

Being Human





Inside

2018: This We Believe



ARTICLES

- 4 This We Believe
- 8 A Journey to Grace | Robert Coulter
- 10 In the Hard Places | Lakeisha D. Blake
- 14 Biblical Revelation | Gordon Feil
- 16 Uprooting the Tree of Temptation | R. Herbert
- 18 The Covenant of Vocation | Amber Riggs
- 20 Butterflies for Shelly | Pam Sheridan
- 23 Sin: Missing the Mark | Jason Overman
- 24 Talking TULIP - Part 2 | Israel Steinmetz

DEPARTMENTS

- 3 First Word — Being Human
- 11 Questions & Answers
- 12 Distinctive Doctrine
- 17 Poetry — Yvonne Kays
- 28 Mail Bag
- 29 G. C. Ministries News
- 30 Ministry Through the IMC
- 31 Last Word — A Tale of Two Mountains

Scripture quotations

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Being Human

Who are we? The world wrestles with this question like never before, and the answers offered and accepted are progressively debasing and dismaying. We need not list examples; it's on display every day in our so-called secular, post-Christian era. Absent a transcendent answer, personal choice is the sole arbiter of meaning.

Left to the tyranny of our subjective selves, and bolstered by technology and societal celebration of unfettered private expression, there are an inestimable array of options for *being human* today. We are the meaning-makers, and we are constrained only by our imaginations. But where does this leave us?

Paul foresaw these days: "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:1, 2, 4). From self-serving and God-negating existence, only confusion and despair can come. But Paul points a way past these perils in the same passage: "You have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (v. 15).

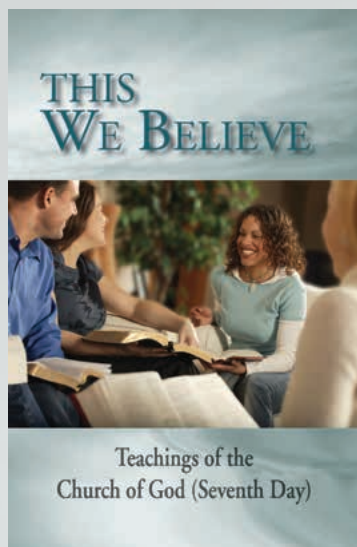
Into the vacuity of self-meaning comes good news for those anguished and estranged. God's transcendent Word of truth has the answer to the question. As this BA attests throughout its pages, our understanding of *being human* is rooted in our relationship to God. As Creator and Redeemer, God made us in His image as living souls, and God reclaimed us to His image by salvation in His Son, Jesus Christ (Genesis 2:7; Hebrews 5:9; Colossians 1:13-20). This good news conclusively affirms the dignity and purpose of every person.

Sin deceives and distorts what being human is really all about, but salvation recovers it and shows us again: *Jesus!* His incarnation not only reveals God to us but also, remarkably, images just what God intended for every human. Being human begins by acknowledging God as our Maker and Savior. What a revolutionary answer for this aimless, self-consuming age.

This BA is dedicated to our third and fourth Statements of Faith — on sin and salvation — as found in *This We Believe: The Teachings of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*. A vibrant church of God is more than just knowing or saying what we believe about being human; she models Jesus with her life to others. God help us be that church!

— Jason Overman





This We Believe

Continuing through our statements of faith, the following excerpts are taken from *This We Believe: Teachings of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*.

Statement of Faith 3

Man, Satan, Sin, and Death

This we believe:

Humanity was created in the image of God as sinless, but not naturally immortal. Sin entered the world when Adam and Eve yielded to the temptation of God's adversary, Satan. The Devil, capable of transforming himself into an angel of light to deceive and destroy humanity, will finally be destroyed in the lake of fire. As a result of Adam's fall, all humanity became sinners by nature and by choice. The result is spiritual separation from God, physical death in an unconscious state, and eternal death for those who do not receive salvation in Christ.

When God created Adam and Eve, He made them in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26, 27). They were the showpieces of His creation, the culmination of all created beings. No other creatures were given such similarity to deity — only mankind. Just flesh and bones, but made in the image and likeness of God. And when God surveyed all that He had created on the sixth day, including humans, “indeed it was very good” (v. 31).

In every way, Adam and Eve were exactly as God wanted them. One could say they were perfect. He fashioned them with His own hands, forming Adam first from the “dust of the ground” and breathing life into his nostrils (2:7). Then, using a rib from Adam's side, He formed Eve, “a helper comparable to him” (vv. 20-22). . . .

Being made in the image and likeness of God opens unlimited potential regarding human capabilities and characteristics. Though humans were invested with spirit, we are not spiritual beings as God is. Humans are finite, not infinite as He is. But most importantly, humans were made with the capacity to communicate with God. They enjoyed open fellowship with God originally, walking with Him in the cool of the evening (3:8). . . .

This paradise was sure to be interrupted, however. The Devil would not let it continue. He was intent on defiling God's beautiful creation, especially humans. His basic goal is to destroy the work of God. There is no good in him; he opposes and seeks to destroy all that is good. . . . So it would be expected that the Devil would make an attack on God's beautiful creation. . . .

The serpent, being “more cunning than any beast of the field” (Genesis 3:1), deceived Eve into eating from the forbidden tree. When she saw “that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate” (v. 6a). She was so impressed that “She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate” (v. 6b). “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked” (v. 7).

Immediately the aura of innocence was gone. The scene was corrupted! “Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). One act of disobedience threw the entire creation into a downward spiral, known as the Fall — a fall that still holds all humanity captive until God’s provided deliverance is received through acceptance of Jesus as Savior. Galatians 3:22 says, “But the Scripture has confined all under sin. . . .”

For Adam and Eve, being the first generation of Satan-duped humans, the results were immediate. They became carnal; that is, they became governed by mere human nature, given to passions and appetites. . . . for all humanity, there arose a barrier between God and man that could only be overcome through Jesus Christ. . . .

God being just, He proceeded to administer punishment for the offense. He pronounced curses upon Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:16-19), which have been handed down to succeeding generations so that every living human has come under the terms of the curses. Death, hardship in survival, pain in childbirth, sorrow, even thorns and thistles were among them. And then to cap it off, God drove Adam and Eve out of the garden, making sure they could never reenter it . . . (3:23, 24).

The curse of death that God pronounced upon Adam came to be reality for mankind (Romans 5:12). All are destined to die. . . . In the garden, Satan told Eve, “You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:4), but God had said, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it *you shall surely die*” (2:17). And as part of the curse pronounced on Adam, God said, “dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (3:19). That settles it: Death is sure!

From pages 39-42



Statement of Faith 4

Man, Salvation, and Life

This we believe:

Sinful humanity may be saved from the penalty of eternal death and receive eternal life instead, solely by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from human merit, works, or ceremonies. Atonement for sins, with its attendant promise of eternal life, comes through Christ’s death and resurrection on our behalf and is received in human experience by faith and repentance.

People need salvation. The gospel message of Scripture is so designed that it appeals best to those who are most aware of the need. The good news about Jesus resonates well with folks who know the truth about their sin. . . .

People need salvation because they need *freedom* from the penalty of their sins, *rescue* from the



practice of their sins, and eventual *deliverance* from the very presence and possibility of sin itself. . . .

The teaching of Scripture is clear and consistent. Unless born again, humanity lives under the curse, enslaved by sin and powerless to be righteous. This sinful state is both a result of man's sinful nature (i.e., original sin) and man's sinful choices (i.e., volitional/willful sin).

Now consider the tragic reality that this sinfulness not only spells hopelessness, enslavement, and misery in this life but also means the condemnation of eternal death for unregenerate humanity. No doubt the punishment on Judgment Day is a horrid and terrifying prospect. It is also eternal and final. Throughout the Bible the final judgment awaiting the unregenerate is one of death and utter destruction (Revelation 21:8). . . .

In juxtaposition to the tragic picture painted above, we can now offer hope to all mankind in Jesus Christ. Paul writes in Romans 5:8 that "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Earlier in the same letter Paul had written, "I am not ashamed of

the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes . . ." (1:16).

Just as sin and death spread to all humanity through Adam, so the hope of salvation and resurrection unto eternal life is offered to all through the second Adam, who is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:21, 22; Romans 5:12-19). As Jesus said: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:16, 17, NKJV). This offer of salvation in Jesus Christ is made available to everyone in the world as foreseen by the prophet Joel and affirmed by Peter and Paul: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13). . . .

Scripture teaches that a person moves from sinfulness to forgiveness, from death to life, by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. As Paul says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no man can boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9; cf. Romans 5:1, 2).

What do the words *grace* and *faith* mean? *Grace* is the unmerited favor, or gift, of God that is bestowed on unworthy humanity in His gracious acts — chiefly in the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16; Romans 3:23, 24). . . .

