



Sola Gratia

Transformation



Inside

2017: Reforming-Transforming



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Blinded by Grace

Sola Gratia is the fourth *sola* in this Reforming-Transforming series. Some might argue that it should have come first. It's true that *grace alone* gets right to the heart of the Reformation and what's been covered in the BA so far this year. Let's review: God's grace is a person, *Christ alone*; it's His revelation, *Scripture alone*; and it grants admission to life with Him, *faith alone*. It's all God's great grace!

I saved *sola gratia* for now to stress where grace is taking us. Pairing it with *transformation* reveals how weighty and robust the gift of God is. While His grace offers undeserved and inestimable forgiveness, it does more still. If we forget its full scope, grace becomes sentimental and, worse, cheap. Dietrich Bonhoeffer reprimanded this sternly in *The Cost of Discipleship*: "Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting to-day for costly grace."

Bonhoeffer defines cheap grace as "grace without discipleship." It showers forgiveness indiscriminately so "everything can remain as it was before." Novelist Flannery O'Connor explains why real, costly grace is so often exchanged for the lure of cheap grace: "All human nature vigorously resists grace because grace changes us and the change is painful."

Cheap grace is grace without transformation, without change. It's not grace at all but what Jude condemned as its perversion: grace as license (v. 4). In the beloved hymn "Amazing Grace" we learn that before grace can relieve our fears, it must first teach us to fear. Like that blinding light on the road to Damascus that throws us to the ground, setting us on an entirely new course (Acts 9:3), precious, saving grace is stunning — nothing less than the teaching, transmuting grace of God.

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age (Titus 2:11, 12, NIV).

A vibrant 21st century church can't exist without transforming grace! Authentic, costly grace is worth fighting for because it points to Jesus Christ, the price of the cross, and the resurrected life we are being conformed to. No wonder Apostle Paul urges us to continue in this grace of God (Acts 13:43).

Sola gratia surveys God's free, blinding, renovating grace. Read on and rediscover this amazing grace for yourself.

— Jason Overman





Confronted by Grace

Self-righteousness
in light of transforming
vision into reality.
by Jody McCoy

For centuries, the Jews had faithfully worshipped in their synagogues each Sabbath, hoping and waiting for the Messiah to come (John 1:41; 4:25). Their prophets were silent because there had been no word from God for four hundred years. Into this silence, the Messiah was born in Bethlehem. He grew up in Nazareth, humbly dwelling among them. Though sinless, He joined sinners in baptism. Then He began publicly preaching, teaching, and performing numerous miracles.

Jesus' lineage (Matthew 1:1; 2 Samuel 7:12-14), birthplace (Luke 2:4; Micah 5:2), hometown (Matthew 2:23; Isaiah 9:1), and ministry (Matthew 11:3-6; Isaiah 35:3-6) all fulfilled Messianic

prophecies. However, each time Jesus told His own people that He was the promised Messiah, they tried to kill Him (John 8:53-59; 10:24-32; Luke 4:17-29). And eventually they did (22:66-71). Jesus had performed miraculous healings in front of them and even raised the dead, yet many of the Jews refused to believe Him. Unknowingly, they eagerly committed the most horrific act in all human history: They hated the promised Messiah without cause, and they crucified God's Son. Why were they so blind?

Christ and self-righteousness

In Romans, Paul reveals the reason for the Jews' blindness as he laments their loss:

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Romans 10:1-4).

Our hope is in Christ; He is our Savior. This is where God's transforming grace begins. We are rescued by His righteousness rather than by seeking to establish our own. We come to Him in faith because we realize we cannot save ourselves.

Self-righteousness is the most debilitating of all sins. It is self-sufficient and cuts off our path to rescue by causing us to deny our need for a Savior (Acts 4:12). The unrighteous are either blissfully ignorant or desperate enough to know their need for salvation and sinful state, but the self-righteous don't easily see their need or that they are self-righteous. They're dangerously confident. They consider themselves good and right and are unwilling to admit they're wrong.

We're all sinners in need of grace, but the self-righteous don't see it that way. They believe the message of repentance applies only to the unrighteous. To suggest otherwise is to risk greatly offending them. In an effort to reach their hearts with a message their minds would reject, Jesus often spoke to the self-righteous in parables. Yet at times, Jesus was also direct, which is why the religious establishment wanted

to kill Him. Here's one of those direct moments:

"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said to Him, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you (Matthew 21:28-31).

The moral of the story? Confronted by the power of His ministry, sinners knew they needed a Savior; but the self-righteous could not admit their guilt.

love is also an active command to love:

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5).

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD (Leviticus 19:18).

Jesus taught that all the law is summed up in these two commandments (Matthew 22:40). Consequently, *failing to love* is also sin, but one that is harder to judge. The self-righteous fail to love. They're like the second son in Jesus' story. The Pharisees did not practice what they preached (23:1-3). For example, they had

“ Our hope is in Christ; He is our Savior. This is where God's transforming grace begins. ”

Law and unconditional love

With the "Thou shalt not" commands, it's easy to think that not committing sin satisfies the law of love. Since, by definition, the unrighteous are those who sin, it's natural to conclude that they're the ones condemned by the law. It's certainly true that the law of love includes abstinence from immorality, but the law of

no compassion for the woman caught in adultery, a decidedly visible sin that is easy to judge. They were eager to condemn and stone her. In their eyes, she was clearly wrong and they were right. It never occurred to them that both they and the woman could be wrong, until Jesus showed them (John 8:1-11).

While we often talk in terms of the self-righteous and the un-

righteous as if they were distinct categories of people, we're all guilty of both sins. We all believe what we want to believe to justify ourselves (self-righteousness) into thinking that we're OK to keep doing what we're doing (unrighteousness). We're all guilty of sins of commission (doing what we shouldn't) and sins of omission (not doing what we should), thus violating the divine law of love (Psalm 19:12-14; James 2:8-13).

Jesus told us plainly that only God is good, yet we don't believe Him. Instead, we want to believe that goodness comes from us. We feel His Spirit convicting us to do the right things, and we mistake it as our own

for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" (Matthew 5:43-46).

We dismiss Jesus' teaching as humanly impossible. Yet that's exactly the point. In our human nature, we can't love those who hate us. The law of love will condemn us because we don't have what it takes to love others unconditionally. The law is the schoolmaster that brings us to Christ. His presence in us enables us to love others as He

that nature with us, but He waits for our permission to do so. To receive His nature, we must be willing to surrender our own independent human nature. That requires confessing our sins and admitting we need a Savior. We must come to trust in His righteousness instead of our own.

This has much to do with Transforming Vision into Reality (TVR). The first stage focuses on justification: We are set right by Christ's righteousness through faith. His salvation is a gift, not a reward. Accepting this gift requires us to forsake our sin and self-righteousness. We acknowledge that goodness comes from God, not from us. Even though we have nothing to offer God, He accepts us as we are because He loves us unconditionally. When we submit ourselves and accept Jesus as Savior, we are not only forgiven by His grace but also transformed by His Spirit of grace, from being self-centered to being Christ centered. Our lives are flooded with gratitude. With our new nature in Christ, we no longer want to live for ourselves; now we want to live for Him and love like Him.

We love God because He first loved us. We love because He is love. And this love is His transforming grace in us. **BA**

“We acknowledge that goodness comes from God, not from us.”

good nature. We believe we are good because we love those who love us back. However, requiring others to love us back is a condition, making our love conditional. But the law of love requires us to love everyone unconditionally — even those who hate us. Read Jesus' words:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray

