



IN GOD WE TRUST

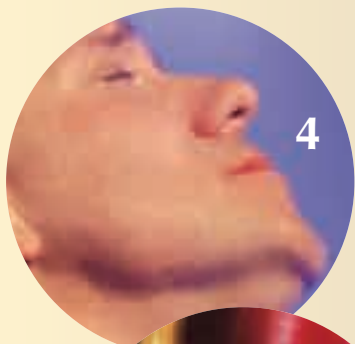
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Coming in the April-May BA: regeneration; victory over sin, guilt, and death

In the March issue of *Now What?*: a preacher's kid finds true faith in Christ (<http://now-what.cog7.org>)

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Melting Doubts



Today's headline: Blustery March's bridge to warmer weather is welcome but brings bitter memory at BA.

One year ago this month we lost lead writer and Northeast District Superintendent Richard Wiedenheft just months after the premature deaths of Lynn Taylor and Denis Burrell — energetic ministers all. I reacted with a “protest” on this page (June '07). You responded with many encouragements and “me too’s” not a few (see “Mailbag,” September '07, pp. 22-23).

On a recent Sabbath in San Antonio, Sister Emilia (Mrs. Jesus) Martinez told me it was two years to the day since her devoted minister-husband died. Other CoG7 losses have come in the past year. Have you noticed that the calendar is nearly as full of death dates as it is with birthdays? Over time the correspondence between the two will always be one-to-one. Only Christ's return, the resurrection, and promised immortality, it seems, can change that.

How to feel at the anniversary of a death and heal from its wound? Those losses still bring pain, though joyful days return. Winter recedes in March, but not all ice thaws. Is it OK to carry a few more questions into springtime and call them doubts?

My experience is that trust re-contours itself during cold, hard times — that faith often encircles our doubts, then dissolves them in a way that assures they will not triumph at last. As distress slowly melts in summer's approach, we'll be better for this, not bitter.

The same Sabbath that two hundred Texans celebrated a grand opening and young adults jammed the front of the church, one more icicle fell from my heart and hit the floor in a puddle. Some of life's stuff nudges me in different directions this year, but Christ's grace and truth will be my path for the duration of the trip.

Thanks for reading the BA in 2008. Don't miss the regular features that unpack gospel concepts or that walk us through the Church's and personal journeys we're all on. The story told by a Florida mom (p. 18) helped to blunt my protest, and it will bless you too.

May I ask you to encourage and assist readers younger than you to get acquainted with our magazine, starting with *Youth Reach* (pp. 20-22). Your letters for the “Mailbag” page are welcome, and your prayers are appreciated!

— Calvin Burrell



The Holy Kiss

Peacemaking in a divided world. by Jason Overman

www.designpics.com

My parents divorced when I was a baby. They had been childhood sweethearts, dating through high school and after. When Mom realized she was pregnant, she decided against abortion and married Dad instead. They did not know God back then, but they did love each other. Love, it turned out, would not be enough to hold them together; “irreconcilable differences” tore the family apart within two years.

The world too is broken. Divorce names but one of the many faces our brokenness takes — a metaphor for all that is sundered and torn. There is no doubting the existence of love in our world, often signified by a kiss. But there is also no doubting the pervasive taint that tends to subvert and spoil that love. From the inter-personal to the inter-national, from families to friends, from races to religions, from neighbors to nations, human relationships are in turmoil.

The causes are legion: from trivial pride and misunderstanding to profound betrayal and victimization. In this world of sin and evil, humans become estranged; things fall apart.

We need look no further than our own hearts to locate the source and the scars of a ruptured reality. Others have afflicted us, but our own natures also conspire against us — and against others. Sometimes these fractures are hairline and carefully masked beneath a veneer of normalcy. Other times they are gaping crevices that cannot be hidden. Either way we are all wrestling at the divide, in conflict not only with others but also with ourselves and, behind that, with God.

How can these conflicts, this brokenness, be resolved? *Reconciliation* is the Bible’s answer. And a kiss, though it can deceive, may be its best symbol.

A coming kiss

Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed (Psalm 85:10).

Genesis offers a view of our severed origins. Humans were created for fellowship, for communion with God and creation. Eden is accord, harmony on every level — spiritual, personal, matrimonial, environmental — and the Fall names the loss. When Adam and Eve overreached the boundary God set, their sin was, before anything else, a heavy blow to their relationships with heaven. This vertical breach quickly overtook everything horizontal as well. In its wake came personal fear and guilt (3:8-10), marital suspicion and conflict (vv. 11-16), environmental estrangement and hostility (vv. 17-19).

Ancient Israel knew the divisive curse that sin drapes over the world. She also knew that her God would not surrender His

creation to sin's cleavage. Sin is abandonment of the righteousness that sustains our relationship with God. The result is the collapse of peace for humanity. But the poets and prophets of Israel anticipated a reversal, a return — a great kiss of reconciliation. And they knew themselves well enough to realize that this work would be not theirs but God's on their behalf.

Psalms 85 celebrates this work — the triumph of mercy over wrath, restoration and revival over iniquity and exile. The poem provides a vivid account of this coming salvation, when "righteousness and peace have kissed" (v. 10). Isaiah echoes this reconciling promise with the words "The work of righteousness will be peace" (32:17).

A cruciform kiss

"Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him" (Matthew 26:48).

Jesus is this righteousness made flesh. As Jacob deceived Isaac with a kiss, so Judas betrayed Jesus with this intimate act. Here the symbol of reconciliation inflicts a deadly wound and proves our separation from God. Yet in the face of our failure, God's surprising love in Christ draws near to restore peace where none is deserved. Despite barren kisses, His righteousness does not hesitate to descend and heal among the severed and betrayed.

We glimpse this truth when Jesus eats with Simon the Pharisee. Simon offers Jesus no kiss, but a woman alienated and shackled by sin appears on the scene and cannot cease to kiss Jesus' feet (Luke 7:38, 45). The same truth

leaps from the story of a prodigal, whose first word is "Father, give me" and whose last is "Father, I have sinned." In between is a wasted life and a dad who "runs and kisses" the lost (15:11-21). Such kisses — of a betraying brother, of a sinning woman, and of a forgiving father — anticipate a cross.

To the Romans, Paul explains that in the cross the "righteousness of God" has appeared so that we now have "peace with God" (3:21-26; 4:13-5:1). Here is the cosmic kiss:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. . . . when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son . . . (vv. 8, 10).

The alienation and wrath that have defined our past and future are overcome. The relationship severed selfishly in Adam is restored sacrificially in Christ (Colossians 1:19-21).

The good news is that in Christ, righteousness and peace have finally kissed and relationship with God is restored. But this reconciliation is not confined to you and me as individuals. Now *all things* are reconciled (Ephesians 1:10) — not just to God but to each other, and to ourselves as well. Old conflicts

can be mended as the new creation begins. If Paul can envision the end of enmity between ancient rivals — Jews and Gentiles — by the blood of Christ (2:11-21), how much more the end of all petty divisions that haunt us today.

A Christian kiss

Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus (1 Peter 5:14).

Like Peter, Apostle Paul calls the churches to greet one other with a holy kiss (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20). This is no quaint, culturally conditioned gesture but a potent sign that we are decisively shaped by the costly reconciliation of God in Christ. It signifies that we are not merely recipients of this reconciliation but representatives of it as well. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, it is not just that Jesus is "the righteousness of God" but "that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." It is not just that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" but that He "has given *us* the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18, 21). As ambassadors of Christ (to our amazement), "we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (v. 20).

But reconciliation is not simple

The relationship severed selfishly in Adam is restored sacrificially in Christ (Colossians 1:19-21).

or sentimental; it is not cheap. It is a divine process that takes sin and suffering seriously. Reconciliation issues from forgiveness, but as L. Gregory Jones writes in *Embodying Forgiveness*, it is not a forgiveness that merely helps people

. . . “cope” with their situation — without having to engage in struggles to change and transform the patterns of their relationships. . . . people are mistaken if they think of Christian forgiveness primarily as absolution from guilt; the purpose of forgiveness is the restoration of communion, the reconciliation of brokenness In response, people are called to embody that forgiveness by unlearning patterns of sin and struggling for reconciliation wherever there is brokenness.¹

A costly kiss

Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way (Psalm 2:12).

Christian reconciliation does not traffic in easy answers or easy outs; it is costly. As Jones writes, “Unfortunately, the cost of forgiveness is *too* high for many people” because it “confronts them with the truth about themselves” and because it directs them to own their sin through confession, repentance, and

restitution. This sin “cannot be overlooked or forgotten; it must be confronted and judged. . . .” But it is a judgment “wholly in the service of mercy, reconciliation, and new life.”²

Despite the victory of the cross, our world remains enthralled with the destructiveness of sin. The cycles of sin and suffering run deep, and sometimes we cling to them, like Jonah who seemed unable to accept the transformation of his enemies in Nineveh to friends, by God’s grace. Regardless of whether the world, the neighbor, or the brother is ready to reconcile, the church exists to embody it, to make space for it, as our Lord did.

At the very least this means that the church must be a community committed to practicing reconciliation within. That we are more often characterized by our splits and conflicts than by our unity and peace is perhaps the greatest indictment the world can level against the validity of our faith.

A concluding kiss

Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept (Genesis 29:11).

Perhaps we are all a little like Jacob, wrestling with God as he ran from — and toward — the

litter of shattered trusts. Peniel, we recall, looks back on Jacob’s flight from angry Laban and forward to his fears of meeting bitter Esau. We cannot help but be startled by the “kisses” each of them extends when hostility is what Jacob dreadfully, deservedly, expected (32:24; 31:55; 33:4). Such is the surprising reconciling grace of God!

