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Adam and Steve in context (p. 14)

Singles in cyberspace (p. 16)



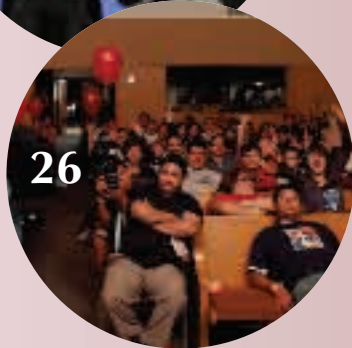
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Domesticated? Why Not!

This BA focuses on the interface of *domestics* and *Christ*. “Jesus, we know; but what about domestics?” Thanks for asking: Editors get paid to unravel such things.

The word *domestic* relates to household and family, as in “domestic duties.” To be domesticated is to be mostly tamed, housebroken, devoted to home life, hearth-loving, and home-grown. While practicing these, dads, singles, and kiddoes bring blessing to every residence. For many moms, domestics are job one – without pay. God bless them.

Domestics in the Bible start with creation, when Adam and Eve began their holy cohabitation in a lovely new abode. After their dietary downturn into sin, Eden’s Owner foreclosed, and the residents were forced into a diminished domicile. Then children arrived, who all bore natural and spiritual resemblance to Mother and Dad.

The Decalogue too underscores domestics. Commandments #5 about parents and #7 about sex give high priority to “home sweet home.” Human welfare and social progress are always tied to honorable, faithful families.

Was Jesus domesticated? He never wed, raised kids, nor called a house His own. But He obeyed His parents, honored women, embraced a high view of marriage, blessed children, and lodged with other single adults. He had a wonderful way of reversing family funerals.

Funerals? They are in the domestic order as well. In our neighborhood, a Circle of Life business just opened its doors, catering to two kinds of family events: weddings and funerals. What’s next?

The articles ahead explore pieces of today’s domestic scene: a modern method of meeting potential life partners, marriages that grow with time, divorce, and sexual struggles that impact both males and females.

Faith and family, marriage and morality, birth and growth, loving and being loved: These are found early and often in the Word and high in the hearts of Christians. Is Christ at home in your house?

On a personal note, May through July for my family is happily strewn with birthdays, anniversaries, moms’ and dads’ holidays. Two new grandbabies are due by July 31! Seeing you and your family at the CoG7 convention in Texas, July 6-11, will make a good summer that much better. In *corpus Christi* – the body of Christ – all domestic treasures are elevated to higher levels of grace and truth.

– Calvin Burrell
Editor



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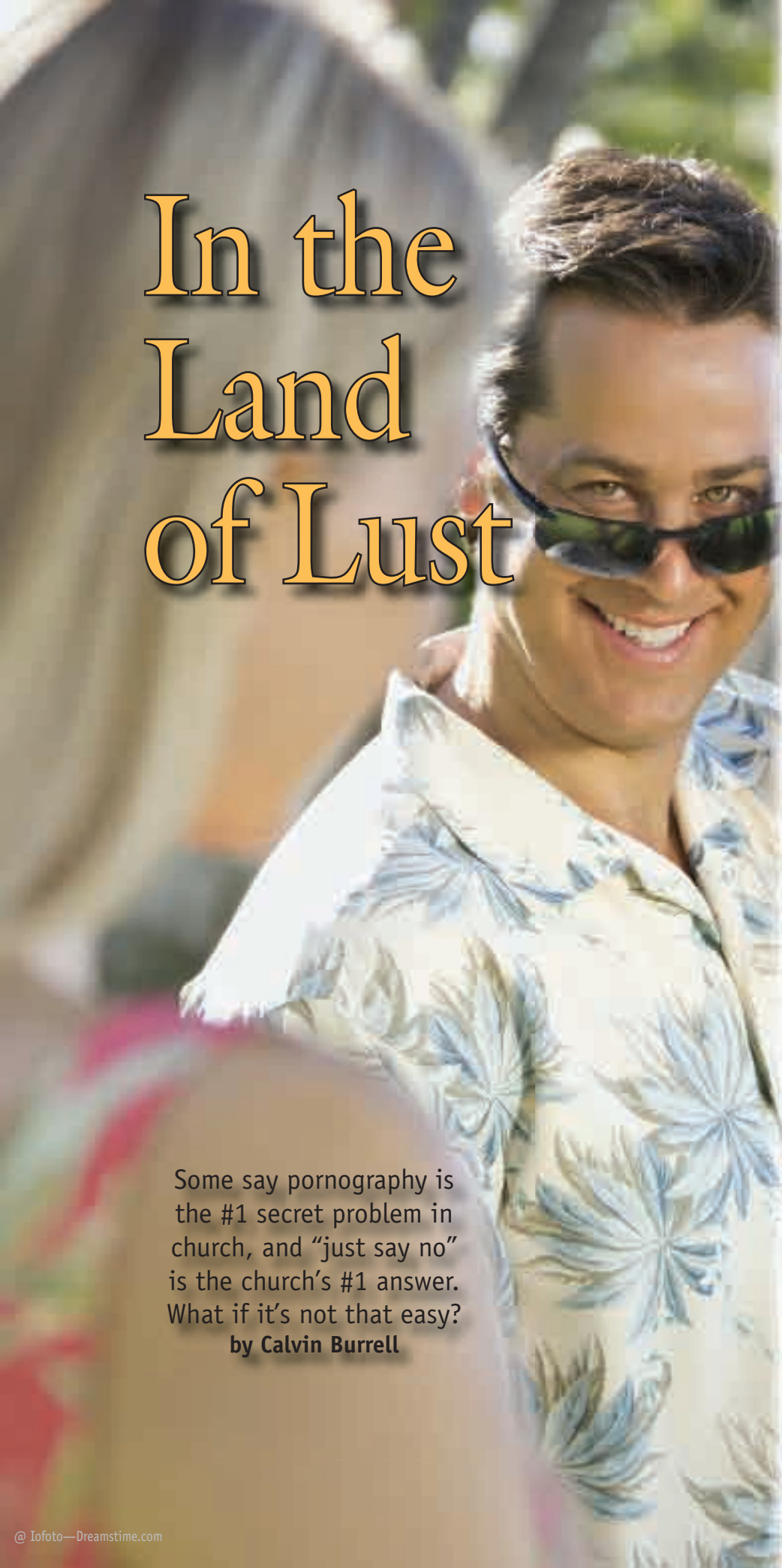
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In the Land of Lust

Some say pornography is the #1 secret problem in church, and “just say no” is the church’s #1 answer. What if it’s not that easy?
by Calvin Burrell

While serving as thirty-ninth president of the United States, Jimmy Carter confessed that he had looked on many women with lust, committing adultery in his heart.

On one hand, Carter knew what His Lord says about this common failure among men: “Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28).

On the other hand, this born-again, Bible-teaching president also knew a vow of the righteous Job: “I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?” (Job 31:1). Most likely, he had made a similar pledge at least once in his life.

Most of us who set out to follow Jesus may find ourselves closer to Jimmy’s earthy failures than to Job’s lofty restraint. Unchecked, our natural instincts can spiral into various addictive and oppressive behaviors, like pornography. Let’s learn more.

Sex and society

God created sex and called it good. He created the feminine figure and gave men eyes to see and admire. He made the masculine physique and persona, and gave women desire for male companionship. God created testosterone and said it is not good for man to be alone. We were engineered as sexual beings, not just for reproductive purposes but also for enriching our lives. No problem!

We live in a sex-saturated society — that’s a problem! Our instincts and interests are easily inflamed and misdirected by a

culture that cares little for Bible standards of decency and virtue. Alluring sights and sounds are more omnipresent today than ever, but even Job needed to lim- it his eyes and discipline his mind – long before the era of photos, computers, and mass media.

We cannot deny the appear- ance or appeal of a sexually charged scene, for then we must either be neutered or go out of the world. Rather, the lingering look that turns to craving for what does not belong to us – this is lust.

See no evil

Given the principle of Jesus, the pledge of Job, and the experi- ence of Jimmy, what is realistic for us in the matter of moral pu- rity for our eyes and minds?

Some people may carry false guilt in this matter, and clear thinking can help free them. The Bible confirms that sexual desire and passion are normal human traits. Between a man and his wife, God affirms and blesses the full-bodied expression of love (Genesis 2:24, 25; Proverbs 5:15-19; Song of Solomon; 1 Corin- thians 7:1-9).

Even beyond matrimony, thoughts with sexual compo- nents are not necessarily sinful thoughts. Since Jesus was tempt- ed in all points, He must have experienced His own sexuality as a natural attraction toward the feminine. Never did He entertain this to the point of sinful lust, however. Thus admiration, ap- preciation, and attraction toward a person of the opposite sex are natural in the human family and may be free of evil intent.

Though the interest we feel in persons of opposite gender may

be innocent enough, too often we cross that border into the land of lust, as Jesus defined it. Temptation, then, has given way to sin. The key to victory is prepa- ration before the test.

Whatever it takes

In this corrupted culture, how can we prepare ourselves to “see

no evil”? A severe analogy that our Lord used can teach us more. In the next verse after Matthew 5:28, Christ urges us to ward off lust before it strikes: “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell” (v. 29). This is not to be

More on Porn

- Pornography is a \$13.3 billion annual industry in the U.S., taking in more than the NFL, NBA, and major league baseball *combined*.
- The porn industry has larger revenues than the top technology companies combined: Microsoft, Google, Amazon, eBay, Yahoo!, Apple, Netflix, and EarthLink.
- Every second, 28,258 Internet users are viewing pornography and spending \$3,075.64 on it.
- Every 39 minutes a new pornographic video is created in the U.S.
- There are 4.2 million pornography Web sites.
- 25 percent of search engine requests are for pornography — 68 million per day.
- 100,000 Web sites offer illegal child pornography.
- Average age of first exposure to Internet porn: eleven years.
- Pornography growth in the last five years: 1800 percent.
- Phone sex is a \$4.5 billion industry; “sexting” is the new trend among teens.