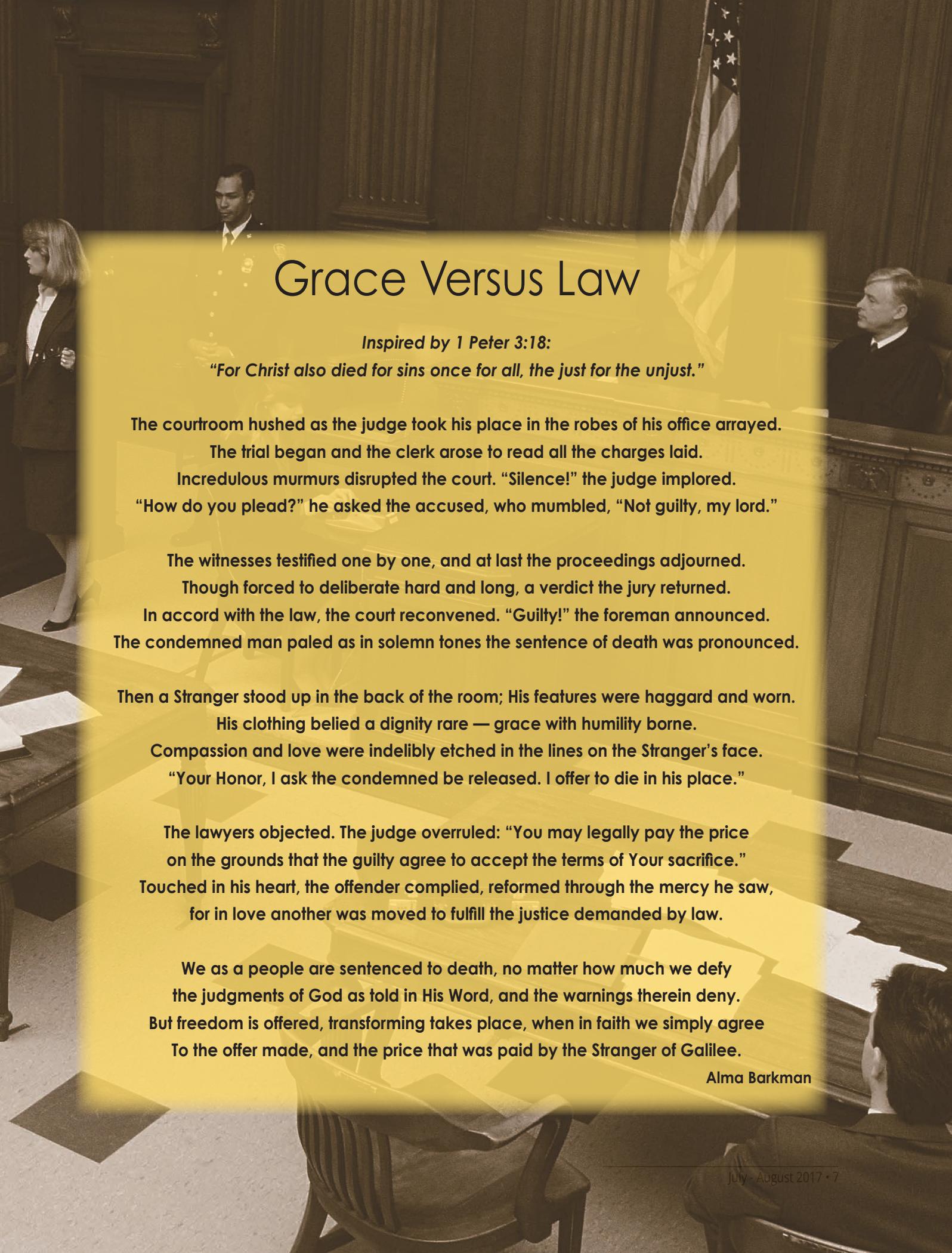
loved and commanded us (John 15:12) — even those who hate us. This is where His transforming grace is taking us!

Faith and transforming grace

Jesus wants the best for us, not because we're good but because He's good. Jesus gave His life for the ungodly, dying even for enemies who hated Him (Romans 5:6-10). That's His good, divine nature. He wants to share

Jody McCoy is executive director of the Church of God (Seventh Day) and lives in Austin, TX.



A courtroom scene with a judge, a woman, and a man in the background. The judge is seated at a desk on the right, wearing a black robe. A woman in a dark suit stands on the left. A man in a dark suit stands in the center background. An American flag is visible on the right. The scene is dimly lit, with a yellow glow behind the text.

Grace Versus Law

Inspired by 1 Peter 3:18:

“For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust.”

The courtroom hushed as the judge took his place in the robes of his office arrayed.

The trial began and the clerk arose to read all the charges laid.

Incredulous murmurs disrupted the court. “Silence!” the judge implored.

“How do you plead?” he asked the accused, who mumbled, “Not guilty, my lord.”

The witnesses testified one by one, and at last the proceedings adjourned.

Though forced to deliberate hard and long, a verdict the jury returned.

In accord with the law, the court reconvened. “Guilty!” the foreman announced.

The condemned man paled as in solemn tones the sentence of death was pronounced.

Then a Stranger stood up in the back of the room; His features were haggard and worn.

His clothing belied a dignity rare — grace with humility borne.

Compassion and love were indelibly etched in the lines on the Stranger’s face.

“Your Honor, I ask the condemned be released. I offer to die in his place.”

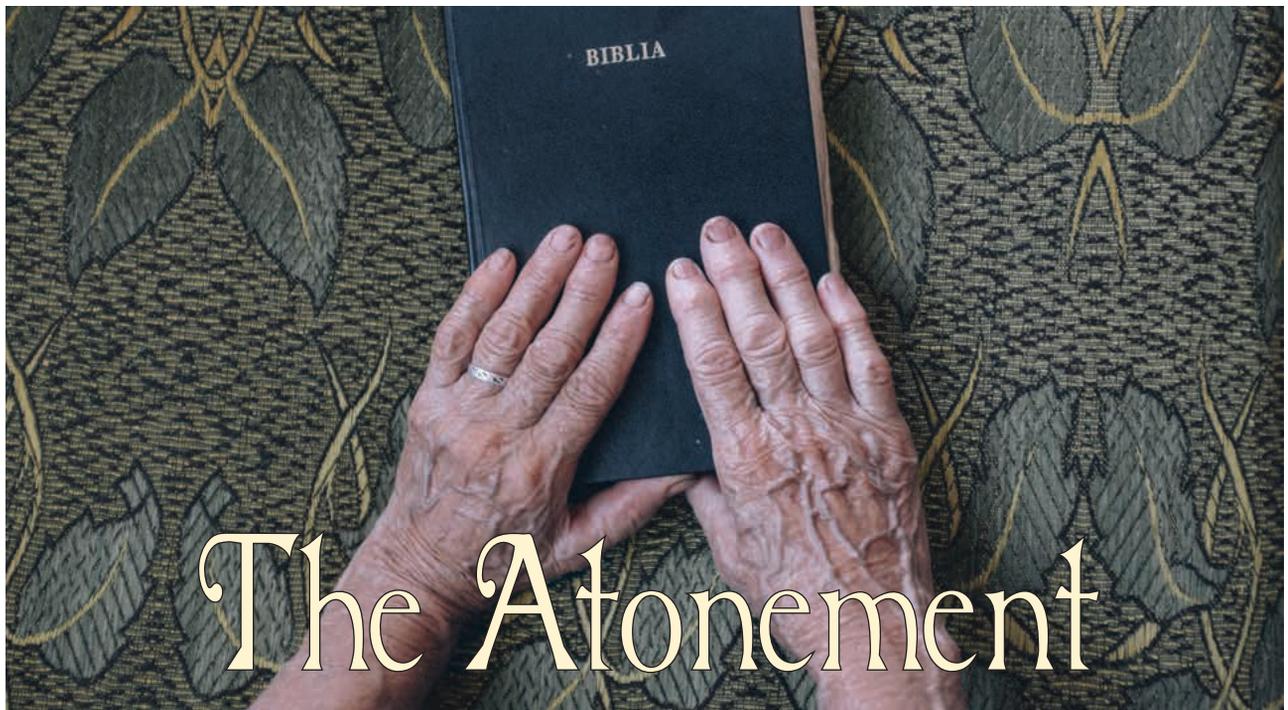
The lawyers objected. The judge overruled: “You may legally pay the price on the grounds that the guilty agree to accept the terms of Your sacrifice.”

Touched in his heart, the offender complied, reformed through the mercy he saw,
for in love another was moved to fulfill the justice demanded by law.

We as a people are sentenced to death, no matter how much we defy
the judgments of God as told in His Word, and the warnings therein deny.

But freedom is offered, transforming takes place, when in faith we simply agree
To the offer made, and the price that was paid by the Stranger of Galilee.

Alma Barkman



Understanding views of a central Christian teaching.
by Dr. Hector M. Alvarenga

In the Old Testament, God commanded Israel to keep the Day of Atonement every year on the tenth day of the seventh month (Leviticus 16:29, 30; 23:27, 28). On that day, the high priest brought the blood of sacrificed animals into the Most Holy Place and sprinkled it seven times on the mercy seat to make atonement for the whole assembly of Israel (vv. 14-17).

Atoning blood

The Bible teaches, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls . . .” and “without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness”

(Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22). Though animal blood and sacrifices had no intrinsic value in cleansing worshippers of sin under the old covenant, God gave them to Israel as a shadow of the life-giving reality to be revealed in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:1-4).

When Jesus shed His blood and accepted death on the cross, giving His life for us, the sacrificial cleansing of the Day of Atonement — the promise of Scripture — was fulfilled (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; John 1:29; Romans 5:8-11; 8:3; Hebrews 9:7-12). The atoning death of Christ was represented in nail-pierced hands and feet, a thorned crown on His brow, and a spear-pierced side (Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19).

When the New Testament epistles use the expression “the blood of Christ,” they refer to this precious life-giving blood, His substitutionary death and life offered for sinners (1 Corinthians 10:16; Ephesians 2:13;

1 Peter 1:12, 19; 1 John 1:7). This sacrificial gift for us is once and forevermore (Hebrews 7:27; 10:12-14).

Atoning reach

For whom did Christ make atonement? How far does it reach?

There are two basic responses. One teaches that the death of Christ was for every human being; hence the view that the atonement is universal. Another view teaches that Christ’s blood covers only those chosen by God for salvation; thus, the atonement is limited. Let’s look at each view a little closer.

Limited. This position emphasizes God’s sovereign choice, that Christ died to save only those the Father God has predestined for eternal life (Ephesians 1:5-7; 2 Timothy 2:10). Therefore, the atoning work of Christ is applied by God’s will to those in whom it is realized.

This limited atonement is circumspect in its reach. The teaching of sovereign grace and choice emerged with Augustine in the fifth century and flowered in the sixteenth with John Calvin and his Reformed heirs.