That kind of grace happened in our home, it turned out. My parents have been married for almost forty years now — the second time. After their divorce, my father became a Christian, and the minister challenged him to humbly face his past and seek to be reconciled to his family just as he had been to God. He did, and it took time. Eventually Mom accepted Christ and Dad too, and they remarried.

Not all our reunion stories have happy endings, but we have stories just the same. As we wrestle through the Spirit with enduring brokenness, we cannot help but expect more stories, to encourage them and strive for them. Reconciliation, after all, is the ministry God has given us in the world. ■■

Jason Overman lives and ministers in Jasper AR, with his wife, Stephanie, and their two children, Tabitha and Isaac.



References

1. L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, pp. 6, 5
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 11, 14, 15

Regardless of whether the world, the neighbor, or the brother is ready to reconcile, the church exists to embody it, to make space for it, as our Lord did.

Questions & Answers

Q Where does the Church stand on smoking? I have read many opinions ranging from it being a blatant sin to it being a form of God-given pleasure when done in moderation.

A Thanks for your question, not often asked anymore. With anti-smoking efforts now in vogue, the Church says less about tobacco than it once did. We stand opposed, based mostly on health risks associated with a nicotine habit. First Corinthians 6:19, 20 is often cited for support, but other verses also inspire a wholesome lifestyle and care for the body – 1 Corinthians 10:31, for example.

Admittedly the same arguments used against smoking also apply to any other personal habits – like overeating – shown to be detrimental to human health. To be consistent, then, we who apply the Bible against smoking should also limit junk foods (high-fat, high-sugar), caffeinated beverages, and repeated activity that puts good health at risk. Do we buckle up in our cars?

Cigarette smoking, which some profess to be pleasurable, ranks high among risky lifestyle behaviors. Addiction here is more damaging and dangerous than almost any other ingested item, except alcoholic drink and recreational drugs. We have good reason to boycott these slaveries, even if the Bible is not as explicit about them as we might wish.

Smoking is among the most addictive of behaviors. Its negative fruits point to it as sin against our bodies and our best interests. In Proverbs, the fool is one who, knowing the evil result of any course, continues that path to his own destruction. The wise man, though, sees danger ahead, turns away, and escapes the snare. In Christ we are free from the guilt of every sin, and we are taught to seek freedom where we're trapped. May those in bondage to any harmful addiction seek and find the Lord's strong help to live freely!

– Elder Calvin Burrell

Q Does the Bible forbid drinking wine or alcoholic beverages?

A Yours is one of those questions to which a yes or no answer will never do full justice. "Forbid" suggests a command against any amount of wine for any purpose. Such a prohibition is not found in Scripture. However, a simple *no* to your question does not adequately address the evidence, either.

In the case of wine or strong drink, texts on both sides of the debate are easily listed:

- Warnings against wine: Proverbs 20:1; 21:17; 23:31; 31:4, 5; Isaiah 5:11; 28:1, 7; 56:12; Hosea 4:11; Habakkuk 2:5; and Ephesians 5:18. Several more forbid drunkenness.

- Approvals of wine: Deuteronomy 14:26; Psalm 104:15; Proverbs 31:6, 7; Ecclesiastes 2:3; Luke 5:39; John 2:1-11; and 1 Timothy 5:23. It will not work to argue that fresh grape juice is intended in each of these texts.

This textual evidence provides wiggle room for the viewpoints of both the total abstainer from alcohol and the user in moderation. The apostle Paul grasped this ambiguity and teaches us to live with it. In Romans 14, a key chapter on doubtful issues, he mentions wine (v. 21), suggesting that drinking may have been on his, or someone's, list of disputable matters in the early church.

And what does the Apostle say about such questions? He urges us to make doubtful decisions based on two factors: their impact on others (v. 21) and our own consciences (vv. 22, 23). So ask yourself these questions: Will my drinking wine or strong drink cause anyone to stumble? And will it go against my best teaching and training in the faith? If the answer to either question is yes, the counsel of Paul is "Just say no."

– Elder Calvin Burrell

Embracing Justification

This gospel teaching is rich in comfort
for every believer in Christ.

**Editor's note: *Justification*
is the Bible term for
standing right with God
through forgiveness of sins
and God's righteousness
reckoned to our account.
The essays offered here,
like a good seminar,
consider the topic from
various perspectives.**

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The Vital Role of Justification

by Jeff Endecott

Justification by grace through faith is the heart of the gospel and the lifeblood of the true church of Jesus Christ. Denial or dilution of this central article of Christian faith is tantamount to treason against the gospel and brings certain loss.

Is this deliberate exaggeration intended to make a point? Consider the words of Apostle Paul, written under inspiration of the

Holy Spirit: "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8). A nearly identical statement is in the next verse, making the point doubly clear.

Two verses earlier, the apostle identified the infection in Galatia that elicited his intense response.

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ (vv. 6, 7).

From these verses, observe:

1. That church was turning away from Christ. If doctrine divides, as some say, this scripture confirms that believing the Galatian heresy divides people for sure – *from Christ!* This was no mere debate over semantics but an abandonment of the person and work of Jesus.

2. That church was turning away from its calling in the grace of Christ. The perversion in Galatia was precisely this: changing salvation from justification by faith alone to justification by works of the law (2:16). The role of works in our salvation is always as *the fruit* of justifying faith, never *the root* of it.

3. That church was exchanging the true gospel for a "different gospel" that was no good news at all. God's gospel, compelled by His love and conveyed by His grace, confers glory upon Himself and peace, forgiveness, and deliverance upon His people (1:3-5). False gospels may offer a promissory note to life, but only the infinite resource of God's riches in Christ Jesus can pay what has been promised.

* * * *

It has always been the church's task to speak the good news of redemption using language that is relevant to the culture, but this must be done without compromising the gospel's essence. Culture has undergone radical shifts in the past fifty years. Ideas and ideals of two generations ago are archaic by "modern" standards.

A case in point is the word *justification*, a key gospel concept that dots dozens of Bible texts with words like *just*, *justice*, *justify*, *judgment*, *righteous*, and

righteousness. And what does this “outmoded” word entail? Just this: Although people sin by violating God’s eternal laws and are therefore guilty and condemned to eternal death, Jesus Christ took God’s wrath against sin upon Himself at the cross, erasing the guilt and penalty for sinners and exchanging their sins for His righteousness in heaven’s record. This forensic view of responsibility, failure, and accountability in our world, under God, is essential to the New Testament gospel. But it has lost its appeal in today’s church and rarely gets major airtime.

When the biblical language of law, sin, guilt, wrath, repentance, and pardon is abandoned, the import of justification is lost — even if we retain some vacuous use of the word. When sermons have more in common with the “Be all you can be” slogan of the U. S. Army than with the Bible’s message “Repent and believe the gospel,” the church may be relevant to the culture but irrelevant to the kingdom of God.

God has ordained only one message through which we may be rescued from eternal ruin and by which His forever family can grow. Ministries of the church, worship and fellowship, youth programs, and other activities may all be vital. But the vitality — *the life* — that animates them all must be centered on the message of the cross. And that message must be centered on God’s provision: justification by faith alone through Christ’s grace alone and to God’s glory alone!

Justification by faith alone is

- God’s ordained avenue for peace between Him and us: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace

with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

- God’s ordained method for salving our conscience: “Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us” (8:34).

- God’s ordained basis for our confidence in future glory: “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

Recovering the centrality of the doctrine of justification by faith may not be necessary for the church to grow, but it is essential to the growth of God’s kingdom.

Jeff Endecott is superintendent of the Southeastern District and serves as pastor at his home church in Farmville, NC.

God has ordained only one message through which we may be rescued from eternal ruin and by which His forever family can grow.

A False Teaching Exposed

by Lennox Abrigo

Millions have been seduced into systems of thought, falsely labeled as Christian teaching, that promote concepts and lifestyles based on legalism or righteousness by works (see Galatians 2:16). They teach that obedience is required for acquittal from God’s sentence to eternal death, pronounced on Adam. But this distorted point of view, while emphasizing obedience, places it outside the correct biblical framework.

Certainly Jesus taught the necessity of obedience to all God’s laws: “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15) and “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). But when studied in the light of the Master’s words about His mission (20:28) and considering that human obedience and Christ’s death as the means to salvation are contradictory ideas (Galatians 2:21; 3:21) and that unsaved sinners cannot obey God (Romans 8:7, 8), these instructions can apply only to a believer’s walk with Christ *after* he receives salvation. Jesus requires *His disciples* — not the unredeemed — to obey all His laws.

Our lives are governed by the New Testament principle of righteousness by faith (Romans 1:17). This states that believers are obedient *from* salvation, not *for* salvation — not as a condition for entering into God’s family but as evidence of divine Sonship.

And that principle, the rediscovery of which sparked the Protestant Reformation, is a premise of the Christian gospel. Given that we can't acquit ourselves from the original legal penalty of sin nor amputate our carnal natures, God initiated His solution to the sin problem. Jesus' death at Calvary resolved both dilemmas and redeemed His children by that means alone. This solution is understandably referred to as grace.

Sinners, then, are acquitted of condemnation to eternal death by means of Christ's atonement alone (Romans 5:8; 8:1). We receive that acquittal and appropriate it to our lives "through faith" (Ephesians 2:8) — by believing Jesus is the one upon whom the Father executed the death sentence and by trusting that the rescue from death has been purchased for us personally (Isaiah 53:4-6).

In like manner, through the Holy Spirit Jesus sent (John 14:16, 17), the flesh ceases to have dominion over believers when they're born again (Romans 6:12-14). So while we, as children of God, don't lose our carnal nature, it no longer governs our lives because we're given another nature that rules our bodies — that of Christ (Romans 7:25).