Faith means "trust" or "belief." . . . As Paul writes, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Romans 10:9, 10). **BA**

From pages 47-53

For more on the biblical teaching of death, conditional immortality, and the life to come, see pages 12-13.

The paperback edition of *This We Believe* may be purchased in English or Spanish for \$10. Order through the online store at cog7.org. Call 303-452-7973 for special pricing on bulk orders.



What Did the Resurrection of Christ Accomplish?

by Kenneth H. Freeman



An old story worth repeating tells of a Mohammedan speaking to a Christian concerning the advantages of his religion over that of his companion: "On our way to Mecca to kiss the Black Stone, we can stop at Medina and visit the tomb of Mohammed. All that you Christians have at Jerusalem is an empty tomb!"

Praise God for the empty tomb! All of the people of God should be thankful for the empty tomb, and the hallelujahs should spring up within them as wells of flowing water when they think and meditate upon the love of God as manifested in the empty tomb.

We speak with reverence and respect of someone who risks his own life that he might save someone else from death. How much more is Jesus Christ deserving of respect and reverence because He actually gave His life that others might live.

"For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would dare to die. But God commend-

eth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:7, 8).

Looking At It Negatively

It may be helpful to us in better appreciating what the resurrection of Christ accomplished if we would first look at it negatively. What would we have lost if Christ had not been raised? What would need to be eliminated from the Gospel we now preach if Christ had not been resurrected? If Christ had not been brought again from the "Land of the Shadow," how would this affect Christianity?

"And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Cor. 15:14).

The argument might be presented that there are many other important subjects on which the preacher could base his teachings, and the elimination of the resurrection of Christ need not affect his preaching. It is true that some congregations would

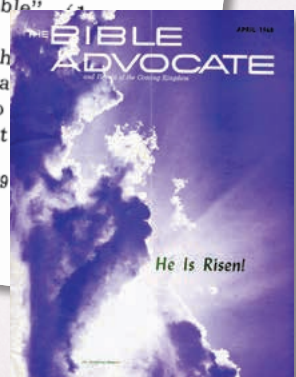
never miss the omission of the great truth of the resurrection of Christ, for they seldom, if ever, hear it preached. Many modern expositors believe that they are called to preach a gospel of social reform, to crusade in behalf of any movement as long as it is in opposition to something, and to carry the torch for any cause that smacks of the mysterious or mystical. Such preaching is in vain, and so is all preaching that does not lift up Christ and Him crucified and risen again.

Our faith would also be in vain if Christ was not risen. As we come to God we must believe that He is, and that He will reward those who diligently seek Him. Although I am enjoying life and rejoice as I walk with my God, it is true as Paul states: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19).

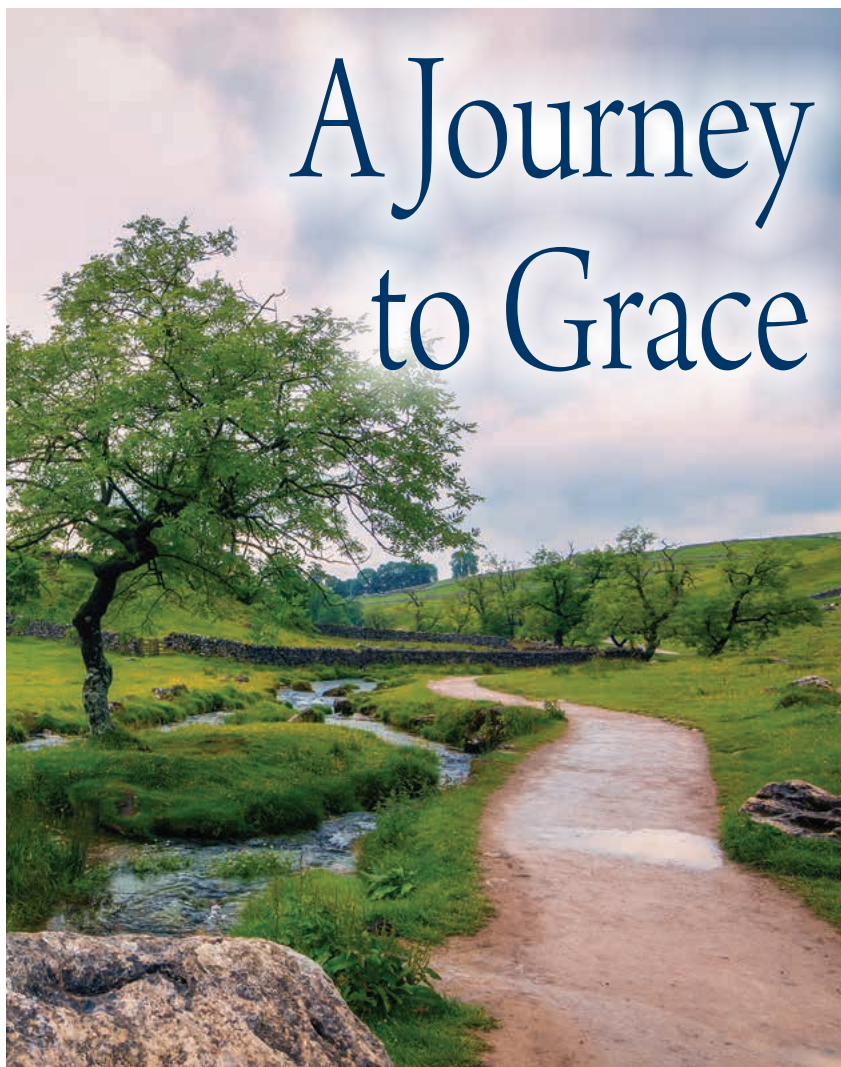
Some will declare that the resurrection of Christ is a fairy story to be told to children, and certainly not

APRIL 1968

Page 19



Read this article in its entirety, along with the April 1968 issue, at baonline.org.



Our CoG7 historian reflects on important developments in our doctrine of salvation.

by Robert Coulter

The Church of Christ (early 1860s) in Michigan was the earliest predecessor to the Church of God (Seventh Day). Her doctrine of salvation through Jesus Christ, or soteriology, was stated by Enos Easton, editor of *The Hope of Israel* magazine: "As principles we shall maintain . . . 'That sin entered the world and

death by sin;' . . . That man having sinned, and [the] sentence of death having been passed upon him, he can have no hope of eternal life except through Christ; and that too, by a resurrection from the dead."

The General Conference of the Church of God adopted Articles of Faith in its 1888 meeting, which stated, "We believe that repentance, conversion, baptism by immersion, a godly life through faith in the cleansing power of the *blood* of Jesus, and His *mediatorship* for us, are the *essential* elements of salvation. . . . that man is mortal and has no consciousness in death

. . . there will be a resurrection of the righteous to everlasting life . . . at the second coming of Christ."

In an article he titled "The Law of God," Gilbert Cranmer, founder of the Church of Christ, expressed his belief that salvation is obtained by faith and works:

Under the New Testament as under the Old, God demands that we show our faith by works . . . our hope, our whole hope [of eternal life] is in the resurrection. . . . How shall we show faith? . . . we must be "buried with Christ" and rise again, to walk in newness of life. This is all plain. May we all love the law; O may it be written in our hearts!"

In the October 5, 1915, issue of the *Bible Advocate*, I. N. Kramer, a charter member of the Marion, Iowa Church of Jesus Christ, expressed his opinion on how sinners receive salvation:

In the death of Christ we see Jesus bearing the punishment due our sins, and giving to us the benefit of his loving righteous act. . . . Law and justice demand satisfaction for offences. Grace meets that satisfaction. . . . The grantor taking upon himself the penalty, makes full requisition for it at his own expense and bestows the benefit upon the erring one. Such is free grace, the grace of God through Christ.

In 1917, Andrew N. Dugger, editor of the *Bible Advocate*, unilaterally revised the Church's Articles of Faith of 1888. He called his revision *What the Church of God Believes and Why*. It contained forty statements of doc-

trine, nine of which addressed different aspects of salvation. But the word *grace* never appeared in his statements on salvation, except in the Bible texts he quoted as support for each statement.

Dugger's revised doctrinal statements taught that salvation is received and maintained by works. They were adopted by the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day), Stanberry, Missouri, as its official statement of doctrine. The Conference retained it as its doctrinal statement, virtually unchanged, until 1949.

The 1949 revision of the Stanberry Conference's doctrinal statement contained four statements that addressed the Church's soteriology. Statement 7 was titled "The Plan of Salvation," and number 8 was titled "The Blood of Christ," but neither statement mentioned God's grace. Further, Statements 9 and 10 emphasized salvation by obedience to God, without a reference to grace.

Number 9: "*Accepting Christ*: To secure the benefits of the Plan of Salvation, each individual must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and accept Him as his personal Savior, obey the terms of the Gospel, and pattern his life after the example of Christ."

