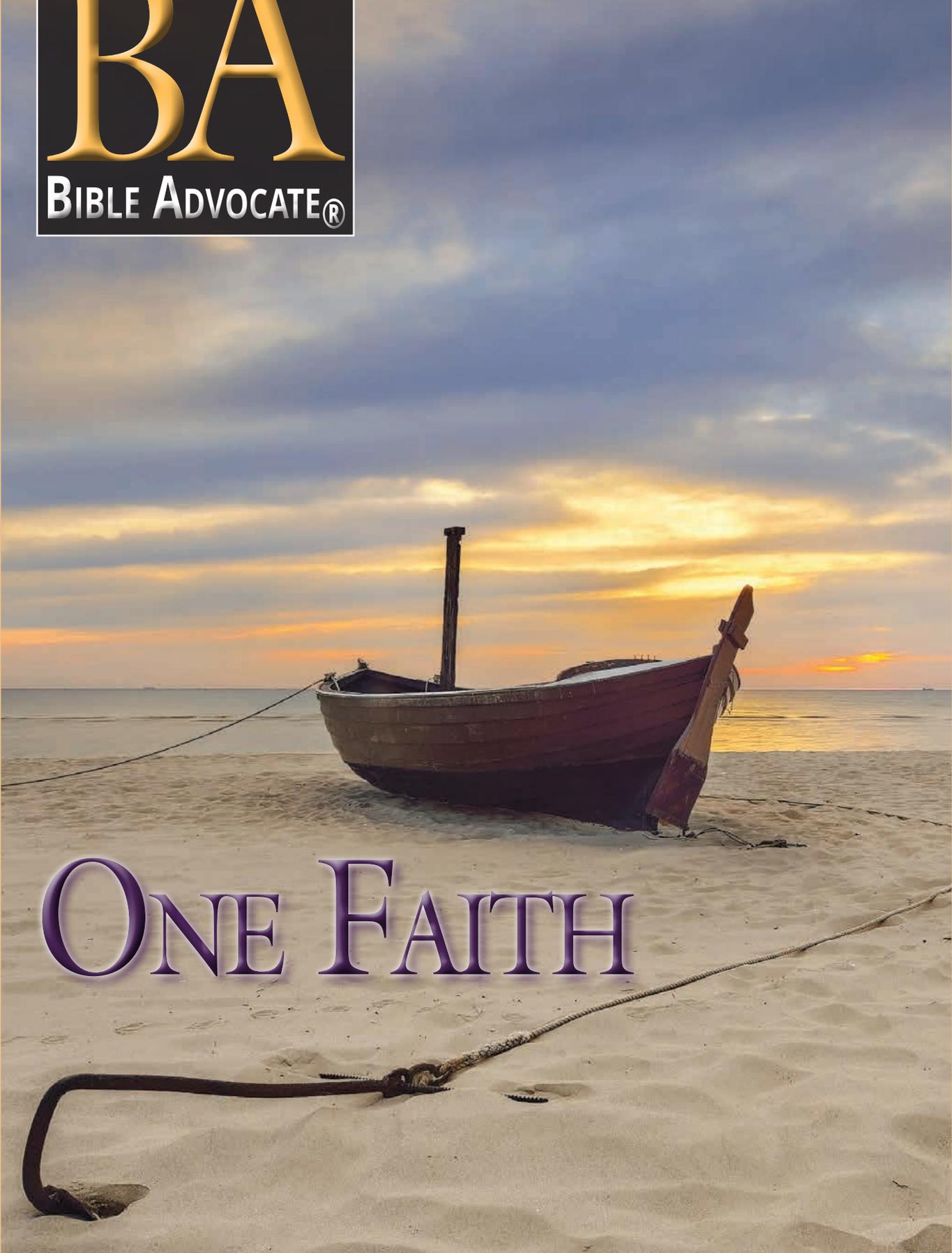
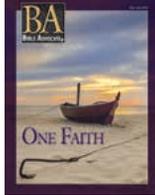


May - June 2016

BA
BIBLE ADVOCATE®

A photograph of a weathered wooden boat on a sandy beach at sunset. The boat is dark brown with a single mast. The sky is filled with soft, golden light from the setting sun, with some clouds. The water is calm, reflecting the light. A rope is attached to the boat and extends across the sand in the foreground.

ONE FAITH



2016: Discipleship



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Disciples Indeed!

What should believers believe? That's the question this *Bible Advocate* just begins to answer. Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31, 32). We of faith can start here.

When I was about nine, I learned I had Cherokee blood in me. This news excited me so much, I had to demonstrate to my cousins how Indians lived off the land. With sincere confidence, I went out to the flower garden, dug up an onion, and made a peanut butter sandwich with it. My cousins were duly impressed.

Now, I knew nothing of Cherokee cuisine. My young faith was misguided. I didn't even know the difference between an onion and a tulip bulb, so I got sick. The moral of the story? Truth and error are real. What we know, or don't know, does matter. And the object and content of faith is as important as faith itself.

When Paul wrote of "one faith," he was well aware of the many faiths on hand. In fact, there was a Roman goddess of faith named Fides (Latin for *faith*), and her likeness was on many coins of the time. But neither hers nor even the Jews' religion, closer to home, was the faith the apostle preached and staunchly defended against corruption (Galatians 1:8, 14, 23).

Given so many faiths to mislead, it is little wonder that of the seven *ones* Paul mentions in Ephesians 4:4-6, his concern for "the unity of the faith" is what he returns to just a few verses later. It is a unity not fully reached but a unity, and faith, located in the "knowledge of the Son of God" and the "fullness of Christ" (v. 13).

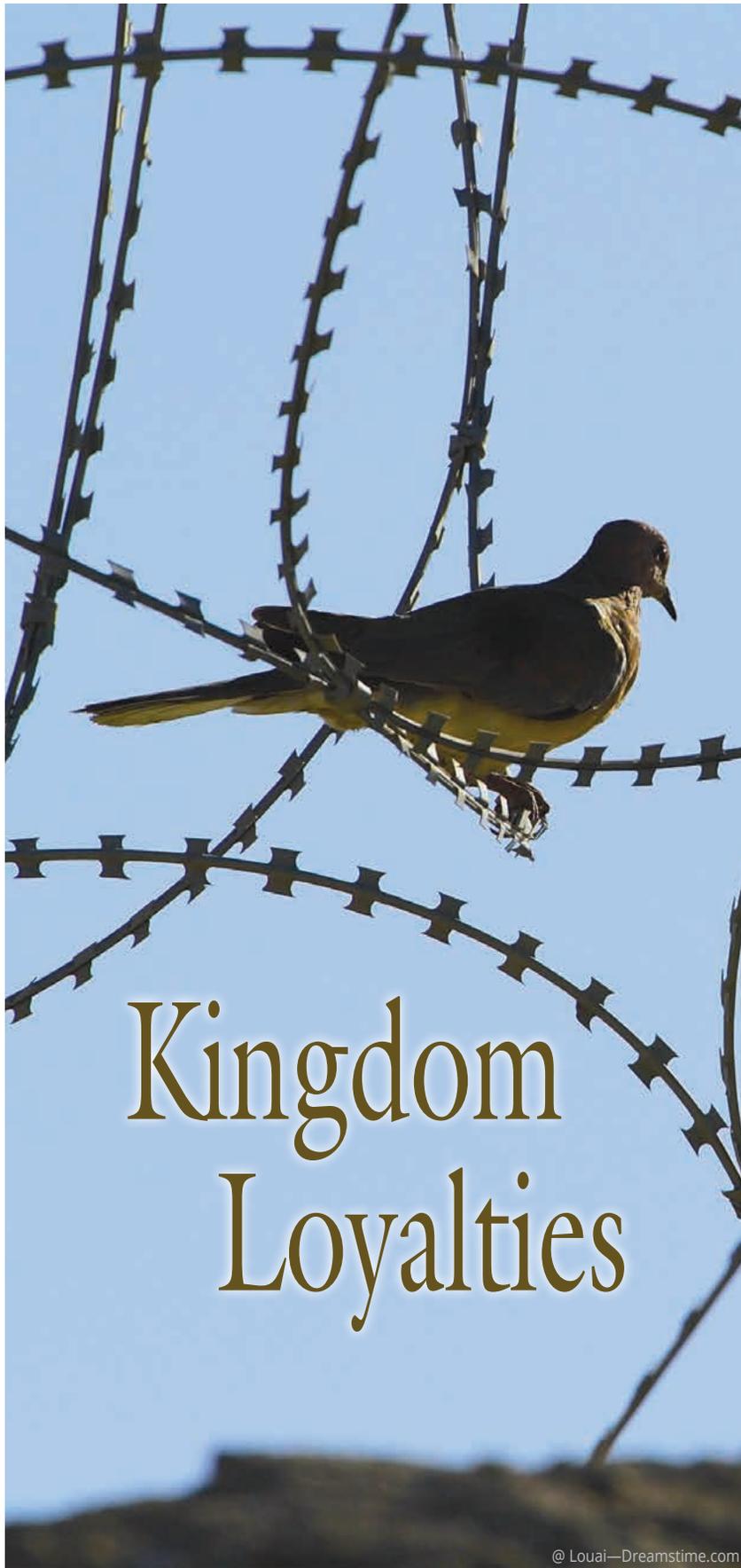
The church today has yet to attain this unity of faith. The Center for the Study of Global Christianity estimates there are 41,000 Christian denominations.* Even if most of these represent organizational distinctions rather than doctrinal differences, this number nevertheless reflects the tragic fragmentation of the Christian faith.

This BA celebrates the one faith — our faith — and challenges believers who would be "disciples indeed" to contend not only for it but also for its unity — our unity! As Paul insists, "Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27).

— Jason Overman



* christianity.about.com/od/denominations/p/christiantoday.htm. Web accessed 3-10-16.



Kingdom Loyalties

@ Louai—Dreamstime.com

Christians, violence, and the
cross of Christ.

by Israel Steinmetz

Dietrich Bonhoeffer begins his classic *Life Together* with these words:

It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians. Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. At the end all his disciples deserted him. On the Cross he was utterly alone, surrounded by evildoers and mockers. For this cause he had come, to bring peace to the enemies of God. So the Christian, too, belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the thick of foes. There is his commission, his work.¹

Bonhoeffer goes on to discuss the privilege and responsibility of Christian fellowship, but he could have written the entire book on our call to live “in the thick of foes,” joining Jesus in bringing “peace to the enemies of God.” This is the calling of all those who would follow Jesus in life, death, and resurrection. Nevertheless, this calling has often proved difficult for Christ’s followers to answer.

Peter and the sword

Jesus spoke a blessing on peacemakers (Matthew 5:9) and taught His followers to willingly endure physical assault, theft, and compelled servitude from evildoers (vv. 38-41). He taught forgiveness (18:21-25) and active love for enemies (Luke 6:27-36),

demonstrating kinship with God, “for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men” (v. 35).

Peter heard this teaching but, like many of Jesus’ followers, couldn’t accept it. On the night of Jesus’ arrest, Peter drew a sword in self-defense against an unjust police force. Jesus’ rebuke echoes through history: “Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword” (Matthew 26:52).

