canadian districts. If you have a heart for young adult ministry, contact your district board to express interest in becoming a SWORD district representative.

– Christy Lang

New at LITES Ministries

Starting this fall, LITES will offer a second year of training for graduates of the Year One training. This second year is designed to personalize the curriculum and activities according to the ministry interests, talents/abilities, and discipleship needs of individual students.

Also new this fall, students will have the option to attend one or two terms or the full year of three terms: Dispelling Lies and Establishing Truth (term one), Developing Christ-like Character and Perspective (term two), and Walking in the Light (term three). We now plan ministry tours after each term, along with various ministry outings during the term.

The vision of LITES is to ground young adults in relationship with Christ and equip them to reach the future with the

gospel. The time is short: We must be about our Father's business! If you would like to know more about LITES or apply for the fall term, please contact LITES Ministries, P.O. Box 172, Stanberry, MO 64489; 660-783-9544; lites@cog7.org; or visit <http://lites.cog7.org/>. Thank you for your continued prayers and support!

– Christine Griffie

Personal Thanks

Translation of the BA and other literature carries a great responsibility to our Spanish-speaking brethren wherever Church publications are sent. My task is alleviated by those who willingly give their time and effort to help. I want to personally acknowledge and thank these people for their invaluable contributions:

Carlos Arreaga, Canada
Norma Chagollan, Texas
Marcela Estrada, Arizona
Néstor García, Indiana
Luis López, Washington
Monico and Martha Muffley, Michigan

Next IMC in Brazil

The International Ministerial Congress of the Church of God (Seventh Day) announces its quadrennial meeting at Sumare, Sao Paulo, Brazil, November 13-18, 2006.

– Ramon Ruiz
President

Marna Rentería, Indiana
Gustavo Salcido, Texas
Allo Sánchez, Texas
Heber Vega, California
Raúl González from Canada, especially, has volunteered services in faithful reading and correcting much of the translation these past two years. May our Lord greatly bless each one who desires to serve Him through the wonderful ministry of publications for our Hispanic brethren.

– Sylvia G. Corral

Elder Richard Cress teaches in the Ft. Smith, AR, classroom of Ministries Training System. MTS holds intensive sessions to help men clarify and pursue the call to ministry. The next three are

- July 4-9 at Marriott Hotel in Denver, CO (bilingual)
- September 1-5 at Sis-Q Meadows, OR (English only)
- September 4-8 at La Puente, CA (Spanish only)

To learn more or to pre-register, contact 303-452-7973 or training@cog7.org.





Spring Vale grads at the Owosso, MI, campus. Some staff positions at the Academy are still open for the next school year, beginning August 14. For staff information or student application, contact Jonathan Albert, 989-725-2391, or svprincipal@chartermi.net.

Calendar of Events

- July 4-9 - General Conference Convention at Marriott Denver Tech Center, Denver, CO; call 303-452-7973 for information
- July 17-24 - Michigan Youth Camp at Long Lake Campground, Hastings, MI; contact Rex Miller (616-534-7564; Kingmerex@aol.com)
- July 20-24 - SWORD Camp (ages 18-35) at Sis-Q Meadows, OR; contact Tim Fauth (509-969-3994; timfauth@nwinform.net; registration forms at <http://sword.cog7.org>)
- July 25-31 - Central District Youth Camp at Camp Cuivre, Troy, MO; contact John/Amy Marlin (319-622-6896; centraldistrictfyc@hotmail.com)
- July 24-31 - Senior Youth Camp (ages 13-18) at Sis-Q Meadows, OR; contact Harold Ogren (541-689-1387; hogren@msn.com) or Greg Haffner (541-935-5361; haffnerg@aol.com)
- July 31-August 7 - Seekers Camp (ages 8-12) at Sis-Q Meadows, OR; contact Ben/Joy Sandford (509-737-1075; seekerscampers.org)
- August 4-7 - Youth convention in Chicago, IL; contact 312-446-7537; getlostwithme@hotmail.com
- August 14-15 - Dorms open, fall enrollment at Spring Vale Academy, Owosso, MI; 989-725-2391
- August 26-31 - Senior Adult Retreat at Sis-Q Meadows, OR; contact Dale/Ken Lawson, co-directors, marioncg7@juno.com or krsnlawson@aol.com

Help the

Many readers are endowed with a charitable spirit and have supported the Church generously. Giving is both a reflection of who we are and the key to the most important work we will accomplish to honor the Lord and benefit humanity.

