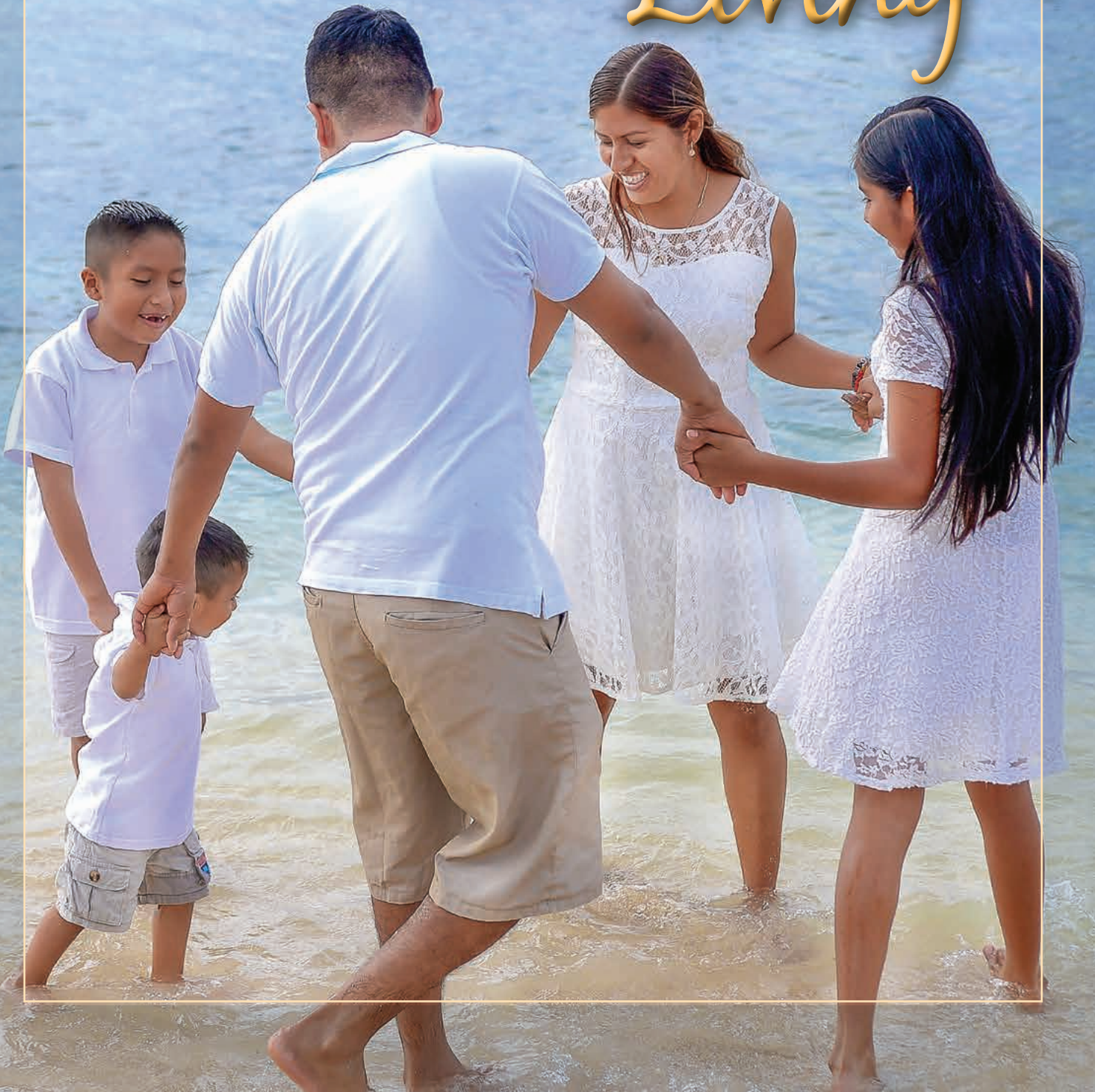


BA
BIBLE ADVOCATE®

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Christian Living





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2018: This We Believe

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How Should We Then Live?

Francis A. Schaeffer asked this question in his influential study on Christian culture well over a generation ago. Much has changed since the 70s, but the question is perennial — and essential. Believers must always ask and answer it in their own context: *How should we live . . . in this time and place?* Worthy answers must consider both the foundations of our faith and the character of our culture. Always engaging the world, we live in Christ, which also sets us apart from it in meaningful ways.