Later, standing before Pilate, Jesus explained, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm” (John 18:36).

Here Jesus proclaimed not only a reality that defined but also an imperative that guided His kingdom and its citizens. His kingdom was not of earthly origin. It had no geo-political interests to protect, no physical borders to defend, no human army to deploy. It was an *otherworldly* kingdom that would advance, not through physical conquest but through the power of the Spirit, good works, and the proclamation of a gospel of peace. The citizens of this kingdom were not to use violence as did the citizens of this earth. In fact, they were to overcome violence with love.

Jesus backed up His words with the most painful of deeds. Contrary to Messianic expectations, Jesus didn’t conquer through physical warfare. Rather, He delivered the decisive blow to sin and death through self-sacrifice (Colossians 2:13-15). In His greatest moment of physical weakness, Jesus conquered

humanity’s greatest spiritual enemies. In His public humiliation, His unjust crucifixion, His willingness to lay aside force, Jesus proclaimed in deed what He had spent His ministry proclaiming in word: His was a gospel and a kingdom of peace. Those who would be citizens of His kingdom would follow His example, loving and forgiving those who mistreated and murdered them.

Peter and the cross

Eventually, Peter understood what he failed to grasp that night

wounds you were healed. . . . To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. For, “The one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. He must turn away from evil and do good; He must seek peace and pursue it (2:21-24; 3:8-11).

“The citizens of this kingdom were not to use violence as did the citizens of this earth. In fact, they were to overcome violence with love.”

in the Garden of Gethsemane. Later, he would write to Christians – those who “reside as aliens” (1 Peter 1:1) – in a world bent on violence and revenge:

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His

At last Peter realized the solution to violence and killing is not violence and killing, but peacemaking and self-sacrifice. He recognized that Jesus’ loving sacrifice, at the hands of violent and evil men, was the only righteous answer to violence and evil. Nearly two millennia later, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. put it this way:

The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you may murder the

hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. . . . Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.²

Paul acknowledged how contrary this rejection of violence was to the world's way of doing things. The world believes in vengeance, an "eye for an eye," self-defense, proportional response, and war. In instructing the Ro-

you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:14, 17-21).

Reflecting on the realities of Jesus' kingdom, Paul reminded the Corinthians that though "we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful . . ." (2 Corinthians 10:3, 4). This reality went beyond forbidding Christians from engaging in violence to forbidding them from engaging in violent speech, manipulation, and intimidation.

“In His unjust crucifixion, His willingness to lay aside force, Jesus proclaimed in deed what He had spent His ministry proclaiming in word.”

mans to cast off the shape of the world and be transformed into the image of Christ, he wrote these words:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. . . . Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing

Kingdom peacekeeping

This is the radical nature of Christ's kingdom. Even our words — to say nothing of our bodies — should not be instruments of violence. Rather, they should be instruments of grace (Ephesians 4:29), particularly in our interaction with non-Christians (Colossians 4:5, 6). And here we discover the heart and logic of non-violence in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is advanced through the spiritual warfare of a people wearing spiritual armor, their feet shod beautifully with the good news of peace

(Ephesians 6:10-17). As Christ's ambassadors taking the message of loving reconciliation to the world, we must do so peacefully (2 Corinthians 5:14-21).

Life in Jesus' kingdom invites us to abandon the temporal hopes and security, pride and braggadocio, of our earthly kingdoms. It compels us to reject the call of our earthly kingdoms as they seek to enlist us in their endless wars for land and power and liberty. Life in Jesus' kingdom calls us to embrace an eternal hope and advance a kingdom that is secured by peace — a hard-fought peace won through loving our enemies, doing good to those who are evil, and when necessary, dying in the process.

The gospel of peace is the story of a God who became human to die for His enemies. It is the story of a kingdom that rejects self-preservation, vengeance, violence, killing, and war in favor of self-sacrifice, forgiveness, healing, life, and peace. If we are to be citizens and ambassadors of this kingdom, we must not only preach the gospel of peace but also live it. **BA**

Israel Steinmetz is dean of Academic Affairs for LifeSpring School of Ministry. He and his wife, Anna, and their seven children live in San Antonio, TX. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.



1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 17.
2. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 64-65.

Lifeless Leftovers



@ Glenda Powers—Dreamstime.com

by Ronald L. Gallagher

It's intriguing how God often avoids details that many would have chosen to include, and inserts others that seem to be oddly incongruent with their surroundings. For instance, He restricted most of the horrific details involved with Jesus' crucifixion to the private screening room of our imagination. Avoiding gory descriptions of physical torture, He chose instead to disrupt our focus and include the following:

Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be," that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: "They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots." Therefore the soldiers did these things (John 19:23, 24).

Attention is moved unexpectedly to Jesus' garments, the only physical remnants of His ministry. It was a meager legacy as far as material things are concerned, but one that was nonetheless a real and personal part of His life. His robe accompanied Him everywhere. It adapted to His frame, moved as He moved, went where He went, and stood where He stood. Perhaps Jesus was wearing that very robe when He called Lazarus back to life, cursed the fig tree, and cast those demons out of Mary Magdalene.

But once taken from Him, the robe was just empty cloth; no power resided in it — just the dead

leftovers of a man whose life would change the world forever.

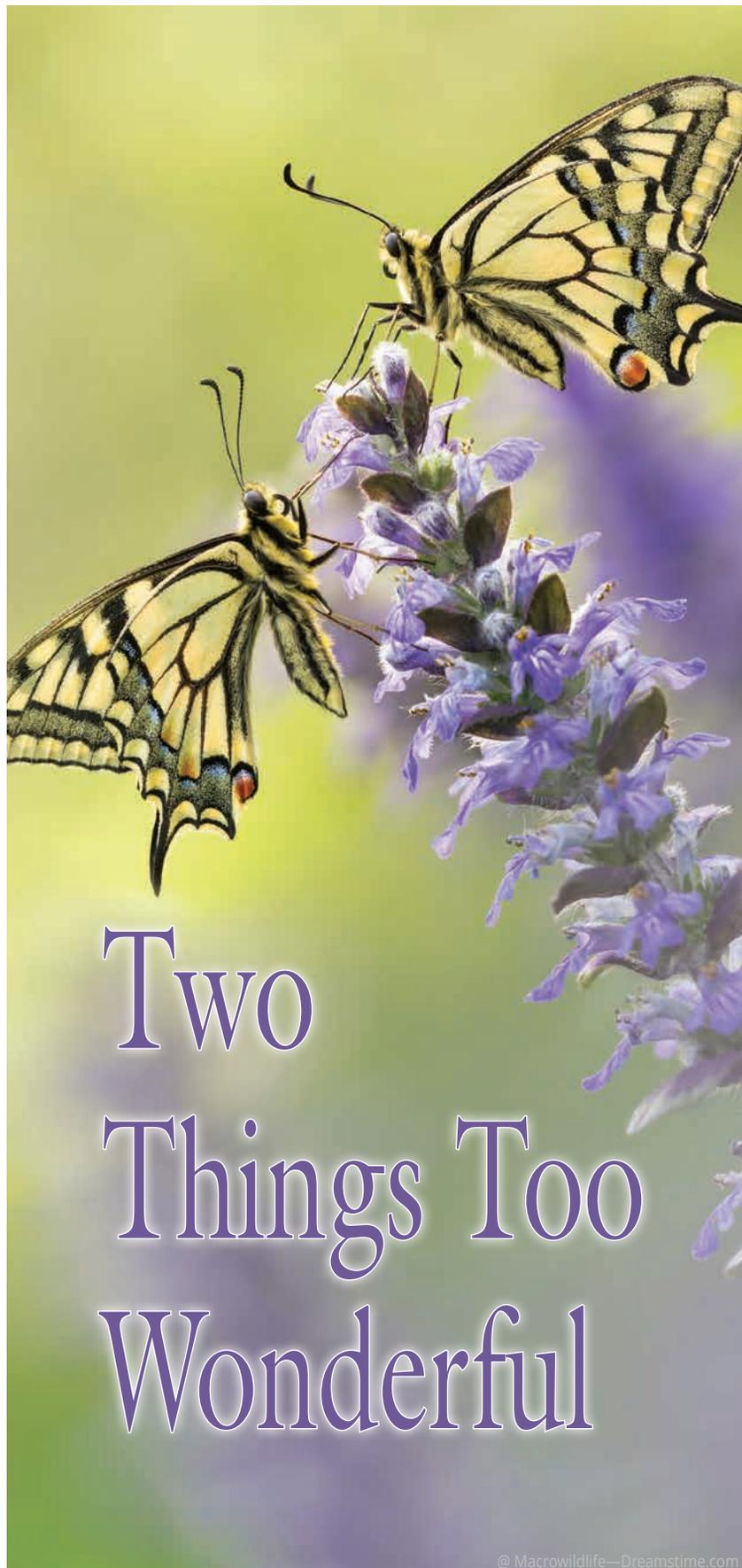
The Roman soldiers laid claim to Jesus' clothes even while He was still alive, a common practice at the time. One of the rewards for those who engaged in torturing people to death was the right to claim their garments, along with whatever else they might have had with them. In Jesus' case, four soldiers wanted the garment. Tearing it apart to divide it didn't make sense, so they decided to cast lots to see who would win it. The hardened soldiers apparently expressed no hesitation in conducting their selfish, heartless game in the shadow of the very cross that would take His sinless life in exchange for their own. In the midst of His agony, they saw value only in what was His, but not in Him.

The soldiers weren't the last ones to see value in Jesus' personal property. Centuries later, Hollywood produced *The Robe* (1953), a fictional movie following the path of the robe after the Crucifixion and its impact on those who possessed it. The writers attributed mystical power to the garment that miraculously transformed the lives of those who had contact with it.

More recently, another Hollywood movie was conjured up about an item Jesus used at least once, though no evidence exists that He actually owned it. That story revolved around the cup He used in His final Passover meal with the disciples. Dubbed the Holy Grail, the cup was endued with the power to transmit eternal life to whoever drank from it. But in the end, no one managed to acquire eternal life, nor even pretend it.

Such is Hollywood's "take" on stuff left behind by Jesus. Nothing of any eternal spiritual value is to

continued on page 26



Two Things Too Wonderful

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Examining God's way with
His people and the way of a
man with a maid.

by Calvin Burrell

With the earth's billions all having their opinions and peculiarities, we should be grateful for agreeable people. Thank heaven for any agreement that adds to the total tonnage of precious peace on earth. Celebrate those folks who agree to disagree and who find grace to do it without being disagreeable.

More important than people's position is their disposition. And no station in life is better suited to prove our disposition than matrimony. If we humble ourselves at home first, we get more grace to avoid offense in other venues too. In this way, Jabez' prayer "that I may not cause pain!" (1 Chronicles 4:10) is answered in us.

A wise and long-wed wife gave away the secret of her marital bliss like this: "When we got married, I settled on ten things that I'd always forgive my husband for — no fuss and no spite on any of those ten."