A traveling evangelist and Christian apologist, **Pastor Lennox Abrigo** enjoys reading, recreation, music, conversation, and his family at their Maryland home.



Finding a Middle Path

by **Dr. James DeFrancisco**

Jesus came to extend grace and truth (John 1:14, 17). Grace is often confused with an antinomianism that opposes using the law as a permanent definition of righteousness. Antinomianism, in turn, can provoke the opposite error of legalism — an over-emphasis on laws or lists of rules.

The antinomian rejects moral law as binding on Christian behavior and resents external controls of any kind, while the legalist depends on outward obedience to some written list as vital to salvation.

The gospel message invokes neither of these extremes. It simply states that God loves His children and has provided a way to restore us to a close and lasting relationship with Him through His Son Jesus, our Lord, Savior, and Life-Giver.

Both antinomianism and legalism fail to understand the power of the gospel, the proper preaching of which never lowers God's

moral standards. Actually the gospel believer is motivated by Christ's grace on the cross and God's Spirit within to avoid sin and live righteously — that is, to fulfill the spirit and intent of the law from the heart.

The gospel brings liberty, and with liberty comes responsibility. The gospel sets the believer free from the condemnation of sin working through the law. The believer is set free from the old master of sin so that he may serve a new master, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not his own master.

The believer is set free not only from the *penalty* of sin (death) but also from the *power* of sin in this life, as God's Spirit begins to produce the fruit of righteous living. Christian conduct springs from the gospel. The gospel brings us into a new relationship with God through the new life of the Spirit. **BA**

Dr. James DeFrancisco is a Christian teacher and counselor who serves the body of Christ from his home in Mishawaka, IN.



The gospel believer is motivated by Christ's grace on the cross and God's Spirit within to avoid sin and live righteously — that is, to fulfill the spirit and intent of the law from the heart.

A sickening feeling slowly engulfed Ken as he read the return address on the envelope: Internal Revenue Service. He quickly opened the letter to learn that he had miscalculated and underpaid on his last three federal returns. Including penalties and interest, he now owed the IRS several thousand dollars!

Ken couldn't possibly pay this debt. Even if he liquidated his meager savings, cashed in his two bonds, and borrowed from his life insurance policy, he would have less than a tenth of what he needed. He hadn't yet established credit in his young life, and, even if he had, a long-term modest loan was not manageable on his current salary. Ken had nobody to help him and nowhere to turn.

Ken decided that his only chance was to meet with an IRS representative, Mrs. Little. After discussion with Ken, Mrs. Little made several phone calls that ultimately led to the director of the IRS in Washington, D. C. Fulfilling her instructions, she took out a large rubber stamp and firmly pressed the words "Paid in Full" on Ken's file. She sent Ken home, free of his IRS debt.

Fantasy? You bet! But is this imaginary story really unbelievable? Not with God. Like Ken, every one of us owes God a sin-debt we cannot pay because sin is so much a part of us (Romans 3:22b, 23a). However, through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, our sin-debt is paid, and we are justified before God.

In view of the incredible gift of Christ, we should pass on the reconciliation we have received from God to others. We do this through forgiving others who do wrong to us. Christ said:

Recycling Reconciliation

by John Schott

"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:14, 15).

This may be especially difficult at times. Many have had harsh experiences and abusive people in their lives. But unforgiveness does not reflect the heart of God.


Jesus illustrated this truth in a parable (Matthew 18:21-35). A servant owed a king an enormous sum of money he couldn't repay, so the king ordered his family to be sold. Begging for patience, the servant said he'd pay all he owed. The king canceled the servant's debt and released him.

The servant, however, demanded payment from a man who owed him a few dollars. He refused to forgive the man and had him imprisoned.

When the king heard this story, he rebuked the servant for not showing mercy to the man as the king had shown him. The king then had the servant imprisoned to be tortured until he repaid his debt. Jesus concluded, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you

forgive your brother from your heart" (v. 35).

We all need to remember that the sin-debt God has forgiven us is much greater than any debt anyone owes us here on earth. God expects us to pattern our hearts after His and forgive others that we may dwell together in reconciliation. Then there will be fewer arguments; thoughtfulness instead of thoughtlessness; patience in place of haste; understanding and reason in place of rudeness and criticism; an outreach of God's loving grace, mercy, and peace.

With compassionate forgiveness, let's live what we have so graciously received, and pass it on! 

A teacher by profession, **Pastor John Schott** and his wife, Susan live in Dundee, MI, and serve the Church in nearby Petersburg. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.





Who Needs the Rules?

Warning: This could turn your head on laws from “irksome” to “honored.” by Jonathan Cleveland with Andrea Vinley Jewell

Against the grain

When God gave the Ten Commandments to the Israelites, they were just beginning their first experience with freedom. They had been slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years, which means generations had lived and died within a slave culture. Think about what they must have felt when they were freed: at first, ecstasy — then as reality set in, confusion and anxiety. These people had never had to answer questions such as:

Where do I work?

Where should I live?

How do I own land?

What if someone takes something I want?

What do I do if I don't like someone?

Freedom was a new concept. So into that chaos God reminded them of who He is and where they just came from: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Exodus 20:2). Then He gave them commandments to help them learn to live in freedom and remain there.

They needed to know that only one God should be worshiped; they must not return to the bondage of other gods. They needed to know that respect for others' lives, property and families allowed everyone in their community to enjoy their newfound liberty. They needed to know that stealing, cheating and lying would only put them back into bondage to their selfish desires.

This was just the beginning of God revealing freedom to humanity. When He sent Christ to earth hundreds of years later,

Ever get tired of the spiel that airline attendants give before takeoff and landing? “Tray tables locked and in the upright . . .” Every passenger could repeat it verbatim, but most don't even pay attention. After all, is a locked tray table going to make takeoff that much safer?

Rules irk us, especially when they seem arbitrary. Though we're raised to obey the rules — of the road, of school, of God — if we don't understand why the rules exist in the first place, we feel as though our freedom is being hindered. Parents understand this well because of the barrage of whys from children whenever Mom or Dad says no. We all want to know the why behind

a rule, especially those given by God. Have you ever considered that freedom is the crucial reason behind divine rules?

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17). Freedom — something we all long for — is part of God's nature. He wants us to be free, but He is always telling us what to do and what not to do. How do we reconcile a God who gives His people a bunch of rules with a God who desires us to be free?

These two topics — freedom and rules — may be two of the most misunderstood aspects of Christianity.

He set the stage for all people to find freedom in Him.

Accept or reject?

Each of us was once a slave to sin, but Christ's death and resurrection brought freedom. Now that we're free to obey God, do we understand why He demands certain actions and attitudes from us?

To start, God's rules reflect His nature, His character. Some of those reflections are easy to understand. We don't murder because God is the creator and protector of life. We aren't dishonest because God is the author of truth. Rules like these clearly keep our relationships free and trusting, so it's easy to accept them.

But many other rules aren't so easy to understand. For example, why are we commanded not to forsake meeting together with other believers (Hebrews 10:24-25)? Wouldn't just praising God at home or listening to a sermon on the radio be sufficient on a Sunday? Yet by meeting with other Christians, we encourage each other and hold one another accountable to avoid sin, to love and to do good deeds.

When we don't understand God's rules, our response will be either to embrace the rules as if keeping them were the chief end of our spiritual life or to reject them as unimportant or arbitrary. These beliefs reveal themselves in the following attitudes:

- *I am going to measure my spiritual success and other people's relationship with God by our ability to keep His rules. As long as I'm keeping the rules, God and I are OK.*

With this mind-set, we start to

see God as a controlling slave master — the opposite of who He really is. We fear disobeying His rules and losing our standing with Him. We then take this approach with others. If they don't follow the rules, we judge their worthiness as a Christian. Sound familiar?

This is the religious setting Christ came into when He started His ministry in Palestine. The Pharisees, who were exceptional at keeping God's commands — as well as their own created rules — had forgotten that the Law was put in place to bring Israel freedom. They had turned it into a bondage of judgment and pride.

- *God didn't really mean "Don't do that." Rules are just for people who don't have maturity and common sense. I'm different; I have a free relationship with God.*

This attitude allows us to overlook the truth that even though we want to be free, slavery feels most natural. We get deceived into thinking that doing whatever we desire is liberty when in reality it is enslavement to the wiles of the Enemy.

Embracing freedom

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slav-

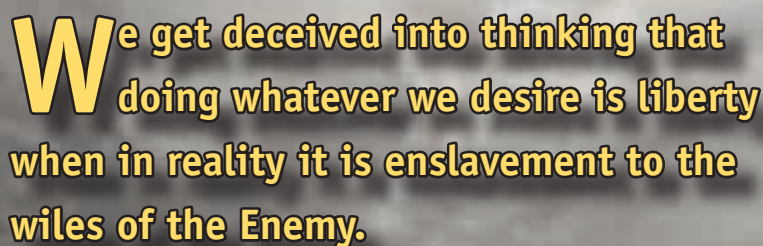
ery" (Galatians 5:1). When God tells us to do something or not do something, it is because He has set us free and He wants to teach us to live as free people.

As you grow in your faith, consider the commands of God and ask this question: How does this teach me to be free from bondage, or how would observing this command keep me free?

Until you can understand God's commands in a context of freedom, you won't keep them for the right reasons, and you won't be able to help others find the freedom God offers. But when you understand His loving purpose in giving us commands, you can obey Him for the right reasons and be excited about freeing others.