Universal. Among those who hold that Jesus' atonement is for all human beings, two groups of thought exist. One minority, known historically as the Universalists, teaches that the atonement is as universal in its *effect* as it is in its *reach*. They draw on New Testament passages that speak about God's universal mercy in Christ, and profess, therefore, that all humans will be saved (Romans 5:18; 11:32).

The second *universal* group seeks a balance between the two groups above.

Atoning grace

The majority opinion holds a position between the extremes of the Calvinists and Universalists by emphasizing God's sovereign grace and human accountability. It believes that the atonement is universal in reach but not in saving effect. In other words, Christ's atonement is available for all, but its saving effect takes place in persons as they respond to God's gift in living faith (John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:3-7). Among this group are the Lutherans, Arminians, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and moderate Calvinists.

Sacred Scripture clearly teaches that the atonement of Christ is for "our sins," yes, but not only for ours "but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Christ became a man to die as a "ransom for all" because it is God's will that all be saved (1 Timothy

2:4, 6). "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. . . . But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6, 8).

Before the gift of Christ's atonement, the world was helpless and lost in sin. Now God's love in Christ has appeared, and the free choice of faith is available to all who respond to the gospel, confessing Jesus as Lord: "those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Romans 4:24; 1 Corinthians 12:3).

“When Jesus shed His blood, the Day of Atonement was fulfilled.”

Faith and hope

Our reconciliation to God by Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice is at the very heart of Christianity. The apostle Paul, a defender of atonement in Christ, condensed it like this: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4).

Christ died for our sins! This is not dreamy, poetic imagination; it is history. Paul's crucified

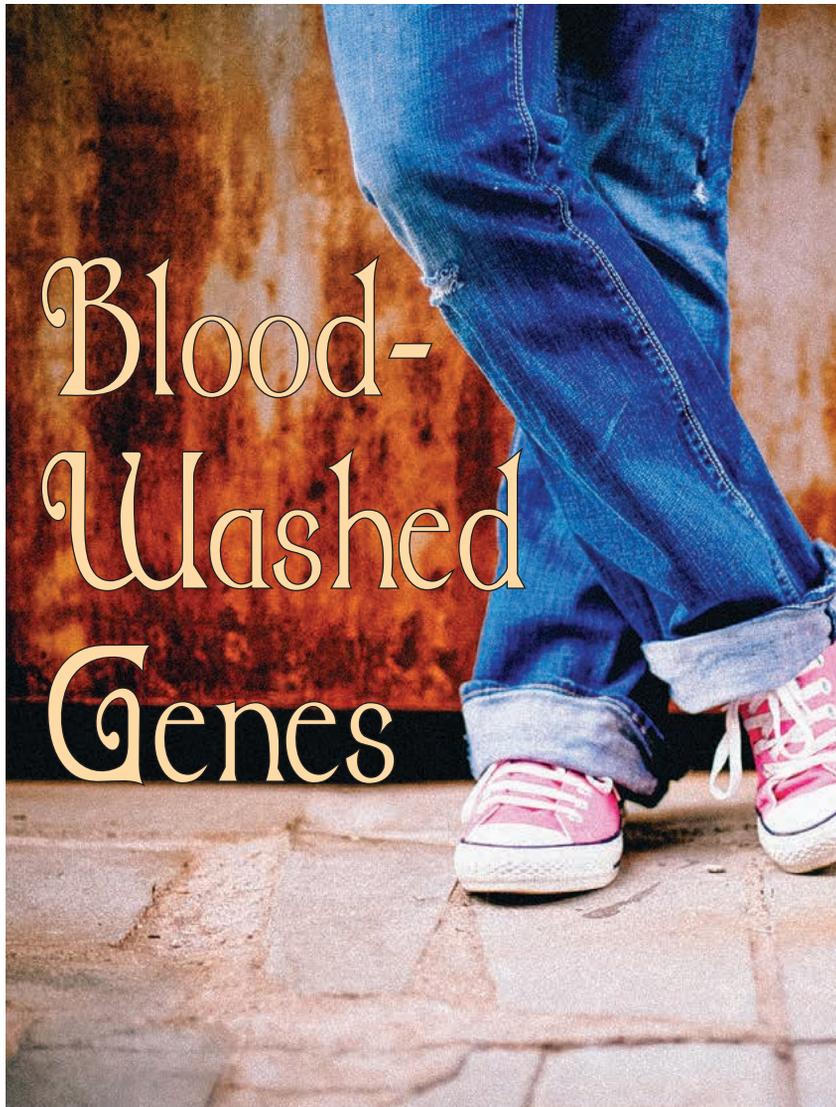
and risen Christ is fact, not fiction. This means that we may be redeemed, reconciled, justified, sanctified, and forgiven by the sacrificial atonement of Christ for a future glorification (Romans 8:30). The atonement of Christ has been a basic tenet of church faith from the first century CE down to the teachings of the Church of God (Seventh Day).

The atonement of Christ gives great confidence in our justification, sanctification, and glorification through faith (Romans 3:23-26). Jesus paid the price: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of

our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7). Atonement is the supreme expression of the love of our Father and Jesus, His beloved Son. We must never forget the riches of this grace and the price of our redemption (1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Peter 1:18, 19). **BA**

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We can't cover ourselves;
we must accept His perfect
righteousness.

by Dorothy Nimchuk

“I’ll absolutely die if I can’t have these stonewashed jeans. All my friends have them!”

“Foolish priorities,” we may respond. But what of our own concerns? What are we willing to forego to satisfy *our* whims? No tickets to the Super Bowl, so

we’re willing to concede to the scalpers’ prices? Max the credit cards, go without at the dinner table, delay some prized purchase – all because we simply *have to be there*?

We all have priorities, and most everything carries a price tag. But the freebies are sometimes overlooked. The greatest freebie of all – salvation – has been grossly underrated, ignored, set aside, all with little thought as to its ultimate value. Free indeed! Yet it did carry a price tag; it cost Someone a lot to provide it for free.

Early sin

The need for salvation arose soon after Creation, when man’s physiology became infected by sin. Adam had been created in the image of God, with the Creator’s DNA imprinted on him. God also bestowed upon him the ability to choose to either function within the given structure or defy his Creator through disobedience. In Eden’s garden, Adam made a bad choice: He succumbed to temptation and lost a part of his genetic makeup. That spiritual connection was broken, and he took on the DNA of the Evil One.

Realizing their nakedness, Adam and Eve tried to cover themselves with fig leaves. But God provided a better covering for the offenders. An animal had to die to provide those skins, but animal blood could not eradicate their sin. God therefore promised a Messiah who would win the battle between good and evil (Genesis 3:15).

Meanwhile, the animal’s death typified this Savior whose blood would be shed for the world’s redemption. All succeeding generations were born with the prevailing capacity to transgress. With this “gene” passed down from Adam, we’ve all come under the penalty of death.

Promised Savior

God’s people tried His patience time after time and attempted to cover their idolatry with a web of deception and lies, but to no avail: “Their webs will not become garments, nor will they cover themselves with their works . . .” (Isaiah 59:6). The only escape would be through

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Questions & Answers



Christ Centered is first in CoG7's Vision of a Vibrant 21st Century Church. Does this rob God of His glory? Shouldn't we be God centered instead?

To answer this vital question, let's explore the meaning of *Christ Centered*.

- It does not mean that Jesus is greater than His Father. A kind of solitary ascendancy and supremacy belong to God as Father. The Son shares most of the Father's attributes (and may be called God), but only the Father begets the Son and is fully transcendent — enveloped in majesty past finding out (Isaiah 55:8, 9; Romans 11:33-36). Christ taught us to pray to our heavenly Father: "Hallowed be thy name. . . thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen" (Matthew 6:9, 13, KJV).

- *Christ Centered* means that Jesus plays a central role in salvation. The Father's transcendence implies that between earth and heaven, a great chasm is fixed, an uncrossable gap. Jesus bridges that gap. He stands alone at the center — the middle Man between God and us, between heaven and earth (1 Timothy 2:5).

- *Christ Centered* means that Christ is the heart and focus of all we are and do as Christians. He is the hub and the main point of our faith. All other points of faith converge in Him (Galatians 2:20).

- *Christ Centered* means that if all days and details of our existence are seen as so many points on or inside a circle, then Christ is the very center of that circle, connected to all the rest by invisible cords of faith and love (Philippians 1:21).

- To affirm Christ centeredness does not diminish God as our Father. When Christ is lifted up, He draws all men to Himself and, by extension, to the Father also. "He who does not honor

the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him" (John 5:23b; 12:32).

- *Christ Centered* is not opposed to God centered. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are perfect manifestations of the one true God, with the Father first in all things. The Father sent the Son to reveal Himself and to be the world's Savior. Then the Spirit came to provide the constant presence of Christ. In this we see Christ at the center, pointing to God's eternal supremacy above all.