As we examine our Statements of Faith on Christian living and marriage in this issue, we come face-to-face with Schaeffer's question and an awareness of the tension between living transformed lives and not being conformed to this world (Romans 12:2). In the area of marriage alone, we recognize that to live as Christians in this time and place is to live counter-culturally.

We're not unique. Preaching the kingdom of God among the religious Jews, Jesus called His generation "sinful" and "faithless" (Mark 8:38; 9:19). Preaching Christ crucified among pagan Gentiles, Paul called that generation "crooked" and "perverse" (Philippians 2:15). Like them, we're called to live in the midst of our own generation, distinctively, while holding forth the word of life.

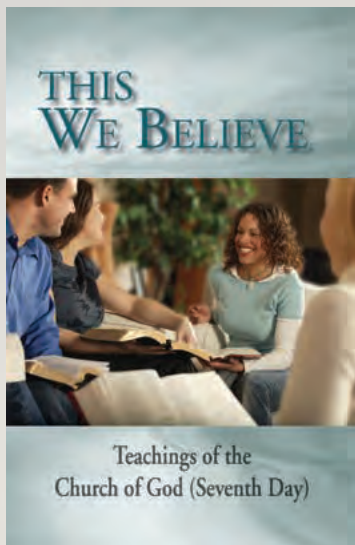
What does that life look like? Looking back at the first three BAs of '18, the Statements of Faith we've reviewed so far reveal the bedrock on which Christian living is built: living as image bearers of a loving Father and by the faith of His Son, Jesus. We live lives formed by the Holy Spirit and consistent with Holy Scripture and God's commandments.

In this issue, we look in closer detail at the specific challenges of this world, while discerning, and endeavoring to do, what is pleasing in the sight of our Lord and God (Colossians 1:10; 1 John 3:22). How do we live as Christian witnesses to God's rule in Christ? How do we behave as singles and marrieds? How do we order family life and our basic appetites? How do we live, die, work, play, care, share, educate, and create well?

This BA isn't the last word on these complex matters, but it is a testament to the importance of the core question — *How should we then live?* — and why it's urgent that we wrestle with the answers together.

— Jason Overman





This We Believe

Our fourth issue this year spotlights our teachings on marriage and Christian living. The following excerpts come from *This We Believe: Teachings of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*.

Statement of Faith 9

Marriage

This we believe:

Marriage is an institution of God and is an exclusive lifetime union between one man and one woman for the purpose of perpetuating humanity and enriching human experience. Reflecting the bond between Christ and His church, marriage may be broken only by sexual immorality. Like the Sabbath, marriage dates to Creation week, is intrinsic to the moral law, is reformed in Christ's teachings, and finds its ultimate meaning at His return.

"It is not good that man should be alone." These words of the Lord in Genesis 2:18a have their primary reference to the first man, Adam, whom God had formed from the dust of the ground (v. 7). In a fuller sense, they echo far beyond our first father and apply directly to every man, woman, boy, and girl from that day until now. We were created for relationship and intimacy.

People not only need the Lord who made them but also other humans. That we are social creatures reflects our being made in the image of God. From eternity our Creator existed — not alone but in perfect union as spiritual Father and Son. Because God wanted humans to reflect His own nature, He made us to be loving, relating, communicating beings.

While Adam was still alone, God generously responded to his relational need, saying, "I will make him a helper comparable to him" (v. 18b).

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said:

"This is now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man."

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed (vv. 21-25).

These verses are the Bible's passage of primary reference regarding marriage, laying a sure foundation for all the Word will later say on the topic. The words *marriage* or *wedding* are not used here, but the "man and his wife" phrase conveys that idea — a marriage made and recognized in heaven. . . .

From pages 115-116

Statement of Faith 10

Christian Living

This we believe:

Christians are called to holiness in thought, word, and deed and to express faith in Christ through devotion to God and godly interaction with others. As a result — not a cause — of redemption, believers should 1) develop relationship with God through Bible reading and study, prayer, fasting, worship, and obedience; 2) relieve the physical and spiritual needs of humanity by compassionate social action and gospel witness; 3) oppose pride, envy, indolence, lust, covetousness, and other evils in the spirit; 4) refuse immoral amusements and practices such as pornography, sexual immorality, and homosexuality in the flesh.

The words of Ephesians 2:8-10 form a wonderful bridge between the truth that salvation is by grace through faith to the reality that believers in Christ are created for obedience to God. Paul writes, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

Freely redeemed by grace, Christians are called to lives of holiness and good works, forsaking the sin and bondage that was our previous manner of life (Romans 13:13, 14; Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 4:17-24).