Number 10: "*Terms of the Gospel*: The terms of the Gospel include faith in God, and His Son, Jesus Christ, repentance and confession of sin, including restitution where possible; baptism by immersion in water, signifying the burial of the old life of sin and the arising to a new life of obedience to God."

Over the next thirty-plus years, the Church of God placed greater emphasis on works in

her doctrine of salvation than on the grace of God. However, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Church's laity and ministry began to understand that salvation is received by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. In recognition of this, the North American Ministerial Council of 1986 took the first step to introduce the concept of grace in the Church's soteriology. The council adopted a Statement of Consensus, which acknowledged God's grace but retained a works ethic:



Statement of Consensus

We are saved by God's grace through faith in the person and finished work of Jesus Christ. This grace and salvation demands our obedient response, inspires our obedient response and empowers our obedient response. Therefore, because it is God's grace which lead to holy living and obedience rather than holy living and obedience which leads to God's grace, God's grace should receive the greater emphasis, but *not* without maintaining a proper balance.

However, as the Church's un-

derstanding of God's grace in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ became clearer, the North American Ministerial Council of 2006 adopted a doctrinal statement recognizing that salvation is by God's grace alone. Its statement, titled "Man, Salvation and Life," represents the Church of God's present doctrine of salvation:

Sinful humanity may be saved from the penalty of eternal death and receive eternal life instead, solely by the grace of God through

faith in Jesus Christ, apart from human merit, works, or ceremonies. Atonement for sins, with its attendant promise of eternal life, comes through Christ's death and resurrection on our behalf and is received in human experience by faith and repentance.

Thank God! His Holy Spirit corrects error and leads believers into truth (John 16:13)! **BA**

Robert Coulter lives with his wife, Ida, in Northglenn, CO. They attend the Denver church.





by Lakeisha D. Blake

I have prayed for a husband since 2006, when I felt the Lord nudging me to do so. At the time, I thought it meant that marriage was coming sooner rather than later.

But now it's later — eleven years later — and sooner is no longer an option. Most of the time, I'm content with being single, especially since it is all I've ever known. But at other times, loneliness, hopelessness, and lies of inadequacy hit like daggers straight to my heart. These are the times when singleness is a hard place of pain and deferred hope. But these are also the times when I've experienced the deepest intimacy with God.

Whether it's unwanted singleness, financial crisis, a negative doctor's report, marital infidelity, or a natural disaster, we all face hard places. As we navigate them, our intellectual understanding about God gives way to experience with Him, and truth becomes an intimate friend, rather than a lifeless doctrine.

It's a beautiful process we also see in Scripture. As the heroes of our faith faced distressing circumstances, God revealed Himself to them in powerful, new ways.

Old Testament: Hagar

Hagar, a woman we first meet in Genesis 16, encountered God in a desert. She was the servant girl of Sarai, Abraham's wife. Since Sarai's body was too old

continued on page 27

Questions & Answers



What do we say to those who think we can do anything we want with our bodies because it's what we are on the inside — the soul — that really matters? Isn't the body important to God, too?

Yes, the whole person is important to God — inside and out. Paul prayed that our whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless before Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23). So what do we tell people who think that what they do with their bodies is of no concern to their soul?

We tell them of God's creation. He spoke the whole world into existence. He gave it incomparable beauty, intricate complexity, and marvelous life forms. And when He was done creating, He called the whole physical-spiritual thing, including human bodies, "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

We tell them that the Bible gives consistent witness to the nobility and value of what God created and called "very good" at the start. Read it in the Law (Exodus 20:11), in the Psalms (8:3; 19:1-6; 104; 139:14), and in the Prophets (Isaiah 6:3b; 40:26; 45:18). Confirm it in the Gospels (Matthew 5:5), the Epistles (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20), and the Revelation (4:11; 11:18b).

First Corinthians 6:20 sums up the biblical testimony well: "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

We tell them that God's created order is a united whole, with physical and spiritual elements forever linked. Humans are not like immortal souls in a sack of dung. Rather, they are whole persons that the Bible often calls "souls." No detachable parts.

We tell them that what God called "very good" at the start was corrupted and scarred by the fall of the human race into sin (Genesis 3:14-19) and "that the whole creation groans and labors with

birth pangs together until now" (Romans 8:22). Ever since our first parents brought ruin to Eden, we've walked in their footsteps in our abuse and misuse of the planet, its human and natural resources.

We tell them that God gave His highest honor to the material world when He ordained Jesus Christ to be conceived and born on earth, in a human body.

We tell them, too, that when heaven sent the beloved Son to execute the Divine plan for reconciling all things to Himself (Ephesians 1:10), our physical bodies were not excluded. Just as all things in heaven and on earth were created through Him and for Him, so will all things be redeemed by His life, death, and resurrection (Colossians 1:16, 20). This includes the whole created order: heavens, earth, and bodies of those who inhabit them (Romans 8:19-23).

We tell them that what God called "very good" at the start, He will not finally destroy at the end. He created the earth to be inhabited (Isaiah 45:18), and He created our bodies for the same. Just as the created universe shall someday be restored to its original perfection (new heavens and new earth), so will our bodies be resurrected to their destined perfection in God's eternal kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:50-54).

Does God care for human bodies? For sure He does! He created them a marvel, and He will redeem them through the salvation of Christ. It follows that we too should care for them and treat them with respect. Christians are not set free to do anything we might want, but we are free and authorized from above to do everything we ought.

"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Death and

“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all

There are three major belief systems about death and the hereafter:



1. Humans are spiritual beings destined for a succession of future lives by reincarnation.

You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. You send forth Your Spirit, they are created (Psalm 104:29, 30).

The Bible does not support the view that humans take on a succession of either higher or lower life forms. It teaches that human beings are living souls who live once and die and have hope for a future life by the grace of God in Christ. This gives life dignity and humans responsibility for life lived.

Genesis 3:19; 2 Samuel 14:14; Job 14:5; Psalm 89:48; Romans 5

It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment (Hebrews 9:27).



2. Humans are mere animals destined for oblivion, with no hope for more life after death.

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to . . . everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

The Bible obviously does not support the fatalistic materialism of modern atheism. We are created and redeemed by a God who loves us as His children. He is also our Judge! The Bible warns that both wicked and righteous will rise from the dead and stand before God to give account for our life lived.

Job 14:14; Matthew 25:31-46; 1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 20

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ . . . (2 Corinthians 5:10).



3. Humans have mortal bodies whose immortal souls go either to heaven or hell when they die.

For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward . . . (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

The Bible does not support the popular view of immortal souls. Only God has immortality, and humans receive it only as a gift through faith in Christ. Death is the absence of life and consciousness, and is often referred to as sleep, pointing toward a future resurrection. Christians await it and are said to “sleep in Jesus.”

Job 7:21; Mark 5:39; 1 Thessalonians 4:14; 1 Timothy 6:16

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life . . . (Romans 6:23).

Immortality

shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22).

But we believe that the Bible clearly teaches a fourth way:



4. Humans are mortal beings who will die and be resurrected either to eternal life or eternal destruction.

Life's best possessions are gifts from God, and at the top of the list is eternal life. Not something we have naturally, eternal life is something God gives us — announced in the gospel. If we were born with immortal souls, eternal life would not depend on faith in Christ. Even failure to trust Christ would not cause us to perish, because immortal souls can never perish.

Immortality comes into light and into our experience only through the gospel:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16; cf. 2 Timothy 1:10).

Jesus Christ, by His life, death, and resurrection, has given us our only hope of escaping a second death, of receiving perfect and everlasting life after death.

Jesus' promise to return for His people is a solid basis on which to build our expectation of eternal life. That promise is sounded scores of times in the New Testament. The doctrine of

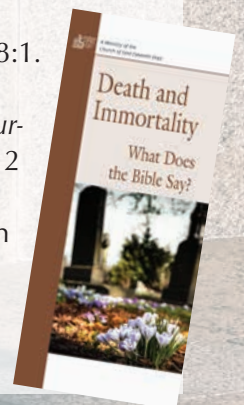
our resurrection is repeated often in the clearest of terms. Our being raised from the grave to immortality is stated without equivocation. These are the truth pillars on which we rest our hope. Our assurance of eternal life comes neither from idle speculations about reincarnation nor from ancient concepts of natural immortality.

Our confidence of immortality and eternal life for the righteous comes from the clear teachings of God's Word.

Additional Verses

Living souls: Genesis 2:7; Exodus 1:5 (KJV); Numbers 9:13 (KJV). *Life and death:* Psalm 6:5; 115:17; 146:3, 4; Isaiah 38:1. *Death and sleep:* 1 Kings 2:10; John 11:11, 14; 1 Thessalonians 5:10. *Resurrection and judgment:* John 5:28, 29; 2 Timothy 4:1.