The heavenly Father holds the universe's highest rank, and His divine Son is the magnetic center of our faith. Jesus became human so that we may be more easily attracted to Him. Christ has the personal experience of being made a little lower than the angels (like us), of taking on a servant's form — like His brethren — of being touched with the feelings of our infirmities, of being tested in all points as we are, of suffering death on our behalf, and of calling us brethren. We identify closely with Him (Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 2:9-18; 4:15). Among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Jesus is God's choice to serve at His right hand as our advocate, our intercessor. He who knows us best loves us most.

No, being Christ centered does not take away from the glory of God. Devotion to Father and Son is not a zero-sum game in which more honor to one means less to the other. Rather, bowing before Christ and calling Him the name above every name — Lord — glorifies God the Father. We make Christ the focus of our faith and devotion precisely because doing so honors God (Philippians 2:9-11). Since God has highly exalted His Son (v. 9; cf Colossians 1:13-27), we may gladly do the same!

— Elder Calvin Burrell



Photo by Yvonne Kays

The God of grace brings forth life in unlikely places.
by Yvonne Kays

Surreal moon-like landscape surrounded me — glossy black rivers of rock, ripples frozen in time with chunks of porous a’ala lava thrown about abstractly. In the distance, smoke billowed into the sky above the ridge ahead as fresh lava flowed from the Kilauea volcano. Destroying and creating, new earth poured out of the molten center of our not-so-stable planet, continuing to form the big island of Hawaii.

As I hiked back toward my vehicle, I stopped in my tracks at the sight of new life breaking through the inky crust of a decade-old lava flow. Fresh shoots of vibrant green sprouted up in crevices, their roots seeking moisture and nutrients necessary to thrive in the desolate

landscape — the beginning of an amazing transformation from barrenness to luxuriant tropical forest.

Scripture flowed into my mind: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). He transformed the unformed mass to the familiar earth we know, filled with plants and animals, land and sea. Wonder filled me as I witnessed the miracle beginning anew.

Finding Light

Just as the seeds perished to break into new forms, their roots reaching downward and their sprouts upward, I thought of the metamorphosis we experience when reborn as new creatures in Christ: death to the old sin nature and resurrection by the power of the Holy Spirit. And like the transformation pictured before me, we face a maturation process that takes a lifetime.

As a newborn Christian, my life had resembled that barren landscape, made desolate by

sin and darkness. Defects and wounds seemed overwhelming and old patterns of living no longer fulfilling. The seedlings had needed light, nutrients, and water to grow into healthy producing plants, as did I.

My new nature sought the Light in this sin-darkened world. “I am the Light of the world,” Jesus said. “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). Drawing close to Him dispelled the darkness as His light illuminated and exposed sin.

I was startled to find layer after layer of sinful thoughts and behaviors, and I learned repentance would be an ongoing process, lasting a lifetime. True repentance involved acknowledgment of my wrongdoing and a total about-face from sin, bringing forgiveness and relief. Our gracious God gently peeled away one layer at a time, teaching me to draw close to Himself as I faced trials that tested my faith.

Growing up

Knowledge brought more light. Jesus declared, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Daily I fed on nourishing nuggets of God’s Word and applied His light in the big and the small things of life. I learned that our souls thrive as we absorb these nutrients — and we grow in faith.

Plants require water. In John 7:37, 38, Jesus said, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within them.” I came to see that thirst and belief in Jesus were the only requirements; the Holy Spirit comes to abide and flow within every new believer.

As I spent time with the Lord, watering my life with prayer, waiting and listening for the leading of His Spirit, He guided me into new patterns of living. I saw His provision and answers to prayer. Sometimes surrounded by pain or darkness, I could not feel His presence. I learned not to rely on my feelings but to have confidence in His promises and His faithfulness — and grow in trust.

Fellowship within Christ’s body, the church, helped me grow as well. Like staking up a tender new stalk, Christian mentors came alongside to encourage and hold me up in prayer. They showed me that being loved teaches us how to love, and we learn that nobody’s perfect. I learned to forgive and not judge. Corporate worship brought joy and opportunities to serve, putting love into action.

Recognizing my many imperfections, I hungered and thirsted

for more righteousness. This would help me thrive in my surroundings, as the apostle Paul warns us not to conform to the world but to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). How could I renew my mind? God would patiently show me in time.

Scripture tells us “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10). Reverence and awe humbled me as I began to realize the majesty and holiness of our God. I reeled at the thought of a Creator who

“ If God can
create life on
barren lava,
He can create
beauty in me. ”

formed man in His own image and gave us the ability to choose His love or not, of a God who planned to redeem broken, sinful human beings by taking our penalty on Himself, suffering and dying to bridge the gap. Wonder at His tender love filled my heart. Amazement brings us to our knees — growth in humility.

The mind functions much like a computer, programmed through daily choices. Paul exhorted the Philippians to think

on “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy . . .” (Philippians 4:8) and to put all into practice. Negative thinking, doubts, and fear hold me back; I was to cast all my anxiety onto Him.

Bearing fruit

Healthy plants produce flowers and fruit. Again, this was not my doing but His, for “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22, 23). Jesus reminds us “I am the vine; you are the branches” (John 15:5). Only as we abide in Him shall we bear much fruit. We exhibit His righteousness.

As Paul prayed for the Thessalonians to be sanctified in spirit, soul, and body, he concluded, “The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:24). Sanctification cannot be accomplished through my own meager efforts, striving and determining to be pure.

If God can create life on barren lava, He can create beauty in me. As a sunflower turns its face to follow the rotation of the sun, I naturally grow more like Him if I daily look into His face and seek His ways.

Praise God for His provision as He transforms us, His children, into His own image! **BA**

Yvonne Kays writes from Bend, OR. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



I Was Wrong



Taking a second look
at first impressions.

by Cathy Mogus

Juquin wandered out of the patch of forest behind our house in Canada's Yukon Territory, looking like a vagabond. He wore baggy pants, a crumpled shirt, and stringless runners. A large floppy hat covered his frizzy brown hair and half of his face.

The boy's body was too small and his vocabulary too big for a four-year-old. I wanted to meet his mother.

I saw her for the first time from my kitchen window. Dressed in blue jeans and flannel shirt, she was pulling a child's wagon loaded with groceries, laundry, and a baby. I could easily picture her living in the house up the hill. According to my boys' report, it was a two-room cabin with no running water or

indoor plumbing. Its outhouse, woodpile, and small garden gave one the feeling of walking back in time.

I knew the man of the house had been a trapper and wore his long hair in a ponytail. It wasn't hard for me to draw conclusions. They were probably the hippie type, I figured. Maybe not even married. No doubt poor — and unsociable.

Making friends

One day as the young mother pulled her wagon past my window, I decided to get acquainted. Slipping off my apron, I hurried out the kitchen door.

"I've wanted to get to know you," she told me after I introduced myself. "I guess I didn't want to come in dressed like this.

But then, I always look this way!”

I got to know Cherry better — and discovered I was all wrong. She was the town’s head librarian and a young Christian. Her husband had given up trapping temporarily to earn a good salary at a sawmill. Their savings would help them live comfortably when he returned to the trap lines.

“We don’t want to get too many modern conveniences,” Cherry once said with a chuckle. “It would spoil me for when we return to the bush.”

We became friends. She gave us lettuce and spinach from her garden, and we hooked up a hose from our house to hers so her family could have running water. Before they left to live in the Yukon wilderness, Cherry gave me her houseplants.

I would have missed a wonderful friendship had I chosen to ignore the “hippies up the hill” because of my first impressions!

Losing the labels

Let’s face it. Our initial impressions of someone can take on the form of instant judging. That’s why Jesus warns us, “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matthew 7:1).

Labeling is bad business spiritually, especially if our judgments are negative. We may actually be thinking lies. Sometimes these untruths will keep us from associating with certain people, causing us to miss opportunities to love them for Jesus’ sake.

We have a responsibility as Christ-followers to be gracious and accepting toward strangers and others we meet for the first time. I suggest the following:

Give them the benefit of the doubt. Paul admonishes Chris-

tians to fix their thoughts on what is true and good and right: “If there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8). How many people have you rejected because they seemed unfriendly or because of what they were wearing? And how many people have you accepted because they smiled at you or because they seemed your type?

Remember, think about what is true. It is virtually impossible to guess the truth at first glance —

“Labeling is bad business spiritually.”

or during the first conversation.

Think about their positive qualities. Many people sit on the sidelines because they have left poor impressions on others. I remember one young woman who sat by herself in church each week because she was too shy to make friends. I avoided her, since I knew I would have to initiate and carry most of the conversation. Eventually I invited her to go with me to a weekly prayer group.

At first I dreaded our little treks across town. But as we got better acquainted, it became

easier to talk. She was soon sharing with me her ambitions and dreams. I’m glad I made the effort to become her friend.

Don’t gossip about first impressions. I sat on the beach one summer watching my children play in the water and sand. Next to me sat a woman I had met briefly before. We both watched as an attractive blond gathered up her gear and called her children.

“She’s a real snob,” my companion commented. “She won’t talk to me. I’m sure she thinks she’s better than I am.”

“Maybe she’s shy,” I offered. Although I tried to defend the blond, I never forgot the other woman’s comments about her. Whenever someone mentioned that lady, I had a tendency to think of her as a snob.

The Bible teaches us to “speak every man truth with his neighbour” (Ephesians 4:25). It’s been said that more people have been ruined by rumors than by the truth.