The women present eagerly asked about the items on the list, and she replied: "To tell the truth, I never got around to writing them down. But every time he did something I didn't like, I just said to myself, *Lucky for him, that's one of the ten.*"

A happy marriage is the union of two good forgivers. This can happen when a man and woman wed based on the agreement "to love and to cherish, so help us God." On the contrary, when

two people marry with a contract in mind and a set of rules in hand, bliss is unlikely. Marriage ordained and blessed by God is rarely a contractual agreement. It is rather a covenantal link of enduring love and forgiveness, bringing horizontal happiness to the home that has it.

Links of faith

As with a man and his maid, covenants between Yahweh God and His people are not much like a business contract either. Instead, they are faith agreements in which God says *He will be our God and we will be His people*. Those who hear and agree respond in kind: “Yes, Lord, You are our God, and we will be Your people.” This is relationship. Several such covenants between humans and their Creator are found in the Bible.

Prominent among these early in the Book are His agreements with Noah, Abraham, and the nation of Israel through Moses. In each case, these covenants were *not* negotiated treaties between two parties, as if God and man were equals. Instead, they originated with the greater Party and were revealed to the lesser.

With Noah and Abraham, God’s covenant consisted largely of His spoken vows: I will never again destroy the earth with a flood (to Noah, in Genesis 9); I will bless you and make your name great; I will give you land and a seed; I will bless all families of the earth through you (to Abraham, in Genesis 12, 15, 17). This is promise, and covenants like these are *promissory* covenants.

In God’s agreement with national Israel, much more em-

phasis was given to obligations and expectations — the laws that God and Moses announced and that the people agreed to obey. This is obligation, and the Mosaic covenant is largely an *obligatory* covenant.

With this background, we can better appreciate the Bible’s premier agreement: the new covenant. It was prophesied by Jeremiah (31:31-34), mentioned by the Lord Jesus and sealed by His blood (Matthew 26:27, 28), and repeated and explained in the New Testament letters of 2 Corinthians (3), Galatians (4:21-31), and Hebrews.

The core link of Bible cov-

The first oath tells the truth of this and any other agreement worth its salt: It has substance, character, and obligation. Rather than written on stone, the “laws” and “ways” of this oath are grafted into our very souls through the Spirit. Living in spiritual harmony with them is not just obligatory; it is our deepest desire. An obedient life raises the level of present blessings promised through the covenant.

The second oath tells the grace of this agreement. If the “laws” and “ways” of Oath #1 are violated, bringing conviction of sin, the mercy of the Lord endures forever to those who

“This is the new covenant in Christ: a mind-and-heart relationship with God, a high faith standard to live for, and a loving, accepting forgiveness when we fail.”

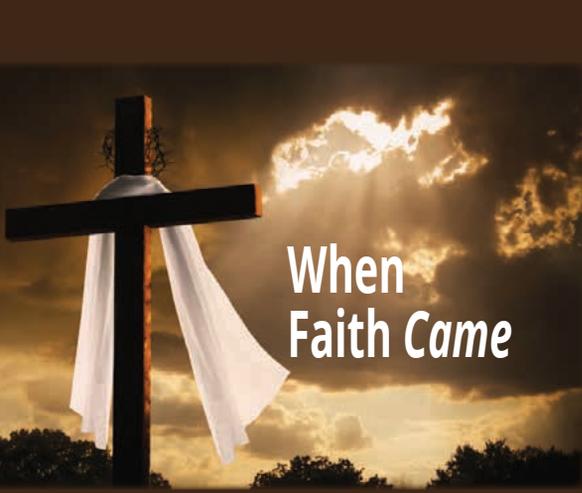
enants — “I will take you as My people, and I will be your God” — punctuates our faith songs like a refrain (Exodus 6:7; et al.). What a sweet sound it is to those who know the precious promises, the divine oaths, the “I wills” of the promissory new covenant! They are two:

Oath #1: I will write My laws, My ways, on your hearts so you will know Me and want to please Me in all your ways (Hebrews 8:7-11; 10:16).

Oath #2: I will forgive your sins (8:12; 10:17).

fear Him in obedient trust. When we fail to please the Lord in all our ways (Oath #1), we have only to confess it and reassure ourselves with His promise of pardon (Oath #2; see also 1 John 1:8–2:2).

This is the new covenant in Christ! Its beauty lies in its unbroken good favor and in its agreeable simplicity. Consider what we have in the three full paragraphs above: a mind-and-heart relationship with God, a high faith standard to live for, and



When Faith Came

Throughout Scripture, faith has always been the premier attribute of God's people (Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4; Hebrews 11). So it's surprising to read in Galatians 3, long after father Abraham, about faith's coming:

"But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. . . . But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor" (vv. 23, 25).

This faith is clearly not general faith in God but a special faith that names and narrates a special person and event: Christ, God's Son sent (v. 24; 4:4).

"The faith" come and revealed, a faith that is a life the law pointed to but could not provide (3:12, 19-22), is the gospel story itself. This is the faith Paul preached after persecuting (1:23) and the story at the core of this faith is embedded all through his letter to the Galatians: "Christ . . . crucified" (2:20; 3:1; 5:11, 24; 6:12, 14).

Jesus and the cross is the faith! And we enter His faith, His story, only "through faith" in Him (3:26).

— BA

a loving, accepting forgiveness when we fail.

Links of love

Bred, born, and brought up in a household of faith, I enjoyed advantages and benefits that exceed my count. Chief among them are, first, that Christ drew me to the Father's bosom by cords of covenantal faith and baptism while I was a teenager, and second, that my wife drew me to hers by cords of covenantal love and marriage a few years

“Too wonderful it is that we are God's beloved and that He is ours — one faith.”

later. Both these blessings are forms of intimate relationship too wonderful to tell.

One of these is living by faith; the other is living in love. Neither relationship began through the letter of a signed contract but through the promise of a shared spirit. Since that spring day in 1966 when Barbara and I agreed and vowed before God and witnesses, I have been her husband and she has been my wife — the essence of our covenant. No list of rules established our union. Rather, we promised a love-pact: to have and to hold in every circumstance until death ends the

agreement. And we soon learned what pleased the other and what didn't — the “laws” and “ways” of a happy home.

Can two walk together except they be agreed? Over the years, my essentially agreeable wife has grown in expressing her own views and desires openly and confidently, even when they differ from mine. That's been good for both of us! When we've disagreed on a dozen details, we've always agreed to keep on walking.

Similarly, I've learned that walking with other Christians doesn't require us to agree on all points. At home and at church, what's needed most is common, new covenant faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord and agreement to walk together. The diversity this allows is, for me, more wonderful than if our thoughts and opinions were carbon copies.

Too wonderful it is that we are God's beloved and that He is ours — one faith; that he who finds an excellent, prudent wife gets favor from the Lord, that she becomes the crown and glory of her husband; that I am my beloved's and my beloved — a good forgiver — is mine (Proverbs 12:4; 18:22; 19:14b; 1 Corinthians 11:7; Song of Solomon 6:3); and that by new covenant faith in Jesus' blood, we come to know the one great Forgiver and Lover of our souls.

On these, may we all agree! **BA**

Calvin and Barb Burrell live in Stayton, OR, and will celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary on May 29.



Questions & Answers



The Bible says there is “one faith” (Ephesians 4:5). Is it really that simple? How can we know if we have it? Why is faith so important?

The text you cite lists faith among seven *ones* that help define our unity in Christ: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. All of these can be known and embraced at a basic level. Each also invites us to dig deep, reach high, and explore widely in the rich and inexhaustible storehouses of our Father’s Word and world.

Speaking simply, “one faith” may point to the empty-handed and truehearted response of the humble soul casting itself on the mercy of God through Jesus Christ, bringing us heaven’s favor and the Spirit’s comfort. No other response promises so rich a result as this.

But that’s not all. “One faith” also refers to all the beliefs and practices Christians take from the Word and Spirit of God. This bird’s-eye view of faith is seen in Jude 3, where we are urged to stoutly defend the faith once delivered to the saints. In this broad sense also, there is only one faith.

Back in Ephesians 4, Paul goes on to write “till we all come to the unity of the faith” (v. 13), conceding that Christians had not yet come to perfect unity in all aspects, intricacies, and nuances of the one faith. Nor have we in 2016.

Let’s grasp the importance of faith here and now: When we have it, God counts us righteous;

His work is revealed in us; we are justified from our sins; salvation comes to us and to our household; we truly live; all things are possible to us; and we have victory over the world, the flesh, and the Devil (Genesis 15:6; Mark 9:23; John 6:28, 29; Acts 16:31; Romans 1:16, 17; 5:1; Ephesians 6:16; Philippians 3:9; 1 John 5:4).

Faith in Christ is so important to God that He has made it the single door by which we may enter into His favor and be saved. Without faith, everything is sin to us, and there is no way we can please God (Romans 14:23; Hebrews 11:6).

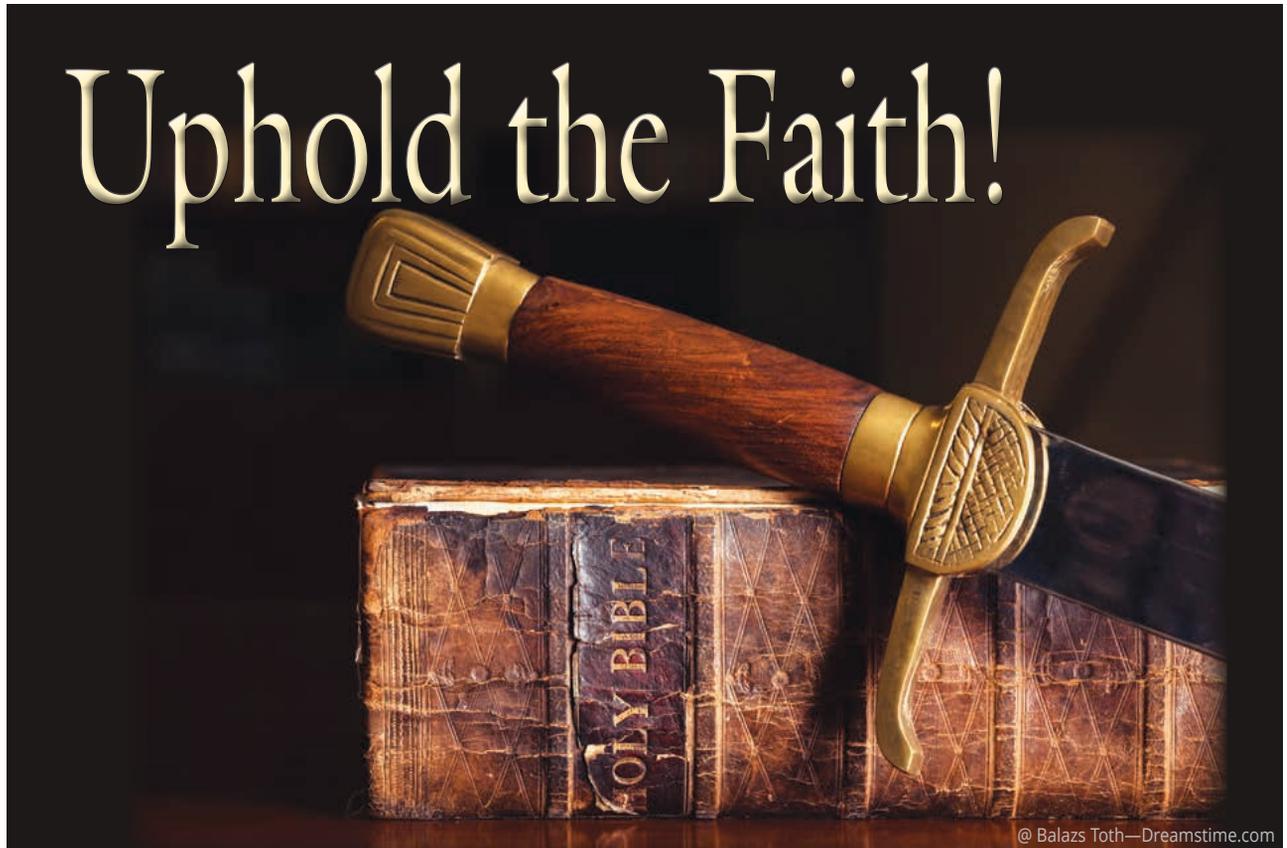
How do we know if we truly believe? It is good to ask, because not everything that goes under the heading of *faith* is faith indeed. A true and living faith in God is sufficient for salvation for sure, but there is a false and dead faith that saves no one. Many will say, “Lord, Lord” in that day but be turned away because Jesus never knew them.