Even airline rules exist for a reason. If you understand that the guidelines for takeoff and landing are to allow passengers a quick, clear exit in case of an emergency evacuation, then you might be more interested in listening to the flight attendant. ■

Jonathan Cleveland is a pastor at Pulpit Rock Church in Colorado Springs, Colo. From the August 2007 *Focus on the Family* magazine. Copyright © 2007, Jonathan Cleveland. All rights reserved. International copyright secured. Used by permission.



We get deceived into thinking that doing whatever we desire is liberty when in reality it is enslavement to the wiles of the Enemy.

Salvation Shorthand

by Calvin Burrell

Simply speaking, salvation in the Bible can refer to rescue, freedom, or preservation — provided by God or man — from any sort of bondage or danger to the peace and welfare of body, mind, spirit, family, community, nation, or world.

The greatest salvation of all speaks of a deliverance and freedom through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, Savior of all. It rescues us from the bondage of our souls — our whole beings — for time and, chiefly, for eternity. This dangerous slavery is known as sin.

The *why* of salvation is sin

To believe and receive the salvation of Christ, we must be aware of sin's reality. If neither God nor an ultimate standard for good and evil exists, if guilt and judgment are only fantasies, then sin is not real and we should cease speaking of salvation. Such talk is superfluous and illusionary.

But God does exist, the Bible is His Word, and sin is any failure to conform to His will. It is missing the mark He has fixed. The Bible consistently says that the entire human race has fallen into sin's bondage and is in danger of its eternal result: death.

Scripture defines sin as

- transgression of divine law
- failure to believe and live by faith

- wrong thoughts, attitudes, or actions
- falling short of God's intent and glory
- anything that is not right, by God's definition
- failure to do all the good we know we should
- not just what we *do* but what we *are* apart from Christ

Salvation is important only if sin is real. The vice, violence, and viciousness that dominate human history confirm the reality of sin. The results of sin — darkness, dysfunction, and death — engulf us all, but the holy God has us midway in a plan to eliminate sin from His creation. Salvation is God's solution to the sin problem.

Salvation . . . in Other Words

Key Word (with synonyms)	Setting
Redemption: rescue, release, deliverance, liberation	A slave market — standing on the auction block
Reconciliation: access, atonement, agreement, peace, harmony, unity	A battlefield — in combat or in flight from it
Regeneration: quickening, vivification, resurrection, renewal, inspiration	A mortuary or cemetery — lying flat
Justification: absolution, acquittal, pardon, forgiveness, vindication, imputed righteousness	A law court — standing before the judge

The how of salvation is Christ

Jesus is heaven’s Son and Savior who saves His people from their sins. This divine deliverance enters human experience in three ways, spanning time:

- **Past:** We were saved from the guilt and penalty of our sins by the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross – His death, burial, and resurrection. This is justification and forgiveness of sins: salvation imputed.
- **Present:** We are being saved from the grip and practice of our sins by the ongoing work of Jesus Christ upon our hearts and minds, through the Holy Spirit. This is sanctification and growth in obedience and service: salvation imparted.

- **Future:** We shall be saved from the presence and possibility of sin forever by the return of Christ and resurrection of the dead to immortality. This is glorification and eternal life: salvation consummated. Here is not only the *how* but also the *when* of our freedom from sin that the gospel delivers. Concerning this salvation . . .
 - God’s grace is its source and ultimate cause
 - Christ’s death and resurrection is God’s provision for it
 - The Holy Spirit is the divine agent in making it personal
 - Faith is the human response required to receive it
 - Calling on the name of the Lord is its human trigger

- Obeying the truth (repentance, baptism, etc.) is its confirming evidence
- Holding fast to faith, hope, and love in Christ is its final proof

The who of salvation is sinners

Salvation is for sinners – Adam’s race. We lost paradise through him. But Jesus came to save the lost, and paradise is regained in Him. Whoever believes the gospel, though sinners we have been, passes out of sin’s darkness into the light of God’s grace and truth.

Scripture texts supporting the points on this page are available in the online version of this article at <http://cog7.org/BA.org>

Prior State	What’s Accomplished	Main Texts
Slavery; chained by sin; controlled by the world, the flesh, and the Devil	Rescue from the prior state, often by payment of a price, or ransom. Jesus’ blood paid the price for our eternal redemption as sin-slaves and made us servants of Christ. In believing, we are freed from the sinful practices that tempt us daily.	Psa. 130:7; Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:12; 1 Peter 1:18; Rev. 5:9
Alienation, separation, hostility, enmity toward God and others	Reunion with others after strife. Jesus bridged the gap between God and us by coming as mediator. His death reunited us vertically with our Creator and horizontally with one another. Because He drew near in love, we love others and draw near to them.	Dan. 9:24; Rom. 5:1, 2; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; Eph. 1:10; 2:11-22; Col. 1:20-22
Death, inability, spiritlessness, lifelessness	Being made alive in spirit by the Spirit of God; being born again. Both Father and Son have life in themselves and give it to whomever hears Christ’s words and believes on the One who sent Him. This is the new birth necessary to enter God’s kingdom.	Ezek. 36:26; John 1:13; 3:1-5; 5:24-26; 2 Cor. 5:17; Titus 3:5; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 5:1
Guilt, condemnation, sin imputed	Being declared righteous by the Judge. We are set free from the guilt and penalty of sin because Jesus took our sins upon Himself at the cross and was raised again for our justification.	Gen. 15:6; Luke 18:14; Acts 13:39; Rom. 3:20-28; 4:1-13; 5:1, 9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:15, 16; 3:24

Gilbert Cranmer and



One hundred and fifty years ago, several congregations of Sabbathkeeping “adventists” were planted in Michigan by the efforts of a preacher named Gilbert Cranmer. More evangelist than theologian, Cranmer is recognized as a CoG7 founder because of his role in these early groups – known as Churches of Christ.

Born in New York State in 1814, Gilbert Cranmer came to Christ as a teenager. He first served the Methodist and Christian churches, preaching as he migrated westward. In St. Catharines, Ontario, he reportedly raised up a church of three hundred members before moving to the Chicago area, where his wife and two children died.

Still only 25 years old, Cranmer left Illinois for Augusta, Michigan, near the city of Battle Creek. Here he married Betsy

Heath, and here he learned the Second Advent teachings of William Miller in 1843. With thousands of other Millerites, Cranmer experienced the Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844 – the night Jesus did not come. Still Cranmer kept preaching the Lord’s return after that date.

Around 1850 the somewhat discouraged preacher learned of the seventh-day Sabbath through the teaching of Joseph Bates in Battle Creek. By the same means, he met James and Ellen G. White, pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This led to a few years of sporadic fellowship between Cranmer and congregations led by the Whites.

Refused the chance to preach by those who endorsed the visions of Mrs. White, Cranmer set out, his Bible in hand, to preach and plant churches in southwestern Michigan. In 1858 he wrote, “We have some eight ministers and some hundreds of members in the state. . . . God has manifest His power among us in a wonderful manner.”*

Until his death in 1903, Cranmer continued service among this band of Sabbatarian adventists in Michigan, organizing them into a conference and serving as its first president. Though

an effective preacher drawn to and energized by the gifts of the Spirit, Elder Cranmer was a man of like passions with all God’s people. His habit of chewing tobacco earned him criticism, and he tended to be suspicious of church government, a common trait among early adventists.

After losing three successive wives by death, Gilbert Cranmer married a fourth time (1879) to Sophia Branch, widow of his co-worker Elder Erastus Branch. He had six children of his own, plus several Branch stepchildren.

* * * *

Five years after Gilbert Cranmer reported his first churches in Michigan, they began to publish a small paper, *The Hope of Israel*. This title begs the question of what those Church pioneers believed about the Jewish people, past and future.

When *The Hope* began in 1863, the tumultuous role of modern Israel as we know it was not anticipated. Only later, near the end of that century, was the Zionist movement begun to promote re-occupation of the ancient homeland in Palestine by the scattered descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That return began as a trickle but increased when the “holy land” came under British control after World War I.

The volume of returnees rose quickly in the 1930’s and 40’s as the Nazi regime killed millions

* From *The Story of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*, by Robert Coulter. This sixty-page booklet is available through Bible Advocate Press.

The Hope of Israel

of Jews and forced many more to seek refuge outside Europe. Responding to the Holocaust tragedy and to fifty years of public call for a Jewish homeland, the modern state of Israel was formed in May 1948 with approval by the United Nations.

The return of the Jews and the rebirth of national Israel are not what our pioneers had in mind when they published *The Hope of Israel*, however. Israel's best hope, as they wrote it, is clarified in ten statements of the first issue of that paper (see sidebar, especially #'s 4 and 5). In this doctrinal summary, its editor amplified *The Hope of Israel* to be the same as the blessed hope of the Church and of Christians: that is, the resurrection of the dead at Christ's return and the establishment of His kingdom on earth.

Thus they used *Israel* in a metaphorical sense as the spiritual people of God, or "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16; Romans 2:29). They saw continuity between God's ancient people Israel and His new nation in Christ, both branching from the same elect olive tree (Romans 11). We are all children of Abraham by faith, overcomers with God (i.e., Israelites), and heirs of His promises to the Fathers (Galatians 3:29).

What then? Did our CoG7 ancestors not support the hope of modern Israel and the return of the Jews to their promised land? They did! The hope for a

final return of the Jewish people was indeed part of the Church's message from its start through 1948, and on to the present. But this was not their primary intent for choosing *The Hope of Israel* as the name of their publication. They evidently believed that without the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, without the millennial kingdom of Christ that would restore heaven to earth, the people of God — the true Israel — had no lasting hope.

The names of both the magazine and the Church have evolved since their mid-nineteenth century starts. *The Hope of Israel* changed several times before settling in as the *Bible Advocate* you now hold. And the early Churches of Christ in Michigan have evolved into the Church of God (Seventh Day) of Denver, Colorado.

