



Sola Fide

Reformation



2017: Reforming-Transforming



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Impossible!

Looking back over the last two issues of the *Bible Advocate*, I'm captivated by the twin gifts of Christ and Scripture. The sheer wonder of them sets up the question at the heart of this BA: How do we respond to such grace as this? There is no response but faith to the impossible beauty of Jesus, our identity in Him, and God's impossible promises revealed in the Bible. To these, *faith alone* can follow!

The Word, in person and on page, declares the righteous, eternal God, and faith is our access – our “yes” to Him, like Abraham's – at the salvation set before us, when our limitation is so evident. The word of the Lord came twice to Abraham, with the impossible beauty and promise of life in the face of death. What else did old Abraham possess but faith? “And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:1-6).

The reformer Isaiah sends believers in pursuit of righteousness back to Abraham and Sarah, and from there forward to their seed Jesus Christ, the resurrection and life: The impossible is possible with God, but without faith, it's impossible to please Him (Isaiah 51:1, 2; Luke 18:27; Hebrews 11:6). Faith is the honest appraiser and bold leveler. It clears leaden vision, cleans the debris of self-sufficiency, making room for God-sized expectations.

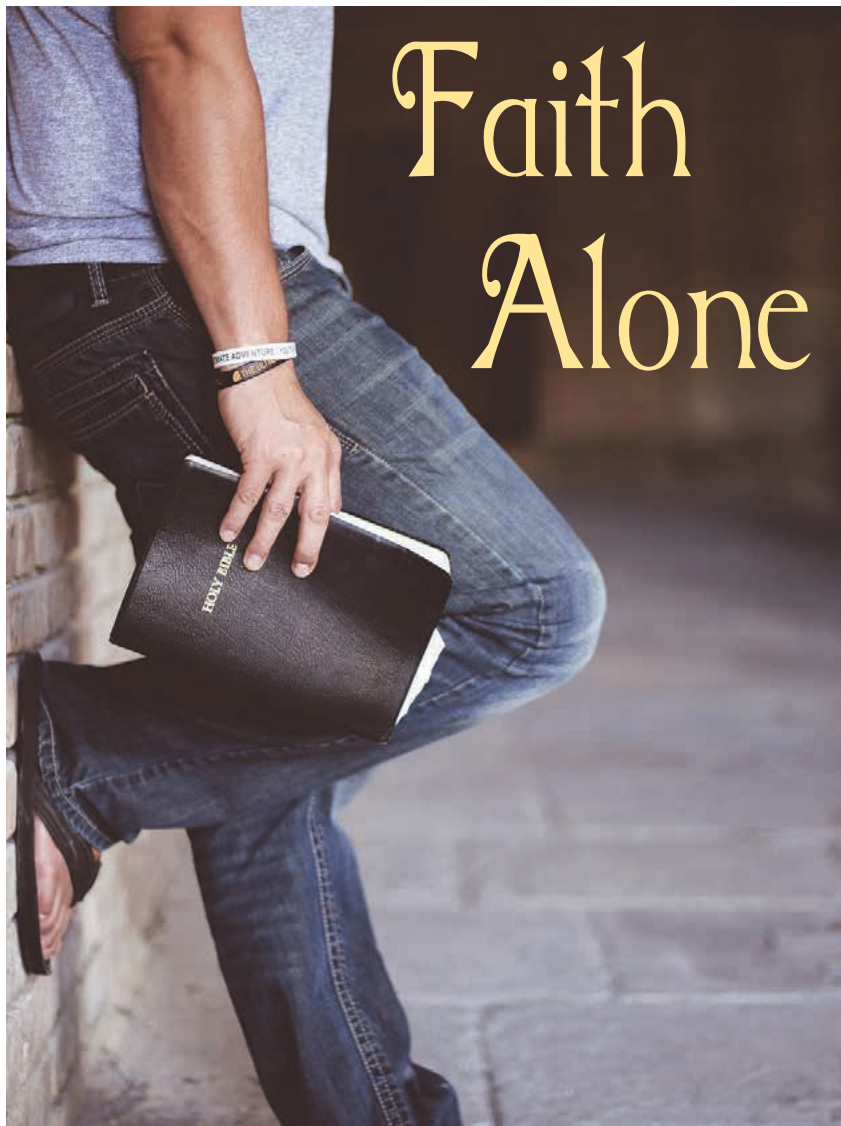
The word *faith* does not appear in our ten-point vision (see page 23), but it undergirds each element. Reforming faith is the Spirit-formed disposition that makes transformation accessible. It is not merely our initial response; faith takes us all the way. This is why Paul is so quick to exchange his own righteousness for the transforming resurrection power that is the righteousness from God by faith in Christ (Philippians 1:6; 3:9, 10).

Faith evokes so many vital truths, and you will read about many of them in these pages. As you begin, let me encourage you to smile at the impossible with Abraham and Sarah while hearing the sobering words of Jesus: “When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). We face so many challenges today. Let it be said of us, “Your faith grows exceedingly . . . the work of faith with power . . .” (2 Thessalonians 1:3, 11).

For His insurmountable gifts, *sola fide!* Read and enjoy!

— Jason Overman





Examining a foundational doctrine of Christianity.

by John Lemley

In English class we learned that a phrase like *faith alone* is a conceptual unit but not a complete sentence. It lacks a verb and fails to answer the standard questions who, what, where, when, why, and how. But in the 1500s *faith alone* stood for the complete sentence “Justification is by God’s grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone.”

When *faith alone* is removed from its historical context, it becomes the source for heated debates. Some fear that it does away with law, obedience, and Christian responsibility. Others

insist that *faith alone* is all-sufficient and that requirements are, indeed, done away with. Charges of legalism and cheap grace abound. In between these extremes are a multitude of varying opinions. But many concerns are removed when the Reformers’ meaning defines the term.

When people read *faith alone* with definitions the Reformers did not intend, misunderstandings also arise. Some think of when one *becomes* a Christian, and others think of how to *be* a Christian. Oftentimes both sides agree that justification is not by works. The miraculous, instantaneous change from being lost to being saved is solely by God giving us what we do not deserve. Many individuals, on both ends of the debate, agree that faith alone in Christ alone is the way God adds to and keeps His family. They reject requiring lists of how to *be* added to the experience of how to *become*.

Oftentimes, when the generic word *saved* is used to complete *faith alone*, the reader is unsure as to which aspect of *saved* is meant. The familiar distinctions between becoming saved (justification) and living like a saved person (sanctification), and ultimately being saved (glorification), remain clear even as grace and faith are infused in each. Obviously, unless one dies at the moment of becoming a Christian, the goal is for future actions, attitudes, speech, thoughts, and beliefs to *be* Christian until God finishes His work in us (Philippians 1:6).

Two opinions

Historically, two major opinions of justification were offered

by theologians: 1) to make just and 2) to declare just.

If *justification* means to *make* just, “infusing” righteousness, then it . . .

- includes a person voluntarily receiving God’s transforming work in their life to remove the sin nature;
- includes the infusion of just characteristics;
- is by God’s grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone – an incomplete statement, omitting important ingredients like baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Justification would also mean good works and obedience to God’s law are necessary.

But if *justification* means to *declare* just, “imputing” righteousness, then it . . .

- is separate from the process of one adopting God’s standards as their own;
- is solely Christ’s righteousness imputed by God’s decree.

Also, justification by God’s grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone is a complete statement, with no additional ingredients. Personal merit, good works, and obedience to God’s law are not part of justification.

Of these two options, the Bible clearly and consistently points to justification as God’s declarative and, admittedly, transformative act. God declares that His righteous Son’s substitutionary sacrifice on our behalf justifies those who believe on Jesus:

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no differ-

ence; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:21-26).

God. Grace alone and the righteousness that comes by faith can accomplish that (pp. 12-14).

Faith alone and the Reformers

The view of the sixteenth century Reformers was different from what was then taught by the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformers insisted that a person is declared just by God, through faith alone in Christ alone. Jesus Christ – plus nothing and plus

“When ‘faith alone’ is removed from its historical context, it becomes the source for heated debates.”

Further, our booklet, *Law of God: a Blessing for the People of God*, declares similarly:

. . . Christians are not under the law and they are not saved [justified] by observing the law. . . . “A man is justified by faith apart from observing the law” (Romans 3:28). . . . Our relationship with God is not denominated by or predicated on the law – any law. It is not based on the Ten Commandments! . . . We are the redeemed people of God through accepting Jesus as our Savior. . . . no law can serve as a means to bring us into a saving relationship with

no one – is God’s way of justifying the world. Justification is thus our acquitted, righteous status in and through Christ (Romans 4:9-13; Philippians 3:9). We have no ways to barter with, impress, or manipulate God. Moral living, emotionalism, and religious intellectualism all fail to reach up to God. God reaching down to us through His Son is the only way fallen humanity can be reconciled to Him.