Demonstrated in various ways, holiness is summed up in the commands of love to God and others (Matthew 22:34-40). True love for God is



demonstrated by obedience to His Word, submission to His will, and adoration of His person (Deuteronomy 11:1; John 14:15; James 4:7; 1 John 5:2, 3). True love for our fellowman is demonstrated by caring concern, unselfish relationships, and refusal to harm others (Romans 13:10; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8). . . .

From pages 129-130

Financial Support for the Gospel

This we believe:

As a result — not a cause — of redemption, believers should give tithe and freewill offerings for the support of the church and its gospel ministry.

Throughout the Bible, God's people honored Him with gifts from their material possessions. From early times, they gave voluntary tithe and offerings, recognizing God as creator, owner, and benevolent giver of Himself to humanity.

Just as tithe and offerings supported the religious service carried out in ancient Israel, and just as Paul was to receive his living from believers he served (1 Corinthians 9:14), so we are to give our tithe and offerings from gratitude for the love and grace God has so freely given us, not from compulsion of the law.

Our complete stewardship responsibility can be fulfilled only when we yield our time, talent, and treasure to God. Tithing our income to support God's work is integral to Christian stewardship. It provides a regular, dependable source of income for spreading the gospel.

The Church's motivation in addressing financial stewardship may be summed up in Paul's expression to the Philippian church: "Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account" (Philippians 4:17).

Let's be faithful stewards of all God has given so that our accounts may be credited with God's richest blessing!

*Scripture quotations are from the
New International Version.*

Clean Meats for Food

This we believe:

As a result — not a cause — of redemption, believers should eat for food only those meats the Bible describes as "clean." *For more on this doctrine, see the Q&A on page 11. You can find our Eating the Bible Way tract at publications.cog7.org.*

Military Warfare

This we believe:

As a result — not a cause — of redemption, believers should regard participation in physical warfare as contrary to a Christian's humanitarian calling.

In a brief dialogue with the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, Jesus spoke these words: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36).

A few hours earlier, Jesus had warned an angry, militant Peter, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52).

In these two verses, Jesus cuts to the heart of this issue by contrasting the identity and methods of His kingdom with those of earthly kingdoms. In the kingdoms of this world, nations fight against other nations with wars and threats of war. Nations rise and fall by their military strength or lack of it. Soldiers are drafted or hired into the service of defending national borders, or crossing them in the nation's interests. For the same reason, soldiers kill other soldiers from other countries — while knowing that the enemy could be Christian like them — and

are themselves killed. All this is standard practice in the kingdoms of this world.

Christ came armed with a different worldview, a different approach to conflict resolution, and a different kingdom that does not depend upon physical power for its support and defense. Unlike earthly kingdoms that rule over physical lands, His throne exists in human hearts and transcends national borders. . . .

Extra-Biblical Days

This we believe:

As a result — not a cause — of redemption, believers should avoid intermixing Christianity with extra-biblical practices, as in the common observances of Sunday, Christmas, Easter, Lent, and Halloween. *For more on our view on the holidays, see our tracts at publications.cog7.org.*

From pages 136-169

Conclusion

We who have died to sin through salvation in Jesus Christ are called to no longer live in it (Romans 6:2). Rather, we are called to a life of holiness, righteousness, and purity by the grace of God and the power of His Spirit. Our sanctification is the will of God (1 Thessalonians 4:3), who has predestined those who walk in the Spirit to be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:1-30). Let us submit to God's purifying work. Let us worship and live in the beauty of holiness as those who have been created for good works!

From page 135 **BA**



THE BIBLE ADVOCATE



"THY WORD IS A LAMP UNTO MY FEET, AND A LIGHT UNTO MY PATH."
VOLUME NO. 70. STANBERRY, MO., FEBRUARY 3, 1936.

NO. 5.

"Not Of This World"

"Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight . . ." John 18:36.

Standing, unafraid before the haughty Roman governor, we find our Lord declaring one of the great truths of His kingdom. It is not of this world! His servants do not fight for His cause here. They are not of the world, even as He was not of the world.

The centuries have passed and still there are those who profess to follow Him, or who desire to be known as Christians, who have not yet learned this great lesson. They forgot that He has said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation . . ." and forgetting, they seek to help with worldly schemes in an effort to take away the tribulation.

Never was there a time when the government was any worse than it was at the time of Christ. Utter poverty and obnoxious disease were to be found in the same city with haughty wealth. The rulers of the people cared nothing for good government and order, but sought only to extort more taxes.