Most of our pioneers' core concerns are reflected in the Church's current teachings; their "hope" persists in us. We remain true to the conviction of our adventist ancestors that Christ's return to earth will be literal, visible, premillennial — and probably soon! We continue our respect for all of God's moral law, summarized in the Decalogue. And we keep on looking to Jesus for forgiveness and eternal salvation, as did they (sidebar, #4). The twelve faith statements of the '08 Church of God (Seventh Day) may be read at <http://cog7.org>.

— BA

Doctrine in the first *Hope of Israel*

1. The Bible and the Bible alone governs God's people in every age.
2. The dead know nothing; death entered the world by sin.
3. Sin is transgression of the law, the Ten Commandments in particular.
4. There is no hope of eternal life but through Christ and resurrection of the dead.
5. This is also the hope of Israel, the fathers, the apostles, and the early church.
6. God will soon set up His kingdom: Christ will return to sit on David's throne.
7. Both the righteous and wicked will be rewarded on the earth.
8. All the saints will share the kingdom with Abraham's seed on the new earth.
9. God will dwell here on earth — paradise restored greater than its Eden glory.
10. Man will have a right to the Tree of Life; no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain.

— Adapted from
Editor H. S. Dille

The Power of Pain

by Kathy Walters

My husband, Darrel, was not affiliated with the Church of God (Seventh Day) when we married at a young age, nor did he have any desire to be. Still, when God gave me Darrel, I was blest with my soul mate. He never pressured me to stop believing. Over time he simply became so curious about my Christian faith that he decided to study it for himself.

God sure has a way of using people for the greater good. Darrel was baptized with me in 1975. What a glorious day!

Untimely death

In 1976 we welcomed Amy as a third daughter in our family, joining Dianna and Teresa, who already had Daddy wrapped around their fingers. It didn't take Amy long to wrap her tiny fingers around Daddy's big ones. He loved and cherished his girls!

Our first son, Darrel II, was born prematurely in 1983, weighing only three pounds. (Today he is a healthy 6 foot 3 and weighs 200 pounds.) Two years later we welcomed another son, Matthew, weighing only two pounds at birth. Now he is twenty-two and full of health. Our miracle sons are a source of joy and happiness for us both.

The oldest, Dianna, was truly Daddy's girl: beautiful, confident, and loving. But their relationship didn't last a lifetime like those of other close fathers and daughters. In 1990 our world was torn apart when we received a call that Dianna, just starting college, had been in an accident. On our way to the hospital, we came upon the accident scene just a few blocks from home. Dianna had gotten out of her car to change a tire and was struck by another car. Now she lay dead in the street — a parent's nightmare. I thought I would never get that horrible scene out of my head.

Turning point

Trying to make sense of why God would allow such a tragedy, I prayed simply for peace and to see another day of joy for my family. My faith stayed strong because I knew my family needed me, especially Darrel. It seemed he lost his whole life when Dianna died. I trusted that God would give him peace through the Comforter, the Holy Spirit.

Six months after Dianna's death, Darrel faced another challenge — a deadly one: bladder cancer. That diagnosis was his turning point and caused him to ask Jesus Christ for strength. After surgery, he returned to his family whole, with no further signs of cancer and convinced God had given him a wake-up call. God knew what lay ahead of us and that we would need Darrel's faith and strength.

Losing faith

Teresa had been born with a severe heart anomaly. We were told she would not live past seven years. On our knees, we asked God for help, and He spared her through thirty-two years. Her beautiful voice and smile and her ability to light up any room she entered were great blessings to her family and others. Teresa endured four open-heart surgeries, gave birth to two beautiful children, and showed us all a strong faith in God.

But in 2004 Teresa's heart suddenly stopped and could not be started again. That was the day I lost my faith. For thirty-two years I had prayed that Teresa could live a healthy life, and I felt positive God would not let me down. But it didn't seem to matter what I wanted; God's will would be done.

I didn't see the need to pray when God did only what He wanted to do anyway. I told my husband I would not talk to a God who was so cruel. He had taken two of our daughters and left a miserable family in the wake. Why should I ever pray or attend church again?



Nikhil Gangavane—Dreamstime.com

That’s when we needed a strong husband and Dad who would not be afraid to get down on his knees and pray for us all. I watched Darrel do that, but I had little or no feelings except anger at God that seemed to increase daily. I had no use for Him. My salvation at that time came from Darrel. He never left my side and never gave up on me. It wasn’t until much later that I realized Jesus had never left me either.

Accident victims

Three months after Teresa died, a car accident gave me a head injury that nearly took my life. Waking from the coma after several days, I wondered why I was still alive; I didn’t want to be. The injury left me with severe headaches, short-term memory loss, and dizziness. I couldn’t even get out of bed for four months.

Later in 2004 I received a call that our son Matt had been in a serious car accident. Darrel was out of town. I had not driven since my accident, but I knew I had to get to Matthew. I found myself praying that God would help me drive safely to the hospital and strengthen me for what I might learn when I got there. Fearing the worst, I instinctively prayed out loud – every inch of the way. I asked God to forgive me for being so unfaithful to Him.

When I finally saw Matt, he was alive, though severely injured, and able to tell me he would be OK. I cried for joy. His smile in return gave me courage, and I sat there thanking God for sparing our son. Matt has gone through thirteen surgeries since and still has pain, but he continues to smile through it all. I began my journey back to my loving God that day in December 2004.

Changed by pain

My family and I continue to struggle with our

losses. Our lives have been changed by the pain, and we still ask why. I have learned it is OK to ask why. Jesus Christ asked His Father that while He hung on the cross. He is our example of faith, hope, and light. I pray for God to strengthen my faith as I continue on life’s uncertain journey. I will trust Him and thank Him daily. No matter what lies ahead, He will be there for us.

I also pray for His help and guidance for all who need Him today. God has showed me what this life is all about: trusting Him no matter where the journey takes us.

Kathy and Darrel Walters serve the Church in Lehigh Acres, FL. The Walters children are pictured below.





YOUTH REACH



Yield: Service and Missions

by Kurt Lang
National Youth Director

All of us are going somewhere, with or without God. Our tendency is to think of this as “my journey.” When that happens, have we shifted the focus to what I can make of the journey instead of seeing where God is taking me?

You get a car. You want to show your new machine off, right? Well, life’s journey is not about showing off what we have or what we can do, but about showing what God can do in us. How does this apply to our involvement in service and missions?

Jesus says that we are the light of the world, that we are to let our light shine so others may see and glorify God. That automatically takes the focus off us and puts it on Him.

How does God shine through us? By using the talents He’s given us, we can glorify our Father in heaven. We can’t travel alone; we must help others and accept help from others along the way.

In this **Youth Reach** you’ll find some ways to get involved in serving others. Lead out in your local youth group. Or help even more by becoming a national youth officer. Participate in the NFYC Hunger Lock-In; it’ll get your local church into foreign missions. You can impact young people in India just by what you and your group do!

Get involved in missions at home. Attend **MISSION POSSIBLE**. Pioneer Missionary Training (PMT), sponsored by CoG7 Missions Ministries, is an excellent way to “get your feet wet” in foreign service.

Stop. Take a minute. Think. Are you yielding your own plans to God so He can use you in service to others? National Youth Ministry is happy to help you in one or more service areas. Contact us at nfyc@cog7.org.



Youth Officer Update

Your youth officers held their annual meeting December 16-19, 2007, at the home of Kurt and Kristi Lang in Harrisburg, Oregon. With a lot of brainstorming and planning, they developed ideas for the 2008 Hunger Lock-In packet, for our 2008 theme - "The Journey: What's Your Story?" — and for the future of the NFYC. They hope your youth group will participate in the spring Lock-In and in other plans through the year.

After our fun, productive meeting, two officers traveled (on their own) to the SW Winter Youth Retreat to assist the district youth coordinators and encourage the youth to register with NFYC for 2008.

The national youth officers are Brian Franks of Colorado Springs (Central District); Brianne Feigum of Albany, Oregon (West Coast District); and Brian Smith of Conroe, Texas (Southwest District). This small team serves with passion and accomplishes much!

The officer team is designed for one youth rep from each of the CoG7's districts. They work directly with National FYC directors and district youth coordinators to design and implement youth ministry. For example . . .

- youth publications (online, magazine, Lock-In packet, etc.)
- assistance with youth camps and other events
- attendance at district and national youth functions
- communication, promotion with local churches
- technology and Web design
- attendance at the annual planning meeting (travel paid)
- training opportunities

If you are between the ages of 15 and 20, have



trusted Christ, are a baptized member of the CoG7, and are active in your local group (1 Timothy 4:12), you may apply to serve as a youth officer for the 2008-2010 term, beginning July 1. To learn more about the offices or to download an application, go to our home page at <http://nfyc.cog7.org> and click on the "Who We Are" link. Or request an application by e-mail at nfyc@cog7.org.

Got Hunger??

Are these statements true or false?

1. The only country in the world that has a Bill of Rights for cows is India.
2. India has the most post offices in the world.
3. The number system originated in India; Aryabhata, a scientist, invented the digit zero.
4. India's movie industry, Bollywood, is the largest in the world, producing over 800 films a year.
5. Barbie's boyfriend, Ken, was not sold in India until recently because he clashed with traditional arranged marriages.

Want to know the answers or learn how to play Kutu-Kutu and other games native to India? Then get your youth group into the Hunger Lock-In this spring (suggested for April 19, but you can hold it any time before June 30). The funds raised then will help CoG7 youth in India where, despite lack of resources, revival is occurring in the state of Mizoram as youth desire to see their churches unified. Lock-In packets provided by National Youth Ministry can be downloaded from http://cog7.org/youth_workers.htm or by e-mailing nfyc@cog7.org.