Sources: *Family Safe Media, Senate testimony by Dr. Mary Anne Layden, Nightline, Crosswalk.com, Home Invasion by Rebecca Hage- lin, Dr. Mark Laaser, and Focus on the Family*

* * * * *

Not Just a Guy Thing

Do ladies lust? Many admit that they too are tempted by “sexy” men. Recent stats suggest that a third of visitors to adult Web sites are women and that one in six women struggle with addiction to porn (<http://familysafemedia.com>).

Still, the greater snare for the most women may be as they “package” or expose themselves in a way that attracts the improper attention of men.

Jesus’ standard in Matthew 5:28 has this corollary for ladies: “Whoever presents herself with the intent of inciting a man’s lust has committed adultery with him already in her heart.”

— BA

Habit of Holiness

Most guys notice a direct relation between increased outdoor temperatures and exposed female flesh. We know we ought to look away for purity's sake and may even memorize verses to deal with the tempting onslaught to our eyes.

Holiness here requires a controlled mind. "Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled. . . . As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. . . . 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Peter 13-16, NIV). Part of controlling our minds is in forming certain habits.

To begin a new habit, we need a loathing for our old habits of lust. If we have no hatred for what God hates, we have no hope of overcoming. Next, it is vital to make a covenant with our eyes (Job 31:1). This means that we train our eyes to bounce off anything that would entice us to lust: checkout counter magazines or some girl with a low-cut blouse.

A third aid in avoiding lustful behavior involves substituting a more rewarding adventure. "Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22). If God tells us to flee from something, is He trying to take away our pleasure, or does He want to prevent us from painful experiences and a lifetime of regret? This question ought to drive us to our knees, confessing that His way is the best and only way to live. When we get to this point, victory is near.

Most are content living in self-created mud huts of sin instead of the penthouse of holiness. Cultivating God's peace and purity, however, gives greater satisfaction than the quick fix of illicit sexual release.

— Eric Swanson

* * * * *

Resources

Freedom Begins Here™. This group offers solution to the porn problem through its line of resources, including toolkits for churches and individuals. Each toolkit contains DVD's and workbooks to help those battling pornography and sexual addictions (www.freedombeginshere.org).

Somebody's Daughter: A Journey to Freedom from Pornography. This DVD/CD multimedia covers the lives of several in ministry who struggled with and overcame addiction. Study guide curriculum is available for individuals, counselors, and churches (www.musicforthesoul.org/).

understood literally, for sure but may be applied in many other ways:

- Pluck out porn from your computer with a good filter; cast from you all lewd and obscene materials; cleanse your home! (Romans 13:14b).

- Amputate sexually charged television and movies; instead, integrate the spiritually charged Word (2 Timothy 2:22, for example) to use in times of temptation, as Jesus did.

- Cut clear boundaries; avoid all improper appearances in male-female relationships.

- Choose a personal accountability partner who will ask hard questions that carve away at your use of pornography.

- When your eyes introduce improper thoughts, switch to your heart and to enlightened prayer. Pray for the object of your temptation, her spouse and family, her faith.

- For deeper sexual addictions, seek professional spiritual counsel until the chains are broken (see "Resources" sidebar).

The "pluck out your eye" counsel of Christ does not endorse self-mutilation but underscores the importance of this topic. Because the wounds of perversion are too painful and the costs of pornography too great, Jesus says, in effect, "Do whatever it takes not to lose this war."

Purity within reach

The most important sexual organ of the body is the mind. We may struggle with impure thoughts even after cleansing our homes and computers, but we will never win the heart-war

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Q How are we to understand the millennium of Revelation 20? Will the righteous be “caught up” to heaven at the first resurrection? Will any ungodly remain during this time, with a chance to repent? The Church’s views would assist me greatly.

A The twentieth chapter of Revelation mentions a thousand-year reign of Christ six times (vv. 2-7). This period, called a *millennium*, is not found elsewhere in the Bible, leading some to accept it as symbolic, not literal.

Our understanding is that the millennium is a literal age that begins when Christ returns to Earth (Rev. 19:11-21) and the righteous dead are raised (1 Cor. 15:20-23; 1 Thess. 4:16). The nature of this period, according to the primary source in Revelation 20, may be summed up as the binding of Satan (vv. 1-3), a judgment scene (v. 4a), and the reign of the righteous with Christ (vv. 4b, 6). Revelation 5:10 confirms that this happens here, not in heaven.

After verse 6 in Revelation 20, the scene moves to the millennium’s finale and postlude: Satan is loosed; the nations gather against Christ’s kingdom and are destroyed. Then comes the last resurrection and great white throne judgment with final rewards to the righteous and destruction of the wicked. These nine verses (7-15) describe the great climax to the millennium, but they do not add greatly to our understanding of the thousand years themselves.

Though not mentioned explicitly outside Revelation 20, the millennium finds support in other texts. For example:

- Isaiah 2:2-4; 11; and 65:17-25 describe circumstances that harmonize with our understanding of a future reign of Christ on Earth.
 - Matthew 19:28 and Acts 3:19-21 use words like *regeneration* and *restoration* to describe that time when Christ will return to sit upon the throne of His glory and the ancient prophecies will be fulfilled.
- One other New Testament text confirms that a

period intervenes between Christ’s second advent and the final consummation of God’s kingdom in eternity: 1 Corinthians 15:24-28. Verse 23 mentions Jesus’ return, followed by an unspecified time when Christ reigns *until* all opposing authorities are subdued and the final enemy — death — is “under His feet” (vv. 24b-28a).

“Then comes the end . . .” (v. 24a) when the kingdom is presented to our Father God and the all-in-all perfection of His reign lasts forever. Although the length of Christ’s intervening rule goes unstated in 1 Corinthians 15, the sequence of events in this passage agrees nicely with the millennium of Revelation 20.

Combining texts that foretell Christ’s millennial kingdom of peace, we conclude that

1. Redeemed persons will be transformed to immortality at Christ’s return, to rule and reign with Him for one thousand years.
2. Jesus will rule all nations with a “rod of iron” when He comes. Many unredeemed will live on to be taught God’s truth from Zion during this age.

First Thessalonians 4:16, 17 describes the “catching up” of the righteous at the first resurrection. We will rise to meet Christ in the air at His coming and then return with Him to the earth. We reject the popular rapture notion that Jesus comes secretly *for* the church and takes believers to heaven for three-and-a-half or seven years prior to His public coming *with* the church.

Will the multitudes that never heard God’s Word or knew the gospel of grace have a chance to repent during the millennium, or just after? This tantalizing question finds no direct answer in Scripture. Based on God’s nature of justice and love, many of Christ’s followers believe the answer is yes. Much about the millennium we do not yet understand.

Note: Reader response to this Q & A is invited and will be considered for publication on a future “Mail Bag” page.

— Elder Calvin Burrell



Divorce From the Inside

Jesus embraced the outcast.
Why shouldn't the church? **by Rebecca Jay**

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The frosting on our anniversary cake was still fresh when I discovered my husband's gay Web site. So much for twenty-five years of marriage — more like twenty-five years of betrayal.

After I picked my heart up off the floor, I called my pastor. He listened and set up a meeting with the other church leaders. I told my story, and the leaders encouraged me to follow the biblical pattern for confrontation:

1. Go to my husband and tell him I knew his secret.
2. If he wanted to change, they would help him be accountable and provide resources.
3. If he didn't want to change, they would go as a group and confront him.

4. Pray and hope for the best.

Unfortunately, my husband refused to follow the leaders' advice or a counselor's suggestions. Two years later, after a trial separation and hours of therapy, I stood before a judge and listened to her end my marriage.

Church members were the perfect support group for my son and me. One of the deaconesses took me to lunch and let me vent. Another woman, also divorced, visited us and gave practical advice. People in my cell group sent cards, and many church members gave us hugs and promised to pray. A youth leader took my son for a ride on his Harley — a boost for a thirteen-year-old boy.

In so many ways, members of

my church family reached out to us, helping us through the initial shock. But in other ways, they failed.

How the church helped

Practical living and survival were the first necessities. My pastor advised me to take everything out of the joint savings account and set up my own checking account. He helped me realize I had to put aside my bruised feelings and learn to survive. I did what he said, then I prayed that God would somehow make my tiny checking account grow.

For the holidays that year, my landlady brought us a huge box of canned goods and some gift cards. We ate these freebies for over a month. Another friend set me up with an interview that resulted in a great job. One of the men from church offered to check over my truck and made sure it was in running order. He showed me how to check the fluids.

Sometimes envelopes came in the mail with twenty dollar bills — no name attached. Coupons appeared for "Buy one get one free" meals. People from church called to check on us. "How are you doing today?" "Do you need anything?" "I've got an extra loaf of bread. May I bring it over?"

One friend went to garage sales and found things she thought we could use. She often came at night and dropped these treasures on our porch. One time, she brought a magazine rack that matched my décor. Another time, a silk scarf appeared to help me feel beautiful again. Usually her gifts included some chocolate — the best comfort food.

A counselor in the church gave free therapy so I could sit on her couch and unload. Her practical advice helped me see areas where I could have been a better wife, but also kept me from wallowing in self-pity.

Another woman who had struggled through divorce gave me the Web site of Divorce Care (www.divorcecare.org/). There I found resources and a daily meditation that helped me stay away from bitterness.

One friend who had been through financial struggles showed me how to save on utilities. A medical clinic for the uninsured helped take care of our health needs. Another person gave us vitamins at a discount.

Maybe my status inside the church helped multiply the kindness given to us. I'd like to think my church would help every single mom. But I also know some churches need to learn a few things about helping the divorced.