What is the difference between saving faith and false faith? The real kind includes 1) acceptance of the basic truths of the gospel — faith’s mental component; 2) trust in the person of Christ as Savior to forgive — faith’s spiritual component; and 3) choice to follow and obey Jesus as Lord — faith’s volitional (or decisive) component. Three components; only one faith.

If we don’t have it, here’s how we can get it: Hear God’s voice. He speaks in His written Word, in the natural world, and through His people. If the seeds of belief don’t sprout and grow, we may humble ourselves by asking God to reveal Himself and give us the gift of faith. Many can tell how that prayer has been answered for them.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Uphold the Faith!



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Reflections on the
distinctives of CoG7 beliefs.
by **Max Morrow**

Fait*h* is such a weighty biblical word that when we speak of it, some explanation is in order for the listener to know what we mean. *Faith* can refer to belief or trust in God or to a set of religious teachings or doctrines (i.e., the Christian faith). Faith “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1) and it was “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3).

So when I write about *faith*,

it’s perfectly understandable that you ask, “What do you mean?” As I write this article, I mean a system of beliefs. I have in mind that faith Jude wrote about “which was once for all delivered to the saints.” It’s the faith for which I “contend earnestly,” in the words of Jude – the faith that has survived centuries of testing and numerous attacks in efforts to destroy it.

Our distinctive faith

Details of that faith have varied, but essentially what the apostles believed and taught is what members of the faith believe and teach today. The same God is supreme. The atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ remains the only means of salvation. The eternal moral law of the Ten

Commandments is fundamental. Holiness is still the aim of every believer. The hope of life eternal on the earth-made-new continues to be central.

Some of the distinctive beliefs of the Church of God (Seventh Day), which we believe are among “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints,” are being tested: namely, divorce and remarriage, tithing, clean and unclean meats, observance of extra-biblical holidays, and participation in military combat. The generations that have gone before set the stage for those of us who follow and, in many instances, they suffered severely to preserve what they – and we – believe. “Hold fast,” the writer of Hebrews said: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He

who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23).

The truths God established in the Scriptures are worthy to be preserved. So in abbreviated form, let God’s Word speak to your heart regarding these teachings.*

Divorce and remarriage.

Divorce results from sin and is never God’s perfect will. “The Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence . . .” (Malachi 2:16a). Jesus added, “I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery” (Matthew 5:32; 19:9).

From God’s perspective, divorce is loathsome and involves violence. Don’t do it! Jesus’ own teaching in the Gospels is equally severe. In Matthew, Jesus permits divorce only under cases of unfaithfulness by a spouse. Elsewhere in the Gospels, He offers no exception at all (Mark 10:11, 12; Luke 16:18). This should cause us to take our marriages, and their dissolution, with the utmost seriousness.

Tithing. “And all the tithes of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord’s. It is holy to the Lord” (Leviticus 27:30). “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me. . . . Bring all

the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house . . .” (Malachi 3:8-10). Admittedly, these verses come from the law of the old covenant. Did God change His position?

Under the new covenant, Paul wrote, “Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar?” This is the old covenant practice. “Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:13, 14). *Even so* means “just like” or “in the same way.” Gospel workers, like the Levitical

all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ But Peter said, ‘Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean’” (Acts 10:11-14).

From childhood and even for perhaps a decade or more after the death of Jesus, Peter had never eaten anything unclean. Did he not know that Jesus did away with that law about unclean meat — if He had? Apparently not. New Testament writers like Luke, John, and Paul carry forward food commands from the Old Testament and/or speak the familiar language of *holiness*

“The truths God established in the Scriptures are worthy to be preserved.”

priests, are to get their support from what is brought to God’s storehouse.

Clean and unclean meats.

To the people of Israel, God gave this instruction: “These are the animals which you may eat among all the animals that are on the earth: . . . whatever divides the hoof, having cloven hooves and chewing the cud — that you may eat” (Leviticus 11:2, 3). In the vision Peter had of “a great sheet . . . descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were

and the *unclean* (Acts 15:20, 26; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20; 2 Corinthians 6:11-18; Revelation 2:14; 18:2, 4). Meats intended for consumption by humans have been sanctified by the word of God (1 Timothy 4:3-5).

Extra-biblical holidays. “Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them. For the customs of the peoples are futile; for one cuts a tree from the forest, the work of the hands of

* Editor’s note: For fuller treatment on each of these distinctive faith positions, see *This We Believe: The Teachings of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*. Order online at cog7.org.



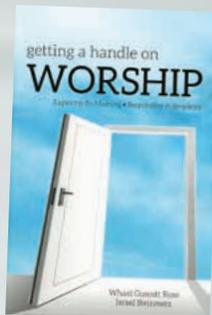
Since its publication a number of years ago, *This We Believe* has been a trusted source for CoG7 members. It develops and defends each of the twelve points in the Church's Statement of Faith, using Scripture as its only authority.

It has been said that, in addition to a Bible and a good hymnbook, all Christians should own a book that explains the main teachings of Scripture and of the church they belong to. Make sure you have a copy of *This We Believe* in your personal library!

Cost is \$10. Order through the online store (cog7.org), e-mail (bap.orders@cog7.org), phone (303-452-7973), or regular mail (Bible Advocate Press, P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233).

Also . . .

Hot off the press, *Getting a Handle on Worship*, the new book by Whaid Rose and Israel Steinmetz, is available for order.



Cost \$12.99. Books can be ordered either through Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com/Getting-Handle-Worship-Responding-Simplicity/dp/0997268905/>) or using the CreateSpace e-store (<https://wwwcreatespace.com/5979603>).

the workman, with the ax. They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with nails and hammers so that it will not topple" (Jeremiah 10:2-4).

Though not limited to the Christmas tree, this passage surely includes it. Notwithstanding the observer's intention, behind idols is demonic influence (1 Corinthians 10:20), and extra-biblical holidays like Christmas, Easter, and Halloween are steeped in symbols of pagan worship and superstition. God's people have "one faith" and should have nothing to do with the trappings of others (Ephesians 4:5-8). Pagan converts were quick to turn from their superstitious practices and traditions (Acts 19:18, 19), and Paul

Jesus calls us to support a gospel-oriented, non-violent lifestyle: Turn the other cheek, go the second mile (Matthew 5:39, 41).

Contend for the faith

Generation after generation, the saints of God have contended for the faith "once delivered." The need is no less today. As faithful children of God, we must "hold fast," remembering who established that faith. The admonition of 2 Corinthians 13:5 fits us as well as it fit early Christians to whom Paul wrote: "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you are disqualified."

We need to check ourselves!

“As faithful children of God, we must “hold fast,” remembering who established that faith.”

taught the early church to keep themselves separate from forms of worship that mixed true with false (2 Corinthians 6:16, 17).

Participation in military combat. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you . . ." (John 14:27). He taught His followers, "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Satan promotes war, while God promotes peace.

We are most assuredly in Christ while He is in us, and we just as surely are "in the faith" now in 2016, by the grace of God. Let's preserve that faith for every generation following — till Christ comes! **BA**

Max Morrow is a former editor of the *Bible Advocate* and now pastors in Owosso MI.



The Bird and the Call



@Johan63—Dreamstime.com

by Barry Mauldin

A scratching noise from the utility closet broke through the quiet dawn hours, awakening me in the adjacent bedroom. Investigating, I discovered the curious commotion was coming from behind the clothes dryer. Then I heard a faint chirp — a bird! The little fellow had slipped down the roofline vent pipe and become trapped. He scurried helplessly back and forth along the flexible hose attaching the vent to the dryer.

God's wake-up call can happen in a curious manner as well. If not curious, it at least varies for each person. It might be a sermon or a dramatic life event that awakens us. For me, it was a bird in my clothes dryer. I didn't know it at the time, but my experience with that bird would teach me much about God's call.

Paul writes to the Ephesians that we are all in the same condition: dead in our trespasses (Ephesians 2:1). Through Jesus Christ, God has made each one of us alive. God's workmanship brings something dead to life. The purpose of His creation — you and me — is good works (Ephesians 2:10). Therefore, Paul's admonishment is to walk worthy of the calling to which we are called (Ephesians 4:1). With this admonishment, though, sometimes we need motivation.

I left home that morning, unsure what to do with this stuck creature, so I called my property manager to handle it. However, when I returned home in the evening, I could still hear the desperate chirp. I knew I needed to remove this poor animal from his prison.

I detached the hose from the wall and placed the exposed end into a paper sack. Failing to coax the bird into the bag, I held the bag in one hand and activated the switch with my other. A sudden burst of air pushed the trapped bird into the sack.

We too need a "sudden burst" of motivation. But how do we get started? Finding motivation is not always simple. We may have self doubts within or distractions without. However, at times someone or something comes along and challenges us. Great people can cause us to evaluate ourselves and push us to do more. *But can a little bird?*

The troubles of life can make finding motivation difficult, trying our faith. Peter refers to it as being "grieved by various trials" (1 Peter 1:6). Trials may make us hesitant. If we push forward, despite our struggle, these trials reveal the genuineness of our faith (v. 7), just as gold is proven by the fire that removes impurities. We would love it if there were an easier way, but the tough stuff drives us to cry out for help and humble ourselves to completely depend on God.

I took the sack outside to free the bird. After his long ordeal, I assumed he would be stunned or disoriented, perhaps even injured. So I placed him in a remote spot to allow him a private convalescence. When I turned the sack over, to my astonishment, the bird flew off the moment after his feet touched the ground. In seconds, he was high in the air, moving quickly out of sight. The bird didn't hesitate. He immediately embraced the freedom afforded him.