Game on!

Got Fed!!

From Elder Baltazar Wooton of the Philippines, where the '07 Hunger Lock-In funds were sent:

"I was thankful to Almighty God and your youth ministry for raising the money that goes a long way for completing our Convention Hall — cement flooring and sound system. God has touched the hearts of your youth, as He knows we badly needed this. On behalf of the entire membership of the Philippine Church of God (Seventh Day), our heartfelt thanks and gratitude to all of them and to all who have prayed for the success of the work He has entrusted to us. Thank you so much, dear brethren! May God richly bless you."

Pure Heart, Ready Feet - Hearing God's Will

“Then Samuel said, ‘Speak for your servant is listening.’” — 1 Samuel 3:10

Missiologist J. Herbert Kane wrote that a person will enhance the possibility of hearing God's call if he or she has

1. An open mind
2. Attentive ear
3. Pure heart
4. Busy hands
5. Ready feet

— Howard Culbertson

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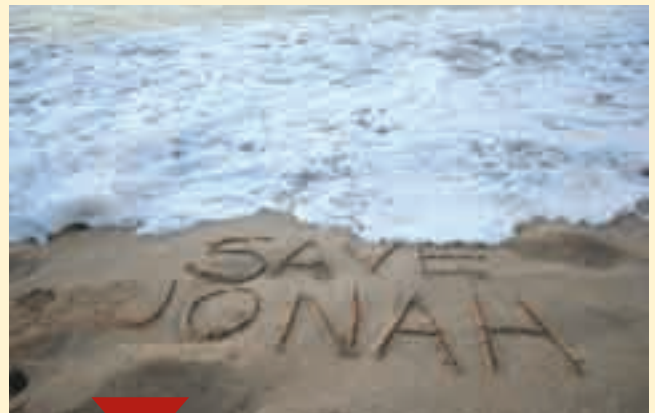
10 Ways to Avoid Becoming a Missionary

A tongue-in-cheek look at sure-fire ways to stay off the mission field.

1. Ignore Jesus' request in John 4:35 that we take a long, hard look at the fields. Seeing the needs of people can be depressing and very unsettling. It could lead to genuine missionary concern.
2. Focus your energies on socially legitimate targets. Go after a bigger salary, job promotion, bigger home, more luxurious car, and financial security. Along the way, run up some big credit card debts.
3. Get married to someone who thinks the Great Commission is what your employer gives you after you make a big sale. After marriage, settle down, establish a respectable career trajectory, and raise a picture-perfect family.
4. Stay away from missionaries. Their testimonies can be disturbing and may distract you from embracing the materialistic lifestyle of your home country.
5. If you think about missions, restrict your thoughts to countries where it's impossible to work openly: North Korea, Saudi Arabia, China, and other closed countries. Forget the vast areas of our globe open to missionaries.

6. Think how bad a missionary you would be based on your own past failures. Don't even think about Moses, David, Jonah, Peter, or Mark, all of whom overcame failures.
7. Always imagine missionaries as talented, super-spiritual people who stand on lofty pedestals. This will heighten your own sense of inadequacy. Convincing yourself that God does not use ordinary people as missionaries will smother any guilt you may feel about refusing to even listen for His call.
8. Agree with people who tell you that you are indispensable where you are and that your local church or home country can't do without you.
9. Worry constantly about money.
10. If you still feel you must serve in missions, go now without any preparation or training. You'll soon be home again, and no one can ever blame you for not trying!

Inspired by Stewart Dinnen's list in *How Are You Doing?* (Bromley: STL Books, 1984). Article by Howard Culbertson. For more original content like this, visit <http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert>. Used by permission.



All of us tend to resist and run from God's leadership and call; the Bible calls this **sin**. God tends to chase after us and intercept our self-destructive behavior; the Bible calls this **grace**. Around those themes — sin and grace, running and chasing — is the heartbeat of our Bible in general and the book of Jonah in particular.

At the Southwestern Winter Retreat, December 27-30, nearly 300 youth (see photo on p. 20) came to “Save Jonah” by learning that they are never too far from God to be rescued and by learning how to please Him. More on this retreat at <http://nfyc.cog7.org>.

— Jason and Rose Rodriguez

In a world of individualism, separation, and partisanship, the human race constantly yearns for more unity — without much success.

God's plan is that His church set an early pattern for harmony among all nations, races, and classes of people. Do you ever wonder why we call each other brothers and sisters, then separate into our own little groups and bicker over whose worship style is more right?

Though we may not agree 100 percent with each other on what God asks of us or how we interpret Scripture, one fact about following Christ remains: that we love each other as Christ has loved us. That's how the world knows us as His disciples (John 13:34, 35).

This love is special. It is not *philanthropia* (human kindness) or *eros* (physical love), and it goes beyond *philadelphia* (tender affection for brethren). The love of God through Christ for His people is *agape* love — unselfish benevolence that embraces not just those seen as lovely or worthy but all people on the single basis of their need.

Have you ever loved another to the point that you could define it as a love feast? It's not love for a spouse, parent, or child; it's love for "whomever" of God's creatures. This love sums up the attitude Christians should have toward one another — not just other Christians but any human being.

Journeying through much of the known world of his day, Paul met and loved through the different cultures. In all his epistles, Paul never talked about how much more God loved him and his brethren than

Love Without Limits

by Phil Biggs

those of other color, language, or culture. Neither Paul nor our Savior Jesus Christ ever shunned people because they were different in appearance or manner of life. They accepted differences because they understood and practiced *agape*.

In my life, one group of people often models this sort of unconditional concern for me: American bikers.

Shocked? Keep reading.

One bike club's vest has a patch that reads "I am my brother's keeper." Do we as the body of Christ have this mentality toward each other? Or do we look at someone else's sins or struggles with an air of piety and indifference?

Many people look at most bikers as scruffy-looking hoodlums or as noisy troublemakers, but we see them differently: a family man or businessman, or a woman once dedicated to God but either chased away from church or never given a reason to stay. Was such an individual ever truly loved by a Christian before deciding to become a biker?

When two motorcycle club members meet, they greet with

"Hi, Brother" and give a hug and/or a kiss. This is often true even when members of different clubs meet. Sounds like 1 Corinthians 16:20 to me. When a biker is having a hard time with life — keeping a job, being a good husband or father, trying to make ends meet — other members go to him with encouragement and counsel.

As a 36-year biker, I've often seen this patch: "Cut one, we all bleed." In other words, when one brother hurts, so do the others. Bikers look out for one another, not with violence or anger for the most part but with genuine brotherly love.

As brothers and sisters in Christ, is this what we do for each other? Is this part of the *agape* love Jesus asks of us? I do believe it is, brothers and sisters. I do believe it is! **✠**

Phil Biggs leads a Christian motorcycle club called The Zealots. He and his family attend CoG7 in Denver, CO.





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Spirituality

BA interview with Houston, Texas, Pastor

What is spirituality, and what roles do Bible reading, prayer, and fasting play in it?

Spirituality, in its Christian context, is the deliberate practice of realizing the living Christ in this natural world that seems so void of the supernatural. A poignant sample of this, though not in the inspired text, appears in the Gospel of Thomas, where Jesus supposedly said, “Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift up a stone, and you will find me.” I am reluctant to cite a non-canonical work here, but I know of no better pithy example.

Bible reading, prayer, and fasting are vital to Christian spirituality. Yet many struggle to make even these basic disciplines come alive. One reason for this is that we have largely separated ourselves from the spiritual traditions of our pre-Reformation past.

For example, reading one or more chapters per day is a common practice, but we may sleepily slide through it, collapse into bed, and think we’ve met our spiritual quota. How much better would it be if we chewed each morsel of the delicacies of Scripture? How much more enthralling to hold in gaze each word, sentence, and idea of the eternal Word? Such is the practice of *lectio divina* (divine

reading), where the rush of a reading calendar doesn’t impose a schedule. Time is suspended as all of heaven waits expectantly for the worshiper to drink and eat the Milk and Meat.

Prayer is often a spoken version of the same disconnected, hurried chore. Our prayers and theology don’t jive. We believe God is all-knowing, yet proceed to give Him the news. Cultivating the balance of spirit and truth in worship, as Jesus taught, requires vulnerability. We must be ready to discard immature spiritual habits. It’s difficult because the same practices may have served us well in children’s church or youth camp but can’t satisfy now.

Fasting’s efficacy is more easily grasped. If one fasts from whatever and till whenever vowed, it works almost automatically. Eight to twelve hours into the fast, the stomach complains. With each growl, we’re reminded of the spiritual purpose for this self-affliction: to make the will master the want, and in so doing, cut the cords that tether us to “the cares of this life” (Luke 8:14).

What other disciplines are used in historic Christian spirituality? Solitude, perhaps?

A sample of less-familiar spiritual disciplines could include

interior prayer, the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the Jesus Prayer of Eastern Orthodox monks, and the “Lord of all pots and pans and things” spirituality of Brother Lawrence (a seventeenth century cook and dishwasher in a Carmelite monastery), as well as silence and solitude. What a rich variety is part of our heritage as Christians! Could it be that we suffer from spiritual anemia, in part, because we fail to know and appreciate the fruitful traditions of Christianity in its wider, universal mode?

Theology proper is inseparable from proper spirituality. If a Christian isn’t willing to wrestle with the mind-boggling enigma of the Ultimate, then he/she isn’t ready to be serious about spiritual development. God’s incomprehensibility and ineffability are potent sources of divinely orchestrated befuddlement. His being and nature are intoxicants that finish with robust tannin. Traces of their captivating aroma are everywhere sensed by those who have drunk it down. For such people, a kaleidoscope of spiritual practice is not only valid but also nearly irresistible.