How the church hurt

When I moved to another church, I found a colder approach to the subject. Suddenly my label of "single mom" was preceded by "divorced." Some people separated us into two demographics: single moms whose husbands had died, and divorced single moms whose marriages had failed. The first group had more advantages.

Sermons at this church focused only on happily married people with perfect families. After awhile, the prejudice sickened me. I knew some of the folks in those pews, and I knew they were faking their smiles. With the rise of pornography, I felt certain

some of those pretending devotion were hiding a secret life. Yet because they still wore wedding rings, they were accepted into leadership. I was not.

Except for the youth program, many classes at that church centered around couples. Single people often did not fit in. Tables at church dinners were set with an even number of chairs, as if singles were not welcome unless they had a date. No one offered to sit beside me in the pew, so I sat alone until a nice couple sat with me. Each of them had been through divorce, so they understood the loneliness. If I hadn't been so stubborn, I would have left that church.

When I researched the subject, I found that many churches do not want to appear as if they support divorce, so they tend to ignore the singles demographic. Churches are, after all, sanctuaries for families, and they want their members to have strong marriages.

Although I am divorced, I believe in the sanctity of marriage. It has always been the cornerstone of family, and church leaders should promote strong marriages. They should also work to ensure accountability and counsel for marriages in trouble. Providing the resources that help keep families together is one solid way the church can help.

But church leaders should also understand the reality that some marriages will fail even in the

best of families. The Bible teaches that God hates divorce, but it does not state that God rejects divorced people. As the group of people that follow God's laws, the church should be the one place where hurting people can find help and hope.

I finally left that church for another. By this time, my son was grown, and more time had passed in the halls of churches. Divorced people were hanging from some of the best family trees, and the leaders had to deal with it. The pastor in my new church still preached about the importance of strong marriages, but he also urged the leadership to consider helping single moms.

Helpful hints

Becoming a church that helps instead of hurts requires swallowing a few nuggets of truth:

- Women and children must be protected from abuse.
- Adultery should not be tolerated or enabled.
- God cares for shattered people and helps them heal.
- The church can help the victims of divorce forgive and move forward.

My status as a divorced woman taught me about reality. My position inside the church taught me how to help. My relationship with Christ teaches me how to forgive. **BA**

Rebecca Jay is a pseudonym.

The Bible teaches that God hates divorce, but it does not state that God rejects divorced people.

Growing Old with God

by Richard Maffeo

I hadn't slept well the night before, and weariness settled over me like a heavy rug. Nancy and I returned home from church and were unwinding on the couch, where she continued our conversation about her passion for art. My mind drifted. My eyes focused on her face.

I'd noticed changing features before, but this time I saw her anew. Creases feather her cheeks and forehead where her skin was once smooth and supple. Her hair is now blonde to mask the gray.

When I asked Nancy to marry me more than three decades ago, I thought I knew her and loved her. Now, half listening to her describe the colors she planned to use in her next project, I realized how little I really knew or loved her in 1975.

We've weathered many storms during our years together; some were tsunamis. Our son suffered through divorce. Nancy's beloved stepfather died and two years later, mine. Financial crises and periods of unemployment rocked our marriage. Friends turned their backs

because of our commitment to Christ. And a dozen military-related moves forced us to leave family, friends, and familiar places.

Sometimes I wonder how we survived it all. God's grace? Unquestionably. Intervening from the shadows, often without revealing His hand, our Father brought peace when turmoil overwhelmed us and freedom when fear bound us. He quieted us when, in frustration, we lashed out at each other instead of going to God.

Something else has proven vital to our relationship: communication.

I suppose more than 80 percent of our discussions over the years have been casual: what's for dinner, what happened at work, the kids have colds. . . . But because of that 80 percent, we can also meet in deeply personal conversations. We talk about our hopes, joys, fears, and dreams because we have spent so much time learning each other. That's why I know her — and love her — so much more today than when we married.

Which brings me to the real

point. Thirty-six years ago, I thought I knew Jesus and loved Him. But, oh, how my knowledge of and love for Him are so different today than they were when I first offered Him my heart.

This too is God's grace; but something else is at work.

Early in my walk with Christ, I learned the importance of prayer, Scripture study, and regular church attendance. Over the years, I've worn out three Bibles, memorized scores of Scripture texts, and can allude to a hundred more. I've spent time with Him in the morning, evening, and throughout the day.

To be honest, most of my prayers (80 percent?) are not what I call passionate: "Lord, I need a good evaluation at work; Mom needs guidance about moving; Gerry needs a job; Helen's son is ill." But because of that 80 percent, I know how to be intimate with Him when battles rage beyond my control.

When men and women grow old with the King of glory, they learn what love and intimacy with Him are like. When life's storms rip at our foundation and Satan's hot breath prickles down our necks, a deeply personal knowledge of God will be our fortress. Our passionate love for Him, born through daily communion, will be our strength.

Surely, that's one reason the prophet urged: "Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55:6). **BA**

Richard Maffeo writes from Gig Harbor, WA. Adapted from his latest book, *Lessons Along the Journey* (Xulon Press).



Faith-Plus Forum

on Homosexuality

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Proper Balance

by Steven D. Krome
Chattanooga, Tennessee

Our nation is struggling with its response to those who embrace homosexuality. Our culture has rapidly indoctrinated many citizens to accept the gay lifestyle as both reasonable and legal. Those who refuse are branded as socially and ethically bigoted.

Many church members have declined these developments, based on biblical teaching that homosexuality is an abomination (Leviticus 18:22). They cite the refusal of many to recognize their sinful lifestyle and abstain from it as the reason that church fellowship and membership should be denied. Some denominations have split over these issues.

We should remember that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We should recall the people Jesus ministered to and socialized with, and the way He did it. With firm resolve, He

dealt with many who refused to admit their sinful lifestyle, yet He tempered it with compassion. He understood that many would refuse the truth, yet He never gave up on the few who would recognize it and be saved. It is not our place to judge anyone, but it is our responsibility to recognize sin and teach the truth regarding it.

We should never discourage anyone from the blessing of attending church. But when it comes to membership and leadership, a higher standard must be upheld. We are expected to abstain from sexual impurity and set the example for others. Our responsibility is to encourage the lost to change the direction of their lives. We should tell them of God's eternal love and of His desire for all to acknowledge Him. We must tell them they need to repent and turn from their sins.

Homosexuality is a sin; the church must not consider it an acceptable lifestyle. We can, however, demonstrate a compassionate attitude while remaining firm against sinful behavior.

Members must maintain the proper balance between outreach and fellowship, remaining true to inspired moral standards and biblical teachings.



Love the Sinner?

by Heber Vega
San Diego, California

Most church talk about homosexuality never fails to include words like *abomination*, *detestable*, and *unnatural*. Most statements on the topic use adjectives like *disgusting*, *revolting*, and *repulsive*. Insults and condemnation are the preferred emphasis.

Result? Those trapped in this lifestyle rarely consider the church as the place to turn for help. The option of understanding or love from Christians seems non-existent, and redemption, out of the question.

"Love the sinner but hate the sin" is an over-worked phrase. We use it to justify our harsh rhetoric, while mostly omitting

God's mercy and grace. Our disgust and disdain ring louder than our love for some sinners.

Struggle with a particular sin need not define a person, but newness in Christ does define a believer. As opportunities arise to share a message of hope with the despised, we should see it as a divine appointment. Endowed with the Holy Spirit, the church must realize it has been given the ministry of reconciliation, not of judgment (2 Corinthians 5:16-20). To the respected and the despised, we are ambassadors of Christ.

People in our world face real human needs that must be met. Questions and self-doubt afflict their existence. They need to know that we, God's church, don't have all the answers, but we know *the One* who is the answer. We must be willing to walk by their side, however long it takes, until they meet Him and hear His voice. The same charity extended to us, which we praise our Father for, must be extended to those we have labeled, avoided, and kept at a distance. This ministry of love is one of

those "greater works" Jesus said He would do — through us (John 14:12)!



Unsolved Mystery

by Gordon Feil

Victoria, British Columbia

It seems to me that Christians express three basic opinions about homosexuality. The first is that homosexuals and their activities are condemned. The second is that it is all right to be a homosexual as long as you don't ply the preference (you can be a bird, provided you don't fly). And the third is that the practice is moral between monogamous lovers and that we have all misunderstood the Bible on this topic. Doubtful that the whole truth is in any of these, I tried putting aside preconceptions and taking a fresh look, beginning with the Gospel accounts.

Contrary to what some believe, Jesus did say something about homosexuality. He said that "for this cause" — the fact that humans were created male and female — a man shall leave his parents "and be joined to his wife" (Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7). This is the model; this is God's plan.

In the processes of mass production, things sometimes go wrong. To paraphrase my favorite movie *The Lion in Winter*, poison mushrooms grow, and babies come with crooked backs. Goiters thrive and dogs go mad. Not all is as we would like it to be.

Jesus informs us that some eunuchs (i.e., emasculated men) are born that way (Matthew 19:12).

This is in contrast to those who were emasculated (or "castrated") after birth, either by accident or intent. The fact that some are born eunuchs, not castrated, apparently occurs "naturally" in a small percent of population.

In Acts 8:27 we are introduced to an Ethiopian eunuch who had gone to the temple in Jerusalem for worship. Had he been castrated or otherwise emasculated after birth, he would have been prohibited from the temple (Deuteronomy 23:1). From this, I infer that the Ethiopian court official was homosexual and that Jesus may allude to homosexuality in Matthew 19:12.

Though it perplexes me, I think Jesus is saying that some are born homosexual. If it was a genetically caused preference, we should expect the trait to decline and die, inasmuch as homosexuals are less likely than others to reproduce and pass on their genes. I fancy there is a mystery here that we have yet to solve.