Excerpted from the BAP tract Death and Immortality. Order it, or read a digital copy, at baonline.org.





How is the Bible revealed to us? Part 2 in this set of articles enlightens.

by Gordon Feil

This series attempts to present a sound rationale for believing that the Bible is from God to man. Apologetics is about knowing why we believe this. We admit that our belief in God is based on faith, but faith is not irrational. God gives some evidence that the faith we have in Him is reasonable, but He gives us *only* enough for that. He does not give us enough evidence that we have no need for faith to believe.

Most of what we know about God comes from the Bible. In the last BA, we summarized the six main issues involved with assessing the authenticity and

authority of the Bible. This article addresses the first issue: *revelation*, which relates to the Bible's authorship and content.

Four kinds of revelation

To briefly review, the Bible reveals at least four kinds of revelation from God. Two of these, creation and miracles, are what theologians call *incomplete revelation* because there are limits to what they reveal. We do not learn all we need to know about God by studying His created world or experiencing a miracle. Creation can show us that God is great (Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:20), but no matter how long we look at it, we will not find God's instructions for our lives. Same goes for miracles.

Two other kinds of Divine revelation make up *complete revelation*. They do teach us all we need to know about God and His will for us.

First, we know God through Jesus the Messiah. John 1:1 tells us that the Word of God *is* God and that God was incarnate — Word became flesh. What we need to know about God we can see fully in Jesus Christ because “in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead *bodily*” (Colossians 2:9, emphasis mine).

Who better to reveal God than God himself? Jesus is the living demonstration of who God is (John 14:9). But the only valid picture we have of Jesus is the one the Bible reveals. We have to study Scripture to learn about the manifestation of God through Christ.

And this brings us to the second kind of complete revelation, and focus of this article. Hebrews 1:1, 2 says:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these

last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.

God revealed Himself to us through prophets and through His Son, and the Bible is the record of both. The message of the prophets and God's Word by and about Jesus came down to us in written form: the Bible, the only rule of faith and practice for humanity.

Authorship

The Bible's author is God. That is reason alone for us to trust it. In addition, the following reasons should prompt us to further conclude that the Bible is a reliable and authoritative revelation.

- Its *ideals*. To paraphrase John Wesley, the best of men could not have written the Bible; the worst of men would not have written it.

- Its *efficacy*. Anyone who has experienced the Bible's transforming power finds it easy to accept it as God's Word, even the difficult parts. The Bible has given us its wisdom, tutored us in its message of love, strengthened us in faith, and filled us with hope, because we have seen its truth at work in our lives.

- Its *integrity*. The Bible's details can be corroborated. The more details in an account, the greater the chance of error. But the Bible isn't afraid of detail. For example, Luke 3:1, 2 offers many testable facts in a short space. The biblical Flood (Genesis 6-8) is another example. The Bible records history's one universal story. The Flood account is preserved in over two hundred fifty cultures.

- Its *composition*. Around thirty people from seven countries composed the Bible across more than fifteen hundred years, yet it is internally consistent and presents a unified theme.

- Its *indestructibility*. Many regimes have attempted to destroy the Bible, but it endures and flourishes. The Roman emperor Diocletian boasted that he had eliminated Christianity and its Bible. To keep the laity from reading it for themselves, the medieval Catholic Church destroyed thousands of copies. The French Revolutionary government, egged on by Voltaire, sought to purge the Bible from France. These efforts were all in vain.

what was written in Scripture about Him (Luke 24:44, 45). But Jesus' resurrection in history is the ultimate endorsement. It not only showed His divinity but also confirmed the authenticity of the Bible as God's revelation.

Unique Book

The Bible is unique. It is authoritative and impacts our lives because the author is God. It makes this claim of Divine revelation throughout its pages (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20, 21), and it challenges us to believe.

Sir Monier Monier-Williams, professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, understood this uniqueness.

“We admit that our belief in God is based on faith, but faith is not irrational.”

- Its *foreknowledge*. About one-third of the Bible is prophecy — “history written in advance.” One has only to study the texts and their many fulfillments to see that God fulfills His promises.

- Its *endorsement by Jesus*. If Jesus accepted the Hebrew Scriptures (the only Bible up to that time) as being from God, then so should we. During His temptation, He battled Satan's attacks by quoting Scripture (Matthew 4:1-10). After His resurrection, Jesus opened the eyes of His followers, showing that His coming back to life fulfilled

Writing about the Eastern books of religion he studied for years, he said, “Pile them . . . on the left side of your study table, but place your own Holy Bible on the right side — all by itself, all alone, with a wide gap between them.”

No other book compares! **BA**

Gordon Feil writes from Victoria, British Columbia, where he resides with his wife, Linza.





■ [In context]

Uprooting the Tree of Temptation

by R. Herbert

The Bible contains many guiding scriptures to help us overcome, but it also provides understanding of the cycle of temptation and sin that grows, figuratively, from tiny seed to burgeoning tree. We find this understanding in both the Old and New Testaments and can apply it directly to our lives.

The apostle James describes the genealogy, or family tree, of every temptation leading to transgression: “each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:14, 15).

Now consider what James says in terms of the analogy of a growing tree:

Seed: “each one is tempted” – exposure

Roots: “drawn away by his own desires” – considering the temptation

Trunk: “and enticed” – intellectual acquiescence

Branches: “when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin” – submission to sin

Fruit: “sin . . . brings forth death” – result of sin

We see this pattern as early as the first sin, when the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil became the focus of Eve’s attention (Genesis 3:6).

Seed: “the woman saw” – exposure

Roots: “the tree was good for food . . . pleasant to the eyes” – considering the temptation

Trunk: “and . . . desirable to make one wise” – intellectual acquiescence

Branches: “she took of its fruit and ate” – submission to sin

Fruit: “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (2:17) – result of sin

Once we understand the structure of this figurative tree of transgression, we can see that the only

logical place to stop the growth of temptation is at the beginning: by killing the seed before the roots begin to grow. Physical seeds need the right conditions to germinate. Spiritually, we must do everything to avoid the conditions in our lives that make the seeds of sin grow. Gardeners use pre-emergent herbicides to stop the germination of unwanted plants. Our regular use of the spiritual “pre-emergents” of prayer, study, and other disciplines can have the same effect on temptation.

Whenever exposed to temptation, we must kill the roots before they take a firm hold. It is always easier to pull up the small roots of a sapling than to cut down a grown tree trunk, and to cut the trunk than to saw off every branch. Theologians refer to this principle of overturning temptation immediately as the *obsta principiis* – the determination to “resist the beginnings,” because that’s where the real battle is always fought. This one unfailing principle can help us overcome temptation more than any other. The earlier we end the growth of sin, the more likely we are to succeed.

That means asking God’s help immediately when temptation arises (Matthew 6:13), replacing the wrong thoughts (Philippians 4:8), and moving into a different environment till the temptation passes (2 Timothy 2:22-24). But the encouraging thing is that there is no temptation that cannot be overcome if we are willing to attack it – before it grows. **BA**

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A photograph of a dirt path lined with tall, leafy trees, creating a canopy effect. A person on a bicycle is visible in the distance, riding away from the viewer. The path is made of brown dirt and is flanked by trees with vibrant green leaves. The scene is peaceful and serene.

Selah

The message came.
Come away to a desert place and rest awhile.
The way opened.
I left my work in the valley to tread the sandy soil
amid the junipers,
To listen to the whispers in the sage.
Stop. Be still.
Know that I am God.
Pause. Ponder. Praise.
Dream My dreams.
And I will do a new thing.
As streams flow from a mighty Rock,
You shall be refreshed and pour out rivers of
living water
in the land of the crystal peaks where the
gray goose grows.

Selah

Yvonne Kays

The Covenant

by Amber Riggs

“What is your calling?” If we were visiting over tea, what would your gut response be? Would you think for a while before answering, or would the words drip freely from your mouth?

Embedded within humanity is this deep-felt desire to not only know that our lives have meaning but also experience the peace of mind that we are indeed *living out* that meaning. However, we often ask the wrong questions, and thus, arrive at incomplete answers.

Human calling

Asking the right questions begins with getting outside ourselves to embrace not our *personal* uniqueness, but rather the uniqueness of humanity and then become enamored with the *collective goal* of humanity. To be sure, the inhabitants of this planet clearly have no allegiance to a collective goal. However, this doesn’t mean that the goal does not exist. It just means that we have to search for it.

In Genesis 2 we find the first representatives of humanity entering into a partnership with the Creator. In the midst of creation, God had designed a paradisaical garden that functioned as

His temple — a place where heaven met earth. He made His presence tangibly known in this place, and the first man and woman served as His priests. How they cared for the temple-garden reflected how God cared for it Himself.