What forms does spirituality take in today’s culture?

Two major forms are obvious within the larger Christian

Introduced

Alex Ciurana, a student of religious thought and practice on a broad level.

community. High church (liturgical) spirituality emphasizes memorized prayers, reflection upon the creeds, and even iconic devotions such as the fourteen “stations of the cross” in which the stages of Christ’s passion are depicted. Contrast this to many evangelical churches that practice a more individualized and extemporaneous style that includes testimonials, song specials, and topical sermons not rooted in a religious calendar.

Each of these has advantages and disadvantages. The high church form links one to the ancientness of the church but can become routine and dry if not properly appreciated and internalized. The evangelical form allows for feeling and freedom of practice but can overemphasize the individual and neglect the aspect of community within the faith.

What distinctions may be made between Christian (biblical) spirituality and that of the New Age or Eastern mysticism?

That’s a tricky question because we assume that evangelical, conservative Christianity is *biblical* Christianity. I maintain that strictly biblical Christianity would be very Jewish, since the entire New Testament was written by Jews or converts to


Judaism (e.g., Luke). But where in the New Testament does Jesus or an apostle demand us to cease being what we are and become Jewish? It’s not to be found, except in the account of the Judaizers, who continually plagued Paul. For me, there is simply no all-encompassing, monolithic, New Testament spiritual model — except Jesus. We must have the courage to develop spiritually as Christ’s followers, without constantly trying to footnote the New Testament church.

The differences between Eastern spirituality and most Christian forms are usually in their philosophical starting points. For example, Christians view time linearly, and therefore each individual lives but once, being judged finally by God. In the Far East, time is cyclical and therefore the soul transmigrates and experiences countless lives intermittently returning to Brahman or the Un-manifest. So if a Christian asks a Hindu, “Would you like to be born again?” the reply will certainly be, “No! I am seeking to escape the cycle of birth and rebirth to enter Nirvana and be eternally one with Brahman.” Many differences arise from this one starting point.

Even with these differences, the spiritual experiences recorded by monks and hermits

— whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or Taoist — are remarkably similar. There are myriad books testifying to this. The difference, then, between Christianity and other world faiths is not so much in the personal, interior experiences claimed by devotees of each but in the worldviews and truth claims of each one’s major writings — in our case, the Bible.

What books do you recommend for those wishing more on spiritual formation?

My favorites from the Catholic and Orthodox traditions are *The Practice of the Presence of God*, by Brother Lawrence; *His Life is Mine*, by Archimandrite Sophrony; and the anonymously authored *The Way of a Pilgrim*. The best from a Protestant contemplative may be found in the Quaker, Richard Foster. His three books — *Celebration of Discipline*, *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life*, and *Freedom of Simplicity* — are available in one volume. (*Editor’s note: Foster’s Celebration of Discipline was named by Christianity Today as one of the top ten religious books of the twentieth century.*) 



Jesus: The Only Way

by John Lemley

A former Muslim asked, “Why does Christianity teach that Jesus is the only way to God?”

He must have been reacting to two scriptures: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6) and “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Why is the way to God’s great salvation so exclusive?

The answer begins with Adam and Eve, created in a sinless world. God gave them one rule: “Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:17). The serpent tempted Eve and she ate. She gave to Adam and he ate. Tragedy, disease, and death have filled the pages of earth’s history since that sad day.

Romans tells what happened:

Just as through *one* man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned . . . the

wages of sin is death . . . (5:12; 6:23).

One sin passed the sin nature and its consequences to all of Adam’s offspring (3:23). The same chapter that stresses the one way that sin came into the world also explains the one way the sin problem will be solved (5:15-19).

This is where Christianity is unique. It points to its founder as the all-sufficient Savior — the only Savior. Other faiths, however, have a list of religious works or a standard of piety as requirements for salvation. This human tendency to help earn an eternal reward has infected some branches of Christianity that define salvation as Jesus plus certain beliefs or practices.

Most religions throughout history have developed a system of works, beliefs, and/or philosophies for appeasing an angry God. In contrast, the Bible teaches that God is love, a truth that takes Christianity on a path shared by few religions. The Bible also teaches that God loves us so much, He sent His only begotten Son. We are invited to

believe on Him so we will enjoy everlasting life (John 3:16). With this doctrine, Christianity stands alone. No other faith teaches a Savior who died for our sins and rose again (2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 4:22-24).

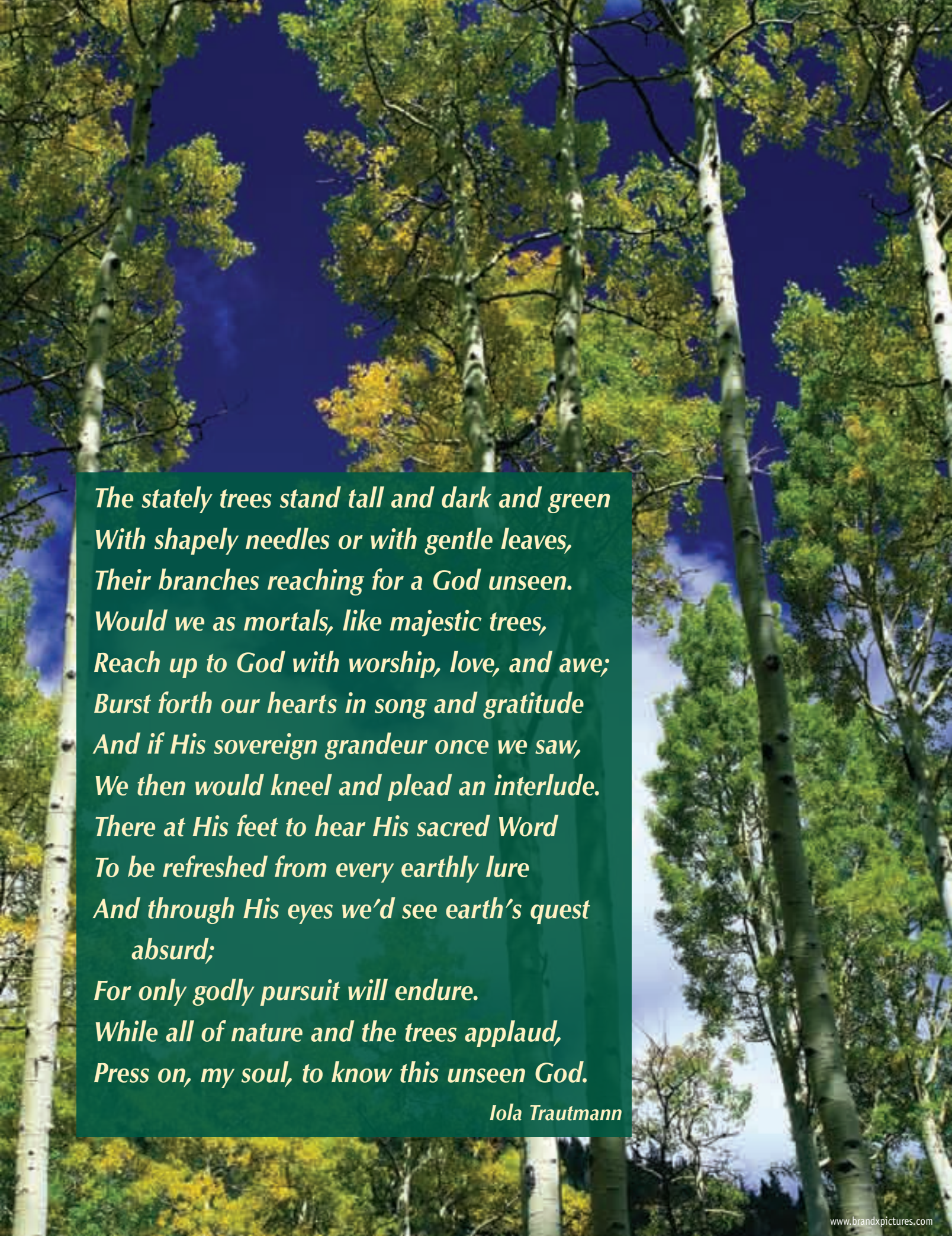
Jesus’ sacrifice is sufficient to deliver us from the death penalty. Yet even some believers try to assist God in salvation.

The doctrine of baptismal regeneration — stating that our sins are washed away in the waters of baptism — is one of their methods. But the Bible teaches that Jesus’ *blood* cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). Being immersed symbolizes both burial of the old nature and cleansing from sin, but does not actually accomplish either.

The Bible presents only one vital test of faith: believing on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 8:37; 16:31). Humanity needs a Savior in order to experience the new birth. An idea or practice cannot save anyone. To teach anything else counters the beloved truth of Scripture.

Christ died to save sinners, not to confuse or burden them. When religions add this or that dogma or practice, they succeed in strengthening the power of the church, but they pollute the simple gospel, weaken the foundational faith of our fathers, and complicate the basic Christian confession. The world’s religions exalt creeds; Christians exalt Christ. ■■■

John Lemley and his wife, Lois, live in Vancouver, WA. John serves the Church as pastor in Portland, OR, and as editor of the *Ministerial Forum*.