As I see it, Jesus confirms the one man, one woman model for marriage, but He also apparently recognizes that a few persons will be programmed otherwise. We ought to be careful how we judge them.



Conviction and Compassion

by Joshua Gutierrez

El Paso, Texas

The Bible is clear about the consequence for those who practice homosexuality. Christians must be careful to warn them, as we would any other sinner, of the eternal danger



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faced if we do not repent of our rebellious lifestyles. Because of God's perfect judgment, Christians should strive to both bring biblical conviction and display personal compassion. We must describe homosexual behavior as sinful, perverse, abnormal, and destructive to people and to the culture it confuses, while at the same time being willing to lay down our lives in love for those who struggle with it.

Here's good news: God offers forgiveness and eternal life to those who repent and embrace the gospel. No matter what the sin, we are still the objects of His unfailing love. The Bible says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, NIV). Jesus Christ "is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2, NIV).

Christians who share God's love for lost sinners should seek to reach the homosexual community with the gospel, the power of God unto salvation. After identifying homosexuals as among those who "will not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10, NIV), we should have a sense of urgency in ministering to people who have chosen this lifestyle. Paul said, "Such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (v. 11).

Homosexuals are precious souls for whom Christ died; therefore, we have the responsibility of pointing them to Jesus, who shows a more abundant way. The Word of God offers

Reaching Out

Do you know someone imprisoned in the homosexual lifestyle? If so, you can share about God and His ability to set free anyone from any sin.

Order *Out of the Closet: Hope for Homosexuals*, a Light for Life tract that explains the Bible's teaching on homosexuality and the path to freedom with God's help. Call (303) 452-7973 or e-mail bap.orders@cog7.org.



hope because it speaks the truth and proclaims forgiveness through our Lord and Savior. May the love of God flow through us so that all may turn to Christ, instead of away from Him.



Whose Neighbor?

by Israel Steinmetz
Kansas City, Missouri

You've seen the pictures of self-professed Christians holding signs that read "God hates fags!" Is that message true? Does it express the attitude Christ desires for His followers? The answer is a resounding "No!"

No doubt about it, homosexuality is a sin (Leviticus 20:13; Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Timothy 1:10). Yet it is a sin that God can, and does, forgive (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). It is not God's desire to judge any sinners (2 Peter 3:9) but to save and deliver them from bondage to live as new creatures in His kingdom.

Jesus tangibly expressed God's incredible love by seeking out sinners, including the immoral outcasts of His day: prostitutes. Rather than expressing contempt, He offered them

forgiveness and praised their trusting response to His mercy.

While we were God's enemies and captive to our lusts, He reached out and delivered us from bondage. As recipients of this lovingkindness, we are compelled to offer God's love to those who've not yet experienced it (2 Corinthians 5:20). It's clear, then, that the hateful declaration "God hates fags!" fails to express the mercy of God and His desire to save homosexuals. Neither do the subtler attitudes of pride, contempt, and disgust that Christians often thinly veil behind crude jokes, insulting epithets, social condescension, and political activism.

Rather, we are called to follow Jesus' steps by reaching out with love, affection, and concern. We are called to look beyond specific sins and see the person made in God's image and called into relationship with Him through grace. We are called to be kind, generous, patient, and gentle to all people. We are called to see homosexuals as our "neighbors" and truly be a neighbor by showing them mercy (Luke 10:25-37). God does not hate homosexuals; He loves them, and He calls us to love them as well. **BA**



Why Do We Hate Adam and Steve?

@ Pixelbrat—Dreamstime.com

We oppose homosexual behavior; it's right there in 1 Corinthians 6:9. Now what else does the same book say in verses 9-11? by **Perry P. Perkins**

When I was twenty, I basked in the glory of having it "all figured out." Christians were good, atheists and homosexuals were bad, and we should be suspicious of anyone over thirty.

In the twenty years since, many of those preconceptions have crumbled into the sand my convictions were built on.

Recently a young man asked

me to contribute to a legal resolution banning gay marriage. This got me thinking about homosexuality and Christianity, asking, "Why do we hate Adam and Steve?"

Hate may be too strong a word for you, but let's be honest: Hatred of "queers, fags, and homos" is alive and well, and it often finds a warm sanctuary in the church. If you find yourself at this point crying, "I don't hate homosexuals!" good for you. I'm not writing this to you but to folks like me who still struggle with this issue.

By *hate*, I'm including disgust, distrust, and everything else that keeps us from reaching out to homosexuals — you know, the guys who make jokes in the lock-

er room, those who get red-faced and righteous over pro-gay ballot measures and hold signs reading "God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve." We know who we are, don't we?

I believe that homosexuality is sin. I *have* to believe that, because I believe the Bible as God's unfailing Word.

But I also try to study the unfailing Word in its setting. So, here's what the Bible says about homosexuality — in context. (Note: The following "The Bible says" verses were all pulled from Web sites rebuking homosexuals and homosexuality. None of the "also" verses were found on those sites.)

Bible balance

The Bible says: "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable" (Leviticus 18:22).

But verse 20 *also* says, "Do not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife and defile yourself with her."

The Bible says: "If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads" (Leviticus 20:13).

But verse 6 *also* says, "I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute himself by following them, and I will cut him off from his people."

Verse 9: "If anyone curses his father or mother, he must be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother, and his blood will be on his own head."

Verse 10: "If a man commits adultery with another man's wife

— with the wife of his neighbor — both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.”

The Bible says: “In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion” (Romans 1:27).

But verses 29-32 *also* say:

They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

The Bible says: “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders . . .” (1 Corinthians 6:9).

But verses 10 and 11 *also* say:

. . . nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

This chapter *also* says, “The very fact that you have lawsuits

among you means you have been completely defeated already” (v. 7). But that’s a whole ‘nother article.

According to these Bible verses, it seems clear that homosexuality is a sin. However, these other sins are listed in the same sections of Scripture: committing adultery with another’s wife; turning to mediums and spiritists; cursing father or mother; greed, envy, murder, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, insolence, arrogance, boasting, disobedience to parents, theft, drunkenness, swindling.

And the penalty for *any* of the above? Death (Leviticus 20:13, 27; Romans 1:32).

Jesus and context

Before we start gathering rocks, keep in mind that Jesus paid the penalty for these sins — *all* of them — so that those who accept His offer of forgiveness won’t have to pay. So why does *one* of these seventeen, homosexuality, carry so much self-righteous weight with us when the rest are often ignored, justified, or snickered about behind closed doors? I don’t understand.

Or, maybe I do. I’m not gay. I don’t remember ever having homosexual feelings toward another man. I’ve never had sex with another man, so I feel righteous in that category of sin. Therefore I’m free to vent my righteous in-

dignation on those who are lost in *that* category.

This was my unspoken, maybe subconscious, position for many years. There’s just one problem with my righteous indignation: Jesus doesn’t take things out of context.

In John’s Gospel we read about the woman caught in adultery and brought before Jesus. The religious leaders pressed Jesus for an answer on what should be done with her: “In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” (John 8:5).

Jesus didn’t respond right away but wrote with His finger on the ground. When they continued to question Him, He answered, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (v. 7).

There’s a lot of conjecture about what Jesus wrote on the ground. I think it was the names of the teachers and Pharisees in the crowd who had slept with this woman. But that’s just my opinion.

What’s taken me years to realize is that Jesus made an important distinction in this verse — one we often miss. He didn’t say, “If any one of you is not an adulterer, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” Nor did He say, “If any one of you is without *this* sin, let him be the first to

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I’ve never had sex with another man, so I feel righteous in that category of sin.

Serving Singles

A BA interview with Kevin Robinson.



Technology has changed everything these days: how we search for a job, how we connect to friends and family – even how we find a potential mate. Many singles, including Christians, who long for companionship use Internet dating sites to find Mr. or Mrs. Right.

But how safe are match-making sites? Do singles really need them? Kevin Robinson, a CoG7 member living in Birmingham, United Kingdom, runs samebelief.com that serves singles around the world. Here he offers insights regarding the online singles scene. – Sherri Langton, Associate Editor

BA: Describe a typical person who has used your Web site.

KR: Lisa is a dedicated Christian and successful criminal lawyer living in Miami, Florida. She is single, hoping and praying to meet Mr. Right in the person of a dedicated Christian guy, fall in love, and get married. Now approaching her thirty-second birthday, she has been asking herself for five years, *Why is he so hard to find? Am I asking too much? Are there no well-qualified Christian men out there – still single?*

BA: How urgent is the need for this type of service?

KR: Finding a good partner is a major issue facing single Christians of both genders. While preachers often remind them it is better to marry than to burn in lust, single Jesus-followers look in frustration: No one tells them how to meet the right mate.

BA: Why is finding a marriage partner more difficult for Christians than for others?

KR: It's more difficult because of the commitment we're making: "Till death do us part." Christians are serious about that, or at least they should be. Also it's harder because of the Bible's counsel that believers not be

"yoked" with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14a). Even though we meet attractive people at work, school, and other places, the Christian knows that the truest compatibility can't be present without common beliefs.

BA: Why isn't the church all we need to meet our life's marriage partner?

KR: Often the congregations we attend are small and eligible prospects few. If one is fortunate to find opposite-sex singles at church, there may be compatibility issues over age, education, and other things. When someone says there are no singles at church, it generally means that none of them meet his/her requirements.

BA: Aren't you talking about a problem mostly for women?

KR: These comments come more frequently from females, but finding a compatible Christian partner is a common problem among men too. That this is a global concern may come as an even greater surprise. Single Christians are having difficulty finding suitable partners in North America, Europe, and all over the world.



BA: What do you tell a young adult who seems to have no marital prospects in the church?

KR: The good news is that we are part of a global Christian community, and the twenty-first century has brought people together in ways never before possible. The Internet has revolutionized many things, and online dating has made it possible for single Christians to look outside their local churches and home countries to meet and date other Christians around the world. Many Christians in such places as the U.S., Caribbean, and U.K. have met partners on Christian dating sites, and many of these are now happily married.