However, unlike a temple made of stones, this temple was designed to expand. Paradise would not always be confined to this area among four rivers. As humanity increased in number, the garden would expand until it filled the entire earth — that is, until all of earth became a temple of God, where all of earth was caught up in heaven to serve as a place where God would be “at home.” God planned from the beginning to partner with humans to literally bless the whole earth. But they didn’t know how the plan would work.

Image-bearing mission

The notion of calling is also inextricably wrapped up in the word *vocation*. From the root word *vocare* (Latin: “to call”), *vocation* embodies this sense of action related to a call. If humanity’s call is to partner with God to bless the entire earth, the action associated with this call is to interact with the world as God does.

We tend to relegate the term *image of God* to physical appear-

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of Vocation

ance that somehow represents a reflection of an invisible God. Yet humans were not designed as inanimate statues in the temple of an inactionable God. In his book *You Are What You Love*, James K. A. Smith asserts, “The ‘image of God’ (*imago Dei*) is not some de facto property of homo sapiens . . . rather, the image of God is a task, a mission.”

This action of imaging God is what N. T. Wright refers to in *The Day the Revolution Began* as the covenant of vocation:

The vocation . . . is that of being a genuine human being, with genuinely human tasks to perform as part of the Creator’s purpose for [His] world. The main task of this vocation is “image-bearing,” reflecting the Creator’s wise stewardship into the world and reflecting the praises of all creation back to its maker.

The story of humanity is our collective rejection of this vocation and with it, a refusal to partner with God in His vision to bless the entire earth with His manifest presence. The story of the Bible is the account of how 1) God is faithful to His original intent that all of earth will become His dwelling place and 2) He is committed to bless the earth by partnering with humanity in the rule of creation.

Covenant renewed

Consider the covenant God made with Abraham. This man and his descendants would take possession of a sanctified space of earth on which they were to faithfully follow God and by which “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3). This agreement was a renewal of the covenant of the vocation of image bearing.

As Moses prepared to lead the Israelites into this promised land of blessing, where “milk and honey flowed,” God once again renewed this covenant with this branch of Abraham’s descendants. As they reflected God’s rule of and reign in that space, all who came into contact with this reign would be blessed.

However, the Israelites demonstrated on their trek to Sinai that they did not know *how* to do this. Instead of mirroring God’s faithfulness, they argued, complained, and exhausted Moses with personal disputes. Galatians says that God had to give them a covenantal law as a schoolmaster, providing a structure by which they would learn how to love God and one another, and thus, act out their covenant with God to bless the whole earth. However, it is one thing to desire to do what is good and something else to physically carry out that desire.

What makes Jesus’ new covenant with humanity so revolutionary is that as the image of God, He imaged God perfectly (Colossians 1:15). Not only did He *show* us how to image God in a way the written law could not, He also gave us the Holy Spirit to *enable* us to live out that covenant of vocation that He called humanity to in the very beginning. In doing so, God made our *bodies* the new temple — the new place where heaven meets earth. As the earth comes into contact with the rule of Christ in our lives, people will indeed be blessed.

Personal calling

So, what is your calling? It is to embrace your influence, great or small, to reflect Christ’s life within you to wherever you are at any moment, with whatever gifts God has given you, bringing glory to God as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. *Amen.* **BA**

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Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.





A family deals with
the heartache of a
transgender member.
by Pam Sheridan

In the ladies' room of the county courthouse, my daughter Shelly collapsed in my arms and sobbed, mascara smearing her cheeks. "Mom, I have to go on the witness stand next, and I don't think I can do it. I'm so scared."

Oh, God, help me! I'm in way over my head.

I held Shelly in a tight embrace and stroked her back. "Honey, you can do this. I know it's scary, but God is with you." The pound-

ing of my heart belied the level of calm in my voice. "You have nothing to be ashamed of. Ted's the one who divorced you, or you'd still be married, right?"

I swiped at moisture forming in the corners of my own eyes, determined not to start crying. I'd shed enough tears over the previous thirty-six months to fill Crater Lake.

Shocking news

On the way to Black Friday sales three years earlier, Shelly broke news that upended my world.

"I never dreamed this would happen to me." Her face crumpled into a wet mess. I pulled into a store's parking lot so I could focus on listening to her

anguished story. "A few weeks ago I found some ladies' clothes in the trunk of Ted's car," Shelly continued. "When I asked him about them, he said he'd been cross-dressing for a while."

My heart sank to the floorboards. "Oh, no! The last time we visited and I noticed Ted barely interacted with you and the kids, I knew something was wrong. But I never dreamed it was this. Sweetheart, I'm so sorry."

Shelly nodded, sopped her tears, and then held up her hand. "Wait, Mom, there's more. He says he wants to become a woman, and if I can't live with that, he'll start divorce proceedings." She related how Ted had told their ten-year-old twins, Colette and Brian, that he'd felt trapped

in a man's body for a long time. "He painted me as the culprit for not supporting him in his decision to take female hormones. He even had his first name legally changed to Trudy. Mom, I feel so stupid! Why didn't I see this coming?"

My heart constricted with grief. I took a deep breath. *Lord, give me Divine wisdom, please.*

Fairytale and nightmare

None of us could have foreseen this. When Ted and Shelly married twelve years prior, my husband, David, and I were elated. Graduates of the same Bible college and with many interests in common, they seemed the perfect match. Ted doted on Shelly, and both were attentive parents when the twins were born two years later. Then the fairytale ended.

Shortly after the twins' second birthday, Shelly told us that Ted had started working additional hours and occasionally stayed out all night. The family rarely saw him, and when he was home, he sat at his computer for long periods, seldom talking to anyone.

Over the next seven years, Shelly read numerous Christian marriage books, went to several counselors, and fervently prayed over her marriage. But Ted became more distant and secretive until the day Shelly discovered his secret.

On that unforgettable Black Friday when Shelly told me of the impending divorce, we forgot all about shopping. "I have to move out," she said. "Ted has become verbally abusive. And the kids are confused. I'm telling them what God's Word says about male

and female, but Ted contradicts everything I say." She began to weep again.

As I tried to reassure her, a vibrant monarch butterfly flitted and dipped close to the windshield. *That's it, Lord. From now on, every time I see a butterfly, I'll ask you to give Shelly a new life, as Jesus talked about in John 10.*

Hard journey

I had no idea the long and arduous journey those prayers would take us on.

Shelly soon found a job as a waitress and located a cheap

ing his father, screaming at Shelly that she wasn't a loving Christian if she refused to call Ted by his female name.

"This is a trial I would not wish on my worst enemy," Shelly lamented. I felt the same. I had trouble sleeping and developed stomach issues. Each time Shelly experienced a setback, my faith took another beating. *When will this end, Lord? Will Shelly ever have a normal family again? In my times of prayer I vacillated between blaming myself (Where did I go wrong?) and blaming God (When I prayed for a godly*

“From many sides, Shelly felt pressure to surrender her biblical values.”

apartment for her and the kids. She had barely left the driveway after packing up her things when Ted moved another transgender man in with him. Six months later, Ted took the kids to see his mom and reveal to her that he was gay.

The battle for custody lasted three long years. Ted often missed court appearances. Shelly's lawyer cancelled a date and failed to tell her. Week after week, at Ted's insistence, the kids went back and forth between the two homes. Brian started defend-

spouse for my daughter, why didn't You answer?).

Although I gave Shelly my best words of encouragement, my own soul lay in a heap, bruised and confused. Every time she called, I braced myself for more bad news.

Pressures in parenting

After Ted, dressed as a woman, arrived at a church event to pick up Colette, one of the leaders scolded Shelly for not warning them that Ted was "so deep"

into the gay lifestyle. Shelly was crushed that a Christian sister would find something to blame her for, instead of offering support in the face of Ted's outrageous actions. At a Boy Scout meeting, a mom pulled Shelly aside and took her to task for not supporting Ted's lifestyle.

From many sides, Shelly felt pressure to surrender her biblical values so that Ted could live the way he wanted with no accountability. She lost her appetite, couldn't make decisions, and showed signs of depression.

But the kids were the ones who suffered most. When Ted

ed to baby talk and played with toys much too young for her. She also developed a form of ADHD. Shelly had to take Brian to a child psychologist for childhood PTSD.

I wept with Shelly for her lost dreams of a happy, whole family. And I kept praying for signs of a new life for her, even on days with no butterflies.

Battles and victories

As I stood in the courthouse ladies' room reassuring my daughter of God's love, I had to ask myself, *Do I really believe what I'm telling Shelly?* I decided

two weekends a month. Shelly had petitioned the court to let her move near us — a five-hour drive across the state — but the judge denied that request. It was not the full victory we wanted. But it was a victory.

The battle did not end that day in court. I wonder if it ever will. But David and I remain faithful in our continual prayers for Shelly, the kids, and Ted. In spite of the grief he's caused our family, I do not wish Ted any ill. I often pray for him and bless him, asking that he repent and return to the ways of the Lord.