*The stately trees stand tall and dark and green
With shapely needles or with gentle leaves,
Their branches reaching for a God unseen.
Would we as mortals, like majestic trees,
Reach up to God with worship, love, and awe;
Burst forth our hearts in song and gratitude
And if His sovereign grandeur once we saw,
We then would kneel and plead an interlude.
There at His feet to hear His sacred Word
To be refreshed from every earthly lure
And through His eyes we'd see earth's quest
absurd;
For only godly pursuit will endure.
While all of nature and the trees applaud,
Press on, my soul, to know this unseen God.*

Lola Trautmann



Did you know . . .

the *Bible Advocate* has been published under six different names in its 145 years? They are:

- *The Hope of Israel* (1863-1872)
- *Advent and Sabbath Advocate and Hope of Israel* (1872-74)
- *Advent and Sabbath Advocate* (1874-1888)
- *Sabbath Advocate and Herald of the Advent* (1888-1900)
- *Bible Advocate and Herald of the Coming Kingdom* (1900-1972)
- *Bible Advocate* (1972-present)

Though *Bible Advocate* remains the official name, many readers know us simply as “the BA.”

Publications

Keith Michalak, Director

The *Bible Advocate* is one of the oldest religious publications in America. It was born in Michigan in 1863 under the name *The Hope of Israel* (see left-hand column), with fewer than 40 copies of the first issue mailed.

The Hope of Israel press was moved from Michigan to Marion, Iowa, in 1866, then to Stanberry, Missouri, by 1888. There it stayed until 1972, when it moved to Broomfield, Colorado. The magazine is still managed and edited at the CoG7 general offices, but it is printed, and single copies are mailed, by Kopco Press in Caney, Kansas.

Eight issues of the BA are produced annually. About 13,000 copies of each issue go to U.S. addresses and over 3,000 more to individuals and church groups in more than 80 other countries. Since 2003 every issue has been translated into Spanish, and the resulting AB (*Abogado de la Biblia*), with identical content to the English version, is mailed to about 2,000 addresses in several nations.

Last year, rates charged by the U.S. Postal Service for foreign mail nearly tripled. The cost of mailing ten pounds of magazines and literature to Africa, for example, increased from \$11.55 to \$37 in one jump.

Individual readers are not billed for the BA, but it and most other literature from the Bible Advocate Press are sent without charge, supported by the tithes and offerings of CoG7 members and friends of this ministry.

Each May an appeal for support goes to all BA subscribers in the U.S. and a few other countries. When it arrives at your house this spring, we ask you to do what you can to keep us advocating the Bible and representing the Church – until Christ comes.





New affiliate: On December 30, 2007, the Topeka, KS, Church of God (Seventh Day) voted to affiliate with the General Conference. Welcome to Pastor and Mrs. James Sawyer (couple at right) and all the brethren in Topeka!

Golden Couples

Again this year, the BA will recognize any CoG7 couple achieving fifty years of marriage. Please send names, hometown, and date of marriage to the editor. To get us started in '08, the BA congratulates Elroy and Joyce Gold of Floresville, Texas, who will celebrate their golden anniversary on March 30!



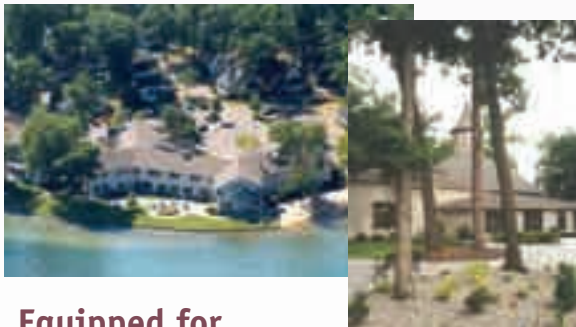
Join us for alumni weekend, March 28-30, as we celebrate SVA's 60th year at the Owosso, Michigan, campus. For more information, check out our Web site at www.springvale.us.



Grand opening: With an overflow crowd, the Heart of Worship congregation in San Antonio, TX, held a dedication for their new worship facilities on Sabbath, January 12. Congratulations to Pastor Joe Corrales (left front) and all the church there.

Lay Pastors and Prospects

The June 2-12 MTS Summer Session in Denver, Colorado, will provide courses you need and address questions you ask about ordained ministry in CoG7. If you have an invitation to attend or you'd like to be invited, contact Ministries Training: 303-452-7973 or training@cog7.org.



Equipped for the Journey

**Ministerial Council and Leadership Conference
October 6-11, 2008
Gull Lake Conference Center
Hickory Corners, Michigan**

All NAMC documented ministers should attend, plus lay pastors and key local leaders. Arrive Sunday evening for a one-day Church Planting Conference on Monday.



Rocky Mountain high: Over 65 folks attended the annual Western Canada family retreat at Crowsnest Pass, Alberta. Elder Brian Larson led in preaching and teaching the theme "Spiritually Fit." District youth leaders Francisco and Deborah Chavez coordinated the relaxing, inspiring event held the last four days of 2007.



International Tour

Mexico

The Church in Mexico, with about eight hundred local congregations, often supports other national Churches of God (Seventh Day) in Latin America, sharing literature and sending preachers, teachers, and even missionaries for two or more years. It also assists Hispanic congregations in the U.S. and Canada with teachers and other personnel.

The evangelization system working in Mexico is known as Family Groups to Grow the Church (GFPCI in Spanish). Families gather one afternoon or evening per week and invite neighbors, friends, or relatives, with a leader from the local church. When the size of this group doubles, it divides into two and the process continues.

The Mexican church also supports efforts of Cristo Viene and IMC to establish a church in Cuba. Despite poverty on that island, people are happy, and our brothers there are doubly joyful in Christ's salvation. A project is underway to provide this mission with photographic equipment, video camera, and at least one computer. This will give video service to the church in Cuba and provide a source of income for our brethren. Please contact Bill Hicks, Missions director, with any support you can give.



Monterrey, Christ Loves You!

In December 2007 the Church in Mexico presented an inspirational evangelistic event in a most important place in the northern state of Nuevo León. This venue was at the Heroes' Esplanade, a public plaza across the street from the Court of Justice Building in Monterrey. The event theme was "Monterrey, Christ Loves You!"

With about six thousand people in attendance, including many from the public citizenry, singer and songwriter Marcos Vidal presented a gospel concert. Claudio Ramirez, state coordinator of Religious Affairs, greeted the crowd in behalf of Governor José Natividad González Parás.

At the midpoint of the concert, local Pastor Ramón Ruiz Garza, who also serves as president of the International Ministerial Congress, spoke about the need of every human being to seek God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ, the only media-

tor between God and man.

Concluding the concert, Vidal invited people to receive the Lord in their hearts, and he asked believers to renew their first love with the song "The Miracle." Minister Rolando López, national director of evangelism for the Church in Mexico, offered the closing prayer.

This event was historic for several reasons, one of which is that civil authorities expressed their desire for the Church to have more presence in Monterrey with these types of events. This city of four million residents is Mexico's industrial capital and is home to more than forty CoG7 congregations.

— Ramon Ruiz Garza



In the Face of Christ

Our vision of a vibrant twenty-first century Church of God (Seventh Day) includes the word *evangelical*. The term can be troublesome because of its baggage; some mainline evangelicals now shun their own label. Yet *evangelical* serves to underscore our commitment to Christ and the relation of our faith family to others who love and embrace the same gospel.

The rise of the evangelical movement in America early in the twentieth century attempted to bring balance to fundamentalism, which sought to correct elements harmful to orthodox Christianity: Darwinism, higher criticism of Scripture, and liberalism. Though noble in their intent, fundamentalists missed the mark, summarized by the late Harold Ockenga in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*: 1) wrong attitude - suspicion of all who do not hold to every doctrine and practice they do; 2) wrong strategy - separation from others to form a totally pure church; and 3) wrong results - failure to turn back liberalism and address cultural/social needs because fundamentalists were too busy being right.

Evangelicalism, on the other hand, emphasized the essentials of historic Christianity, embraced others committed to Christ, and cooperated with them in kingdom efforts – despite doctrinal differences – and in meeting the social needs of humanity. Organizations such as the Billy Graham Association and World Vision International were poised to benefit from the rise of this new evangelical spirit.

Historically the CoG7 has sounded more like fundamentalism than evangelicalism. The heartbeat of the Millerite Movement was Christ's second return, and "being right" about Scripture soon followed as a twin emphasis. Both are understandably part of our church's DNA. By the nature of our heritage, we've too often seen our role more as pointing out the error of other Christians than as pointing sinners to Christ. This leads to exclusivity, to a sense of being the true church, and leaves little room for gospel cooperation or social concern.

I am not sold on the evangelical label, but its overarching principle remains true and is part of the current CoG7 vision. It is the vision of a church whose members find their identity in Christ, not in being different. It is distinct in its doctrinal convictions but not exclusive. This church takes seriously Paul's words: "In Christ Jesus . . . the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Galatians 5:6, NIV).

This is neither "easy believe-ism" nor *carte blanche* acceptance of all who wear a Jesus badge. Many claim to know Jesus but have no relationship with Him nor authentic discipleship to back it up. Some differences do matter and should not be ignored. But Scripture admonishes us more to be different from the world, transformed by God's grace, than to be different from other Christians. Those who love Christ and embrace His gospel are not enemies of the faith. Our mutual love for Christ brings us together in the kingdom of grace.

The Greek noun *euangelion*, translated "glad tidings," "good news," or "gospel," is defined in 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4: "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (NIV), thereby providing the only way of redemption for lost humanity. Paul's reminder that "this is of first importance" (v. 3a) alerts us against the tendency to place other things – distinctive beliefs, traditions, cultural customs – above the gospel. But we will do differently as we grow in understanding Jesus and the gospel's primacy: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

– Whaid Guscott Rose
General Conference President





PORTLAND, AUSTRALIA

These brethren attended their national convention at Portland, State of Victoria, December 26-31. The Church “down under,” though not large, meets in four far-flung locations and assists the international CoG7 beyond its numbers. For Pastor Phil Kordahi’s report on the recent meeting, go to www.cog7.org/BA.

Photo by John Klassek of Perth

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