BA: Are there any benefits to online dating over traditional dating?

KR: Yes. There's the issue of security. The nature of the Internet allows potential partners to communicate until they are ready to meet in person. This makes it easier for each party to decide if the relationship isn't working out and to move on before personal wounds and scars are inflicted. Then there's the hyper-sexuality that's so much a part of the modern dating scene. Internet dating

reduces some of the intimacy temptations inherent in regular face-to-face dating. A third benefit might be for Christian professionals whose busy lifestyles do not permit the time-consuming task of meeting and evaluating others in today's social scene. For them, the Internet can be an invaluable tool.

BA: Any downsides to online dating?

KR: Singles should use caution on a Christian dating Web site. For one thing, you never know whom you are communicating with. The person may already be married but hasn't told you that. Or he/she may not yet be

eighteen years old but can be posing as an adult, and shouldn't be using the site. Beware of people who ask for money or take undue interest in your finances. Many have reported being bilked out of their money online.

If you suspect that the person you are in contact with is deceitful in any area, break off the communication immediately. Both in person and on the "Christian" Web, beware of wolves masking as sheep. May divine discernment and God's richest blessings be yours as you pursue a lifetime of love and godliness. **BA**

For Singles Only

Books

51 Good Things to Do While You're Waiting for the Right One to Come Along: How to Make the Most of Being Single, by Harold Ivan Smith (Baptist Sunday School Board)

Common Mistakes Singles Make (And How to Avoid Them), by Mary S. Whelchel (Revell)

Singles Ask: Answers to Questions About Relationships and Sexuality, by Harold Ivan Smith (Augsburg Fortress)

Online

Great advice for Christian singles: www.crosswalk.com/singles/

Reputable Christian dating Web sites:

www.eharmony.com (pricey but professional)

www.samebelief.com (popular with Sabbathkeepers)

More Truth in Jesus

by Dewey E. Fox

I can't remember when church wasn't part of my upbringing. It happened every Sunday, with Bible schools in the summer and other church outings. Around age twelve or thirteen, in a small church in western North Carolina, I walked to the altar one Sunday morning and gave my life to Christ — after the preacher had spoken to me before service and asked if I wanted to be saved. Apparently he was led by the Holy Spirit and sensed that my soul needed help. I said yes to his invitation.

I remember the day well. It poured rain with lightning and thunder while I was saying yes to Jesus. It was as if God said, "Welcome home, My son." A few weeks later we had a baptism in the creek that meandered beside the church. I was now a full-fledged Baptist.

After we moved, I lost track of the preacher but still went to church off and on. Most Christians I knew worshipped on Sunday, except for a few Adventists I wondered about because they attended church on Saturday. My previous doctor, a Sabbathkeeper, remembers the answer I gave him years ago when we

discussed this issue: "If you believe the Bible, you have to believe in the Sabbath." I don't remember saying that, nor pursuing the issue beyond minor discussion.

About ten years ago, I began a more serious relationship with God and His Word. Walking down the hall of a church my wife and I attended, I felt an emptiness and wondered what I was doing there.

Thus I began a search for more spiritual truths. I knew that God was more than just going to church, teaching Sunday school, attending Wednesday nights, serving on the board, and then doing the same thing over again next week. There had to be more than just tradition, but I didn't know what. I wanted to know and follow Jesus Christ. I was tired of people leaving church early to get a good seat at the restaurant and ministers talking more about ball games than about God.

I started a list of churches to visit. My wife and I attended several before trying a Sabbathkeeping church, then we discarded the list. At that point, I think God showed me that we are all babes in diapers, needing to crawl, walk, and run to Jesus and more



of His truth. Praise the Lord, we shouldn't stay in diapers.

At first it was strange attending church on Saturday. Martha and I were dressed each Sabbath and driving to services while our neighbors worked in their yards and did things we previously did on that day. As the only Sabbathkeepers in our families, we are seen as somewhat non-conforming. Looking back, it was a radical change. I began closing my office on Saturdays and did not let any employees work for me on God's holy day. I still get those strange looks and comments when I tell my clients that I'm closed on Saturdays but open on Sundays.

A year or so later, I started having conflicts with other teachings of the church we were attending, so we visited other Sabbath groups — not easy to find. I searched the Internet and talked to people about Bible-believing churches that didn't have an agenda other than what Scripture teaches.

In the Land of Lust

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I found a Church of God (Seventh Day) in Newton, North Carolina, called the lay pastor for information, and took him up on his invitation to visit. It was about seventy miles round-trip from home — a long drive for us.

The people at Newton church were different: They didn't care about ball game scores or getting out of church early to eat. They wanted to talk about Jesus and study His Word. They wanted to honor God and keep His commandments. They wanted to keep "the main thing the main thing": Christ and nobody else.

This church didn't even have a regular pastor but was held together by God and devoted laymen. Sometimes an ordained minister came to preach, but laymen spoke at other times. One Sabbath they asked me to give a message and testimony. That was the first of several I would deliver over the next few years. I don't call myself a preacher, only a bondservant of God. Now five laymen rotate to bring the Word to the congregation, and I'm happy to be one of them.

Fifty-plus years after I began with Him in that Baptist church, God has shown me the light of the Sabbath. Or should I say the light was always there; I just finally saw it. I'm so glad to be part of the family of God!

Dewey and Martha Fox live in Morganton, NC, where he owns and manages a tax preparation business.

unless we deal firmly and constantly with external sources that stimulate and stoke our sinful desires.

When the battle against lust seems endless and the foe relentless, it will be to our great advantage if we simply confine it to the smallest possible arena: our thoughts. If the war is allowed to overflow the mind into our hands and habits, our reading and viewing, and into our beds, battle casualties will multiply and victory become ever more distant.

Try this promise: "Somewhere between asexual blindness, monkish self-denial, and austere seclusion on the one hand and lewd, lecherous, lascivious, licentious *porneia* on the other, I will walk in integrity before the Lord, my wife, and my family."

Or simplify it like Job: "I will pledge anew not to look upon a woman with evil intent."

Can we can do this? We can. It is our personal responsibility to avoid evil, not to accept it. By faith, we are free to make this good choice.

If the Spirit finds us in bondage to our lusts, we will turn to Christ in fresh, fervent repentance and reaffirm His precious forgiveness. We will choose to seek the help we need until we are free in Him to reject the obscenity and pornography that enters our eyes and ears, threatening a sewer of our soul.

Today we vow to walk with the Lord in purity. And we will be promise keepers. If our eye offends us, we will do whatever it takes. So help us God. **BA**

Why Do We Hate Adam and Steve?

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throw a stone at her." He said, "If any one of you is without *sin*, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Not *this sin*, not a sin, but *any sin*.

Showing grace

I spoke recently with Shar Geisert, a speaker and volunteer counselor with Mid-Valley Fellowship in Oregon.

"One of my proudest moments in Jesus' ministry," she told me, "is when Jesus touched the untouchable leper. He risked everything in doing so, and yet, what could minister more to a leper than touch? It's the same with homosexuality. It takes the pure love from healthy men to help heal a homosexual man. It is how to say, 'You are acceptable.' That's how Jesus does it."

So does the fact that I show grace toward sins that mirror my own, while expressing my righteous indignation for those that don't, imply that I fear revealing my own sin in those other areas?

Am I only quiet on those other seventeen because I'm terrified that someone will write *my* name in the dirt?

Jesus doesn't take things out of context. **BA**

Perry P. Perkins writes from Wilsonville, OR. Scriptures are from the *New International Version*.



Q. Social justice is a huge movement in the Christian church. New ideas of tearing down our church walls and moving out to the world's need is growing. What are your thoughts on this?

A. You are correct that social justice is huge in today's church, and this has pros and cons. God is a God of justice; His heart bleeds for the oppressed. If we love God, our hearts must be broken with the things that break His heart. I believe it was Ian Thomas who said that Jesus died, not in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves. Being a Christian church and not becoming involved in some of the social causes in the world around us is a contradiction. But once again, we return to the principle of balance. Jesus did not go to the cross for the social ills of society; He gave His life for the sins of the world. More than anything else, people need the Lord. They need the Bread of life more than they need physical bread. So as a church, we must live between the two worlds of taking up the cause of the oppressed whenever and wherever we find opportunity, and preaching the gospel to dying men and women so they may have life, even if their justice is never served in this life.

Q. You once said that you believe the kingdom of God is bigger than the Church of God (Seventh Day). Explain what you mean by this.

A. That comment was intended to help the members of our church guard against feelings of exclusivity. It may disappoint some to read it, but CoG7 is not the whole of God's family on Earth. As a denomination, we must be "distinct, but not exclusive." Lots of people love Jesus and belong to the Lord who do not believe or practice their faith exactly as we do. His kingdom is not limited to any denomination, for which we should be grateful.

Q. The upcoming convention will mark your twelfth year in your current position, which means that for many of our teens you are the only Conference president they've known. Share your heart with our church's youth about your spiritual journey and your deepest desire for them.

A. Through the influence of a godly grandmother, I learned about Jesus early in life, was baptized at age twelve, and soon began preaching. The call to vocational ministry became so strong that at the end of my second year of college, I transferred to our church's ministerial training school. After that, I entered full-time ministry. I pray that all CoG7 youth and young adults will come to know Christ in a personal way and discover their God-given purpose in life. Third John 1:4 summarizes my heart's desire for our church's youth: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (NIV).

Q. Entering the world of young people is key to reaching them. As the father of two, how well do you understand their world? Can you relate to what's going on in their lives?