Walking through this valley has forced me to examine my heart and my prayer habits. When I ask God for a certain outcome and it doesn't happen, is my disappointment in Him justified? Is my faith based on my prayers, or is it grounded in the Father, whose love and wisdom supersede my requests?

I'm learning to rely on the Lord to send Shelly the help she needs in His own time and ways. From friendships to parenting help to money for a car when her old one died, God has proven faithful beyond our wildest dreams.

Shelly landed a new job this year, one that gives her more time with the twins. Brian is less antagonistic toward her. And I'm learning to trust God more. The butterfly prayers are working, not just for Shelly, but also for me. Thank God for His bottomless grace. **BA**

Pam Sheridan is a pen name. Names have been changed.

“I often pray for Ted and bless him, asking that he repent and return to the ways of the Lord.”

planned a birthday party for the twins at his home, not one child showed up.

“Mom, it was so pitiful to see Colette crying, wondering why no one came to their party,” Shelly told me. “Brian tried to appear brave, but I could see the hurt in his eyes.” Then she added, “Ted makes the kids call him Mom. And I overheard Colette tell a church friend, ‘I don’t have a dad.’ I nearly lost it right then.”

I knew that Colette had revert-

in that moment that even if the judge didn't rule in Shelly's favor, it wouldn't change God's love for her. No court could overrule His grace and faithfulness to our family.

While David accompanied our daughter into the courtroom, I sat in the hallway and prayed. In another hour, they reappeared with Shelly's lawyer. The judge had granted Shelly most of the custody time. Ted and his partner were allowed to have the kids

Sin: Missing the Mark

by Jason Overman

Both *soul* and *salvation* were leading candidates for this issue's word study, but I went instead with the word that often comes between them in the Bible, and in experience. *Sin* ruins souls and makes intervening salvation necessary, so sin must be understood in relation to God. Sin interrupts relationship with Him by rejecting His rule and violating His will for us. Sin opposes God and is lawlessness (1 John 3:4; cf. Romans 3:20; 5:20; 7:7-14).

We often equate human nature with sin. "If You, LORD, should mark iniquities . . . who could stand?" (Psalm 130:3). "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Scripture knows well that sin is universal — *but only by intrusion*. It's unnatural in that it distorts God's image and intent for His creatures. Let's take a closer look.

As we might expect, *sin*, in word and deed, is as ubiquitous in the Bible as it is in life. The Hebrew root *ht'* is just the most common of a dozen or more terms related to the concept of sin. With its Greek equivalent, *hamartia*, the word's meaning derives from *missing a mark* (see Judges 20:16 for non-theological usage), a failure or offense. With their derivatives, *ht'* and *hamartia* appear over 750 times in the Old and New Testaments. If God's glory is the mark, sin is anything else.

Genesis 4:7 illustrates this well. In it is, if not the first example of sin, then the first time the word appears in the Bible (and the first murder). Like the story of Adam and Eve just before it, the account of Cain and Abel is paradigmatic. It helps us organize the vast biblical instruction on sin. God warns Cain, "sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

Several themes flow from this verse and Cain's story: 1) Sin is a predatory power that seeks to dominate us; 2) Sin involves personal responsibility for choices; 3) Sin strikes against the Creator through His creation; 4) Sin carries the consequences of alienation and death; 5) Despite sin/sins, there's hope in God. These broad themes are expanded throughout Scripture.

Confessing personal sins to God, David sees the power of sin present at his conception (Psalm 51:1-5). Jesus warns of dying in sins and being a slave of sin (John 8:24, 34). Paul recognizes personal responsibility for sins committed and the dark domination of sin over humans (Romans 2:12; 3:9).

Sin injures creatures, but it is ultimately against the Creator (cf. Genesis 13:13; Psalm 119:11; Luke 15:18) and results in separation from Him (Isaiah 59:2). Sin thus carries its own consequence in death. Sin and death are paired in scores of places (e.g., Ezekiel 18:4) before Paul's famous maxim: "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

But as Cain's mark teaches us, there's hope despite sin. The Old Testament trio of near synonyms (*sin*, *iniquity*, and *transgression*) often join to show the totality of human guilt, while stressing the abundant forgiveness of God (Exodus 34:7; Psalm 32:5; Daniel 9:24). But the Father's gracious power to overcome sin is fully revealed in His Son, Jesus: "He was manifested to take away our sins" (1 John 3:5).

We've all missed the mark, but Jesus hit the bull's eye, and through Him is the gift of eternal life. That's *being human* as God intended. **BA**



What else can we learn
about God, humanity,
and grace?

by Israel Steinmetz

As we progress on a journey exploring our Statement of Faith, we continue to look at the five letters of the Calvinist TULIP. Previously, we discovered that our Statement of Faith and Scripture support total depravity. But we observed that unconditional election is not a teaching clearly found in either. What about the *L* in TULIP?

Limited atonement

Also known as *particular redemption*, *limited atonement* is the teaching that Jesus' death was only *intended* to atone for the sins of the elect. For those

not elected by God, no atonement is provided for their sin. Further, the atonement made possible by Jesus' death is *effectual* in every case. That is, everyone who is elected will be atoned for. There is no possibility that an elect person will ultimately be condemned.

Theologian Walter Elwell summarizes seven key arguments in support of limited atonement:

- Some scriptures refer to Christ's death being specifically for "his sheep" (John 10:11, 15), "his church" (Acts 20:28), "the elect" (Romans 8:32-35), and "his people" (Matthew 1:21).
- God's will is always carried out and cannot be frustrated by humans. Had God intended to save everyone, then all would be saved. The salvation of relatively few proves God intended to save only certain ones.
- Based on a penal-substitutionary theory of the atonement,

it would be unjust for God to punish both Christ and sinners for their sins. If Jesus truly took the penalty for the sins of the entire world, then God would have no grounds upon which to condemn anyone.

- Consequently, if Christ truly died for everyone and bore the penalty of their sins, then everyone would be saved. But the Bible rules out universalism.
- Christ died in order to *actually* save, not *potentially* save. Everyone for whom Christ died is irrevocably saved.
- The atonement is for those who repent and believe. According to Calvinism, repentance and belief depend entirely upon unconditional election, not human choice. Thus, the atonement is only available to those who have been unconditionally elected to repent, believe, and have their sins atoned for.
- Scriptures referring to Christ

dying for “the world” or for “all” do not refer to *all people* or *everyone in the world*. Rather, they refer to the “world of the elect” or the elect taken from all nations of the world. It is not *all* Christ died for, but *representatives from all* nations and classes.

Our Statement of Faith does not directly answer the question “What is the extent of the atonement?” However, Article 4 implies our perspective. The offer of salvation is extended to humanity, not just the elect. While salvation is not obtained through “human merit, works, or ceremonies,” it is available for those who believe and repent. Repentance and faith are not human works that *merit* salvation, but they are human responses that *receive* it.

Scripture’s response

But what does Scripture say in response to the notion of a limited atonement? In order to answer, we will address each of the seven arguments listed above.

Point 1: To be sure, in some scriptures, Jesus’ death is said to be *effectual* for the elect. However, none of these passages rule out the possibility that His death was sufficient to provide salvation for all, or that it was intended to do so. If indeed Christ’s death atoned for the entire world, then there is no contradiction in saying that it was for the elect.

Point 2: One of Calvinism’s central themes is the sovereignty of God. While Scripture affirms God’s sovereignty, it does not describe it along Calvinistic lines. The notion that God’s desires are always carried out, regardless

of human actions, is particularly troubling.

Though many scriptures contradict this Calvinist doctrine, the most striking one speaks of God’s will in connection with the scope of the atonement. Second Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord . . . is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (NKJV, cf. 1 Timothy 2:3, 4). This verse poses an intractable problem for Calvinists. If God’s will is always carried out and cannot be frustrated by humans, then why will some perish rather than repent? If repentance is given by God’s sovereign will as part of the process of unconditional election and God’s will is for everyone to repent, then why



isn’t everyone elected?

Passages like this are ultimately fatal to the notion that God wills the salvation of only a select few. Rather, they affirm that God’s will is for everyone to enjoy the benefits of the atonement and experience salvation. *The fact that so many do not receive salvation is a testament to humanity’s God-given ability to make choices contrary to God’s will.*

Points 3-6: While each of the theories of the atonement informs our understanding of what was accomplished by Christ’s death, we agree with many Calvinists that the penal-substitutionary theory most fully expresses its purpose. Simply put, by dying on the cross, Jesus bore the penalty of our sins and became a substitute for us so we would not have to endure our just punishment. If this is so, Calvinists ask, how then could God punish both Christ and sinners for the same sins?

Here we need to introduce two elements of the atonement. One element is *objective*, the other *subjective*. When Christ died, He objectively atoned for

the sins of all people. If no one had ever accepted His sacrifice, that would not have changed the fact that He paid the full penalty for sin. However, in order for individuals to experience the benefit of this atonement, they need to accept it by grace through faith. This is the *subjective* element.