What did the Roman Church actually teach about justification five hundred years ago? Some say the difference between Protestant and Catholic views on the

teaching remains wide. Others suggest the entire Reformation movement was the result of a misunderstanding. A number of ecumenical meetings in recent years among Catholics, Lutherans, and leaders of other Protestant denominations have concluded that these believers really aren't as far apart as previously thought. If this were the case, wouldn't the Council of Trent (1545-1563) have reached that conclusion? Instead, the council members wrote a response condemning the Reformers. It is hard to know exactly what was taught in the 1500s by the opposing sides in the debate. But it seems that the Roman view agreed more with justification being "to

puted to him [Abraham] for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 4:22—5:1).

We clearly teach that God's justifying work is "for us also." Justification is *for you* in contrast to being *because of you*. The Church of God's book *This We Believe* explains the difference:

Thus there is no merit, work, or ceremony prescribed

which is only available through grace, cannot be earned. To be sure, good works are a beautiful and necessary expression of loving obedience to God and are the joy, duty, and destiny of those who have been saved (Exodus 20:6; Deuteronomy 11:1; John 14:15; 1 John 5:3; Ephesians 2:10). However, they are a response to and a result of, not a means to or a cause of, the free salvation found in Jesus Christ.

Our faithfulness to the teaching that justification is by God's grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone has distinguished us from some of the Sabbath-observing denominations throughout history. The preciousness of this *faith alone* doctrine blesses us with the confidence of salvation (Philippians 1:6; Jude 24). We are spared the mental anguish of wondering if our lives measure up enough to be rewarded a home in God's kingdom. Jesus' life measured up: "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Christ alone is worthy! We can happily anticipate being part of the great multitude from every nation, kindred, people, and tongue singing, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb."

This is our hope, not because of us, but "for us also." **BA**

“ God reaching down to us through His Son is the only way fallen humanity can be reconciled to Him. ”

be *made just*" and the Reformers with justification being "to *declare just*."

Faith alone and CoG7

The Church of God (Seventh Day) did not learn the *faith alone* concept from the Reformers. Both groups learned it from the teachings of Jesus, His disciples, and the apostle Paul.

And therefore it was im-

in Scripture that is required for salvation. Indeed, when people attempt to be justified in God's sight or "earn" their salvation through human work, merit, or ceremony, attempted apart from God's free gift of salvation by grace through faith, their deeds are offensive and worthless to God (see Isaiah 1:10-20; Galatians 3:1-5). Grace is not grace if it is awarded for work (Romans 11:6); thus salvation,

John Lemley and his wife, Lois, live in Vancouver, WA, and attend CoG7 in Kalama, WA.



Cancer teaches a woman
tough lessons about faith.

by Marlys Johnson

My cell phone rang at a stoplight. “It’s cancer.” My body sagged into itself. Though my husband had gotten work, we were still digging out from the financial reversals of a layoff. How would we afford cancer? How was I going to manage this, plus care for my mother, sinking into dementia?

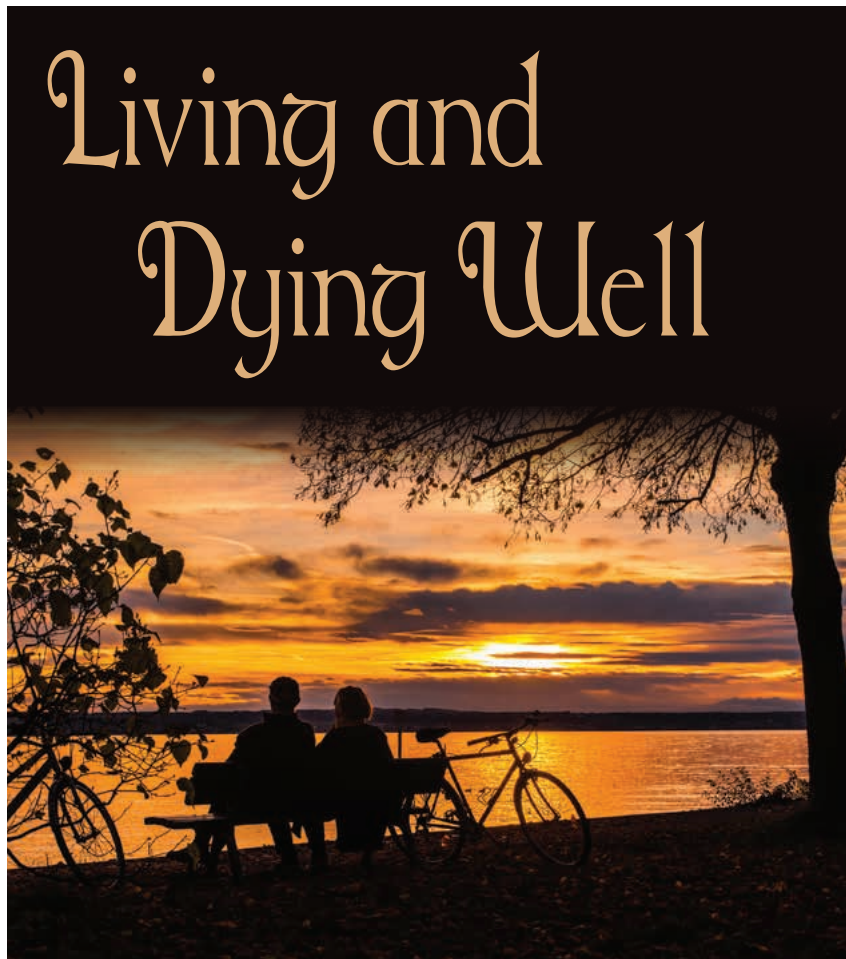
Just like that, things went from bad to worse.

Learning to lean

The experts said, “Maybe two years” — feeling generous, I suppose, because although it was late-stage cancer, my husband, Gary, was relatively young and in good shape. And prostate cancer is slow growing. “This did not catch God by surprise,” I said bravely. But then followed too many days heavy with self-pity and despair.

During those early weeks, a simple verse I had memorized as a child crowded into my mind: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). While hiking a trail with Gary one day, I pondered this word *lean*.

Leaning means shifting my full weight onto another object. *It involves trust*, I reflected as we hiked past massive ponderosa pines. *Now there’s a solid lean*, I thought, mentally nodding at a ponderosa. But that manzanita bush over there . . . not so solid.



Which did I really want to put all my weight on: God’s towering knowledge or my scrawny understanding? I repented of my lack of trust. Hope lit up my heart as I committed to trust God with my husband’s health and our future.

Learning to be vulnerable

Gary struggled with a sense of failure because his layoff triggered selling our home and cashing out our 401(k). The prescribed hormone therapy made matters worse, giving Gary physical and emotional side effects. He withdrew, carrying this heavy load alone.

For a time, my brother in Florida took over Mom’s care so Gary and I could freely discuss

cancer fallout in our home. Gary admitted his distress at leaving me in uncertain financial circumstances. I confessed my frequent 3 a.m. anxiety at the thought of widowhood.

“You might not want to care for me if I become a burden,” he said. “I need your heart to belong to me until the end.”

I cried. This was the man who placed the kids and me first all these years and was so easy to be married to. We made a new commitment to openness, established a standing Friday date night, and held each other a little longer and a little tighter. My heart wasn’t going anywhere.

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Sisters of Faith



I Am Clean

It all started at a daycare. The position I got wasn't the one I expected, but I loved it – playing with, feeding, consoling children. At this time in my life, I had good friends, a great job, a wonderful husband. Life was good. So it was a big surprise when suddenly my healthy body started feeling ill.

I noticed I was getting sick much more frequently than my co-workers and the kids. I'd always been able to resist viruses before. I couldn't figure it out. I would find myself nauseated at random hours of the day. My friends assured me it was stress or asked if I was pregnant, but I knew these weren't the reasons. I finally went to the doctor.

That visit started a chain of

events that led me through the most difficult year of my life. I was medicated and tested, saw multiple specialists, but I only got worse. I lost 20 pounds and the ability to eat most everything. With my energy depleted, I started getting desperate.

One night at my lowest point I started praying for healing. I knew God could heal, but would He? I'd been sick for ten months now. Still praying, I opened my Bible:

Behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." Then He put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately the leprosy left him (Luke 5:12, 13).

I can't describe the joy and relief I felt reading these words. I believed God had spoken directly to me. "Would You heal me?"

I prayed. He responded in my spirit, *I am willing; be cleansed.*

Not long after that, God led me to two knowledgeable women who helped me find health solutions and set me on the road to recovery. Over two years later, I still have a ways to go, but I happily sit here writing after eating a nourishing dinner, with no pain or nausea. I'm stronger now than I've been in a long time and stronger still in my love of and trust in the Lord. He was willing and now, I am clean.

– Stefanie Kraus
Brenham, TX



Time With God

How much time do we spend with God praying, meditating, and reading His Word? He

created us; doesn't He deserve our every breath? God does, but that's not possible for humans. Still, this is not an excuse to hold back. Let's give Him everything we can.