While giving may seem a bold discussion, there are many ways to make a gift. Here is an overview of some of the most common, with the benefits of each. Careful planning will ensure the donor's objectives are met.

Current gifts

The most common way to make a gift is to write a **check**, thus providing immediate liquidity for the Church and generating a charitable income tax deduction for the giver.

Giving **stocks or bonds** may provide greater tax benefits. If you have owned securities for a year and their value has increased, you can avoid capital gains tax and receive a tax deduction equal to the fair market value.

A gift of **real estate** held more than a year also has the advantage of providing a deduction, as well as bypassing capital gains tax on the appreciation.

Artwork, books, and antiques are examples of gifts of **personal property**. To ensure that any tangible property qualifies for a tax deduction, contact our Office of Planned Giving.

Church Accomplish Her Mission

Planned gifts

Sometimes called deferred gifts, planned gifts refer to specific strategies that will benefit the Church at some point while offering immediate benefits to the donor.

The gift of a paid-up life insurance policy is a good example. By designating the Church as owner and beneficiary, you will receive a tax deduction that, in most cases, is equal to your cost in the policy.

Gifts that generate income

The benefits of planning compound when you follow a strategy that generates income as well as provides other attractive benefits.

The **gift annuity** is a great example of how a gift generates income for the donor. A contract between you and the Church, this is part gift and part annuity. In addition to the annuity payment, you receive a tax deduction. A portion of each annuity payment may be tax-free.

For example, an individual arranging an annuity at age 65 would receive 6 percent of his investment each year for the remainder of his life. The annual rate increases for those who arrange an annuity at an older age.

The **deferred payment gift annuity** in which payments are delayed for some years offers higher rates that supplement retirement income.

The **charitable remainder trust** is perhaps the most versatile charitable giving tool. With the CRT it is possible to bypass capital gains tax on the sale of highly appreciated assets, generate an increase in income, receive an attractive charitable income tax deduction, and fulfill philanthropic objectives.

Charitable bequests

Next to writing a check, perhaps the best-known vehicle for philanthropy is the bequest. A bequest permits a donor to make wishes known today without relinquishing needed lifetime assets. Bequests can transfer a specific asset, give a percent of the estate after costs and taxes, or transfer property to a trust.

Major gifts to the Church of God (Seventh Day) may be designated for the General Conference operation or for a specific G. C. ministry. Also, gifts may be designated either for ongoing ministry or for the Endowment Fund, whose earnings are used to underwrite ministries.

For more information on these giving strategies, complete and mail the form below or send an e-mail to Plannedgiving@cog7.org.

This information is provided by Crescendo Interactive, Inc. and adapted by the Church of God (Seventh Day) to help folks make their major gifts more effective. Personal advisors should always be consulted in the planning process.

More information, please:

I would like to speak to someone about planned giving.

I would like more information about these options.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Mail to: Office of Planned Giving, Church of God (Seventh Day), P. O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233.

International Tour

Jamaica

The Church in Jamaica was first planted by Brother Murray, who visited the U.S. Church in the late 1930s from his home in Trinidad, West Indies. Upon his return, he stopped in Jamaica and began to evangelize. An early convert, Charles Ellis, carried on the work begun by Brother Murray.

Assisted by Missions Abroad, the Jamaican Conference was reorganized in 1965. It adopted bylaws clarifying conference functions and setting forth duties and terms for its board of directors.

From the start, strong and capable leaders have served this island church. Elders Charles Ellis, Thomas Madden, and Gersham Wallen combined for more than 50 years at the helm in Jamaica.

The Jamaican Conference is a charter member of the International Ministerial Congress, having been consistently represented in international meetings since 1968. Its delegates assisted in the present organization of the congress in Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico in 1978.

— Elder Robert Coulter

Current members, leaders, loss

Although the island of Jamaica is small (no larger than the state of Connecticut), the Church there has grown to 65 congregations with approximately 4,000 members.

The current officers of the Jamaican Conference are all pastors: Henry M. Harley, chairman, executive board; Robert Jacobs, vice chairman; Derrick Coward, Hibbert Hamilton, secretary; Karrel Wilson, Claud Brown, Donville Bell, members.

The Jamaican Church was recently saddened by the death of Elder Roger Peart. In addition to pastoring for many years, Elder Peart often represented Jamaica in the International Ministerial Congress, serving as IMC treasurer for a time.

Chairman's vision

The Jamaican Church's new approach to evangelism is geared to include members in active, one-on-one sharing of faith in Jesus Christ. This involves

getting outside the Church walls with the message of salvation.