A. This is a critical stage in one's personal and spiritual development. Youth are asking questions: *Who am I? Why am I here? Whose values will I embrace: those of my parents or those of the culture?* These questions are not unique to the youth of our generation, but the challenges they face are like none other. In the cultural context of our generation, truth is relative, morality is out of vogue, and evil is multiplied through the images and voices that bombard youth daily. To love our youth and serve them effectively, we must enter their world. Lord, help us do so individually and corporately.

Q. Your description of the culture paints a grim picture. Is there anything positive on the horizon for this generation?

A. Through the providence of God, the increase of sin has another side: the increase of God's grace: "Where sin increased, grace increased all the more" (Romans 5:20, NIV). Those modern inventions through which evil is multiplied in our day are also the means through which the gospel is multiplied. Exciting things are happening in the lives of young people, both in and outside our church. The record sale of Rick Warren's book **The Purpose Driven Life** is evidence of a hunger for meaning and purpose in our culture. And as I travel throughout the Church, I meet young people who thirst for God. Testimonies, reports of baptisms, youth camps, and other events confirm a bright outlook for our youth.

Q. As a Christian, do you ever feel that God makes Himself absent from the world? If so, why?

A. No, I do not experience such feelings, though I recognize that others, including Christians, do. Elements such as disaster, famine, and injustice can cause some to perceive that God is absent from the world, but He is not. In fact, when such elements shake our faith, we should try to imagine what the world would look like if God actually removed Himself from it. In the words of the late Francis Shaeffer, we serve a "God who is there." He is not only there but near. He isn't the great clockmaker who puts the world together and leaves it to unwind by itself. Rather, God is involved in the world and in the minute details of our lives. He seeks a deep and personal relationship with us.

Q. Some question whether life exists on other planets. As Christians, should we concern ourselves with these ideas?

hope
love
global warming
social justice

“AS BELIEVERS, WE SHOULD GUARD AGAINST PREOCCUPATION WITH DISPUTABLE QUESTIONS AND FOCUS ON WHAT GOD’S WORD CLEARLY REVEALS.”

A. Tom Skinner was a member of the Harlem Lords before his dramatic conversion to Christianity. In his latter years, Skinner remarked that his spiritual journey was greatly impacted by his decision to not dwell on the questions he couldn't answer but on the answers he couldn't escape (not a direct quote). As believers, we should guard against preoccupation with disputable questions and focus on what God's Word clearly reveals. Quite often the quest to find life on other planets reflects a desire to undermine the existence of God and the biblical account of Creation. Christians should not be overly concerned with such matters. Scripture teaches that God created life on this planet, and our thoughts should focus on how to protect life and introduce the living to eternal life in Christ.

Q. Do you feel global warming is a real threat? Should Christians concern themselves with being "green" or environmentally conscious?

A. Global warming is a controversial subject, with evidence to support both sides of the issue. Noticeable warming and cooling of the planet have occurred at different periods in recorded history. Some of the claims regarding climate change are not scientific proof but statements that reflect a majority opinion. I am not suggesting global warming isn't a real problem, but I would guard against driving stakes down on either side of this issue too quickly, given the unsubstantiated and often contradictory data that we hear. Instead, we must develop a balanced view of the subject. The environment is important, and Christians ought to treat it with appreciation and stewardship, while being careful to not worship it. Neither should we allow politically driven ideas to cloud our thinking about the world or plant fear in our hearts. We live in a broken world, but God is still in control. The Bible teaches that the planet groans to be delivered from the brokenness sin has brought upon it (Romans 8:18-22). Therefore climate change is not the most important dilemma facing humanity.

Q. There was much debate between youth of our church about our current president, Barack Obama. What are your feelings about him and how the Church should respond to his leadership of this country?

A. The Church should respond to the leadership of President Obama in the same way it should respond to the leadership of any president: according to the instructions of God's Word. Two passages stand out in this regard: "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for

there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Romans 13:1, NIV); and "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone — for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (1 Timothy 2:1, 2, NIV). The former calls upon us to submit to the governing authorities, and the latter commands us to lift up holy hands in prayer for our leaders. Because God is sovereign, no political election escapes His notice, and all civil authority derives its power from Him. Therefore we submit to all authority, except where such submission requires disobedience to God (Daniel 3:16-18; 6:7, 19). Beyond this one exception, failure to honor our leaders and pray for them is to disobey the Word of God. And when the philosophy of a leader seems in conflict with God's will for the nation, that's even more reason to pray for him.

Q. What is your opinion on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and what does the Bible say about it?

A. There are differing schools of thought within the Church regarding Israel and whether or not the Jews are still "God's chosen people." Regardless of where one may be on this issue, it should be clear that God has had a unique relationship with the Jewish people throughout their history. The very existence of the modern state of Israel testifies to God's commitment to the Jews and to the truth of His prophetic Word. It should also give us comfort that those who plan to "wipe Israel from the face of the earth" will not succeed. I am confident that God will use the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians in the unfolding of His plan for the future of planet Earth and the destiny of humanity. Whether or not the Palestinians have a right to a portion of the land is a different question, with which I struggle a lot. What I do know, however, is that God's love extends even to the Palestinians, as it does to all people.

Q. There is often a split in the Church between traditional and progressive thinking, especially between older members and youth, that often drives youth away. What are your thoughts?

A. The generation gap isn't unique to CoG7; all generations in every church face this problem. It manifests itself in various areas of church life: music and worship style (traditional versus contemporary) and in whether to focus

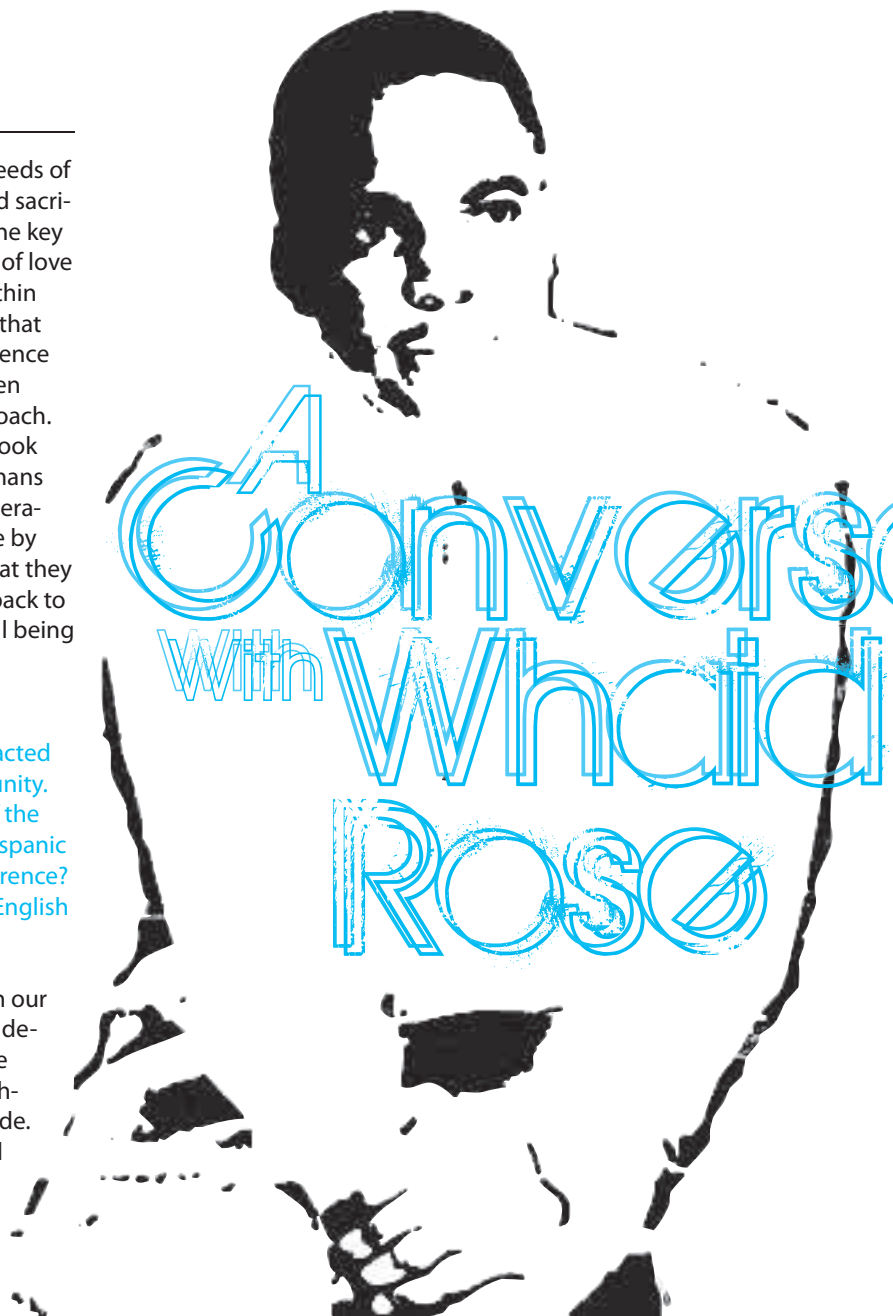
“WHEN IT COMES TO CULTURAL DIVERSITY, THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT IF WHAT I SEE AMONG OUR YOUTH IS FOR REAL. I AM CONVINCED THAT IT IS.”

seek new and innovative programs that will serve the needs of the family, the older generation feels that their labor and sacrificial giving over many years is no longer appreciated. The key to bridging this gap is balance, once again, on the basis of love for one another. For example, caring for one another within Christ's body should preclude any bent on making sure that my type of music gets sung every Sabbath, with indifference to what someone else may like. Worship wars begin when various people in the same congregation take this approach. In contrast to the worship wars, imagine what it would look like if everyone preferred others above themselves (Romans 12:10). Youth should love their elders, and the older generation should care for and reach out to their young people by making sure that they aren't asking them to tolerate what they wouldn't if they were in their circumstances. It all goes back to the principle of love and our mutual concern for the well being of others.