Depend on the Spirit to guide your thoughts. If you are a Christian, the Spirit of truth is dwelling in you (John 14:17). He can reveal things you may never discover without His help.

The poet J. G. Whittier once wrote, “Man judges from a partial view.” Only God knows the whole. **BA**

Cathy Mogus

writes from Richmond, British Columbia. Scripture quotations are from the *King James Version*.



Lighting the World

*I am not the man I
ought to be, I am not
the man I wish to be,
and I am not the man I
hope to be, but by the
grace of God, I am not
the man I used to be.*

—John Newton



by Whaid Rose

By today's standards, Martin Luther's epic experience at Worms would have been followed by a bus tour promoting his vision of a church free from the shackles of Rome. But Luther led no campaign. As before Worms, he spent the rest of his life as a professor and pastor in Wittenberg.

Yet the light of the Reformation spread rapidly throughout Germany. It soon crossed the Channel into England, impacting all the places Wittenberg students had come from, as they enthusiastically took Luther's ideas to the streets and to their homelands. John Knox soon led the movement in Scotland, causing Queen Mary to publicly express fear of Knox's preaching and prayers. After fleeing Paris to escape the consequences of embracing Luther's teachings, John Calvin took refuge in Geneva, Switzerland. Along with Wittenberg, Geneva became an epicenter of this unstoppable worldwide movement.

But all wasn't smooth sailing for the early Reformers. In her pledge to restore Roman Catholicism in England, Queen Mary (nicknamed Bloody Mary) burned many Protestants at the stake. Thankfully, many escaped, taking refuge in Geneva. This resulted in the production of the Geneva Bible, the first English Bible with theological notes in its margins. Until the King James Bible was published (1611), this was the Bible of the English world, brought to America by the Pilgrims.

Writers and historians point to several factors that aided the rapid expansion of the Reformation, including Gutenberg's newly invented printing press, the composition of hymns based on Reformation theology, and the influence of the arts. In his 1996 *Christianity Today* editorial "Why We Still Need Luther," Timothy George provides even deeper insights:

Luther lived at one of the most dynamic intersections in history. He experienced firsthand the death throes of the Middle Ages and the birth pangs of modern times. Luther was only nine when Columbus set sail for India and stumbled onto the New World. Copernicus and Galileo were just opening the heavens to the human eye. The printing press was a brand new invention. The modern nation-state was beginning to emerge from the shadows of feudalism. In one way or another, Luther was involved in all these changes.

But the greatest factor is the sheer nature and impact of grace. The realization that God, whose holiness demands perfect justice, has given us through Christ what we don't deserve is radically transforming. When this grace captures the heart, the light of the gospel comes on. Trying to put it out only increases it; light is never overcome by darkness.

So when coining Latin phrases (or slogans) that capture their convictions regarding the essentials of Christianity, the early Reformers included *sola gratia* — *grace alone!* It's been noted that *grace* is the only remaining untarnished theological term in our language. Other words, such as *love*, have long lost their original meaning, but *grace* has managed to retain both its meaning and impact over the centuries. Grace is still amazing; it still captures hearts. We see it each time "Amazing Grace" is sung, whether in a Christian or secular setting. It's John Newton's personal testimony — rebel, infidel, slave trader-turned-preacher-of-grace.

Standing at history's most dynamic intersection yet, let's live *sola gratia*, causing the light of the gospel to shine in the darkest places of our twenty-first century world!

Could I But

**For I know my transgressions,
And my sin is ever before me (Psalm 51:3, NIV).**

**One thing I have desired of the Lord,
That will I seek . . .**

to behold the beauty of the Lord (Psalm 27:4).

**Could I but see that face I'd know
So deep inside me beauty lives,
And all the ugliness I've done
Would be reformed, informed by love.**

**Could I but hear that voice of His —
Like some bell sounding well below
The walled resistance of my mind —
At last I would obey His law.**

**Could I but feel His touch on me
My sickness would be swept out clean —
The fever broken, shame flushed free —
And I would be a child again.**

— James Sale



A Leader

■ [Vibrant leadership]

by Israel Steinmetz

Joe didn't look like a leader. The eleventh of twelve sons, he was loved by his father but despised by his ten older half-brothers. We meet him at seventeen years of age, tattling on them. Then the dreams started — dreams of ruling over his siblings and his parents. Even his loving father wasn't happy about this. His brothers seethed with jealousy.

The jealousy and hatred grew, and eventually some of his brothers conspired to kill Joe. He was spared, but he jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire. Sold into slavery in a foreign country, he seemed doomed to a life of degradation and hard labor. Joe's dreams of leading appeared dead.

But then things took an unexpected turn. It turns out Joe was an excellent servant — hard working, resourceful, honest, responsible. It wasn't long before his master made him ruler of the house. And the house prospered as a result. Joe was leading well.

Then came an opportunity. His master's wife tried to have an affair with Joe. It was the first great test of Joe's leadership, and he faced temptation exactly how leaders are supposed to: He ran away! But sometimes a lie is easier to believe than the truth, and Joe's master sent him off to

prison. Once more, Joe didn't look like a leader.

But leadership is influence, and Joe influenced those around him wherever he went. Leaders lead no matter where they are. Soon the warden made Joe responsible for all the prisoners, and the prison prospered as a result. Once again, Joe was leading well.

Then came another opportunity. Two former servants of the king who were imprisoned had dreams. With special insight, Joe interpreted them. One servant would be restored to his place; the other servant would be hanged. The dream and the nightmare both came true. But the servant whose dream came true forgot about Joe, leaving him in prison while he enjoyed the palace life.

Two years later, the king began to dream. No one could tell him the dreams' meaning, but then his servant remembered Joe. They brought him from prison, and he interpreted the dreams. The kingdom would enjoy seven years of abundance, followed by seven years of famine. The king knew leadership was necessary for the future, so he placed Joe over his entire kingdom. From prison to second-in-command of the world's greatest empire, Joe's long journey of leadership had apparently reached its apex. Joe led well.

Named Joe

Then came one final opportunity. The famine affected surrounding peoples, including Joe's family. His brothers came looking for food, and though Joe recognized them, they didn't recognize him. For a time he tested them, probing their hearts and motivations, desperately seeking a way to see his father and full brother again.

At last Joe revealed himself to his brothers, and in time brought his whole family to live under the protection of his kingdom. Then Joe's father died. While he grieved, his half-brothers trembled in fear. The brother they had sold into slavery had become the second most powerful man in the world. The fear of reciprocity overwhelmed them. But that's when Joe's leadership reached its true zenith. As his brothers begged for mercy, Joe spoke the words that would define his life:

"Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Genesis 50:19, 20, NASB).

Lessons learned

We learn so much about life and leadership from the story of Joseph in Genesis.

We learn that God is sovereign, working in the midst of

our lives to transform and empower us by His grace, despite our weakness or the malicious intent of others. We observe the power of integrity and God's favor on those who suffer for doing what's right. We discover the faithfulness of God, never leaving or forsaking us, especially in our darkest days. We see the power of simply trusting in God through it all, despite trial, tribulation, mistreatment, false accusation, and unjust turns of fate. We are challenged by Joseph's refusal to stand in the place of God and take vengeance on scheming brothers, a lying temptress, or a forgetful fellow prisoner.

Ultimately, we discover God's desire to show mercy and restore broken relationships, despite how wickedly others may behave or how wide and deep the divide may be. Finally, we realize the true purpose of leadership is not to lord it over people or grasp for justice, but to give life and provision to those in need.

The story of Joseph is not really about him. Rather, it is about the God who called Joseph and gave him a vision of leadership. Initially, Joseph saw only the power, position, and prestige. He was called, but he was not yet equipped. With his friends, family, and freedom stolen from him, Joseph learned to simply have faith in God.

And God proved faithful. As

God showed Joseph favor and restored him after every defeat, Joseph learned discipline and perseverance that would be necessary to save the world from famine. Through myriad challenges, God taught Joseph what true leadership consists of: humility, dependence, faith, patience, and mercy.

Accept the call

Leadership in God's kingdom hasn't changed. God is still calling women and men who will risk estrangement from family and friends, face hardship, suffer disappointment, and emerge triumphant by His grace made perfect in weakness. He's looking for those who will deny themselves the fleeting pleasures of this world and the forceful power of demanding justice. He's calling us to place our faith in Him and join Him in His mission to rescue a dying world.

Are you ready to answer the call? Continue your leadership journey at www.artioscollege.org. **BA**

Israel Steinmetz is co-director and dean of Academic Affairs at Artios Christian College. He lives in San Antonio, TX, with his wife, Anna, and their seven young children.



Three Loves



Greek can help us understand an overused English word.
by Mike Wallace with Jason Overman

God's will is for us to be reconciled to Him, and He has done this through His Son, Jesus — all because of love. God in Christ is the epitome of pure love, and only by it can we become a part of His family. Anything less is sin, the opposite of love, and sin leads to death rather than to fullness of life.

All Christians must understand this important word, as we have been commanded to “love one another” as Jesus has loved us (John 15:12, 13, 17). This love shows humanity that we're the children of God, Christians living in an ungodly society yet shin-

ing brightly as a beacon for the world to see.