We are also planning a Model Church Planting Project, capable of being transferred whenever and wherever Church planting opportunities arise. And we continue to build new conference facilities in the city of Spanish Town.

To the Church around the world, we say, "God is doing a marvelous work in making us aware that we are a global church. We are blessed to be a part of this wonderful fellowship and are praying for success and a bountiful harvest of souls for the eternal kingdom of God."

— Pastor Henry Harley

In fellowshipping with the brethren in Jamaica for over 20 years, I have observed a growing commitment to pursuing excellence in ministry. Elder Gersham Wallen and earlier leaders have paved the way for the current enthusiastic and visionary leadership of Pastor Henry Harley. Undaunted by the economic and political problems that beset this small island, the Jamaican Church continues to be passionate in worship and moves toward the realization of God's vision for its future. Thanks to the entire conference for its worldwide influence, evidenced by its many sons and daughters who serve churches in the United States, Canada, England, and elsewhere.

— Elder Whaid Rose (native Jamaican)



The church at 58 Maxfield Avenue, Kingston, Jamaica



The Pursuit of Excellence

The most important decision we will ever make is to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord. This decision determines our destiny after we die.

The second most important decision is the manner in which we serve Christ. This decision determines our fruitfulness before we die. Christians are called to be not only faithful but also fruitful. Fruitfulness comes to those who serve with diligence.

That's why the Conference's calendar for 2005 includes two significant leadership gatherings — one at the beginning of the year and the other toward the end. The first meeting brought together G. C.

Ministries directors, district superintendents and their boards, and other Conference personnel for a refresher course in the Church's organization and polity. The second meeting will bring together the superintendents and G. C. board members to evaluate the effectiveness of our current system and to make any organizational changes necessary so we can make the greatest impact for Christ.

A few things are generally true of organizations that achieve significance. They 1) have a compelling vision and purpose, 2) build a dynamic and cohesive team, 3) call people to a high level of commitment, and 4) pursue excellence in everything they do.

Our vision of a vibrant twenty-first century Church of God (Seventh Day) is to be Christ-centered, evangelical, Sabbath-observing, Spirit-filled, Bible-based, as well as passionate in worship, compassionate in service, aggressive in witness, strong in fellowship, and committed to discipleship.

Because our team of leaders, both vocational and volunteer, is spread across the U.S. and Canada, we must gather often to build team spirit, sharpen our focus, and recommit ourselves to the vision and purpose of the organization. Therefore, we are investing more and more in team-building through annual meetings, leadership conferences, and other efforts to increase the cohesion of our work and ministry.

Significance is achieved by people with great vision whose level of commitment matches the size of their vision. Such individuals see themselves as influencers and change-agents, not as maintainers of the status quo. The answer to the Church's needs is less about finding the right program and more about cultivating the right environment, pathos, or church culture. You are invited to be part of that process.

Addressing groups of Church leaders in recent months, I have emphasized the importance of pursuing excellence — not settling for mediocrity — and being the best Church we can be. I have asked these leaders to give attention to five critical leadership questions: 1) Accessibility: Is anybody home? 2) Organization: Are you open for business? 3) Vision: Do you have a plan for the expansion of this ministry? 4) Success: Are you preparing to pass the torch on to someone else? 5) Legacy: Do you plan to leave the ministry better than you found it? Leaders on every level of the organization are asked to keep these questions in the forefront of their thinking.

Achieving significance is not about our size. It is about our willingness to pursue excellence in all we do, by God's grace and for His glory. Near the end of his letter to the church at Philippi, the apostle Paul gives this charge: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things" (Philippians 4:8, NIV).

We pursue excellence in ministry because of the object of our service. Jesus, the embodiment of true excellence, deserves nothing less.

— Whaid Guscott Rose
General Conference President



**DISASTER
RELIEF FUND**

**Working
hard to share
God's love in
2004-05 . . .**

**Drought relief for South Nyanza, Kenya
Typhoon relief for northern Philippines
Hurricane relief in Haiti and Jamaica
Tsunami relief for Sri Lanka
Flood relief in Guyana**

Before and after disaster strikes, please remember the
Disaster Relief Fund so that our brethren can know
how much we care!

The Disaster Relief Fund is a managed project fund of G. C. Missions Ministries, which also encompasses Church Planting, Home Missions, Missions Abroad, and the Christ is Coming Fund that provides for missionaries globally.

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