Spending time with God in prayer, meditation, and Bible reading requires discipline and commitment. It's not easy, but it's worth it: "Commit everything you do to the LORD. Trust him, and he will help you" (Psalm 37:5, NLT throughout).

Prayer isn't just asking God for what you want; it is talking to God. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us how to pray: "Our Father in heaven . . ." (Matthew 6:9-13). Prayer is a time to get to know God and learn His plans. Luke 5:16 says that "Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer." Withdraw from the daily grind and pray. Give Him your undivided attention.

Meditation can be focusing on God in silence. Consider the enormity of all He is. Meditation is pleasing to God, as the psalmist says: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer" (Psalm 19:14). Often we think about what needs to be done today. Meditation is stopping to give God our worries and reminding ourselves that He's in control.

Reading the Bible is another way to spend time with God. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your Word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path." There are answers to our questions in the Bible, if we will study it. Sometimes God doesn't answer our questions in prayer because He's already given us the answer in His Word. If we're not reading it,

how can we know the answer is there?

If you want to know God more, spend more time with Him. Read the Word, meditate, and pray, as Jesus showed us. We were created to worship and glorify our King, so let's get to know Him better.

— Kara Caswell
*Spring Vale Christian School
Journalism Student*



Filthy Curtains

We just moved into a new house — one we can truly call our own! As I settled into my bedroom amid stacks of clothing and boxes, I stopped to admire the cute half-shuttered windows in my room. It was a feature unique to my room, from another era. Charming! Not the boring white window frames of yet another rental house.

As the days went by, I looked at those windows again — up close this time. To my dismay, I realized the curtains were filthy. They probably hadn't been washed in ten years, so I took them down and hand washed them. Twice. The grime that came out was truly shocking.

A thought struck me: *This is how we are.* "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6, NIV throughout). To the casual observer, we look good — charming, desirable! However, on closer examination, our souls need Christ's cleansing. Perhaps the dust of complacency or pride

has left our curtains filthy with "respectable" sins.

Yet the Master makes us aware of this, puts us in His holy washtub, and cleans us up. How gently He does it, too! Not a rip in our "curtain," not a piece of it tossed out: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out" (42:3). Purifying may be unsettling, but it is part of God's kind, cleansing work in us to make us whole.

This is sanctification — our cleansing in the blood of Jesus by faith:

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:4, 5).

Hallelujah! Open every corner of your heart, and let Him clean those unnoticed places today. He will be gentle.

— Melody Manwell
Battle Creek, MI



Miracles

We record miracles God has done for us in a "miracles book." We have found that when God's people tell their miracle stories, everyone's faith is strengthened. Here is a small sampling of those miracles.

God — our healer (Psalm 103:3). Our daughter, Sarah, had open-heart surgery when she was four years old. During recovery she was more susceptible

to infections. A couple of weeks after surgery, she was exposed to meningitis. One day while we were driving, Sarah started crying with a headache. Her fever was at least 104, and she could not bend her head forward. As a nurse, I knew all of these signs could indicate meningitis. We stopped the car and prayed. While praying, I could feel Sarah's skin cool. All symptoms were gone!

God – our protector (Psalm 91:2). One day when our youngest daughter, Heidi, was 2, she was sitting at a table with a lit kerosene lamp. Someone bumped the table, and it tipped over. The lamp and Heidi fell to the floor together. Her aunt “happened” to be close by and picked up Heidi just as the lamp burst into flames. Heidi had kerosene on her clothes and hair and only a small burn on her arm, which quickly healed.

We are blessed with an amazing spiritual heritage spanning multiple generations. We grew up on stories of answers to their prayers. God has not changed. Our “miracles book” includes amazing stories of God's leading, warning, and providing regarding us, our pets, and our possessions. We do this to share with future generations:

We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. . . . That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments (Psalm 78:4, 7).

Miracles happen for us every day. Some are large; some are

small. All build up our faith as we go through the days exclaiming, “Thank You, Lord!”

– Lois Lemley
Vancouver, WA



Behind the Veil

Can you see the shadows people hide in today? They don't appear suddenly but develop over time, walling off our relationships. Shadows become so common, we forget they're even present. They are a modern day veil we shroud ourselves in, unseen.

In Exodus, God put the veil up between Himself and His people. Even Moses could see only a small glimpse of God's glory. The necessity for a veil changed after Christ died for us. Matthew 27:50, 51 describes this shift: “And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split.” The presence of God was revealed as it had never been before. A personal bond with the Father was now possible through Christ.

Why do we hide? Why do we veil our hearts? I think it's because we are afraid to be known. This fear controls our lives, dictating our thoughts, actions, and speech. We're afraid that if we open up, people won't like what they see. We're petrified of what others may think about us.

Are there things you're not proud of, that you keep in the

shadows instead of talking about them? It is normal to feel nervous about sharing, but we can't let this fear stop us from being relational, especially with God. As Hebrews 10:19, 20 says, thanks to the blood of Jesus, we can come out of the shadows and into His presence.

– Danielle Endecott
Spring Vale Christian School
Journalism Student



Faith of a Child

Sometimes as adults we struggle with our faith when life's troubles come our way. But the faith of a little child is so sure and absolute.

Years ago, when one of my sons was about five years old, he discovered grasshoppers eating up our green beans. Running into the house to tell me all about it, he assured me I didn't have anything to worry about. “Mommy, I prayed!” That year the grasshoppers devoured everything in the garden except the green beans. We ate and canned all the green beans we wanted, plus shared them with church members.

Jesus tells us, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14, NIV).

Oh, let us have the faith of a little child! **BA**

– Joy Miller Walter
St. Joseph, MO

Questions & Answers



Romans 6:15 says Christians are not under law but under grace. Galatians 3:23-25 says after faith has come, we are no longer under the law as a tutor. Is the law still relevant to believers in Jesus? If so, in what ways?

According to Christ and the apostles, the law of God remains relevant under the new covenant that came with the shedding of Jesus' blood. The role of the law has been clarified and even adjusted in New Testament writings, but the law's importance did not come to an end at the cross.

To defend this answer, we need only turn and read the Christian Scriptures that uphold and support God's law: Matthew 5:17-19; 19:16-19; 22:36-40; John 14:15; 15:10; Romans 3:31; 7:7, 12; 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Ephesians 6:1-3; 1 Timothy 1:8-11; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; Hebrews 8:10; 10:16, 17; James 2:10-12; 1 John 2:4; 3:22-24; 5:2, 3; and Revelation 12:17; 14:12.

With these forty-plus verses from ten New Testament books by five authors in support of God's law, it must be true that a role remains for the commands and laws of God in the gospel age of the church. (We also gladly affirm that Apostle Paul, especially, wrote much to teach us that, due to human sin and weakness, no salvation can be had through the law. See Romans 3-8, all of Galatians, and Philippians 3:7-9. Paul's gospel tells us that forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life come to us only by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ.)

Seeing, then, that God's eternal law remains relevant in some sense to believers in Jesus, let's list a few ways it serves His plan in this gospel age:

- God's law still serves to show people their

sins (Romans 3:20b; 7:7b). In this sense, it writes our need for a Savior in bold face. Without the law of God, we have no need for His grace.

- God's law points us and leads us to Christ for salvation so we might be justified by faith (Galatians 3:23-25).
- God's law is a valid part of Christian instruction (Ephesians 6:1-3; 1 Corinthians 9:8, 9).
- God's law serves as a necessary corrective and deterrent to the world's evil — if only to a limited extent.

As Christians, we believe in the God who partially revealed Himself in a law so perfect and plain, so broad and deep, so true and righteous that it exposes the depth and breadth of our sin and shows our need of a Savior: the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ — so full of grace and truth that He not only forgives us of all sins and remembers them against us no more, but also teaches us obedience by writing God's moral law in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

While the law has never been God's method for salvation, it continues to be His standard for human lives. His law standard states expectations for conduct, sets targets for behavior — a high bar for words and actions. As we compare our lives with what's written in the law, we can know if we've met God's expectation, hit His target, or cleared His bar. God's Word, His holy law, remains as one piece of the target we aim for. His perfect, holy law still upholds His high standard.

And faith in the perfect atonement of Christ is still His only remedy for all the sins His law points out.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Reflections on faith and freedom in Paul's epistle to the Romans.

by Dr. David Downey

Romans 3:9-20 contains a simple formula to remember: God is salvation; the rest of us are in *need* of salvation. In these verses, Paul lays out a solid foundation for his teaching of salvation by grace through faith. He implies that since we all wander, we all need a shepherd.

I remember hearing years ago of a well-known and respected pastor who was approached by a member of his church after one of his sermons. She said, "Sir, you are the godliest man I know!" He replied, "Ma'am, if you could see what is inside of me, you would run from this church." He was not confessing some secret sin — just where he stood if it were not for grace.