Defining love

What is love, then?

God is love (1 John 4:16). We may also define it in three more words: “unselfish, outgoing concern”; love is sacrificial. Biblically defined, love is of God. First Corinthians 13 says it is kind and never selfish. Anything else is not true, godly love.

In the English language we use the word *love* all the time. But to understand the meaning of the word, we must know the context in which it is used. For example, simply saying, “I love you” in English can refer to affection for a friend, relative, or lover. Or love can mean passion for a variety of objects, like cars. Love can also apply to something deeper — spiritual love. This is why context is so important to understand the different *loves*. Sometimes even the tone in which the word

is said is needed to perceive the intended meaning.

Not so in Greek, the language in which the New Testament was written. There our single *love* is differentiated by several Greek words. Let's look at three — *agape*, *philia*, and *eros* — in light of the biblical concept of love as being “unselfish, outgoing concern.” While these three can and do overlap, their basic distinctions are helpful:

Agape: Divine love between God and creation

Philia: Devoted love between friends and family

Eros: Romantic love between a husband and wife

Agape

While the verb *agapao* is common in Classical Greek, the noun *agape* is rare. *Agapao* is often a synonym for the verbal forms of *philia* and *eros* and conveys the idea of favor or fondness. This favor, on rare occasions, can refer

to a generous act of one for another. But the distinctive character of *agape* love, as we think of it, is almost entirely derived from its particular New Testament use as the love of God or the love of Christ.

In John 3:16, for instance, we read, “God so loved [*agapao*] the world, that He gave. . . .” God’s gift of His only begotten Son expresses this special *agape* love, God’s unselfish, outgoing concern for the whole world. This is the same love that Christ exemplified in giving Himself for us on the cross and the same love He has for His church (Ephesians 5:2, 24). It’s also the love that Jesus commands us to have for one another (John 13:34). So *agape* is God’s love in Christ toward us and that love reciprocated to Him. Though common in Paul’s epistles, it is most plain in the writings of John, where 79 of the New Testament’s 215 instances of *agape/agapao* appear.

Philia

In Classical Greek, the verb *phileo* referred to a natural affection among relatives and friends. This sense can be found in the New Testament. A good example is 2 Peter 1:7, where the compound word *philadelphia* is used to refer to brotherly love now reenvisioned by the faith (cf Romans 12:10). In Luke, the more general sense of friendship is often conveyed by the noun *philos* (“friend,” 11:5-8). It is not much used in Paul’s epistles (but note 1 Corinthians 16:22), yet in John’s writings the *philia* word group can not only carry basic brother-friend connotations but also serve as a synonym with the

agape word group (5:20; 11:3, 5, 11; cf 19:26; 20:2).

John 21:15-17 is an interesting case. Twice Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love [*agapao*] Me. . . ?” Twice Peter answers “Yes, Lord; You know that I love [*phileo*] You.” The third time the distinction breaks down, and both Jesus and Peter say *phileo* (v. 17). So is a distinction or equivalence to be discerned here? It is not clear, but overall the New Testament makes a basic distinction: *Philia* love is unselfish, outgoing concern toward others.



Eros

The verb *erao* and the noun *eros* do not appear in the New Testament. In Classical Greek, *eros* referred to romantic, sexual love between a man and woman. This love involves the desire and craving to have and possess. This, combined with common pagan excesses in regard to ecstasy and fertility, are probably why the New Testament doesn’t utilize the word.

Nevertheless, the distinction is helpful. God is no prude. The Bible is full of sexual encounters, but God instructs us to keep sex-

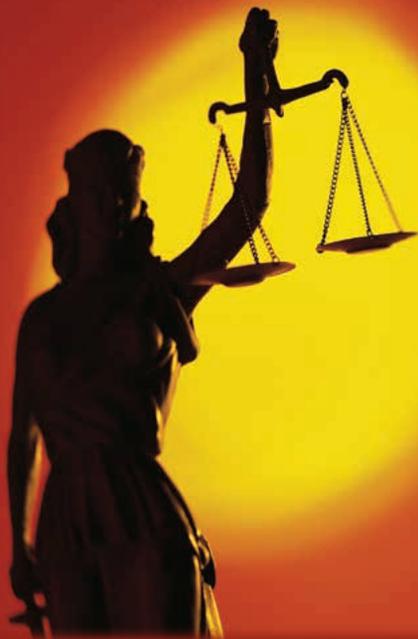
ual *eros* love, which is not dirty but part of His good creation, between a husband and wife (Proverbs 5:18, 19; Song of Solomon; 1 Timothy 3:2). God’s first commandment to Adam and Eve was to be fruitful and multiply, becoming one flesh in marriage (Genesis 1:28; 2:24). When Paul talks about marriage and the love husbands should have toward their wives in Ephesians 5:25-33, *agapao* is his word of choice for *love*. So with these biblical amendments in mind, pagan *eros* being appropriately tamed by

God’s will for sex, we can think of *eros* love as unselfish, outgoing concern toward a spouse.

Imagine

Can we imagine a world where all people live by *agape*, *philia*, and *eros*? Can we imagine a world where all love is defined and lived as “divine unselfish, outgoing concern,” total *agape* love of God and man for each other? Can we imagine a world where friendship, or *philia* love, is defined and lived as “unselfish, outgoing concern” for our neighbors? Can we imagine a

continued on page 28



The World Isn't Looking for Justice

by Shadia Hrichi

As we consider the ever-increasing and more sinister tragedies befalling our world today – ISIS, human trafficking, wholesale slaughter of children through abortion – our hearts cry out in deep despair for justice. Yet at the end of the day, what the world truly desires most is not justice, but love. As Christians, we have the answer for both because through Christ, both love and justice are satisfied.

The truth is that we are not called to make justice our aim, but to proclaim the God who is just. We are not called to rally around a cause, but to rally around Christ. Then, as we become transformed and empowered by His Holy Spirit, who grieves every injustice, He will use us to bring hope to a broken and unjust world until that day when our King Jesus sets up His righteous kingdom and establishes justice on earth, once and for all:

But of the Son He says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom” (Hebrews 1:8).

We have been given only one task before His righteous kingdom and true justice are finally established: to go and make disciples (Matthew 28:19). Therefore, the ultimate aim of any ministry God calls us to, no matter whom we serve or wherever or however we serve Him, must be to point people to Christ. He alone is our hope and refuge and healer – the one every wounded soul is crying for.

Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; how blessed are all those who long for Him (Isaiah 30:18).

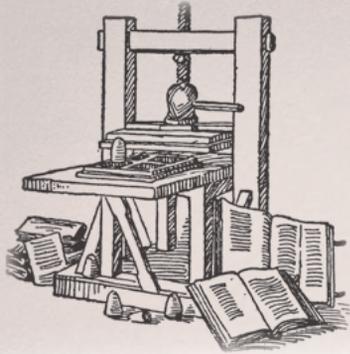
“Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations” (Matthew 12:18, NIV).

“In the past God overlooked [our ignorance and idolatry], but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:30, 31, NIV).

Father, as we go out and serve You in the ministry to which You have called us – to the broken, forsaken, wounded, and lost – remind us afresh that ultimately, what the world desires most is not justice but love. Through our glorious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, both are satisfied. For this we rejoice and praise Your name! Amen. BA

Shadia Hrichi writes from San Jose, CA. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*, except where noted.





Did You Know?

- The use of music in worship, particularly the hymns and choruses so familiar to Protestants today, was a practice slow in coming and met with controversy. Martin Luther, a musician himself, championed the use of music — and all the arts — in public worship. “Next to the Word of God,” he wrote, “music deserves the highest praise.” He encouraged the Reforming movement to write hymns to inspire all Christianity.
- Luther’s most influential worship innovation was the chorale — verse written in stanza form and set to catchy melodies like those of secular songs. Much later, John Wesley followed the same formula, believing that hymns fostered both personal devotion and biblical understanding. With new lyrics, he turned the popular ballad “I Must Leave You, Innsbruck” into the devotional “I Must Leave You, O World.”
- Unlike the Lutherans, the emerging Reformed and Anglican movements were dismissive of Luther’s “hymnody,” thinking it implied that the inspired psalms in the Bible were inadequate for the musical needs of the church. In English-speaking congregations, singing was primarily vocal, and most Reformed clergy thought that musical instruments were appropriate only to secular music.
- By the nineteenth century, church music was becoming increasingly important, with diverse genres emerging, especially in America. The African American spiritual introduced themes of suffering and solace that attracted the attention of the wider Protestant community, and the revivalist tradition popularized the chorus and gospel song as both a means of evangelizing and of experiencing God’s presence.

Sources

Alister McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea* (Harper One, 2007), 295-310.

His Grace is Enough For Me
by J. Bruce Evans, 1906

~
Just when I am disheartened,
Just when with cares oppressed,
Just when my way is darkest,
Just when I am distressed —
Then is my Savior near me,
He knows my every care;
Jesus will never leave me,
He helps my burdens bear.

~
Just when my hopes are vanished,
Just when my friends forsake,
Just when the fight is thickest,
Just when with fear I shake —
Then comes a still small whisper:
“Fear not, My child, I’m near.”
Jesus brings peace and comfort,
I love His voice to hear.