To use the penal-substitutionary analogy of a courtroom, imagine the following scenario.

Ten men are convicted of a capital crime. An innocent man offers to be executed, on the condition that any of the guilty may escape punishment if they accept his punishment on their behalf.

The judge agrees, and the man is executed. In the judge's eyes, the innocent man has objectively accepted the punishment for all ten guilty. But when the judge explains the situation to the ten guilty men, only five of them agree to accept the judge's offer. The five who accept the innocent man's death on their behalf have now subjectively received his sacrifice. The other five did

is, they must subjectively receive Jesus' sacrifice.

The situation described here is a relationship. God has reconciled Himself to humanity through Christ's death. Humanity must now be reconciled to God by faith. One of the great casualties of Calvinistic notions about God's sovereignty is that it rules out the possibility of genuine relationship between God and humans. According to Scripture, humans subjectively decide whether they will be reconciled to God, but God has already been objectively reconciled to humanity.



not subjectively receive it, even though it was already objectively accomplished.

This distinction between the objective and subjective elements of the atonement is beautifully described in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 (cf. 1 Timothy 4:10). In Christ, God has already reconciled the world to Himself (v. 19). That is, He has objectively made peace with humanity. Yet as God's ambassadors, we are commissioned to beg the world to be reconciled to God (v. 20). That

In the last issue, we discussed *unconditional election*, along with its claim that faith is something predestined by God for certain ones to receive. We found that faith is a human response of trust in God. God initiates, humans respond. To be sure, faith originates with God, as does the grace to respond in faith. However, these gifts of faith and grace are not limited to an elect few but extended to all, so that everyone can respond to God's offer of life and relationship with Him.

Point 7: The Calvinist notion that scriptures such as John 3:16 and 2 Corinthians 5:19 do not refer to all inhabitants of the world, cannot be supported hermeneutically. As Elwell notes, "A study of the word *world* . . . shows that the world is God-hating, Christ-rejecting, and Satan-dominated. Yet that is the world for which Christ died. There is not one place in the entire NT where 'world' means 'church' or 'the elect'." Numerous passages clearly rule out the Calvinist interpretations of *world* and *all* (e.g., Isaiah 53:6; 1 John 2:2; and 1 Timothy 2:1-6). No wonder, then, that the vast majority of theologians throughout church history have held to an *unlimited* view of the atonement.

We hold this view as well. We are not content to simply enjoy our election as the favored few. Rather, we join God in His desire for *all* to be saved, and we take seriously our commission to preach the message of reconciliation to a world for which Christ has already atoned. When we preach the gospel, we affirm that God has reconciled Himself to them. And on His behalf, we beg them, *be reconciled to God!* We are a church on mission — a church engaged in witness. **BA**

Israel Steinmetz is dean of Academic Affairs for Artios Christian College. He lives in San Antonio, TX, with his wife, Anna, and their eight young children. Scripture quotations are from *New American Standard Bible*, unless otherwise noted.



In the Hard Places

continued from page 10

(or so she thought) to bring forth the promised son that she and Abraham longed for, she decided to give Hagar to Abraham, hoping the promised son would come through her.

Hagar did indeed conceive a son, but he was not the son that God had promised. Now pregnant, Hagar looked on Sarai with contempt. In return, Sarai treated her servant harshly, and Hagar ran away. The angel of the Lord found her sitting by a spring of water in the wilderness, and instructed Hagar to go back and submit to Sarai. Then he spoke to her concerning the son growing in her womb.

After this meeting, Hagar called the Lord “You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees” and asked, “Have I also here seen Him who sees me?” (Genesis 16:13). It is the first and only time in Scripture where this name for God is mentioned, pointing to the intimate nature of her encounter. In Hagar’s place of pain, uncertainty, and sorrow, the Lord revealed Himself as the one whose eyes had never left her. Perhaps this revelation is what enabled her to go back and submit to an unjust mistress.

New Testament: Samaritan

This pattern of trial leading to revelation continues in the New Testament. John 4 details a beautiful exchange at a well between Jesus and a woman from Samaria. This woman had two strikes against her. First, she was a Samaritan, a people group the Jews viewed as inferior because

of their mixed race and worship practices. The fact that Jesus approached her for a drink of water shattered the cultural norms of the day. The woman’s response to His request was shock: “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” (John 4:9).

Second, this woman had a shameful history with men, having been married five times and now living with a man who wasn’t her husband. She drew water at the sixth hour of day (noon), which suggests that she was avoiding other women who visited the well at an hour when the sun was more forgiving. Then she came face to face with Jesus, and He revealed that He was the long-awaited Messiah.

Jesus didn’t make a habit of announcing His Messianic identity, but He did it for her — this rejected Samaritan woman whose life had become littered with failed relationships. Her broken heart set the stage for her to receive an unparalleled revelation of Jesus’ true nature, and with this revelation, she immediately began to testify about Him (v. 28).

Deeper understanding

Helplessness. Heartbreak. For the people in Scripture, these hard places of pain and grief became gateways into a deeper understanding of God. He has not changed. He is still using the harshest circumstances of life to unveil the sweetest realities of His character.

Armed with this new perspective, we can endure our hard places with a new prayer on our lips: *Lord, when all is said and done, I want to know you better*

than I did before. Open my eyes to see You more clearly. Take me deeper in You. When we stop seeking the comfort of relief, we can receive the greater blessing that God wants to give us: the intimacy of revelation. **BA**

Lakeisha D. Blake
writes from Fayetteville, NC.



Lord's Supper Service

Thursday
March 29



Mail Bag



Taking another look

Concerning the article “Let’s Take Another Look” (November-December ‘17, p. 12), I’d agree with one point: CoG7 needs to reexamine its understanding of Gog and Armageddon. But any reassessment must be based on what the biblical texts actually say, rather than on traditional assumptions or the desire to link worrisome current events to biblical visions of the end. Such linkage often has the emotional effect of giving one a sense of control — of being in the know — thus easing one’s anxieties about an uncertain future. But it’s a false sense of control, having more to do with human psychology than with hermeneutical accuracy.

To make ever-changing current events “fit” the prophetic scenarios of ancient and unchanging biblical texts, one must regularly overlook the original literary and historical contexts of those texts. For example, the historical context of John’s Revelation is the persecution of the early church by imperial Rome, the great city on seven hills (17:9, 18), which John cryptically portrays as a harlot, beast, and Babylon reincarnate. It’s Rome and her allies who gather for battle at Armaged-

don (16:16, the only scriptural use of the term). But they have not gathered to fight another human army (see 19:19). Instead, they have gathered to fight the heavenly armies of the returning Christ, who supernaturally defeats beastly Rome by the sword proceeding from his mouth (19:11-21).

Following Christ’s victory, Satan is thrown into a bottomless pit for 1,000 years, during which time the saints reign with Christ in peace (20:1-6). Whether the 1,000 years are to be taken literally or symbolically, they nonetheless represent a significant passage of time. And it is only after this millennial period that Satan is released and Gog, according to John’s scenario, makes his first and only appearance. (Note that Gog was not mentioned in regard to Armageddon.) Gog and the land of Magog (borrowed from Ezekiel 38-39) represent, not just one country but all the Gentile nations from the four corners of the earth (20:8), that is, those nations on the edge of the known world of John’s day that were left after the defeat of the Roman Empire a thousand years earlier. In one last act of Satan-inspired rebellion, Gog comes against, not the USA or some Western alliance, but the saints in the millennial kingdom of Christ. And like beastly Rome before him, Gog is supernaturally defeated, this time by fire direct from God (Revelation 20:7-10).

This is the outline revealed by John to give hope to his fellow Christians who were being persecuted and martyred for refusing the cult of emperor worship. One need only read the text *in context*

and then judge how well modern-day interpretations follow John’s outline, or invent their own. It’s important for a host of political, social, and theological reasons — exegetical integrity being just one.

J. G.
E-mail

Robert Coulter’s response: When I suggested that we take another look at the Church’s interpretation of the prophecy of end-time events, I did not necessarily mean that it should substantiate its traditional positions, but in assessing current events after its study of them, it may arrive at an entirely new conclusion. I hesitate to endorse the Church’s past teachings on prophecy! I tend to agree with the pioneer church’s position that a great deal of prophecy had been fulfilled in history except for those plain prophecies that speak of Jesus’ return to the earth to establish His eternal kingdom.

Standing strong

I recently read your new tract, *Military Service: Is It Biblical?* . . . I am sure this belief does not go unchallenged in your church, but as long as you don’t give up as a church, you will embody the best of Christian love. Is this tract available as a PDF? I would be happy to share it.