I was the one stunned and motionless, not the bird. In an instant, I understood something about myself: I too tend to hesitate. I realized that I could be doing much more with myself. Perhaps I had

continued on page 27



Sing a Hymn of Providence

by Whaid Rose

Where is history going? Do the details of our lives count as part of that history? Are our individual stories all there is, or is there a big story, a grand metanarrative?

We derive from Scripture that there is a big story, that God is writing its chapters, and that it includes even the minutest details of our individual lives. Theologians call this *providence*, the classic Christian doctrine that affirms God is active in all the affairs of this world, superintending all things according to His divine purpose, for His glory.

Many hymns express this truth, but none more specifically and colorfully than William Cowper's "God Moves in a Mysterious Way." God reveals Himself, but He reserves part of Himself, veiled in mystery (Romans 11:33). We learn to live with God's unknown. What unsettles us is the part we know, His "mysterious ways."

God's ways frustrated Job (3:1), angered David (Psalm 13:1), and drove Habakkuk up the wall (1:13). But as their stories illustrate, one is never closer to God than in the crucible of suffering. Joseph seemed to know that intuitively. Thus his paradoxical reply to his brothers: "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20).

This puts life's trials in hopeful perspective, bolsters faith in a world falling apart. When we bury our loved ones despite earnest prayers; when natural disasters devastate the poorest countries, compounding poverty and human suffering; when believers struggle to survive while the ungodly prosper, providence gives us firm standing.

Cowper (England, 1731-1800) grasped this truth through personal experience. His profile includes lifelong depression, bereavement over his mother's death when he was six, as well as the deaths of four siblings, abortion of his marriage just days before the wedding, several suicide attempts, and years in an insane asylum. But during his time in that asylum, Cowper wrote this hymn. There, living between hope and despair, he glimpsed this beautiful truth.

God is working all things for our good (Romans 8:28). Someday, with clearer vision, we'll praise Him for the pattern He has planned. Meanwhile, we pray like David, "Teach me Your way, O Lord . . ." (Psalm 27:11). He's not running for President; He is sovereign. History is His-story, and, as the saying goes, "There's no maverick molecule in His universe."

This reassuring perspective inspired a hymn writer while in an asylum. May it inspire Christians to live confidently in a broken world.



God moves in a mysterious way/His wonders to perform;/He plants His footsteps on the sea,/And rides upon the storm.

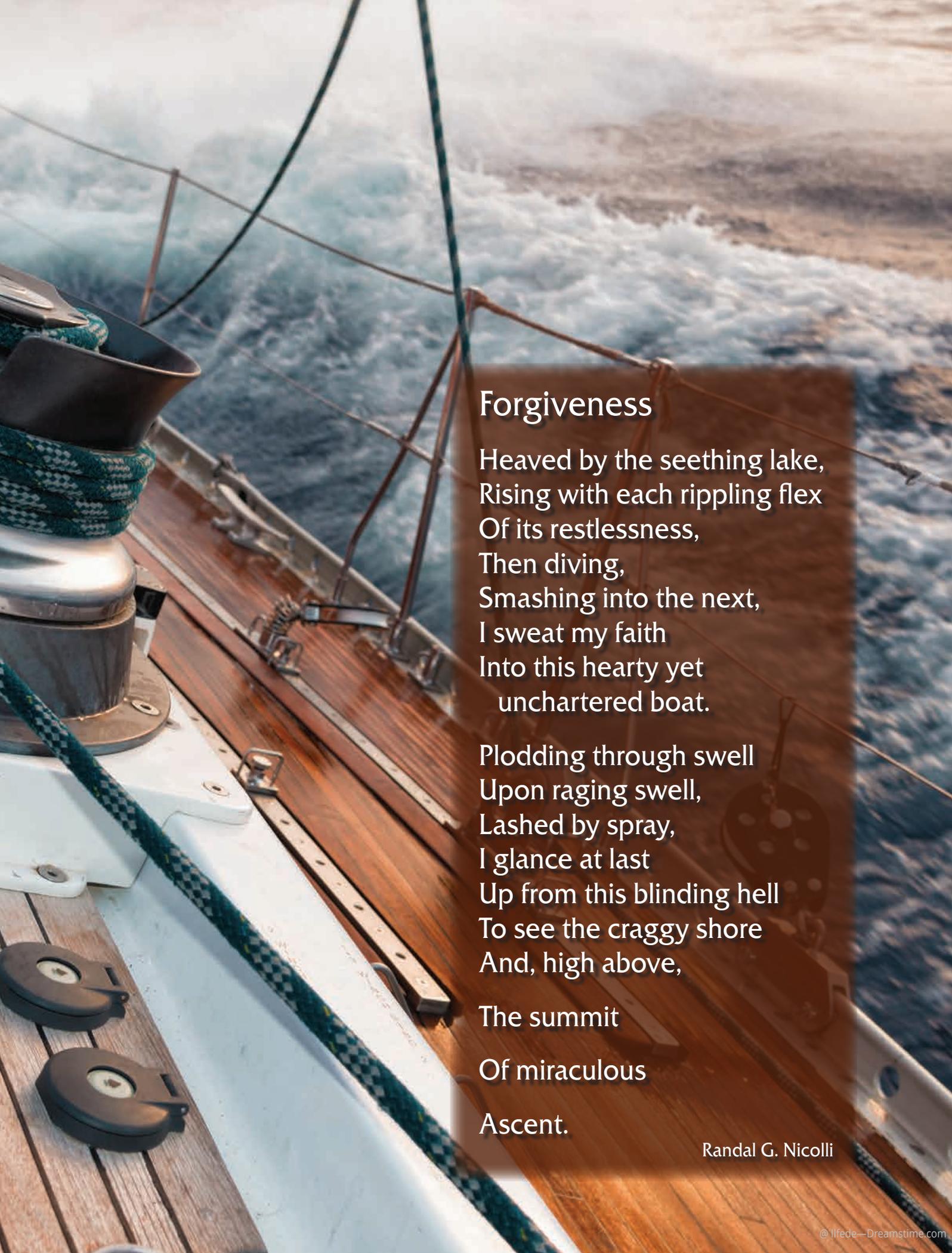
Deep in unfathomable mines/Of never failing skill,/He treasures up His bright designs,/And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,/The clouds ye so much dread,/Are filled with mercy and shall break/In blessing on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,/But trust Him for His grace;/Behind a frowning providence/He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,/Unfolding very hour;/The bud may have a bitter taste,/But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,/And scan His work in vain;/God is His own interpreter,/And He will make it plain.



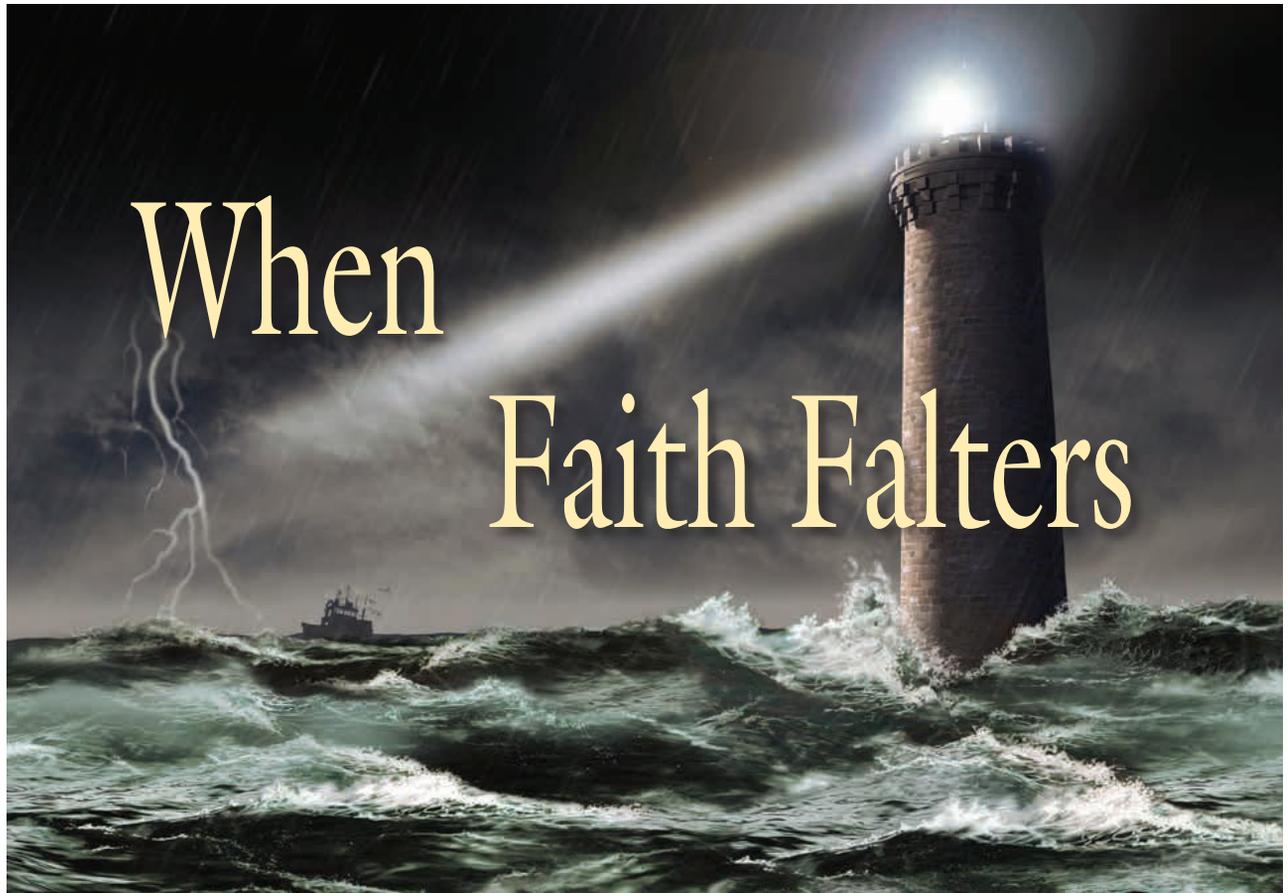
Forgiveness

Heaved by the seething lake,
Rising with each rippling flex
Of its restlessness,
Then diving,
Smashing into the next,
I sweat my faith
Into this hearty yet
unchartered boat.

Plodding through swell
Upon raging swell,
Lashed by spray,
I glance at last
Up from this blinding hell
To see the craggy shore
And, high above,

The summit
Of miraculous
Ascent.

Randal G. Nicolli



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Timely lessons from
Moses and Peter.

by **R. Herbert**

The book of Hebrews contains some of the Bible's most encouraging statements regarding faith, but it also contains some cautions. One of those is found in Hebrews 10:38, which quotes Habakkuk: "Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him" (NKJV). The writer of Hebrews then continues, "But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved" (v. 39).

Those are inspiring and encouraging words — as long as our faith is doing well. But every disciple of Jesus Christ comes to realize that our faith, just like our love or any other spiritual quality, doesn't always run at 100 percent operating potential. In fact, occasionally we may even experience a failure of faith in some aspect of our lives. The shadow of doubt may fall on us only for a while, but for some, even a temporary failure of faith can become a matter of lasting discouragement.