Refrain

His grace is enough for me, for me,
His grace is enough for me;
Through sorrow and pain,
Through loss or gain,
His grace is enough for me.

•
“My grace is sufficient for you . . .”
(2 Corinthians 12:9).

“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



Grace Alone

Relying on God's sufficiency
— then, now, and forever.

by **John Lemley**

Here are three popular definitions for grace:

God's unmerited favor.

God giving us what we do not deserve.

God's riches at Christ's expense.

These all show that the source of grace is God, *not us*. God's most significant gift of grace is His Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16). Jesus must remain exclusively central in order for the Reformation phrase *grace alone* to make sense. God's justifying grace cannot be paid for, worked for, bargained for, or added to. It is His gift, offered freely to whosoever will: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11).

The term *sola gratia*, or "grace alone," was important to the

Reformers because of the perception that grace was decidedly *not alone* in the Roman church. The Reformers recovered the biblical testimony regarding the sole initiative and sufficiency of God's act in Christ. One of the New Testament's fullest, and most memorable, descriptions of God's grace in Christ is found in Ephesians:

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love where-with he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that

not of yourselves: it is the gift of God (2:4-8).

Ephesians 2 explains God's great grace in Christ Jesus with the help of three other close synonyms: *love*, *mercy*, and *kindness*. Grace alone is our recognition of God's action and initiative alone to save and transform us: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (v. 10). It's all about grace because it's all about God.

Grace before

In the Old Testament the word *favor* is another translation of the Hebrew word for *grace*. Sometimes God is the one extending grace, and sometimes the verse is about grace extended from one person to another. It's notable, though, that all of the occurrences of the word *gracious* are about God. A few favorites are . . .

And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth . . . (Exodus 34:6).

The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy (Psalm 103:8).

And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil (Jonah 4:2).

Throughout the Old Testament, God's grace — His un-

deserved mercy, kindness, and loving favor toward His people — was seen and celebrated again and again. But this key attribute of God's character, with its saving and transforming work, would be completely known, and for all the world to see, only in God's Son, Jesus.

Grace embodied

When the Word was made flesh in Jesus Christ, God's graciousness was expressed fully:

“It's all about grace because it's all about God.”

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him (John 1:14-18).

John summarizes who Jesus

is in His very person with two words: *grace* and *truth*. It follows that grace and truth were at the heart of Jesus' ministry, in word and in deed.

In Luke 7 a centurion's servant is critically ill. He sends the Jewish elders to Jesus for help. The elders urge Jesus to heal the servant because the centurion "was worthy . . . he hath built us a synagogue" (vv. 4, 5). But on the way there, the centurion sends a message asking Jesus to simply say the word, and his servant will

be healed. Jesus commends the centurion for such great faith (v. 9). It's the great grace of God, not the worthiness of the centurion, that resulted in the servant's miraculous healing.

The cross of Christ demonstrates the grace and truth of God most completely. This is the length to which God's love will go. The saving, transforming effect of this grace alone is seen especially in the life of Paul. He gives credit to God's grace for changing him from a Christian hater to a Christian laborer:

For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of

God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me (1 Corinthians 15:9, 10).

Paul and the centurion were not unique. Each of us wasted years violating God's grace. All people of Adam's race need the gift of God's wonderful grace: "For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many" (Romans 5:15).

“Every breath we take, every step we walk, every task we do is because of His grace.”

Grace eternal

What is true of *grace alone* with God in the Old Testament and with Jesus in the New Testament is true for all times because graciousness is God's eternal nature: "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work" (2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17).

The saving "everlasting con-

solation" Paul speaks of, that stretches out before us into eternity, that transforms the Christian in "every good word and work," is likely related to John's curious words about Jesus' gift for us all: "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). Other translations read "grace upon grace" (NASB, et al.).

Meditate on the statement "grace for grace." Prayerfully think about what it means for us. Remember the first life-changing work of God's grace in your life. Recall when the old, old story became your story. Jesus took your sins upon Himself and died

for them, and a great exchange took place: "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

First, we are favored with that wonderful saving grace. Then, our Lord continues with us, transforming us by His workmanship and good favor, giving one blessing upon another. This is grace upon grace, and it lasts into eternity with Him in His kingdom.

What amazing grace!

Great grace

From the moment we believed on Jesus, God's great grace has continued to bless us. We awaken from each night's sleep because of His grace. We travel safely to our destinations and back home again because of His grace. We serve His church and minister to others, we speak and write because of His grace. Every breath we take, every step we walk, every task we do is because of His grace. His promise of eternal life with Him is because of His great grace. We rejoice that the Word, full of grace and truth, was made flesh and dwelt with us. His grace is the only way. It is by His grace alone.

This truth should impact our lives. It should change the way we think, speak, and act. Our response of faith to God's great grace leads to more grace — *grace upon grace*: His work of saving and transforming us. So be alert to God's favor in your life. Be aware of Him as the source of grace, and be quick to thank Him for it. Make it a habit, because the more you look for His grace, the more of His grace you'll find. **BA**

John and Lois Lemley live in Vancouver, WA, and attend the CoG7 in Kalama, WA. Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.



Blood-Washed Genes

continued from page 10

the provision of a perfect blood offering and a replacement for their torn, stained garments – garments that revealed their nakedness in the sight of the Creator. Only the promised Savior would be able to redeem the lost and bring them back under God's grace.

As a test of faith, God told Abraham to offer Isaac, his son of promise, as a sacrifice to Him. Abraham obeyed. As he raised the knife, the angel of the Lord stayed his hand, acknowledging that Abraham had passed the test of his faith and love for God. This was yet another type of the coming Messiah and reaffirmation of the promised deliverance.

Jesus knew that He was that designated Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:18-20). Think of it! He held a position equal to God and was part of the Father God himself: active in Creation . . . living in glory . . . revered by angels . . . greatly beloved by His Father!

Life in the blood

Jesus left the glory that was rightfully His to become the baby within Mary, conceived through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. He developed over nine months in Mary's womb, where her blood nourished Him with the oxygen and nutrients needed to grow. Blood: that life-giving elixir that renews and strengthens those who receive it!

Blood is the medium through which oxygen and nutrients are delivered to sustain life. It is vital in that it affects the functioning

of all areas of the body. Without blood, the body would soon wither and die. Lungs would refuse to provide oxygen, and heart pumps would shut down, preventing life-giving blood from coursing through veins. Kidneys would cease to release wastes and toxins. Without blood, there would be no life (Genesis 9:4)!

And without a perfect blood sacrifice, there could be no redemption:

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul" (Leviticus 17:11; cf Hebrews 9:22).

Spirit transformation

Jesus Christ thwarted Satan's every attempt to woo Him, though Satan offered the world if He would but worship him. Thank God that Jesus successfully resisted the wiles of the Evil One. Otherwise, all of us would have been eternally separated from God, and Satan would have been declared the winner of that long-standing conflict. Jesus willingly humbled Himself and became obedient to God's plan of salvation. He not only died but also rose again, assuring us of our own resurrection and a place in His kingdom. Jesus did His part. Now we need to do ours by allowing the Spirit to transform us into His image.

When converted, we are washed by the blood of the Lamb and adopted into God's family. Christ's blood figuratively infuses new life within us and restores the once lost spiritual DNA bestowed upon man at Creation. This special grace

comes sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, our guarantee of inheritance in God's kingdom (Ephesians 1:14). We need the power and presence of Christ in our lives. Our physiology is still infected by sin, but in our new life, God's Spirit is dominant and provides immunization against the infection so we can fight it.

In step

We may willingly go without other comforts to ensure tickets to a favorite sporting event, but investing in eternity produces far greater rewards. Stonewashed jeans may keep us in step with outward style, but the inward possession of blood-washed genes keeps us in step with the Savior. Salvation is indeed free, yet Jesus paid an exorbitantly high price to purchase it.

The first Adam was responsible for sin's inception; the last Adam (Jesus Christ) erased the stain of sin through His shed blood (1 Corinthians 15:45). Amazing! Christ's blood! That life-giving elixir that spiritually renews and strengthens those who receive it! Wrapped in His righteousness – the perfect cover. **BA**

Dorothy Nimchuk and her husband, Nick, serve the CoG7 in Medicine Hat, Alberta.





Mail Bag

Three Loves

continued from page 21

Praise for BA

The “Sola Scriptura” [March-April] issue was one of the best. The article about seeing and hearing what God wants to show and tell us was *awesome* [“Are You Listening?” p. 6]. Listening and hearing is the greatest gift we can give to God and one another.

B. M.
BA Online

I am extremely grateful for all that our sister Sonya Lopez Orr mentioned in her teaching [“Bible Beauty,” p. 14]. . . . If some of our sisters can come out to give understanding about this issue as our sister Sonya, I think that it can be more helpful to many of our sisters in the Lord. . . .

M. O.
Kisumu, Kenya

Correction

I appreciate the effort at addressing apologetic issues [“Integrity of Scripture,” p. 20]. . . . but I think we have to be careful with our facts. Codex Vaticanus does *not* contain the entire New Testament. It stops part way through Hebrews 9 and has large gaps to and after that point. . . .