There is a vast difference between what we are legally in God's eyes and what we are relationally. Legally, we are, as Paul says in verse 9, "proved" to be "under sin" (KJV).

Our son has never been much trouble for his parents, but like all of us, he still fails. When he was about twelve, one incident stands out. My wife and I were in the living room, and he was involved with something in his room. Mom yelled for him, but he did not come or respond. She called again, even louder. When our son came in the room, she asked, "Did you hear me calling you?"

"I didn't the first time," he said, "but I did the second."



Then his face fell. "Oops!" My wife had not mentioned she had called him twice.

Guilty!

Our status

Paul gives a list of Old Testament proofs in verses 10-18 that are like counts in a court of law proving each of us guilty. Of these, William Barclay points out that in verse 12, the phrase "have [together] become unprofitable" [KJV] comes from a word the Greeks also used for sour milk (*The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letter to the Romans*). That about sums it up: We have become useless, soured. However, because of the grace extended to us, we are now in a new position — not only in relation to *our* past but also in relation to the failure of other Christians, and to those who have not come to Christ at all.

To illustrate this, we can imag-

ine three relationships. How would you relate as a free person to prisoners? Surely there would be a barrier to true fellowship; it would be you and *them*. Then imagine that *you* became a prisoner. Would you see prisoners differently? Finally, consider having been a prisoner. What would happen if you were freed? Your understanding of those still in prison would certainly be different, and your actions toward them would change.

This is true of all of us who call Jesus Lord. We have been given freedom; how could we not care for the prisoner? We understand their guilt because it is ours as well.

That is what Paul is saying in verse 10. Legally, we are all unrighteous. We may try to point to our "small" sins (like pettiness, greed, impatience, coldness) and then look at the sins of the embezzler, the rapist, and the

a Prisoner

murderer, and say, “See, I am not like other people!” We should remember in the story of the Pharisee and the publican that Jesus justified only one who could barely lift his eyes to heaven (Luke 18:13, 14).

Our son, as exceptional as he is, was condemned in that one simple sin (and others like it). The Bible tells us that if we fail in one part, we have completely failed (Galatians 3:10; James 2:10). In light of this, Paul says that one day every mouth will be stopped (Romans 3:19). When we all stand before God’s judgment, no one can object or dissent.

We should see it that way today: We are without excuse.

No despair

Nonetheless, even though my son was immediately a prisoner, and realized that, he does not live as if he is condemned, because he is free. Legally we are

like everyone else: sinners all. Relationally, however, we can be something else entirely. When we come to Jesus, He changes our legal status from condemned to acquitted. By the application of His grace, we are His friends and have unbroken communion.

By analyzing verses 10 and 20 together, we come to an important understanding. Although no one is declared righteous in verse 10, verse 20 clears the air: This is according to the law. The law is good at *pointing* sin out, but it is no good in *helping* us out.

All other religions teach some kind of works-based salvation because they live outside of grace. They feverishly try to conform, whether it is through a prescribed austerity, secret knowledge, copious evangelism, or even aggressive attacks against others who do not agree. Christianity alone announces there is no salvation apart from grace.

When we accept Jesus’ offer of a relationship, we have the potential to live differently. Even though the Bible says on one hand that there is no one righteous (v. 10), it also says there are some who *are* righteous (Luke 1:6; 1 John 3:7). The difference is whether a person is under law or grace. Under law – adding in the sum total of all of our works – we are unrighteous. However, since we are saved by grace, it is also by grace that we can live according to God’s desires (Romans 6:14). Certainly, perfection will never be ours in this life, but a life pleasing to God is not just possible; it is expected.

Our hope

Thankfully, Paul did not finish at the end of verse 20 of Romans 3, or we might have reason to despair. The verses following clarify that our hope is in the One who justifies when we believe in Him. Paul says that “the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed” and that “through faith in Jesus Christ . . . [we are] justified freely by His grace . . .” (vv. 21, 22, 24).

Today these two thoughts – our clear position of unrighteousness and our being *made* righteous – should remind us that we are prisoners who have been freed. And so we have a message of grace to share with those who are still under spiritual lock and key. **BA**

Dr. David Downey
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The faith of Romans and Paul's Ten Exclamations.
by Jason Overman

How else are we to relate to our Creator and Redeemer than by faith? Do we possess something — something other than faith — that recommends us to our Lord and Savior? If we stand at all, we stand by faith only, naked and empty handed before the great God Almighty. Faith changes everything!

Jesus tells and actually lived this story of faith. It's a simple but no small story because in the root and flower of faith, our trusting obedience to Him who gave us life — His life — is known. If there's a Bible book dedicated to this saving orientation of humans to God, it is Romans.

The epistle of Paul to the Romans is about faith — the righteousness of faith — from start to last. Not only does *faith* (Greek: *pistis*) appear forty times in Romans' sixteen chapters (more than in any other book of the Bible), but that key truth — “the obedience of faith” — bookends Romans as a whole (1:5; 16:26).

Apostle Paul writes of *pistis* in reference to God, Jesus, Abraham, the Law, and the Prophets.



God Forbid!

His scope is comprehensive, but most of all, he speaks of that “mutual faith” that defines “you and me” (1:12). This faith that Paul is so fixed on is grounded in Christ and Scripture, but it is so all-encompassing in nature that misinterpretation was bound to arise among his audience.

Though brother Paul's writings are full of wisdom, Peter himself admits that his epistles are sometimes hard to understand (2 Peter 3:15, 16). The apostle James likely addresses some of this confusion in his teachings about faith in his own epistle (James 2). Paul himself is keenly aware of the possibility, especially in Romans. He knows that his message of faith might be understood in a manner other than he intended. How do we know this?

Faithfulness and future

You've heard of the Ten Commandments, but have you heard of Paul's Ten Exclamations? They pepper the heart of Romans, from chapters 3 through 11, and typically right in the heat of his teaching on faith and what it means for the church. Just when we think Paul has thrown something important away because of faith, he stops and checks us. He asks the question we're thinking, and just when we assume he's going to agree with us, he surprisingly reverses course and bursts out, “*God forbid*” (using the classic KJV translation; see sidebar).

Paul's ten “*God forbid*” statements revolve around two broad categories of misunderstanding, two interpretive mistakes that continue to haunt corners of

Ten Exclamations

1 Shall their [the Jews] unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid.

Romans 3:3, 4

2 Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? God forbid.

Romans 3:5, 6

3 Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid.

Romans 3:31

4 Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid.

Romans 6:1, 2

5 Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.

Romans 6:15



Christianity both before and after the Reformation. The first mistake that Paul wants his readers to avoid (see 1, 2, 8-10) is the question about God's faithfulness and Israel's future now that "the faith of Jesus Christ" is come.

Has God been unrighteous in His dealings with His people, Israel, if most of them are not responding in faith to His Son, the Messiah? Doesn't the gospel to the Gentiles mean that Israel is simply tossed aside, or supplanted in His plan, as if Christ were Plan B? To this tempting heresy Paul gave a loud and resounding, "No way!" Faith, rightly understood, is God's righteousness to Jew and Gentile alike. God has realized Israel's story in Jesus Christ. He has not abandoned His people because the story of salvation is not over until it's over. Israel has a vital role to play

from beginning to end (11:25-32).

Sin and law

Closely related to this is a second set of concerns Paul addresses. This is in respect to the relation of faith to sin and law (see 3-7). If righteousness is by faith without works of the law; if the law just increases our awareness of and bondage to sin; if by faith we're no longer under the law and there's no escape for us other than to throw ourselves on the mercies of God in Christ, doesn't all this mean that the law is bad like sin and should be tossed aside? Doesn't faith also suggest that we may continue to break God's law and sin because we're forgiven anyway?

Like before, Paul reacts strongly to these conclusions: "No

way!" Faith rightly understood accomplishes under Christ's new covenant what the old covenant could not, but pointed toward: forgiveness of sin and its overcoming by the Spirit who writes the law in our hearts (8:1-14).

Recovering *sola fide*, "faith alone," brought with it the full renewal of awareness that our sufficiency is not of ourselves but that our confidence is in the God at work in Christ by the Spirit. But *faith alone* also revived in more than a few Reformation locales the same antinomian and anti-Semitic heresies that Apostle Paul worked so hard to stamp out in Romans, even as he celebrated the centrality of the faith of Jesus Christ over all.

Emphatic response

The law cannot save you. Being a Jew does not save either. Paul is emphatic about that in Romans.

Does this mean there is no place for either in the new covenant? *No way!* If we learn that God's righteousness is being called into question by the sometimes popular rejection of His law, or of His Israel, we should be just as quick to burst out with the apostle: *God forbid*. Faith demands it! **BA**

6 Is the law sin? God forbid.

Romans 7:7

7 Was then that which is good [the law] made death unto me? God forbid.

Romans 7:13

8 Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

Romans 9:14

9 Hath God cast away his people? God forbid.

Romans 11:1

10 Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid.