D. Y. D.
E-mail

Editor’s note: Thank you for the encouraging feedback. While we do not offer our tracts in PDF format, you can order print tracts and find free, shareable digital versions of our entire catalogue at baonline.org.



G. C. Ministries News

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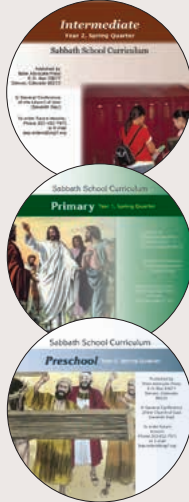
Publications

Second Quarter Children's Curriculum

Intermediate – In *Paul's Missionary Journeys*, most lessons center on the three missionary journeys of Paul and his companions, and their determination to share the gospel under trying circumstances.

Primary – *The Last Days of Jesus* teaches students about some of the events leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection.

Preschool – In *Jesus: Servant, Savior and Risen King*, students will learn that Jesus came to serve us, take our sins, and die in our place so that we can live with Him forever.



Following Jesus makes people leaders. Artios Christian College equips Christians to be vibrant leaders through flexible programs, affordable courses, and other focused resources that lay a foundation of biblical theology, restoration, and missional engagement.

Artios courses are a focused, flexible, and financially responsible way to increase your influence as a Christian. Each five-week on-line course is designed to create a focused learning community that fosters meaningful engagement with peers and an instructor. Instructors are vibrant 21st century Christian leaders who are committed to equipping vibrant leaders.

For more information about Artios or to enroll in our introductory course, *Essentials of Vibrant Leadership*, visit ArtiosCollege.org.



Pioneer Missionary Training

Hosted by the Boturini Church of God (Seventh Day), the 2017 Pioneer Missionary Training (PMT) was held December 17-27, 2017, in Mexico City, Mexico.

The team ministered to the sick and their family members outside a hospital, and to displaced families living in temporary camps in Mexico City, as well as families affected by the most recent earthquake in Jojutla, Morelos. The Holy Spirit moved us to preach the gospel and bring healing to the hurting. While we proclaimed, prayed, and sang at the different locations, many accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior and allowed us to pray for them.

In addition to sharing spiritual food, we distributed futons, toys, medicine, and non-perishable food bags to around 120

families, the most needy in Jojutla.

Among the participants of PMT 2017, there was also healing, encouragement, and the charge to continue our commission, for we know that the gospel of Christ is power.

— Tamar Alvarenga-Melgar





Ministry Through the IMC

Zone 2

Glory be to God! The 2017 National Pastoral Convention in Guatemala took place November 24-27. The theme was “May Your Good Spirit Guide My Steps.” — *Pastor Nicodemus Choc, Guatemala*



Zone 3

Four new brothers were baptized in Quilpué, Chile, near the capital of Santiago. A brother from the congregation in Iquique, a native of this region, has been working with these brothers and sisters for the glory of God. — *Pastor Enrique Vega, Chile*



Zone 4

Near Ludhiana, Punjab, India, seven people were baptized into Jesus Christ by our CoG7 pastor there. — *Pastor Jacob Rao, India*



Zone 5

After five days of our preaching the good news, 53 new converts were baptized. Let the glory be to our God! Oh, God, You are marvelous and powerful. — *Pastor Alexandre Masumbuko, Burundi*



Brother Denmark was baptized in Bulawayo. His level of grasping God’s Word is amazing. It’s like Jesus himself taught him nearly everything first and then directed him to the church. I thank God for the light that has shown on him. — *Pastor Tshidzanani T. Malaba, Zimbabwe*



Fifteen souls were converted and baptized in our new church, Asembo Kokise CoG7. They responded to the message entitled “Thou Shalt Know the Truth.” The truth convicted one member of a spiritualist sect, and he surrendered tools and idols that he used for worship. — *Pastor Abrahams Wanda Odongo, Kenya*



Zone 6

Sharing the best of times with dear brothers in the faith of Jesus during the General Conference in Australia. Brother Tluang Kung serves as secretary general of the Church in Myanmar, and Pastor Phil Kordahi is the Zone 6 International Ministerial Congress representative. — *Elder John Klassek, Australia*





A Tale of Two Mountains

The history of God's gracious activities to restore fallen humanity to Himself may be considered as a tale of two mountains: Mount Sinai and Mount Calvary. I am grateful to God for both, but I am incredibly grateful to God that I can live my life on the second, Mount Calvary.

Mount Sinai and the events there fill me with wonder. To that mountain God first led the children of Israel after saving them from the Egyptians by miraculously crossing the Red Sea. There God encompassed the mountaintop with fire and smoke, and His mighty voice boomed forth as He addressed the people directly. There Moses met with God and received His law, the articles of the covenant that governed Israel's relationship with God for thousands of years thereafter. Magnificent!

Yet while much can be admired about Mount Sinai, it was, literally and figuratively, a mountain of separation. When God spoke to the people from that fiery peak, they were strictly forbidden to set foot on it. Separation. Trembling with fear upon hearing God's voice, the people begged Moses to be their intermediary with God, and from that time forward, He was. Separation. The law given there established further separations between the people and God: a tabernacle with its Holy of Holies they could not enter; the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system that stood between; the laws of clean and unclean that divided the people from other peoples and, sometimes, from one another. Living on the slopes of Mount Sinai, one was in constant danger of being made unclean. On Mount Sinai, when the clean touched the unclean, the clean became unclean and had to be removed. Separation.

I much prefer Mount Calvary. Mount Sinai,

Moses, and that old covenant were wonderful in fulfilling God's purposes for them, but they were intended to be only part of the path to Mount Calvary. Moses himself understood that Jesus would come, and spoke of a future "prophet like me" the people should listen to (Deuteronomy 18:15, NASB). Peering forward from the slopes of Mount Sinai, the prophet Jeremiah saw a new covenant, one written on hearts rather than on stone.

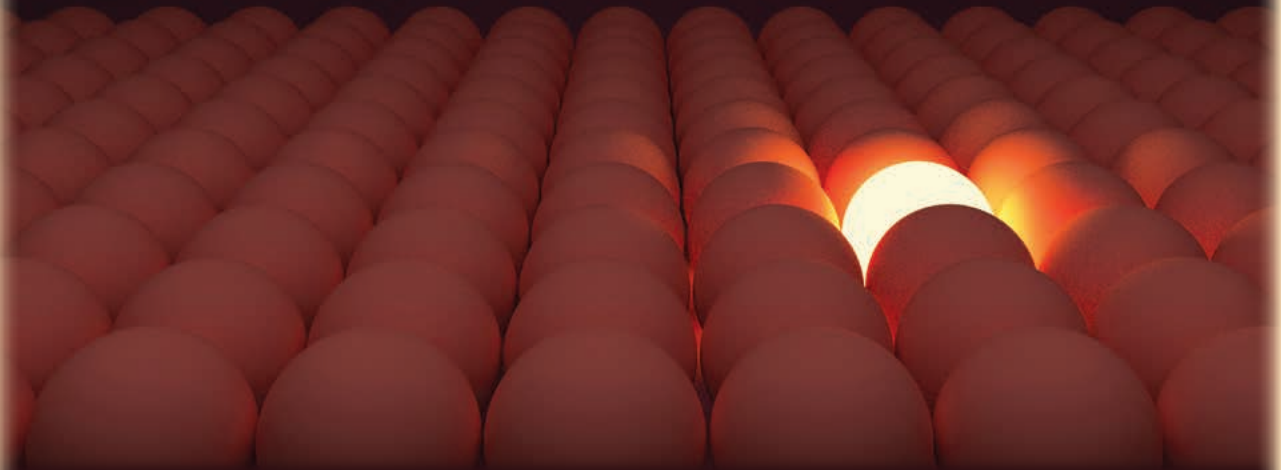
Mount Calvary is the place for me. Here, with Jesus and His new covenant, I am blessed to live. Here the things that separate have been torn down. I am not separated from God; He lives within me. I am invited to boldly enter His presence, and as I confess my sin, He forgives me and purifies me and transforms me more and more into the likeness of Jesus. Jesus touched the unclean and, rather than being made unclean, He made the unclean clean. As Christ's follower, I am called to do the same, to bring light into darkness, to bring purity into impurity, to embody Jesus as He in me invades the kingdom of darkness and, person by person, expands His kingdom of light.

The history of God's gracious activities to restore fallen humanity to Himself may be considered as a tale of two mountains, but it is only one story. It is the story of the one God, the loving God who created us and died for us, restoring us to the intimate and eternal relationship He's always wanted with us. Don't settle for Mount Sinai. Mount Calvary is the place to be.

— Loren Stacy



Let your light shine



**Illuminate the world with a passion to serve.
Ask your district superintendent and area rep to
help you “plug in” so your influence can shine the
brightest and advance God’s kingdom.**

**Don’t forget to pray for your district and its
leaders, and support them financially.**