It doesn't need to be that way. There are clear biblical examples of servants of God whose belief "cracked" temporarily, and yet those individuals went on to be listed in the Bible as examples of true and lasting faith. You may be

surprised that two such persons were Moses and Peter.

Moses at Meribah

At one point during the Israelites' wanderings in the wilderness, the community had no water, and the people rose in opposition to Moses and Aaron. At Meribah, God told the two leaders to take the staff from the holy place in the tabernacle and "Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water" (Numbers 20:8). Then Moses and Aaron gathered the people in front of the rock. When Moses struck the rock twice with his staff, water gushed out (vv. 10, 11).

But God was angry with these leaders for the way they

handled the situation. Though the account does not say exactly why, the fact that Moses struck the rock twice indicates he may have doubted when nothing happened at first. Wavering, he hit the rock again. Numbers tells us, in fact, that the incident involved a failure of faith on Moses' part: "And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them'" (v. 12, ESV).

So in God's estimation — not ours — Moses' faith faltered and temporarily failed. But this did not mean that Moses needed to be replaced or that his potential for faith-based service was gone. God continued to do great things through Moses' leadership. When we turn to Hebrews 11, we find Moses is given a place of distinct honor in the great Faith Hall of Fame. That inspiring chapter assigns six specific acts of faith to Moses (vv. 24-28), but his failing of faith at Meribah is not mentioned. This should teach us that God, who inspired the writer of Hebrews, is keeping track of our victories of faith — not our failures.

Crumbling rock

Another, and better known, example of this principle is the apostle Peter. We all know the story, told in three of the Gospels. The disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee in a small boat when Jesus appeared to them, standing on the water. At that point, Peter exceeded his own level of faith development and asked Jesus:

"Lord, if it's you . . . tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him (Matthew 14:28-31).

“God is keeping track of our victories of faith — not our failures.”

Peter's faith was good to a point, but then it cracked under the strain, as anyone's might under those circumstances. Yet although Jesus mildly rebuked him, saying, "You of little faith . . . why did you doubt?" (v. 31), this was not the end of Peter's discipleship. We know that Peter's faith wavered and cracked again at Jesus' betrayal (John 18), but we know equally that Jesus continued to work with him (21:15-17). And we have only to read the

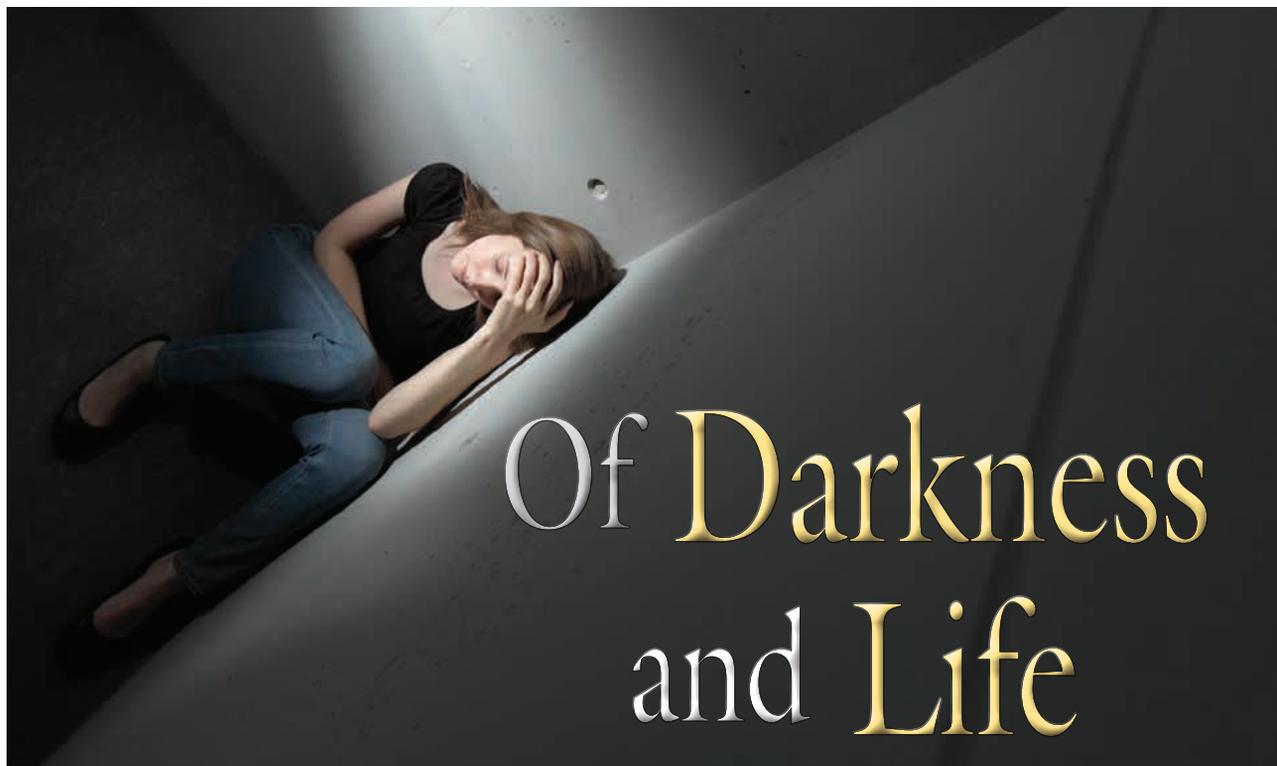
book of Acts to see that Peter went on to great acts of faith after these failures (3:1-10, et al.).

Investment of faith

The God who knows our hearts knows that our faith, like that of Moses and Peter, can and certainly does waver at times. But if we regularly walk in the way of belief and seek His help, the Bible makes clear that, just as He does in every other aspect of life, God looks at the overall picture of our faith, beyond any isolated failures. Put simply, God does not balance the ups and downs of our faith like a checkbook. He helps us grow faith like a savings account. Even after we experience a temporary setback, God still desires to strengthen and develop our faith according to His purpose.

It's one of the most encouraging things we can learn about the path of faith every disciple must walk: If we keep with it, our faith will grow in a cumulative manner (2 Thessalonians 1:3). We must heed the biblical warnings against losing faith, but if we do not give up, faith will grow through time. And the more we grow in faith, the more faith grows in us. **BA**

R. Herbert (a pen name) holds a Ph.D. in ancient Near Eastern and biblical studies and has served as an ordained minister and church pastor. He writes for several Christian venues and for his websites *LivingWithFaith.org* and *TacticalChristianity.org*. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.



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Persons, politics, and the challenge of abortion.

by Caitlin Meadows

A *abortion*. It is a word that polarizes people and politics. It makes one group of people feel empowered and another feel disgusted. For many, it is a word that brings confusion.

What does *abortion* mean? According to Merriam-Webster.com, the simple definition is “a medical procedure used to end a pregnancy and cause the death of a fetus.” The Planned Parenthood website provides explanations of in-clinic abortions. One option is *aspiration*, defined by Planned Parenthood as “A procedure that ends pregnancy by emptying the uterus with the gentle suction of a manual sy-

ringe or with machine-operated suction.”¹ The other option is *dilation and evacuation (D&E)*, which, according to Planned Parenthood, is completed when “Medical instruments and a suction machine gently empty your uterus.”² Planned Parenthood explains that during a D&E, a woman in her second trimester may require an abdominal shot “to make sure that the fetus’s heart stops before the procedure begins.”³

How is it that in our civilized society, so many can read these definitions and explanations of abortion, including phrases like “cause the death of a fetus” and “make sure the fetus’s heart stops,” and not feel disgust? How has this practice become so widely accepted, when its proponents and practitioners openly admit that it is the voluntary ending of human life? When Christians use words like *murder*

to describe abortion, they are decried as fear-mongers. But what other word can better describe willingly stopping an innocent heart from beating?

This issue goes far beyond semantics. Ultimately, abortion is an issue of sin. For our voices to be heard in the abortion conversation, we must reach the hearts of people by revealing to them the heart of God. As 1 John 4:8 says, God is love. In His love, He made His law clear regarding murder: It shall not be committed (Exodus 20:13).

Politics of sin

In 1973, the United States Supreme Court ruling of *Roe v. Wade* made abortions legal throughout the nation.⁴ This became a turning point in American culture. Numerous women interpreted it as empowering, feeling that the right to choice they claimed was finally validated

by law. Conversely, conservative thinkers and Christians were devastated by this ruling. While the secular world applauded women for their newfound freedom, Christians recognized the consequence would be countless unborn lives snuffed out by the choice of their own mothers. As Steven Ertelt put it in his January 2015 LifeNews.com article, "The blood of more than 57 million aborted babies represents an enormous stain on our national conscience and a heavy burden on our hearts."⁵

The horror of abortion is, at its root, the result of sin. The fact that such a practice can not only become lawful but also become a law so desired by citizens, is a result of sin. When separated from God, darkness takes over, and even the most deplorable acts are praised. "The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble" (Proverbs 4:19).

Psalms 82:5 speaks of rulers and governments: "They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course." As with the legalizing of abortion, a government not submitted to God rules its land in darkness. It is incapable of understanding truth, and thus, its sin-directed laws destroy the foundation of its nation.

This is what has happened in the United States. Mother is pitted against child. Wrong is declared right. The worth of human life is measured by time and convenience. Sin destroys millions of unborn lives in this age and even more lives (those of abortion's supporters) eternally.

We can attempt to address the abortion issue by arguing its

legality, but even if *Roe v. Wade* were overturned, the problem would not be solved. The problem is sin and darkness. The only solution to sin and darkness is the Light of the world, Jesus Christ (John 8:12).

Politics of light

In response to the *Roe v. Wade* ruling, Christians have spent the last forty-three years marching, picketing, protesting, and voting against abortion. Pro-lifers have utilized the Internet

to prevent continued abortions? His light. As Christ's followers and ambassadors, we are His light. We cannot allow our contempt for abortion to become contempt for the ones receiving, performing, and promoting abortion. Christ was crucified and rose again for them too.

Each of us was lost in the darkness of sin at one time, but Christ shone His light on us and eradicated darkness. He desires to do the same for all who support abortion, and particularly for the women who have had abortions

“For our voices to be heard in the abortion conversation, we must reach the hearts of people by revealing to them the heart of God.”

and social media to speak truth about the sanctity of life and engage in thoughtful debate with those who identify as pro-choice. While all these efforts are noble, there is another perspective to be considered. Instead of attempting to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, we can turn our focus to shining Christ's light on the darkness causing such mayhem.

Jesus declared, "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46).

Women with unwanted pregnancies desperately need His light. The secular world desperately needs His light. What is desperately needed in order to

or are considering aborting their unborn child. He pours His love for these people into us through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5) so that they can learn of Him through us. Genuinely loving them with Christ's love is the first step we take in shining into their darkness.

Several years ago, I was trained as a crisis pregnancy counselor at the local Pregnancy Resource Center. During training, the PRC taught us to advocate for the mother before advocating for her unborn baby. The point was not to neglect her baby but to first address the mother's needs in hopes that she would willingly protect her baby.