Romans 11:11

The Reformation's Brightest Light

by Whaid Rose

Legend has it that upon reading Luther's 95 Theses, Pope Leo exclaimed, "Luther is a drunken German. He will feel different when he is sober." The "papal bull" (edict) that was subsequently issued began with these words: "Arise, O Lord, and judge thy cause. A wild boar has invaded thy vineyard."

Was Martin Luther drunk, a wild boar? What's the story of the Reformation's main man?

Born to Christian parents in Germany in 1483, he was reared under strict discipline. But inner peace eluded Luther as he grew older; he struggled to know freedom from sin and assurance of salvation. Keeping his promise to become a monk if spared from a life-threatening thunderstorm, he joined the Augustinian Order and devoted himself to a rigid monastic lifestyle. But this only deepened his anxiety and despair.

Luther's transformation began when, as head of the theology department at the University of Wittenberg, he began a serious study of Romans. Suffice it to say, he discovered justification by faith (1:17) — God's sovereign act whereby He declares us "not guilty" and places us in right standing with Himself, on the basis of Jesus' atoning sacrifice. Luther's life was suddenly and forever unshackled.

As a result, Luther became increasingly unsettled by the unbiblical practices of the Roman Catholic Church, which led him to nail his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church on October 31, 1517. These were merely questions and propositions for debate. But thanks to zealous university students and Guttenberg's new invention, Luther's theses were soon spread all over Germany, sparking a firestorm. When his books were burned in Rome,

he appealed to the emperor for a hearing. It was granted, bringing us to the showdown at the Imperial Diet (assembly) in Worms, 1521.

Asked if willing to recant, Luther begged time to think it over and spent the night in agonizing prayer. It's believed that Psalm 46, the biblical framework for Luther's signature hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," was before him that night.

As Luther stood before the assembly the following day, his inquisitor demanded a final answer, prompting his now famous response: "I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture, which is my basis; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one's conscience is neither safe nor sound. God help me." This is Christianity's finest hour. The landscape of Christianity was forever changed.

Five hundred years later, we still need Luther. His inner struggles encourage us; we're not alone. His humble circumstances remind us that God uses ordinary people, that one person can make a difference. His discovery in Romans urges us to return to Scripture and get the gospel right. His conviction and courage embolden us to take our stand, to seek a new Reformation.

An old Bohemian psalter features a picture of Wycliffe striking the spark, Huss kindling the coals, and Luther brandishing the flame — an accurate depiction of Luther's role in the Protestant Reformation. Among Reformation lights, Luther shines brightest. Yet we celebrate his legacy, not so much because he was a religious hero but because he points us beyond himself to the God who alone redeems us in Christ — by faith alone.

Faith Digs

Full house

Stuffed with crowd

Faith dug its way

Through roof and reed

Dangerous,

Audacious,

Inconvenient faith

He completed it with

healing

Both obvious

And obscured

— Lisa M. Luciano





An Influential

■ [Vibrant leadership]

by Amber Riggs

Taking in the world around me, I can't help but dream of being a conduit of healing and change. I see these things that aren't right with the world, and *I want to make them right*. I know I'm not alone.

We want to influence our culture. We foresee a more perfect world and then pour our resources into words, ministries, and social media posts that we think will help bring about this reality. And then naturally, we try to quantify our collective righteousness by tallying numbers and gauging power.

Yet as we envision the future, we must consider influential faith as it has been defined by the past.

Desperate search

Sixteenth century Western Europe bore significant evidence of the righteousness we seek in our culture. A majority professed to be Christians; their king – the most powerful man in the world – was a professing Christian; the church's wealth was second only to the king's; colleges, cathedrals, and hospitals bearing Christ's name dotted the map; and the culture was relatively peaceful and stable. If the church sought to quantify its righteousness,

surely it needed to point no further than the fruit that was the age of Christendom.

However, deep in the heart of that Christendom lived a Christian who was desperately searching for a different kind of peace – the kind that the apostle Paul professed to have: “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1b). Though Martin Luther was an ardent follower of Christ, he did not have this peace that Paul connected with being “justified through faith” (v. 5:1a).

Luther began relentlessly meditating on Scripture until he put the pieces together of this faith that Paul had spoken of. But why was it so hard to find? Ironically, this faith had been obscured by the culture of this supposedly flourishing Christendom. The sad reality: It was full of corruption.

Church challenge

Professing the authority of Scripture alone, Luther challenged the church to accept that we are justified through faith alone, in Christ alone by grace alone, to God's glory alone. Unlike many Protestants today, Luther didn't choose to leave his church and start over. Instead, His heart was to see the church he loved reformed by these truths.

Faith

Five hundred years later, Martin Luther is recognized as one of the most influential figures in history – not just because his faith continues to impact the world, but because only the faith he taught brings the “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” that we long to see saturate the world.

Affirming the faith

What then is this type of faith, and how can we affirm it in our own lives?

It sees God’s righteousness. Righteousness belongs to God alone and does not exist apart from Him. As the psalmist observed, “Your righteousness, God, reaches to the heavens, you who have done great things. Who is like you, God?” (Psalm 71:19).

If we are *justified* – made right – by faith, then it is inherent that we have a revelation of what this righteousness looks like as it is defined within God alone and embodied in Christ. Faith contemplates and stands in awe of the breadth and depth of this righteousness.

It receives God’s righteousness through Christ. By definition, *faith* is “the assurance of things *hoped for*” (Hebrews 11:1a, ESV, emphasis mine). If righteousness belongs to God

alone, then true righteousness is something that we can only hope for and desire, but never possess apart from Him (Galatians 5:5).

This is where faith comes in. Having a revelation of God’s righteousness, we see that we are *not* righteous. But in Christ, God tells us that this righteousness we hope for is ours as a free gift – a grace – that we receive by faith, by believing that He has given it to us *while our bodies bear no evidence of this righteousness*.

Faith walks toward God’s righteousness becoming ours. We are also told that the “righteous shall *live by faith*” (Romans 1:17, ESV, emphasis mine). Though we start off with this righteousness not evidenced in our bodies, faith involves an understanding that this righteousness will one day be a tangible reality that we *can* see. Faith keeps Christ’s righteousness in front of us and enables us to be transformed by it.

The process of sanctification is the component of salvation that involves Christ’s righteousness becoming more and more visible in our lives until the day when we are glorified in His presence.

Bearing God’s image

Christian influence isn’t about manipulating or ridiculing the

world around us until it takes on the appearances of rightness. Rather, the type of influence that moves our world closer to accepting and manifesting God’s righteousness is a byproduct of Christians living by faith. Likewise, your influence on this world can’t be measured in terms of how we traditionally define success.

When you became a follower of Christ, you became a leader – a bearer of God’s image entrusted with bearing testimony of a righteousness that is not our own. Embrace this influence that comes through faith, and seek to deepen it. See God’s righteousness, receive it, and then walk toward it in intentionality and grace. **BA**

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have four young daughters and are members of the Eugene, OR congregation. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, except where noted.

If you’re ready to deepen the influence of your faith, why not try Artios Christian College? Find out more at artioscollege.org.



How Can I Know?

Answering the hard questions in the steps of Abraham.

by Janice Hilton

After ten months of unemployment, I was finally being offered a great job. But there were strings attached — more like one big rope. Accepting this job required that I uproot my life and move twelve hundred miles north. Thinking of leaving everything and everyone I knew and going to an unknown environment, with a change in climate, terrain, and social norms, I was left with one big question: How can I know if this is the right thing to do?

At times in each of our lives we face big questions. Do any of these resonate with you?

I'm unhappy with my circumstances. Do I make an effort to change them or learn to live with them? Would a change be better? How can I know?

The doctor has given me a

daunting prognosis, and I've got to decide among several options. Which will be best? How can I know?

Someone has made me a promise, and it's an important one. Can I trust them? How can I know?

When that question takes over your life, what do you usually do? I hope you know people who can give you wise counsel. But when it comes down to it, the decisions in your life are your responsibility. And you want to be the one to make them. That's the fun of being alive, of being an adult: We get to have a say in what our lives become. At times, though, it can be overwhelming.

Old Testament lesson

A story in the Old Testament includes the very question we

ask when we face these challenges.

Before he became Abraham, Abram received some promises from God. In Genesis 15 God made him two fundamental vows. The first was “a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir” (v. 4). God had already promised Abram that he would become a great nation and be blessed. But you can’t become a great nation if you have no children. So Abram expressed his concerns to God: “I remain childless” (v. 2).

God’s promise of a child became a seminal moment, not just for Abram but for all believers everywhere throughout time. “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (v. 6). God said it, Abram believed it, and that settled it. The apostle Paul makes much of this principle in Romans 4 and Galatians 3. Our hope and salvation are not based on works, but on faith.

But the conversation did not end with this pledge. God went on to promise Abram an inheritance of land. Abram’s response was more like mine: “Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?” (v. 8). Those familiar words: *How can I know?* It’s encouraging to know that the heroes of our faith had the same concerns we do.