Q. You have been an inspiration to all and have impacted many churches, especially in the Hispanic community. But there always seems to be a barrier because of the language and culture. How are you planning to unite Hispanic churches and work them more and more into the Conference? What would be the next move in changing the typical “English church” or “Spanish church” into “Church of God”?

A. I would hope that the barriers between cultures in our church have decreased significantly over the past decades. As I travel throughout the Church, I observe wide acceptance of cultural differences among our brethren. But even so, areas of improvement are yet to be made. Various culture groups tend to flock together, which will happen naturally because we are who we are. You mention Hispanics, the fastest growing segment of our church at this time. I am pleased to affirm the Conference's commitment to serving the needs of Hispanics among us through the translation of literature and

other services provided to enhance their participation in the life of the Church. Given past disappointments, we've been reluctant to form a Hispanic department, seeking instead to serve such needs through our various ministries. But more recently, a new position of Hispanic Services coordinator has been created. More details will be shared as this new effort is up and running. All this is in addition to deliberate efforts to encourage and cultivate cultural diversity on all levels of the organization. Since I'm speaking to the youth of the Church, let me not miss this opportunity to say that the greatest potential for unity across cultures lies within the hearts and minds of our young people. Your values and mindset shape the future of the Church. And when it comes to cultural diversity, the future looks bright if what I see among our youth is for real. I am convinced that it is.



Warm welcome?

I noticed you gave President-elect Obama a warm welcome [January-February '09, p. 3]. I appreciate your patriotic respect and faith in the power of prayer, but I had to swallow hard and question my own shortcomings in not enthusiastically putting out the welcome mat for one who supports "a woman's right to choose" to kill her baby and one sympathetic to the homosexual agenda, now pretty much accomplished.

D. W.
Evergreen, CO

Praying for Obama

Just a note to say how much we really appreciated Brother Whaid's "Praying for Obama" [March '09, p. 31] We are so tired of the "Obamanation" e-mails received regularly.

S. and J. A.
College Place, WA

After reading "Praying for Obama," I sensed I was being encouraged to accept positively the election of this president. On serious issues, a "biblical worldview" would consider the Obama presidency to be ominous. The completely open policy on abortion at any time, including birthing, along with denial of medical practitioners the right to refuse such procedures as a matter of conscience; the complete equalization of homosexual unions with heterosexual marriage and vilification of those who speak in opposition; the redistribution of wealth by those who thrive on exchanging special "favors": These



are proving to be defining issues of the present administration. Where his values align with Scripture, one hopes for his success. It is never appropriate to be crass. This seems like a good time for the church not just to comply but to speak straightforwardly when her values are being corrupted.

R. S.
West Linn, OR

If this president's policies are enacted successfully, is that success for us? Not for me.

E. S.
Orangevale, CA

For you to bring up the race issue was upsetting. That will divide our nation further and erase progress. Black and white Americans should never enter any conversation on politics or religion. Now that I've heard how you really feel, it has made me think about where this nation is going – and where this church is going. God does control government, and He has His reasons for making this president the most powerful man in the world.

I will never agree that Obama's

racial heritage makes him special or historical. If his political views didn't make him the wrong man for the job, then his skin color shouldn't make him the right man for the job. I feel that black Americans should get past the color issue and just be Americans. I will pray for our country.

K. W.
Lehigh Acres, FL

Response from Whaid Rose: My comments on the history of African Americans in this country and the progress that Barack Obama's election signifies in this regard have been misread as endorsement of him as a candidate — and on the basis of his skin color. Some found it offensive for me to suggest that those who love justice and liberty should find some measure of delight in what Obama's election means to African Americans. This is regrettable.

I find the idea of voting for a candidate on the basis of race absurd. Even if I favored voting on this basis, it would be inappropriate for me to use space in our church's magazine to promote it.

The merits, or lack thereof, in what I wrote should be weighed on this basis: Was this an attempt on my part to express personal political views or to woo support for Obama? Objective review, I trust, shows it was neither. I made no public comments on the subject during the long election process. Only after it was over did I advise on the biblical responsibility of Christians to engage in prayer, rather than careless and cynical talk, for our new leaders — whether or not we voted for them.

Keep them coming — the little things:
Any one kindly act that brings
A faint smile to a forlorn face
The smallest hope of love and grace.
For those who barely just get by
Yet reach for one more fragile try
(A smile or outstretched hand will do)
Can feel that spark of Spirit, too.

Let leaders strut the world stage
And vent their ignorance and rage . . .
But let us call our legions out
And with no drumbeat, strident shout,
Drown them out with quiet power,
Reclaim the moment and the hour.
Keep them coming, those acts of love
That no army can rise above.

Stephen Keller





Part of the 300+ crowd at Conroe, TX, youth conference, April 11-12



Did you know . . .

- *Churchright* is the new name of an old friend called *Pulse*? This full-color communicator combines news with short items that inspire excellence at church. Distributed in congregations bimonthly and available online at www.cog7.org.
- *HeartSpeak* is the new name of *Youth Reach*, designed and coordinated by Michael Mancha especially for the Church's youth? Look for it in each '09 BA.
- LifeSpring School of Ministry is the new name of Ministries Training System? Larry Marrs is the new director of this arm of the Church that prepares pastors and ministers.

National FYC

Kurt Lang, Director

Who we are

National FYC is devoted to spiritual growth of the Church's younger generation, ages 13 to 22. Our purpose is "to enable youth to lift up their hands in intimate worship to God, to lend an encouraging hand to each other, and to stretch out a helping hand to those in need."

To learn more about how to achieve this purpose, request a copy of our **Gimme Five** resource from the National FYC office. Call or text 541-517-1079 or e-mail nfyc@cog7.org.

Looking for a place to serve?

If you're between ages 15 and 20, committed to Jesus, and looking for a way to serve, you can apply to be a national youth officer. Officers help plan National Youth Week; assist at camps, retreats, conventions, etc.; assist with Web site design and hi-tech communication; and more! Several positions are open. For more info, contact Kurt Lang at the number above.

NFYC is also looking for youth or young adults with talent in designing Web sites, photography or video work online, and the like. This is a

great opportunity for anyone majoring in a related field and needing experience. Please contact us!

Don't forget!

If your church participated in the National Youth Week / Hunger Lock-In program or will do so soon, please send all offerings to the Conference office (earmarked "Lock-In") by June 30. This will help us reach our goal of \$5,500 to assist in building Dreamland orphanage school in Ghana (www.message7.org/home/dreamland). Even if you didn't do Youth Week, individual offerings will help. Thanks for extending a generous hand of service!

Convention in Corpus

Got your road trip planned for the conference in Corpus Christi? Don't miss this chance to see old friends, meet new ones, renew your faith, and be filled with teachings that counter this world's message. We'll have awesome worship times, as well as workshops on evolution vs. creation and how to share the gospel with friends. Just for fun, we're planning a beach trip (with surfing lessons!), scavenger hunt, Wii competitions, and go-kart races, to name a few. Hope to see you in Corpus Christi July 6-11!



LifeSpring

With the goal of becoming a four-year accredited institution, LifeSpring School of Ministry (formerly MTS) is implementing greater levels of standardization in curriculum, instruction, and recordkeeping.

Under Larry Marrs' leadership, curriculum is being defined and enhanced, new delivery models are being explored and developed, instructors are being identified to match new curriculum, and new recordkeeping software is in place, as well as new staff.

The new system for training ministers will be un-

veiled at the July 6-11 conference in Corpus Christi, Texas. Please be present to learn how LifeSpring intends to meet the training needs of a new generation of leaders and strengthen those now in place. And listen for how God would have you be involved in the ministries of the Church.



LITES Ministries

Progress never happens without the discomfort of change, but God-directed change produces rich dividends. LITES Ministries is now experiencing such a transition.

Larry Marrs, director of LITES for ten years, became the new director for LifeSpring School of Ministry (formerly MTS) on April 1. Questions raised by this departure were quickly answered as the LITES staff and the Stanberry, Missouri, church went to prayer seeking God's will for the ministry.

The result? LITES Ministries will continue this fall with two new staff members: Andrew Fernandez and Tim Steinhauser. Current staff includes Marybell Sweet, Larry Marrs, and Don and Janis Steinhauser. Since the passing of Elder Melvin Sweet, we are seeking a senior man or couple to fill a mentoring-teaching role with LITES. We hope to expand our service into possibilities like a group home, soup kitchen, crisis pregnancy work, and other venues in the Stanberry community. Please pray that we will grow into the vision God has for us.

LITES has a purpose: to place our lives under the authority of Almighty God; to be the hands and feet that dramatically affect churches and communities; to show Jesus to the world. If you're looking for a way to deepen your walk with the Lord, this may be it. Applications for fall semester are now open. Contact 660-783-9544 or lites@cog7.org.



Convention Nears

From the Gulf coast of the American South, we invite you to celebrate the General Conference convention in Corpus Christi, Texas, July 6-11. The stage is set and the program prepared. All we need is you.

Monday, July 6, is Family Day in the Corpus Christi area. Options include the Texas State Aquarium; the *USS Lexington* with its IMAX and flight simulator; a golf tournament; the beach and waterfront; and the evening Hooks baseball game at Whataburger Field that includes dinner, a playground, and a Christian concert (cut-off for tickets is **June 15**).

During evening worship times, our convention theme, "Fresh Encounter," will be expounded on by Elders Heber Vega, Israel Steinmetz, Ken Knoll, Larry Zaragoza, Calvin Burrell, and Whaid Rose. Workshops on a variety of themes will also be available.

What else? Concerts, afterglows, CoG7 business, events for children and youth, and nightly fellowship at the Water Gardens, a park beside the convention center. It's reserved every evening after service (8:00 p.m. to midnight) as a place for impromptu music (bring instruments) and singing, visiting, or whatever.