G. F.
E-mail

Editor’s note: Thank you for this correction, and we apologize for the oversight. The writer’s source material (Geisler, Christian Apologetics, 343) was inaccurate. In fact, Codex Vaticanus is not “entire,” missing the pastoral epistles, Philemon, Revelation, and a large section of Hebrews. Codex Sinaiticus, from the same period, is the more complete manuscript, containing all the books of the New Testament.

Puzzle

The aim of this article [“The Book,” p. 24] is epic; the author’s scope, immense. Although a few of its statements and words are suspect, its overall effect is impressive and inspiring!

If nothing else, this article should make us think. I’m thinking, for example, that the words *fantastical*, *fantastic*, and *fantasy* (tagline, p. 24; subheads and third column, p. 25) were not used as consistently or accurately as they might have been.

My *Webster’s New World Dictionary (Third College Edition)* lists six connotations of the root word *fantasy*, all of which place it in the realm of fiction or imagination. The adjective *fantastic*, then, should be the quality possessed by a fantasy — namely, that of being fictional or imaginary. Your subheads on p. 25 suggest something different. While popular usage makes *fantastic* a good synonym for any positive description, from *good* to *awesome*, the inflated language we accept today may not be good for well-nuanced language in the long run.

C. B.
Stayton, OR

Response from Associate Editor Sherri Langton: I think if you look at fantastic in isolation, your point makes sense. But given the context of Jody’s remarks, he clearly indicates that the Bible isn’t fantasy — a stark contrast to the fantasy book in the opening illustration. So I read fantastic in the popular sense. The dictionary I use while editing is Merriam-Webster.com. Its third definition of fantastic is “exceedingly large or great.” In that sense, I think the word is fine as is.

world where in marriage, sexual eros love is defined and lived as “unselfish, outgoing concern” for one’s lover and spouse?

Imagine a marriage in which both husband and wife practice all three kinds of love — as God’s children, as best friends, and as committed lovers. There would be no arguments or divorce, only complete and loving harmony. Imagine a world where all people practiced *agape* and *philia* love for one another. There would be no war, no murder, no theft, lying, or coveting. Imagine a world where everyone loved God fully with His complete *agape* love, whereby He loved us.

A bigger love

When we expand our definition of *love* from the English to a better understanding of these three Greek words, we can expand our concept of godly, unselfish, outgoing concern toward all. This is how the kingdom of God on earth starts: through the fulfillment of His love.

Jesus says, “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). Truly we should all practice this love. What a wonderful life it would be. This love is what makes the world go around! **BA**

Mike Wallace, a father of five and financial advisor, writes from Florence, MT, where he lives with Bonnie, his wife of 38 years.





G. C. Ministries News

ARTIOS • MISSIONS • PUBLICATIONS



SHINE's Medical and Dental mission to Peru this year has two main goals: 1) to conduct clinics November 19-26 and 2) to offer initial assistance and support to local brethren in building Peru's first CoG7 temple.

The construction is in three phases, beginning in May of this year and ending in October. SHINE's medical/dental clinics in November will be held in the new church facility in Lima.

In recent years, Peru's economic stability has improved and the poverty rate has dropped substantially, but poverty is still around 30 percent (more than 55 percent in rural areas). Despite economic growth, many have left Peru. Civil war (1980-2000) and drug problems have caused more than two million Peruvians to exit this country in the last decade.

Peru can be a harsh place. The country's brethren, as with all believers, need solid foundations of Christian spirituality in their lives (Matthew 7:24), even as they work to build a foundationally solid church home in which to worship.

Please pray for Peru, that the Lord guides the construction of the church, that it will be a shining light to its community, that the SHINE team will be blessed, and that God's will prevails in everything.

Your donations are needed as well. Several ways to give are listed at cog7.org (Contact/Donate;



specify "SHINE" beneath the "Other" category under G. C. Missions).

Contact Ernesto Frausto (916-896-9267), SHINE director, if you have any questions. Online applications for people interested in joining the SHINE team to Peru will be available June 1 - August 31 and will be due by August 31. Watch for more details on SHINE Mission's Facebook site and on the home page of cog7.org.

— Bev Brenneise



Change in Quarterly Orders

Beginning with the fourth quarter 2017, standing orders of Bible study quarterlies will no longer be shipped automatically. Instead, they need to be placed through the Church of God (Seventh Day) online bookstore (cog7.org). Instructions on how to order will be sent by e-mail and by regular mail prior to fourth quarter 2017.

We will offer a "recurring" option on the curriculum order site for those who want an electronic standing order. We're making this change because of the inconsistencies and errors in our present system.

The BAP staff looks forward to serving you more efficiently in the future with online ordering. Please don't hesitate to call (303-452-7973) or e-mail us (bap.orders@cog7.org) with any questions you may have.



Ministry Through the IMC

Zone 2

David Bermudez (left) and the CoG7 in Nicaragua serve the needs of street children in Managua, Nicaragua, through the Garden of Eden ministry.



Zone 3

Three congregations in Colombia, located in Bogota, Villavicencio, and Bucaramanga, celebrated the annual Lord's Supper on April 9. Jorge Ferrero serves here as a Cristo Viene evangelist. Bogota is home to the Sol de Justicia children's outreach ministry.



Jesus Cruz shares the good news, planting CoG7's first congregation in Lima, Peru, thanks to generous donations through Cristo Viene.



Zone 4

Nine students have graduated from CoG7's ACTS Bible Seminary in Yangon, Myanmar. They will fill existing needs within the church and help plant three new congregations, two of which will be located on the borders of China and Thailand.



Zone 5

In remote northern Kenya, Turkana is home to women and children supported through sponsors of the Widows & Orphans ministry. Abrahams Odongo (Kenyan Conference president) and Tom Benzen (Arkansas) recently visited there to further explore ways to support the church and its ministry in this harsh environment.



Makuey Gai baptizes new brethren in South Sudan, where civil war and famine have affected millions since 2013. Most CoG7 brethren here live in U.N. refugee camps or escape to neighboring Sudan, Uganda, and Ethiopia.



Zone 6

Phil Kordahi (Australia) visited Cagayan de Oro and Manila April 26-30 for the annual national convention of the Church in the Philippines, where he shared progress of the international church. Over 600 attended, representing more than 7,000 members.





Transfigured by Grace

A small habitat now holds center stage on my dining room table. My wife, Karen, and grandson Logan watch the slow metamorphosis of five small caterpillars – hanging as five ugly chrysalides – into five beautiful butterflies.

A form of the Greek word from which comes our English word *metamorphosis* is translated “transfigured” in Matthew 17:1, 2. In his book *Studies in the Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, Kenneth Wuest wrote, “The sentence, ‘He was transfigured before them,’ in expanded translation could read: ‘His outward expression was changed before them, which outward expression proceeded from and was truly representative of His inward being.’”

In other words, explains Dr. Wuest, Jesus’ true and innermost nature became visible. During most of His life on earth, this nature was hidden. Philippians 2 says that Jesus, being in very nature (or form) God, made Himself nothing by taking the nature (or form) of man (vv. 6-8). But when Jesus was transfigured, His outward appearance changed. *Metamorphoomai!* His true and innermost nature – His glorious deity – burst through.

Another New Testament Greek word means almost the opposite of the word translated “transfigured.” In 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 (NIV), it is translated “masquerading” and “masquerade(s).” Whereas *transfigure* is used in the sense of changing the outward expression to *reveal* the true innermost nature, *masquerade* is used in the sense of changing the outward expression to *conceal* the true innermost nature. Second Corinthians 11:13-15 speaks of false apostles masquerading as apostles of Christ, Satan masquerading as an angel of light, and

Satan’s servants masquerading as servants of righteousness. They change their outward expressions, not to reveal but to hide their true and innermost natures.

Romans 12:2 includes both these Greek words: “Do not *conform* [or masquerade] any longer to the pattern of this world . . .” (NIV). In other words, “Christians, stop masquerading as worldly people!” Verse 2 continues, “but be *transformed* [or transfigured] by the renewing of your mind” (NIV). In other words, “Christians, let the new nature you have in Christ be seen.” Just as Jesus was transfigured on the mountain so that Peter, James, and John could see the glorious brightness of His deity, so Romans 12:2 instructs Christians to allow God to renew our minds so that our outward expressions reveal to everyone who sees our manner of living that we are, in very nature, children of God.

The grace of God must be received (Titus 2:11; Ephesians 2:8, 9), but having received it, we must express it to others. As new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), we must allow our new true and innermost being – the nature of Christ – to shine forth from us. Our lives are to “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect” (Titus 2:10, NASB).

Between the day I started writing this article and the day I finished it, those five ugly chrysalides did burst open, revealing five beautiful butterflies that Logan helped release into our backyard garden. May we too be transfigured. May we grace the lives of those around us with the beauty of Christ.

– Loren Stacy





Free us . . . to help others

Your regular and faithful tithes untie our hands and enable all of us to take advantage of new opportunities.

Where does your 10 percent go?

- 75 percent to the local church for local programs
- 10 percent to the district for district events and programs
- 15 percent to the General Conference and its ministries (Artios, Missions, and Publications) for training, world outreach, and publishing

Help us thrive. Tithe!