God’s response to this question was unusual, even puzzling. He instructed Abram to gather a heifer, a goat, a ram, a dove, and a pigeon. Abram was not puzzled by this instruction. Without being told, he knew exactly what to do with them. He cut the animals in half and laid them with the birds opposite each other. Abram fell into a deep sleep, and

while he was sleeping, a smoking fire pot and blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. Genesis 15:18 says, “On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I give this land. . . .’”

Cutting a covenant

While this scene seems bizarre to us, it made perfect sense to Abram. And thanks to archeology, we can now appreciate what he experienced. Documents going back to the Hittite

agreements throughout the Old Testament. In this case, He used type 3.

The Hittite documents then describe the process of ratification that involved cutting an animal. Hence the term *cutting a covenant*. The superior party was in essence saying, “If I do not keep this promise, may my life be like that of these animals.” Jeremiah 34:8-22 confirms the prevalence of this custom. Thirteen hundred years after Abram, the same ritual was in use.

This promise must have been

“The decisions in your life are your responsibility.”

culture, Abram’s contemporaries, describe the terms of cutting a covenant between two parties. These documents describe three types of covenants that were generally made:

- agreements between equals drawn up to outline the expectations of each in a specific situation;
- agreements between a superior and an inferior outlining the expectations between each regarding a specific situation;
- a grant or promissory covenant obligating a superior to do something for the inferior.

There is ample evidence of God using the second and third

affirming to Abram, given his cultural understanding of the situation. But, in truth, how meaningful was this promise, if the One who made it cannot die but gives all to keep His promises?

New Testament application

The power behind the gospel is this: God did die. By His death, Jesus, the Son of God, died to ratify a new covenant with all who will believe. Romans 3:25 says, “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood – to be received by faith.” And just as Abram believed God, so we must believe God.

When we believe, as Abram did, we will be accounted as righteous. Then all the promises of the New Testament apply to us. Like Abram, when we are at a loss to understand our circumstances, we can with confidence take steps to gain clarity.

Abram couldn't see his future. He took stock of his circumstances and assessed that his inheritance would be left to a servant. You too, when unable to see your future, can stop and assess your circumstances. Do the research, do the math, take the

them to pray for your clarity and discernment.

Perhaps this process will reveal some steps you need to take. Like Abram, take these steps without question. Take them diligently and completely. Be as obedient to the promptings of God as your understanding allows, continually looking to Him for guidance and further clarity.

Sleep on it, as Abram did. His sleep was part of God's communication tool. It may well be a useful step toward your sense of clarity. A good night's sleep

hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

How can you know? God has made you a guarantee, one that He gave His life to validate. When you face challenges and are left wondering "How can I know?" don't be anxious. Instead, bring your concerns to Jesus. When you give Him the opportunity by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, He can and will direct your life.

Troubled about what to do? Pray, pray again, then pray some more, always with thanksgiving. When the peace of God comes, as it will — that's His promise — it will come with a sense of direction. The answer may not be the one you'd hoped for. But if it's the direction that gives you His peace, it will be His answer.

The answer will be in God's timing. If it doesn't come quickly, keep in mind that this situation consuming you at the moment may just be the beginning of a new chapter in your relationship with God. This situation may put you on a road that will lead to a deeper, richer love for Him and for others.

You are in a covenant relationship with God. He shed His own blood to guarantee His promises to you. It is His desire to draw close to you so that you can understand His heart and be transformed by the circumstances He brings into your life. **BA**

“The heroes of our faith had the same concerns we do.”

time to think through your alternatives. Then talk to God about it, as Abram did. This alone may reveal the direction you seek.

The process may involve taking counsel from the godly people in your life. Proverbs 15:22 says, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." And the apostle Paul encourages us to "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). Turn to those you trust and let them help you think through your situation. Engage

— several nights of sound sleep — may help clear your mind of distractions and open you to a sense of God's direction.

Checklist

And without fail, continue to pray. God has made you a significant guarantee outlined in Philipians 4:6, 7: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your

Janice Hilton writes from Puyallup, WA. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.





Did You Know?

- The fifth century Pelagian controversy was an early precursor to Martin Luther's doctrine of justification by faith. Pelagius taught that individuals had to behave in certain ways to secure God's favor. Augustine adamantly disagreed. Such behavior, he argued, was the result — not the cause — of God's gracious acceptance. To many, the Reformation was a replay of this older controversy. Catholics did not take kindly to being compared to Pelagius, with whom they also disagreed.

- While justification by faith, often summarized by the Latin slogan "sola fide" ("by faith alone"), was central to the German Reformation, it was not universal. The early Swiss Reformers, focused on sola Scriptura, were more interested in the renewal of the moral life of the church and of individuals.

- The addition of "alone," intended to avoid the thought that faith was just one cause of justification among others, was met with resistance by Catholics and some Protestants. The Bible does not specifically say "faith

Let Us Plead for Faith Alone
by Charles Wesley

*Let us plead for faith alone,
faith which by our works is shown;
God it is who justifies,
only faith the grace applies.*

~
*Active faith that lives within,
conquers hell and death and sin,
hallows whom it first made whole,
forms the Savior in the soul.*

~
*Only let us persevere
till we see our Lord appear,
never from the Rock remove,
saved by faith which works by love.*

alone"; indeed, the letter of James explicitly denies this. Others were concerned with the moral implications: Is there no duty to do good deeds? Luther countered that sola fide did encapsulate New Testament teaching and that good deeds naturally follow justifying faith. As for the letter of James, Luther would, to the consternation of many, provocatively reply that it was "an epistle of straw."

- The unintended yet common problem of "cheap grace" that followed from the doctrine of justification by faith was forcefully addressed by twentieth century German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his classic book "The Cost of Discipleship." He wrote it for fellow Lutherans four hundred years after Martin Luther introduced the doctrine. "Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our church," he wrote.

- The legacy of the doctrine of justification by faith is best seen in its impact on the individual and the church. The role of faith in the process of salvation gave people direct and personal access to a saving relationship with God. The Catholic view of the church was radically challenged as the need for ceremonies, saints, and priests in the mediation of salvation was circumvented.

Sources

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"Transforming Vision into Reality" — Christ Centered • Spirit Formed • Bible Based

• Sabbath Celebrating • Distinct Yet Inclusive • Passionate in Worship • Compassionate in Service • Engaging in Witness • United in Fellowship • Committed to Discipleship

Transforming Vision into Reality

What it means to be Spirit Formed and to follow a plan for a vibrant 21st century church.

by Jody McCoy

The Church of God (Seventh Day) has a vision of a vibrant 21st century church. In the previous two *Bible Advocate* issues we explored two elements of that vision: *Christ Centered* and *Bible Based*. Since many of you are studying the ten vision points at length in the quarterlies, we don't need to cover all of them again here. However, a brief venture into *Spirit Formed* will neatly connect our previous exploration of the vision with our next concern: transforming our vision into reality.

Relationship

The Bible isn't a litany of commands; it's a collection of life stories. Stories are about relationships (Isaiah 1:2-7,18-20). God reveals Himself to us in the loving relationship of Father and Son sharing one Spirit (John 3:34, 35). This is the very core of His nature.

In His love for us, Jesus became human to restore humanity's broken relationship with God by paying for our sins Himself. As both God and man, Jesus became the gateway between God and man through which God can share His Spirit with us (John 5:26; 20:31; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 John 4:12-16). Because of Jesus, mortals can become immortal; sinners can become saints (Ephesians 5:1-3).

Christianity is founded, not on a principle but on a person: Jesus Christ. It is His presence,

His Spirit, resonating within us, that makes us Christians (Romans 8:14-16; 1 John 3:24; 4:13). As kindred hearts gather together, the collective resonance of our spirits with His Spirit creates vibrant worship. A vibrant 21st century church is, therefore, Spirit formed.

Reforming

Though we've had our vision for seventeen years, few of our local congregations consider themselves vibrant 21st century churches. Most of them recognize they aren't growing, and many are struggling against decline. Even those with active ministries often find their ministries exclusively inward focused. Too often our love is limited to those within (Matthew 5:46-48).

What's wrong? Why do our worship services feel routine

instead of alive? Why does God feel distant at times? On the human level, we often wonder if we're at fault when a relationship drifts apart. However, when our relationship with God drifts, there is no question it's entirely our fault (Isaiah 59:1, 2). We're falling out of love with Him. How can this happen, and what can we do?

The answer is in 2 Chronicles 7:14:

"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

We usually think of "wicked ways" as sinful acts. True, God's Spirit doesn't dwell in the habitually disobedient, but neither does He dwell in those who fail to love (1 John 3:10, 11). James reminds us that if we don't do what we know we should do, that too is sin (4:17). In other words, sins of commission (disobedience) and sins of omission (failing to love) are both unloving behavior, both wicked ways. It's up to us to humble ourselves, pray, seek God, and change our ways. God's law requires us to love everyone, not just those who love us back (Matthew 5:38-48) — another part of being a Spirit-formed church.