It was made clear to our training group that women facing crisis pregnancies need to know that they are not alone. They believe the lie that it's either them or their baby; it cannot be both. If a woman doesn't feel supported by Christians, she will turn to a place where she will feel support. Organizations like Planned Parenthood are designed to make women feel valued, validated, and cared for. We can question the sincerity of these organizations, but mothers with crisis pregnancies rarely do.

Politics of love

It is imperative to the lives of the unborn and to the eternal

lives of their mothers that we shine the light of Christ's love into their darkness by seeking them out in their distress, caring for them in their need, and demonstrating and speaking the gospel of Jesus Christ to their hearts. We do this in faith that He is able and willing to give each woman her own faith in Him. We do this by His grace that enables us to reach her, love her, and guide her out of darkness and into His transforming light.

We can take practical steps individually and as churches to combat abortion by first ministering to mothers:

- Pray for women who have chosen abortion in the past or

are contemplating it in the present.

- Converse with abortion supporters in a way that showcases the gospel.

- Donate time, money, and resources to local pregnancy resource centers.

- Donate time, money, and resources to reputable Christian adoption agencies.

- Begin a church outreach fund/ministry to draw in and assist women in crisis pregnancies.

These are just a few of the many ways to reach women affected by unwanted pregnancies. As with all things, we must begin by aligning our own hearts and minds with Christ and pray to be used to shine His light into darkness. When we hear and read the word *abortion*, may our disgust be accompanied by love as we seek to shine brightly for our King. ^{BA}

Ambient Joyful Noise

**I wait on words,
wait for a whisper,
wait for a sly elbow nudge
to point out a profound peace
within the quotations of a boisterous conversation.
But all I hear are library coughs and sputters, paper
shuffling,
the rattle of ball bearings, and forced-air
heat blowing dust off my flat, sensible shoes.
And just as the refrigerator kicks in, there's the nudge.
These annoying distractions are Maslow's hierarchy
of needs:
shelter, food, clothing.
As I wait on words,
I am grateful for His provisions:
clothes flapping on the line,
caesar salad on the table,
shingled roof overhead, and
knowledge that the right words will come
stringing along in good time.**

Carol L. MacKay

Caitlin (Stacy)

Meadows is assistant editor of *EQUIP* magazine.org and lives with her husband, Adam, in Hudsonville, MI.

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.



1. www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/abortion/in-clinic-abortion-procedures. Web accessed 3-3-16.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. www.lawnix.com/cases/roe-wade.html. Web accessed 3-3-16.
5. Steven Ertelt, "57,762,169 Abortions in America Since Roe vs. Wade in 1973" (January 21, 2015), www.lifenews.com/2015/01/21/57762169-abortion-in-america-since-roe-vs-wade-in-1973. Web accessed 3-3-16.



THE TWINNS OF TITUS

The Essential Characteristics of our "Common Faith" - Two by Two

To Titus, a true son in our common faith:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior (1:4).

Two of a Kind: the Source and Center of the Faith

God our Savior mentioned three times: 1:3; 2:10; 3:4.

Jesus Christ our Savior, also three times: 1:4; 2:13; 3:6.

Two Bookends to Titus: It's all about the Faith

Salutation

"Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect . . ." (1:1).

Benediction

"All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen" (3:15).

Two Sides of the Faith: Sound Doctrine and Good Works

. . . the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness (1:1).

Truth, right belief, is essential to the faith. Soundness, or whole and healthy teaching, is found in Titus five times, more than any other epistle of Paul. Be *sound* in doctrine, in the faith, and in speech (1:9, 13; 2:1, 2, 8).

Godliness, right behavior, is essential to the faith. Good works, or that holy living that accords to the truth, is also mentioned five times in little Titus, more times than in any other New Testament book (1:16; 2:7, 14; 3:3, 14).

Two by Two: a Well-Ordered Faith for the Whole Church

Leaders and Laity, Men and Women, Old and Young (2:1-10)

Two Foundational Faith Texts: Grace that Brings Salvation

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works (2:11-14).

But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (3:4-7).

Two Divine Acts of the Faith: Twin Graces of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Grace of God *appears and teaches* (2:11, 12)

Grace of Jesus Christ *redeems and purifies* (v. 14)

Grace of Holy Spirit *regenerates and renews* (3:5)

Two "Appearings" of Christ: Living the Faith in Between

First, past appearing of Christ (2:11)

Second, future appearing of Christ (2:13)

— BA



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Contemplating the faith
prior to my own.
by Jason Overman

For many years, when I thought about faith, I thought of it primarily in terms of my *own faith*, my appropriate response to God's free gift of grace — a faith like Abraham's, a faith prophesied by Habakkuk, a faith without which it is impossible to please our God (Romans 4:16; Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4; Hebrews 11:6).

This first thought is justified. Numerous New Testament verses point us in this Reformation "justification by faith" direction. Ephesians 2:8, 9 is a classic example: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

Is there any other orientation, other than faith, by which I can stand in relationship to the God of my salvation? *No!* As the apostle Paul insists in Romans 1:16, 17, the gospel "is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes." And by this gospel of Christ, "the righteousness

of God is revealed from faith to faith." Paul calls on Habakkuk 2:4 to clinch his point as the passage ends: "The just shall live by faith." Amen!

But I'm older now, and age gives rise to second thoughts — or at least other thoughts. It's not at all that I have found something else, something other than faith — much less, that I have found something *more*, in addition to faith. Rather, as I have matured in my faith and understand my own need and limitations, as I've studied and learned, I see that my faith itself requires a faith greater than, and prior to, my own.

God's faithfulness

From faith to faith. It's an interesting phrase. What does it mean? The NIV interprets it more than translates it: "Faith from first to last." That is a possible rendering, and certainly true in any case. But what is the nature of this faith, or who is its subject? Surely Paul is not saying that the gospel of Christ, the power of God unto salvation, the righteousness of God revealed all comes down to *my* faith from first to last, as if my faith is the beginning and end of faith itself!

I think N. T. Wright, following James Dunn's detailed and persuasive argument,¹ is right when he writes in his Romans commentary:

... its most natural meaning is "from God's faithfulness to human faithfulness." When God's action in fulfillment of the covenant is unveiled, it is because God is faithful to what has been promised; when it is received, it is received by that human faith that answers to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, that human faith that is also *faithfulness* to the call of God in Jesus the Messiah.²

In other words, God's own faithfulness is in view with the first of Paul's *faiths*. This is a progression "from [God's] faith to [our] faith." Notably, Paul's next reference to *faith* in Romans is of "the faith of God" (Romans 3:3, KJV). Paul asks rhetorically, "Does the unbelief, or faithlessness, of the Jews nullify God's faithfulness?" Paul adamantly replies: *God forbid!* Human beings, as Paul has already concluded in chapter 1 — and even God's own people, Israel (in chapter 2) — are

fundamentally faithless because of sin.

What then is to become of us? The good news of the gospel is that God's faith can be counted on. He acts. And it is exactly His faithfulness that is at work to save in the "faith of Jesus Christ" (vv. 21-26).

This viewpoint highlights a little-appreciated fact about the Greek word *pistis*. Both *faith* (*trust*) and *faithfulness* (*trustworthiness*) are within its semantic range. It is like two sides of a coin: The thing trusted in must itself first be trustworthy. Of course, God's faith does not indicate His trust in us but rather

steadfast love and faithfulness . . ." (Exodus 34:6, ESV) — and sung by David: "but I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness" (Psalm 89:33, ESV).

From Old to New

The faithful God of covenant and community is found throughout the Bible, from His own people at Sinai (Deuteronomy 7:9) to His people in Zion (1 Corinthians 1:9). Significantly, His faithfulness is often found in Old Testament texts that celebrate the righteousness of God that brings His salvation, the very same themes used in Romans 1:16, 17:

“*The “faith of God” is prior to all. It is the fundamental faithfulness that undergirds the covenant and creation itself.*”

His trustworthiness. And our faith indicates empty-handed trust in Him, as well as that faithfulness that follows from being in relationship with Him.

The "faith of God" is prior to all. It is the fundamental faithfulness that undergirds the covenant and creation itself. Often paired with God's "steadfast love," it is celebrated throughout the Old Testament as essential to the character of God, as told to Moses — "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in

I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth from the great assembly (Psalm 40:10).

This is personal for David. God's righteousness is His faithfulness to save: "Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications! In Your faithfulness answer me, and in Your righteousness" (Psalm 143:1). Paul quotes the next verse in Romans 3:20: "For in Your sight no one living is

righteous" (v. 2). What have we without His faith?

But the revelation of God's righteousness is not just personal but cosmic. The prophet Isaiah virtually equates God's righteousness with His salvation, which will act for the whole world: "Thus says the LORD: 'Keep justice, and do righteousness, for My salvation is about to come, and My righteousness to be revealed'" (Isaiah 56:1; cf. Psalm 98:2, 3).

Of course, Paul sees all of this Scripture pointing toward Christ (Romans 1:1, 2). This saving righteousness of God is His faithfulness that is revealed in Jesus Christ. After Romans 3:3, Paul's next reference to faith is found in verse 22 of the same chapter and is a reference to the "faith of Jesus Christ" (KJV). Here Paul says again, much as David does, that God's righteousness is revealed, a righteousness that brings salvation "through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe" (vv. 21-26, NET).

In Romans 3 alone we see this beautiful progression from God's faith (v. 3) to Jesus' faith, which finally leads to our own faith and belief in their faithful work (v. 22). The mediating faith of Jesus stands between the faith of God and the responding faith of man, reinforcing the centrality of Jesus Christ in God's saving and reconciling work of love.

Covenant relationship

Jesus is not only the "author and finisher" of *our* faith but also the author and finisher of faith itself (Hebrews 12:2). The faithfulness of Jesus Christ reveals, on one hand, God's faithfulness toward man. On the other hand,

He as representative man reveals the faithful response of humanity toward God. And here is where my faith is born: in Him!

Paul said it: It is from faith to faith, it is by faith from first to last, because *faith* is a word that binds God and man together through Christ in covenant relationship. In light of this, our own efforts and works are truly of no avail at all, for if we are not "of faith," we are apart from God and Christ. But when we are "of faith," then we are united in them and participate with them in the faith that defines them, and us.

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20, KJV).

Today I rejoice knowing that *faith* is a much bigger word than I first thought. Much more than just me! Because before there was my faith, there was His faith, the faith of God that was embodied in my Lord, Jesus Christ. It is their faith, the faithfulness of the Father and Son, that I think about most these days. For their faith is what makes my faith possible. **BA**

1. James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary: Romans 1-8*, 38A (Dallas: Word, 1988), 38-49.
2. N. T. Wright, *Romans, NIB Vol. X* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2002), 425.

Lifeless Leftovers

continued from page 7

be gained by anything material that the Son of God might have left behind or had contact with. The power is in Him, not in the stuff.