To get there, fly, drive, or walk to the Omni Bayfront Hotel (call 1-800-THE-OMNI for reservations) in downtown Corpus Christi. Let us know you're coming, please. Go online at convention.cog7.org, call 303-452-7973, or e-mail convention@cog7.org to receive a registration booklet.

Please come praying that you will have a sparkling, firsthand experience with the Lord and His people.

— Mike Vlad
Program Committee Chairman

Ministers Recognized

In a recent meeting of the License and Credentials Committee, these men were approved for ministerial license and membership in the North American Ministerial Council:

John Adame of Sacramento, California
 Dan Bellows of Eugene, Oregon
 Gabriel Guzman of Phoenix, Arizona
 Richard Jensen of Walla Walla, Washington
 Bruce Noble of Owosso, Michigan
 Tom Robinson of Santa Clarita, California

Summer Camps

Dover Family Camp, near Kingfisher, OK

June 14-20; free-will offering
 Contact: Allan Burlison at 405-229-1186 or
aburlison@cox.net

Michigan Senior Youth Camp at SVA, Owosso

July 19-26; ages 13-17
 Contact: Rex Miller at kingmerex@aol.com

Sis-Q Meadows Senior Youth Camp, Cave Junction, OR

July 19-26
 Contact: Harold/Vona Ogren at 541-689-1387 or
hogren@msn.com

Sis-Q Meadows Junior Camp, Cave Junction, OR

July 26 – August 2; ages 8-12
 Contact: Ben and Joy Sandford at seekerscampers@yahoo.com



Argentina: Executive council officers of the Church dedicate new conference offices in the city of Obera, Misiones, in northeastern Argentina. Council president George Gillig (behind microphone) is among them.

Michigan Junior Youth Camp at SVA, Owosso

July 26 – August 2; ages 9-12

Contact: Rex Miller at kingmerex@aol.com

North Dakota Lakewood Park Bible Camp, Devil's Lake

July 31 - August 4; cost: \$50

Contact: Julie Hess at 701-763-6320 or wheatfarmer62@hotmail.com

Northern California Youth Camp

Capital Mountain Camp, Weimar, CA

August 3-9

Contact: Jorge Perez at 408-250-9985
or nazaritemex@hotmail.com

Refuge in the Rockies Youth Camp, Divide, CO

August 5-9; see www.cscog7.org for more info

Contact: Colorado Springs church at office@cscog7.org

Southern California Camps for FYC and Young Adults

Camp Cedar Falls near Angelous Oaks, CA

August 20-23

Ages 13-18 contact: David Sandoval at 951-224-0395 or cogdsdelgado@yahoo.com

Ages 19-35 (single or married) contact: Ruth Martinez at 951-489-9325 or colgatesmile@gmail.com

Serving Right

Have you seen *Churchright*, the replacement newsletter for *Pulse*? The May-June issue focuses on service, with articles by Howard E. Butts, Jr., voice of *The High Calling of Our Daily Living*, and Whaid Rose about the proper attitude Christians should have about serving. There's also vital information about copyright guidelines churches should follow.

If your church needs more copies of *Churchright*, contact the Conference office at 303-452-7973 or bap.orders@cog7.org.



What American Christians Believe

The Barna Group recently conducted a national survey of adults, revealing a diverse set of beliefs about God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Of the nearly 1,900 professing Christians asked about how they viewed God, more than three-quarters agreed that He is the "all powerful, all-knowing Creator of the universe who rules the world today." The other 22 percent chose other descriptions that fall short of biblical teaching ("everyone is god," for example).

While the Bible represents Jesus Christ as a perfect, divine being, more than one-fifth of those surveyed evidently reject that view; they strongly agreed with a statement saying that Jesus sinned while He was on Earth. An additional 17 percent somewhat agreed.

A majority of Christians do not view the Holy Spirit as a living force or being. Nearly 60 percent agreed, either strongly or somewhat, that the Spirit is "a symbol of God's power or presence but is not a living entity." — From "Most American Christians Do Not Believe that Satan or the Holy Spirit Exist" (www.barna.org). Used by permission.



In Memory

Jesus Sandoval, an ordained minister of the Church for many years, was born October 31, 1915, in Michoacan, Mexico, and died April 3, 2009, in Chicago, Illinois. Those who knew him best say that Brother San-

doval was dedicated, disciplined, and decisive; well organized, hard-working, efficient, and practical; always possessed with a strong sense of duty and morality. He served the gospel in every way he could in the Chicago area. Just over a year ago, at age 93, he relocated briefly to Des Moines, Iowa, to assist with a church plant there.

He was blessed with two sons, Ernesto and José; a daughter, Mary; and ten grandchildren.

International Tour

India and Asia

Asia occupies an important, dynamic role in spreading the gospel from the time of the apostles of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is believed that Thomas, one of the twelve, touched the southern-most tip of India during his missionary travel.

The first ever All India National Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) was held at Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, in February 2001, with the assistance of William C. Hicks (U.S) of Missions Ministries and Josafat Santa Cruz (Guatemala) of the International Ministerial Congress. Several pastors representing churches from the northeastern states of Mizoram, Assam, and West Bengal, and the southern states of Andhra Pradesh and Chennai, attended the four-day conference. On the final day, all the members present agreed to form the Association of the Churches of God (Seventh Day), or ACOG7, which was recognized as the national board of the Church in India. Elder Jacob Rao served as the coordinator for these "India Reach" meetings and was later appointed as the general secretary/treasurer of the national board.

Since that new beginning, the Church in India has made rapid strides, including

- Subsidy. We have established a systematic, verifiable



procedure for paying monthly subsidy to about 85 pastors.

- Projects. We have sponsored construction of churches in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, and Myanmar and assisted with construction of classrooms for the school in Assam. We propose to help build twelve new churches in the next year.

- Membership. New members have been added by baptism of Christians, Hindus, and Muslims.

- Camps. We have co-sponsored (with Elder George Hnamte) two annual youth camps in Aizawl, Mizoram.

- Outreach. Elder Jacob Rao and Elder P. Kennedy visited Myanmar January 6-12, 2008, as a pioneering effort to strengthen the churches there.

- Church planting. Jacob Rao and P. Kennedy recently visited Parlakhemundi and established the first church in the troubled state of Orissa.

We extend Christian greetings to our brethren in the countries

of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, East Timor, India, Kazakhstan, Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam. We are willing to visit any of our sister churches and look forward to the Holy Spirit again using the churches in Asia to play a vital role in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.

— Jacob Rao
General Secretary, ACOG7-India

Jacob Rao also serves as Zone 4 (Asia) representative of the International Ministerial Congress. He receives a small monthly subsidy from Missions Abroad and occasional special project funds in support of his ministry. Send your offering for India Mission to Missions Abroad, P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233-0677.



Crossroads

We come to them often in places along the way where we decide which way to turn. Whether literal or figurative, individual or corporate, crossroads impact our lives and our future.

The Church of God (Seventh Day) has come to various crossroads throughout its history. Will the Bible alone be the basis of our faith and practice, or will it be the Bible plus other writings? Will our day of worship be the first day of the week or the seventh-day Sabbath? In more recent years we've come to the crossroads of the gospel: Will we be known as a people of the commandments or also as a people of Jesus? Thankfully, because of decisions made at these critical junctures, terms such as *Bible-based*, *Sabbath-observing*, and *Christ-centered* are among our identifying marks and emphases.

New crossroads are expected as the journey continues, but in a sense, the Church always stands at crossroads. Consider these:

The crossroads of life. Two trees stood at that intersection: the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2:9). Prior to eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Adam and Eve enjoyed innocence of soul and intimacy with God. After eating, however, these were replaced by fear, separation, blame, and shame

These two trees represent different approaches to relationship with God. Surrounded by people who lived under the Tree of Knowledge (their relation to God was based on how much they knew), Jesus admonished: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:39, 40, NIV). Real spirituality is found, not in what or how much we know but in *whom* we know — Jesus, the source of eternal life (John 17:3).

Daily, and in various ways, the Church comes to the intersection of life.

The crossroads of culture. Every generation of the Church must decide its role and responsibility to a culture that has lost its way. Boiled down to essentials, the Church's mission is to love God and love people. And the most tangible evidence of our love for God is our capacity to love the bruised, the broken, and the abandoned of the world. Two paths lie before us here: being salt and light to the culture or being against culture; being fishers of men or keepers of the aquarium.

The crossroads of identity. Having made the "right" turn at the gospel crossroads, the Church still must decide along the way whether to base its identity on "being different" or on "being in Christ." The Church should be different from the world, and the unique truths that set us apart from other denominations must be taught and defended. But where the primary focus is on being different from other churches, isolationism and "holier than thou" attitudes usually abound.

The crossroads of significance. Significance is not only a basic human need, as modern psychology teaches, but also a crossroads at which the Church always stands. Here mediocrity and the status quo seem easier routes and require less effort than the high road of commitment and the pursuit of excellence. If personal significance is found in discovering and pursuing our God-given purpose, corporate significance flows from living out the biblical purposes for which it was designed — effectively and for God's glory.

Corpus Christi, where our biennial Church convention will soon convene, translates "body of Christ." So church is on my mind. I'm praying that in the face of economic challenges, cultural unrest, and deepening human need, CoG7's crossroads choices will continue to shape its future and bring hope to our world.

— Whaid Guscott Rose
General Conference President

Summers were meant to be ...

Breath-taking: “the heavens declare ...”

- family trips, worship somewhere every Sabbath

Memory-making: moments we share

- CoG7 conference on Texas coast (see p. 28)

Life-shaking: burdens we no longer bear

- camps and retreats (see pp. 28-29)



*“Blessed be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits,
the God of our salvation! Selah” (Psalm 68:19).*