Loving

Perhaps you're thinking it isn't humanly possible to love those who hate us. You're correct. When someone mistreats us, we want to get even. We live in an increasingly polarized culture that is readily offended. People's self-worth is bound up in their

God-given right to be treated with respect. They exact justice through verbal abuse, demonizing, boycotts, riots, violence, destructive acts, and — in extreme cases — acts of terror. Immersed in this culture, even Christians find themselves satisfying their desire for justice in overt or passive-aggressive ways. We don't lead in kindness; we return in kind. That's justice; that's human nature (Proverbs 16:25).

It's not in our nature to want the best for those who abuse us. We aren't *good* by nature; we're *just* by nature. Our love is limited to those who love us back. Humans can't love unconditionally, but children of God can. They have God's Spirit, His good nature, within them. They're connected to the Source of love. In a world focused on its rights under the law, how powerful would it be to see a soul willing to suffer injustice and return true grace. Wouldn't those who witnessed it say, "I don't know what you have, but I want that!"?

When we're under the law, our self-worth comes from how people treat us. But when we

give our lives to the One who gave His life for us, our self-worth no longer depends on our rights under the law but on the price Jesus paid for us. To be under grace doesn't mean we're free to disobey the law of love. Rather, it means that we can now participate in God's grace. With His Spirit dwelling in us, we can suffer injustice for others because Jesus suffered injustice at our hands for us. Jesus led in kindness so that we can follow His kindness in kind. We're still concerned about justice for others, but we no longer need justice for ourselves (Micah 6:8). We want the best for others regardless of how they treat us. That is God's good nature dwelling in us.

Transforming

A vision that remains a vision is a fantasy. Unless we're willing to be transformed by the love of Jesus, the vision of a vibrant 21st century church will never become a reality for the Church of God (Seventh Day). The same law that gives us our rights will condemn us for our failure to

OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

HARMONY OF GRACE AND TRUTH

Christ Centered

Spirit Formed	Sabbath Celebrating
Bible Based	Distinct Yet Inclusive

AND IN HIS LOVE RECEIVED AND SHARED

<p style="margin: 0;">THE GREAT COMMANDS</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Passionate in Worship</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Compassionate in Service</p>	<p style="margin: 0;">THE GREAT COMMISSION</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Engaging in Witness</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">United in Fellowship</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Committed to Discipleship</p>
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love unconditionally. If we're willing to release our demand for justice under the law and place our faith in His justice, He can transform us into His good, immortal nature. In His grace, Jesus will forgive our transgressions if we're willing to forgive those who transgress against us (Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 6:37; 11:4).

The plan to transform our vision into reality (TVR) follows the personal spiritual journey: justification, sanctification, and

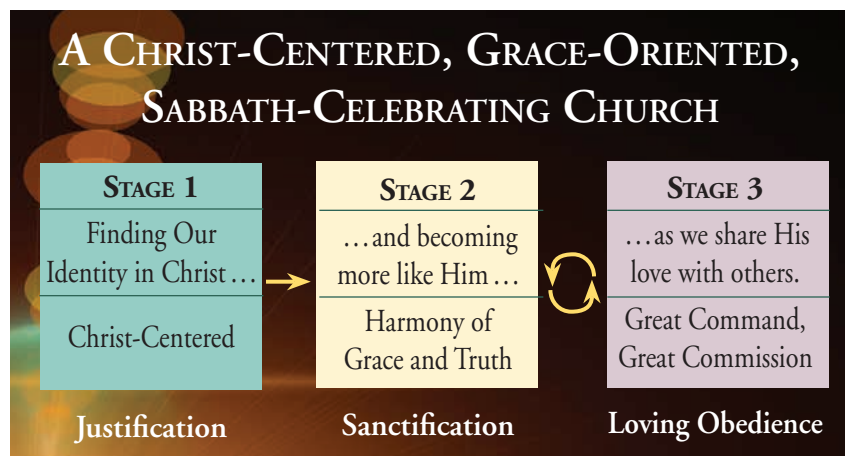
personified: unrighteousness in the woman, self-righteousness in the Pharisees, and true righteousness in Jesus. His love draws us in from the polar extremes of unrighteousness (lawless grace) and self-righteousness (graceless law). When we invite His Spirit to dwell within us, His law of love dwells in our hearts, and we grow to become obedient by nature.

The second stage, sanctification, addresses unrighteousness. Grace isn't a license to sin; it's the ability to participate in God's giving nature. In our consumer-oriented culture, we are acclimated to being served rather than serving. The longer we live in this comfortable environment, the more foreign the idea of self-sacrifice becomes. We begin to think that it is something to avoid, not embrace. As we fail to participate in sacrificial grace, our gratitude for Christ's sacrifice fades, and we begin to fall out of love with Him. The goal of Stage 2 is to reverse that decline and grow in His grace to become a giving people zealous of good works (Titus 2:14).

The third stage, loving obedience, is sharing His love with others – the Great Commission. We want to become a welcoming church with a compassion for those in spiritual peril. Jesus loves those who are perishing (1 Timothy 2:3, 4). He asks us to sacrifice for others while the door of grace remains open (Matthew 24:37-39). One day all suffering will end, and paradise will begin (Romans 8:18; Revelation 21:4). Once this moment is gone, it's gone. Today, right now, is our opportunity to be Jesus' friend.

In the upcoming issues of the *Bible Advocate* we will explore each stage in detail. In the meantime, let's be the Spirit-formed church God wants us to be. **BA**

Jody McCoy is executive director of the General Conference and lives in Austin, TX.



loving obedience. Our plan is to take this journey together as a church, with a year dedicated to each stage. The General Conference has provided the vision, the plan, and the tools (TVR posters, welcome booklets, Sabbath school lessons, *Bible Advocate* articles, and *Churchright* focus). But the plan itself isn't the transformation; transformation only happens when we change. We're asking our pastors to utilize these tools and lead their congregations toward transformation as we all take this spiritual journey together.

The Pharisees brought a woman before Jesus who had been caught in adultery (John 8:2-11). In this brief story three natures struggling within each of us are

Three-step plan

Now that we've discussed being Spirit Formed, as well as transformation, let's look at the three stages of the TVR plan.

The first, justification, addresses self-righteousness. We must understand that goodness comes from God, not from us. Christ died, not for the righteous but for the ungodly (Romans 5:6-8). The law of love requires us to love everyone; it leads us to our need for Christ. Salvation isn't a reward; it's a gift, and faith is the only appropriate response (4:5). Our gratitude for Christ and His gift of grace fills our hearts with His giving Spirit, creating in us a compassion for all (Luke 7:36-47).

Living and Dying Well

continued from page 7

Learning to give back

With fresh hope, Gary and I waded away from the shifting sand into deeper water. We became proactive and recruited a cancer team. To the treatments, we added better eating, increased physical activity, and finding purpose. While holding down our day jobs, we drafted a tag team message, established a nonprofit, and traveled the country sharing what we were doing to live well with terminal cancer.

Managing a nonprofit, booking speaking engagements, standing on platforms with distinguished physicians in the audience — Gary and I had never attempted these things. But choosing to give back was worth the challenge.

Learning to be grateful

It's one thing to be grateful when circumstances are going well, and quite another when they are crazy. Gary and I learned we could count all that was lost or we could focus on what remained: people to love and people who loved us, air to breathe, the splendor of a sunset, hiking near the sound of water tumbling over rocks, another day of freedom.

As he sat chained to a Roman guard in a damp, dark prison, Paul wrote, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want" (Philippians 4:12). Contentment isn't natural.

Fear, despair, self-pity, anger, discontent: These things are natural. Contentment must be learned.

The secret to contentment is not in having more. It doesn't come from my own determination but from a relationship with Jesus Christ. And a good relationship involves keeping open communication lines: "Father, I don't understand why these hard things are happening. But I trust that You cause all things to work together for our good because we love You and You love us."

Learning to die well

During the last months of Gary's life, our home was filled with unimaginable peace as my beloved slipped away from me. Part of that peace came from knowing that cancer did not catch God off guard and that if He had allowed it, then He had a purpose for it. In one of my favorite Old Testament passages the psalmist praises God for creating him and knowing him intimately:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well (Psalm 139:13, 14).

On the other end of the spectrum is death, and the psalmist had something to say about that as well: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful servants" (116:15). From *Albert Barnes' Notes*: "The idea here is, that the death of saints is an object of value; that God regards it as of importance; that it is connected with his great plans, and that there are great purposes to be accomplished by it."

Gary lived ten years with terminal disease, much longer than the original projection. And they were arguably the best years of our marriage. Cancer taught us to sit up and pay attention to the hours and weeks and months that were ticking by, to create more memories and live more fully — peacefully, gratefully, joyfully, purposefully.