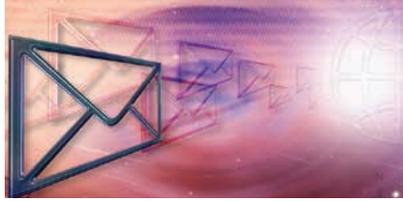
Why do we exhibit such a tendency to attach more value to things associated with Jesus than we do to Him? Exhibitions of devotion and allegiance to the buildings we call churches seem more prevalent than personal submission to the One who founded the church. We seem to be more comfortable in venerating the rituals we have declared holy than in striving for personal holiness itself. And we're more ready to attach great value to the Book in which His Words are written than to embrace and apply the meaning of those words to our lives.

The woman who received healing because she touched the hem of Jesus' garment didn't get it from the material she touched with her hand. Jesus didn't remark to His disciples that He felt some power leak out of His robe. Transforming power comes through touching *Him*, not through superstitious attachment to the things around Him. Personal faith is the only effective means of doing that.

Ignoring the One on the cross while gambling over lifeless leftovers didn't end at Calvary. As it was then, it's still a game that allows no winners. **BA**

Ronald L. Gallagher
writes from Mechanicsville, VA.





Mail Bag

The Bird and the Call

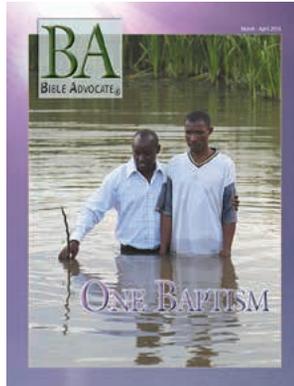
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been spiritually asleep that morning the bird visited me. I needed to put my focus on the Lord and move forward.

I soon found the motivation to make more of an effort in my spiritual life. I made morning Bible study part of my regular routine and took a more active part in my church's worship team. I even decided to tag along with some others to our local ministry training classes (then called Ministries Training System, later LifeSpring). Before long, I was given opportunities to preach, both in my local church and then as a guest in other area congregations. As I put forth the effort, I saw growth in my spiritual life. Additionally, I felt stamina from the Holy Spirit.

What might God use in your calling? The first step is to wake up. Then take action. Blessings and opportunities can be missed if you do not answer this call. We all need a nudge from time to time when we find ourselves stuck in place. It can come in unusual ways — even through a visit from a wayward bird. **BA**

Barry Mauldin pastors the Claremore, OK CoG7. He also works for Oklahoma State University as a web application developer.



Baptism blessings

This current issue of the *Bible Advocate* [March-April] with its emphasis on baptism is probably the best one in the years I've received it. The timing could not have been better, as it added encouragement to my upcoming baptism. "Come to the Birth" [Dorothy Nimchuk, p. 22] was of particular interest because in it I could see myself: from the first baptism, through years of low times, and back into the hand of God with His grace and mercy. I like the part about how Satan has had failures, yet he never gives up trying to abort our Christian experience. But thank God that He is still in the business of delivering souls from the clutches of sin.

D. G.
Eureka, SD

Finished reading the BA, and this issue meant a lot to me. Dorothy [Nimchuk's] article reminded me of myself. I was stuck in the birth canal for years, too, and am rejoicing in what God has done for me. Her article helped me to understand my life before I came back to the Lord.

S. L.
Denver, CO

Congratulations on the latest BA, which is a tremendous issue. I was happy to see that you were able to use "The Gospel According to Prayer" [p. 20], and send my thanks for the excellent editorial and layout work done on it. I particularly enjoyed [Jason Overman's] article on baptism ["Baptism Through the Bible," p. 24] (I had never thought about the John-Isaiah connection in this regard), and I liked Sherri Langton's article, too ["Preparing for the Plunge," p. 7].

R. H.
E-mail

Spiritual food

Thanks BA for the spiritually filled magazine. I learned a lot from it. I was deeply touched of Laurie Crowson's "Adorned in Love" in the November-December 2015 issue [p. 14].

E. S.
Bayugan, The Philippines

Very thankfully receiving your wonderful *Bible Advocate* magazine and am being fed by its rich food! Kindly do continue to send it very regularly. Thankfully greet the dear one who has paid my subscription.

M. P. S.
Raju, India

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CoG7 In Action



Roy Leonard Keim 1932-2016

Brother Keim (83) of Huntsville, Texas, passed away at his home on January 31.

Born October 13, 1932, to Simeon and Katherine Keim, Roy was one of eleven children. After graduating high school, he joined the Army and later served in the National Guard. During this time, he married his sweetheart, Shirley Cummings. He attended universities in four different states and Midwest Bible College in Stanberry, Missouri, where he received his credentials as pastor for the General Conference.

Roy served as a teacher and pastor in many states and in Canada. He also served the students of Spring Vale Academy in various capacities over many years.

Roy is survived by his wife, six children, fourteen grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Calendar

May 27-29 – Spring Vale Academy Graduation Weekend, Owosso, MI

May 27-30 - #yMinistry16 Young Adult Retreat, Hawkins, TX; information and online registration at <http://yministry16.eventbrite.com>; contact Jacquie Melgoza (210-900-9889)

June 3-6 - Men's Retreat, Still Waters Prairie Retreat Center, Alfred, ND; guest speaker: Loren Stacy; contact: Stephen J. Kyner (tohiswork1@msn.com)

September 12-17 - North American Ministerial Council meeting in Ridgecrest, NC

Visit our new page, "Memorials," at cog7.org.

Springfield, Illinois, has been chosen as the site of the 2017 Biennial Convention.

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Colombia: When the Spirit Works

by Jamin Teran

We've all read Acts 2, where the Holy Spirit moves Peter to share the gospel with a large crowd. No matter their origin or language, they all heard the message. The result? "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (v. 41, NIV throughout). Something similar happened in Bogotá, Colombia, February 7-13.

When SHINE members travel to different countries, we rely on the Holy Spirit to help us connect to the community. At the beginning, everyone has a hard time adapting to the needs and environment of the site. But as the Spirit works, we start speaking the language of God.

During a mission, team members serve in their fields of expertise: doctors, nurses, dentists, pastors, etc. Each speaks a language that must be heard by someone in need. During the week, many people come, hoping to find a solution to their physical and emotional problems. All team members are ready to speak God's language to impact lives.

The result of this year's SHINE mission? We met the needs of 3,429 people! Every day the patient count increased so much, the clinic had to extend its hours. Evangelism services were packed. The gospel was preached, and



people wanted to hear more.

God's formula succeeded: 200 Bibles, 41 SHINE team members, seven special cases chosen for treatment, five days, three marriages, and one Holy Spirit who sealed God's work. Despite Zika virus warnings, a history of drug dealers in the region, and Colombia's violence, ministry was not deterred.

Acts 2:43 says, "Everyone was

filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles." We too saw the work of the Holy Spirit. At the end of the week as we sang "Shine, Jesus, Shine" together, we were in awe and filled with wonder at what had just happened in Colombia.

Keep SHINE in your prayers as the new mission unfolds for the glory of God.

Carl Palmer

1939-2016

Elder Carl Palmer (77), who served a lifetime in the Pacific Northwest, died March 24. He was a beloved son — one of thirteen children — to Luvelt and Bernice Palmer, a devoted husband to RowEla for 53 years, a faithful father to David, Carla, and Karen, and granddad to their nine children.

As a gentle and godly shepherd, Carl believed a pastor should join in people's lives, not just address them from a pulpit. He was always there for them. As a wise student-teacher of Scripture, he championed justification by faith — salvation through the grace of God alone, received by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

As a Church administrator, Carl built harmony and fellowship among members, leaders, and churches with his genial manner — especially when opinions varied. God has greatly blest the home and Church families of Carl Palmer through his humility, integrity, and legacy.





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Outreach in South America

Colombia

November 27 - December 2, 2015, Jose Forero and the Church in Bogotá, Colombia, were blessed by a visit from IMC Zone 3 Representative Jorge Gillig from Argentina and Marcos De Melo from Uruguay. Activities included teaching on Sabbath, national board meeting on Sunday morning, couples meeting on Sunday afternoon, and a trip to Sol de Justicia on Monday. The Church greatly appreciated the brothers' visit, motivating members to remain strong in the Lord.



Sol de Justicia (Sun of Justice)

Located in a busy region of Bogotá, this daycare ministry of the Church completed its first year of service to poor, displaced, and highly vulnerable families. Thirty-two children between the ages of three and eight regularly receive care and enjoy learning about the Bible. Forty-five families have also been visited, many of whom have received the gospel. The Church has successfully involved its members in evangelism and service, with twelve volunteers preparing food and cleaning and ten teachers volunteering from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. They also have the assistance of two volunteer dentists. More information: sol-dejusticia.org.co; "Corporación Sol de Justicia" (Facebook).

Venezuela

Continuing from Bogota, Jorge Gillig and Marcos De Melo met with Jose Caballero and the Church in Vigia, Venezuela, December 2-6. Activities included visitation and prayer with local families and attending family and youth workshops. On Sabbath, time was spent in worship that included a second local congregation. Messages were provided on "The Good News of the Kingdom" and "A God Who Lifts the Broken." The Church in Vigia greatly appreciates the IMC for the stimulation and refreshment brought through Jorge Gillig and Marcos De Melo and the support provided for their local outreach efforts through the Cristo Viene ministry.



— Bryan Cleeton



One Faith and *This Life*

Whether in New Testament Greek or present-day English, the word *faith* has different possible meanings. What did the apostle Paul mean by *faith* in his beautiful statement of Christian unity? He wrote, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:4-6, NASB throughout).

In my search for Paul’s meaning, I consulted three respected Bible commentators regarding *one faith*. The first insisted that Paul was speaking of the entirety of Christian beliefs and practices. Paul intended, according to this source, to use *faith* in the same way that Jude used the word when he wrote, “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (v. 3). From this perspective, the *one faith* that unifies all Christians is our belief system — the things we believe and practice that set us apart as followers of Christ.

The second commentator just as adamantly stated that by *one faith* Paul meant the acceptance of Jesus that brings salvation. Paul intended, I think this source would agree, to use *faith* in the same way he used it earlier in Ephesians when he wrote, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (2:8, 9). From this perspective, the *one faith* that unifies all Christians is not what we believe; it is our common experience, each having placed his or her trust and hope for salvation entirely in Christ as Savior and Lord.

The third commentator acknowledged these two possible interpretations, that either one might have been intended by Paul when he wrote *one faith*, and that he (the commentator) couldn’t be sure whether Paul meant one, the other, or both.

I relate to the third commentator. I can make a good argument for either position of the first two commentators precisely because both aspects of our *one faith* — our faith *about* Christ (and the things flowing from that) and our faith *in* Christ (and the things flowing from that) — are biblical and important. They set us apart from those who choose to follow other belief systems concerning God or choose to deny God altogether.

Last week as my wife, Karen, and I read the Bible together in our morning devotions, we came across another expression of our *one faith* that I like much. In Acts 5, the apostles are thrown in jail for teaching and preaching the gospel about Jesus: “But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, ‘Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life’” (vv. 19, 20).

“This Life”! Who we believe in and what we believe are important aspects of our *one faith*. So is the life lived by each true follower of Christ. *This Life* moves *one faith* into the realm of transformation. When this faith is real, it is life changing: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

— Loren Stacy



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