Living forward

With clear hindsight, I see God's fingerprints beautifying the long, hard wilderness years that began with joblessness and financial reversals. It's now easier to let go of the cares of this world and rest in my heavenly Father, who has proved His faithfulness. My faith is strong, and I carry more courage these days. I find myself whispering gratitude for all the simple pleasures in life, taking nothing for granted.

With my children's encouragement, I am living forward and accepting speaking opportunities to help others who are experiencing life's challenges. While I wouldn't wish this journey on anyone, I see the beauty and joy and compassion God carved out of the hard circumstances, and I remain open to what He wants to teach me. **BA**

Marlys Johnson writes from Bend, OR. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.





Mail Bag



Glorifying the Reformation?

I was surprised that you glorified the Reformation as you did [January-February '17]. How can we glorify the Reformation when God refers to them as "harlots" (Rev. 17:5)? There was hardly an article in the *Advocate* that did not glorify the Protestant movement.

W. W.
E-mail

Editor's response: Thank you for sharing your concern. Setting your pointed interpretation of Revelation 17:5 aside for the moment, it is not our intention to "glorify" the Protestant Reformation. (There is certainly much to critique, and you will see some of that in these pages.) Rather, we want to simply acknowledge this important moment of Christian history and our shared theological heritage five hundred years later — particularly the solas featured in these issues.

To be Christ centered and Bible based is to grasp the very core of the Reformers' vision. For those interested in Christian history, the Church of God (Seventh Day) stands within the tradition of the "radical Reformation" begun by the Anabaptists in the earliest days of the Reformation. In upcoming issues we will review some characteristics of this important branch of the movement and CoG7's unique contribution and witness at

the far end of the Reformation. Soli Deo gloria!

"Curiouser and curiouser," cried Alice" as she read that "our theological roots find common cause with . . . John Calvin"? ["Q & A," p. 11, January-February]. "Fallible"?! Calvin was a mass murderer, personally responsible for the torture of hundreds and death of dozens who did not wholeheartedly embrace his perverted teachings. Reading on, Alice found ". . . the Reformation's greater lights like . . . Calvin"?! ["Dawn's Early Lights," p. 16]. The only light this monster generated was from the fires with which he burned his victims alive. "I wonder where this leads?" said Alice as she looked down the rabbit hole.

J. N.
E-mail

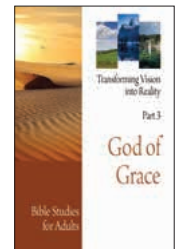
*Editor's response: I cannot speak for John Calvin "personally," but persecution against dissenters, and even war between nations, undoubtedly marred the Reformation, and this violence had far-reaching political consequences. It's important to set this in historical perspective. Like the Medieval age before it, the sixteenth century world of Calvin's Geneva knew no church/state, or civil/ecclesial distinction. Punishment for law breaking, moral or doctrinal, was as harsh as the times. The non-violent faith of Anabaptists of that day bore the brunt of much persecution from the "established" church even as they laid a foundation for the eighteenth century separation of church and state. We may, and should, own our theological "common cause with **many views** held by . . . John Calvin" even as we renounce the violent coercion of the times as contrary to the gospel of Christ.*

New Partnership

Spring Vale Christian School and Bible Advocate Press have teamed up to develop a new Christian curriculum reflecting the teachings of the Church of God (Seventh Day). BAP has provided the school with CoG7 literature (including *This We Believe*) to use in its new virtual classrooms (coming 2017-2018). Learn more about online classes and Christian education at <http://springvale.us/virtualschool/>.

God of Grace

Part 3 (third quarter) of the "Transforming Vision into Reality" quarterly series covers the next three points in CoG7's ten-point vision. Elder Whaid Rose explores God's grace in making us into a people of compassionate service, united fellowship and passionate worship. Lessons are available in adult and senior youth editions. See page 3 for ordering information.



Attention, International Subscribers!

Have you contacted the BA yet to continue receiving the magazine in the mail? See page 3 for contact information. Don't forget that you may view and download the magazine anytime at ba-online.org.





G. C. Ministries News

ARTIOS • MISSIONS • PUBLICATIONS



Call to Convention

It is my great pleasure to call all members and friends of the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) to our 2017 Biennial Convention, July 3-8, 2017, at the Crowne Plaza Springfield Hotel in Springfield, Illinois.

Why should you come?

Come to worship. Wonderful evening and Sabbath services are being planned around our convention theme "Worthy is the Lamb." Morning devotions will begin each day's business sessions.

Come for fellowship. Conventions are your op-

portunity to fellowship with brothers and sisters from across the United States and Canada. Old and new friends will be waiting for you!

Come to learn. Promotional booths, presentations, and special meals will offer lots of positive information about our church and its various ministries.

Come to be heard. If you are a formal member of the General Conference, at least 18 years of age, you may fully participate in the business sessions and directly impact the direction and future of our church.

More time than usual will be given to business at this convention, but our normal programs for children, teens, and young adults will be available. Additionally, it's Springfield, Illinois — Abraham Lincoln's hometown. There is much to see and experience!

So please do come to convention. I look forward to seeing you there!

— Loren Stacy

Information and registration are available at <https://cog7.org/convention/2017-info/>.

Painstaking Work



At the BA, we write and edit the gospel message one word at a time. Support our publication by responding to the BA fund-raising letter in May.



Find us at baonline.org.



Ministry Through the IMC

Zone ...

2 Cristo Viene evangelist Josue Escobar presents the gospel in Talnique, El Salvador.



3 Waldemar Patzer (second from right), an evangelist supported through Cristo Viene, visits families in Incarnation, Paraguay, where he recently helped plant the first church in this country.



4 Representative Jacob Rao trains Cristo Viene pastors and evangelists in Tanaku, Andhra Pradesh, India. More than 65 workers are assisted in this country through the Cristo Viene ministry.



5 Daniel Fungulane (second from left), with help from the brethren in Portugal, works to establish groups in Northern Mozambique.



5 With help from supporters of G. C. Missions and the Orphans and Widows Ministry, the CoG7 in Sierra Leone planted and harvested 300 acres of rice to support its rapidly growing ministry.



6 Alfred Ander (with guitar), Cristo Viene evangelist, works in Indonesia to help establish the fledgling church there. Indonesia has the most Muslims of any country in the world.

Support G. C. Missions with your prayers and offerings to reach the world with the good news!





Saved *and* Transformed!

"Yes. That's true. But don't tell the people. They'll sin."

That's what another minister said to me as we discussed the good news about Jesus dying in our place to pay for our sins. His comment was not about Jesus' death on the cross but about what God requires of people who want to receive the eternal benefit of Christ's death on the cross. My friend was concerned that I was moving too far toward the grace-faith side of the equation, and I was concerned he might not even know that there is a grace-faith side. I quoted the scriptures that changed my life: "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" (Ephesians 2:8, 9, NASB throughout).

"What could be clearer than that?" I asked. Grace, faith, gift of God. *Not* self. *Not* works. *Not* self-earned or deserved. That's when he warned me not to tell the people, or they would sin.

I've often thought about that conversation. My friend fully trusted that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). He fully believed that "If we confess our sins, He [God] is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). But my friend did not fully trust his fellow believers to be as committed to God as he was. Apparently, he did not fully trust God to transform the lives of other people who fully trust Him, in the ways that God transformed his own life. "Don't tell the people," he said. "They'll sin."

My experience is completely contrary to that statement. It was only *after* I came to understand Ephesians 2:8, 9 that God's transformation of me accelerated. Before, when I thought that God required me to earn my salvation by knowing and obeying perfectly, I was frustrated and afraid. I knew nothing was perfect about me! After countless promises to God that I'd be perfect "from now on" if He'd only give me another chance, I was ready to give up. *What's the point of trying to please God if I'm not going to "make it" anyway?* I asked myself.

But after, when I understood Ephesians 2:8, 9, everything changed! When I understood that salvation is a gift from God to those who fully devote themselves to Him through faith in Jesus — *not* something that can be earned by self-righteousness — my entire attitude changed. After, I *wanted* to please God because I knew He loves me. And I found that more and more, I could. Justified by faith alone, I began to experience God's sanctification process. In Christ, I am being made a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Does the good news that we are saved by God's grace alone, through faith in Christ alone, lead to disobedience and sin? Not for those who fully embrace Christ! Justification leads to sanctification. Our very essence is being transformed: "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, *are being transformed* into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

— Loren Stacy



CONVENTION 2017



Have you checked your calendar recently? Convention 2017 is rapidly approaching! Be sure to register for convention and make your hotel reservations ASAP.

- G. C. President Loren Stacy and Executive Director Jody McCoy invite all for a Leadership Conference Monday, July 3.
- The Welcome Reception on that Monday evening will be a great place to reconnect with friends.
- Our guaranteed hotel rate of \$110/night is effective only until June 11.
- Meal tickets must be purchased before arriving at convention, as the hotel needs adequate time to purchase menu items.

Let's make the Crowne Plaza Springfield
ring with worship because . . .

WORTHY IS THE LAMB!