Yet in the midst of such conditions we find the Christ leading out in no movement to reform or overthrow the government. He warned them of the great persecutions which they would have, but He did not advise them to seek protection in laws.

Today we find a world of crime, war, political and social injustice. Various plans, systems, parties and laws are advocated to relieve these conditions, and many of them seek the support of those who profess to follow Christ.

The true Christian recognizes only one cause of all the strife and trouble in this world, and that great, underlying cause is SIN. Likewise the Christian recognizes only one remedy for this world's troubles, and that great, all-sufficient remedy is Christ in the lives of the people.

Ambassadors of the King, citizens of a "heavenly" country, strangers and sojourners here—how can we have a part in the strife of the world? Let us rather proclaim the message of the government soon to be set up, under which all will be righteousness and joy and peace. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" S. J. K.

How did our understanding of some areas of Christian living change over time? Our church historian explains.

by Robert Coulter

The Church of Christ, later known as the Church of God (Seventh Day), of the 1860s did not have a written position on Christian lifestyles. Apparently she left standards of morality and Christian living up to the Christian community as a whole. The church's theological concerns were weekly Sabbath observance, the second coming of Jesus, mortality and unconscious state of the dead, resurrection of the righteous to everlasting life at Jesus' return, and His millennial kingdom, followed by the final judgment and annihilation of the wicked and the establishment of the eternal kingdom of God.

Early days

The use of tobacco and alcoholic beverages was acceptable to the Church of Christ. Her founder, Gilbert Cranmer, chewed tobacco, but was loved and accepted by her membership as the church's founder and evangelist.

However, a sizable group of churches in New England, known as the Church of the First Born, had teachings similar to those of the Church of Christ. The group proposed that the two churches explore the possibility of uniting, but when it learned that Cranmer used tobacco, it cancelled the talks. One of the group's lead-

ing ministers wrote in a letter, published in *The Hope of Israel* (December 23, 1864), "as far as the use of tobacco is concerned, I am happy to say the Church of the First Born . . . regards it as a dirty, loathsome, expensive, unhealthy practice, from which every disciple of Christ should abstain."

The Church of God in Wisconsin also interacted with the Church of Christ by sending representatives to attend her quarterly, churchwide meetings throughout the 1860s, and frequent exchanges of ministers occurred between the Church of God and the churches in Michigan, Iowa, and Missouri. But the leadership of the Church of God never proposed to affiliate with the Church of Christ, nor any of her sister churches, possibly because she accepted Cranmer's use of tobacco.

Tobacco, alcohol, dress

Andrew N. Dugger became president of the General Conference in 1921 and was the first to challenge the Church to condemn the use of tobacco and alcoholic beverages. His reforms met with resistance in some quarters of the Church. This prompted him to urge the General Conference-in-session to adopt resolutions requiring the membership to refrain from using tobacco and alcohol.

The conference's delegates were asked to appoint a committee to study the question of members using tobacco and alcoholic drinks and report their findings to the conference before it adjourned. The committee made its study and reported that members of the Church of God should not use tobacco in any form. But it failed to address the use of alcoholic beverages out of





respect for some newly affiliated members from North and South Dakota who consumed wine from various fruit juices and a low-alcoholic beer for table and recreational use.

In 1933 the competing conference that organized at Salem, West Virginia, adopted a more ascetic “holiness” lifestyle for its membership. Women of the church were discouraged from cutting their hair and encouraged to wear dresses with long sleeves and hems down to their ankles. Wedding rings and other jewelry were also discouraged. Tobacco and alcohol were forbidden, along with tea and coffee, as habit-forming beverages.

Salem’s more ascetic lifestyle eventually faded by the 1950s when members returned to drinking coffee and tea, and the ladies cut their hair and wore stylish dresses.

Marriage and divorce

The doctrinal statements of the Stanberry and Salem conferences of the Church of God didn’t address marriage and divorce prior to 1949. But their revised doctrinal statement on marriage of 1949 said, “We believe that any marriage contract entered into between husband and wife at a time prior to the conversion of either party to the marriage, should be recognized as acceptable to the Church if recognized by civil law. . . .”

In spite of that statement, some ministers advised married couples that if one of the partners had been divorced prior to their marriage, they should separate because the couple was living in adultery. In 1974 a study by the Church of God’s Ministerial Council on marriage and divorce removed the misconception about divorce that had

misguided the Church on the subject:

1. The Church recognizes that anyone who obtains a divorce for reasons of illicit sex, such as adultery, fornication, incest, homosexuality, etc., on the part of his/her marriage partner may be the innocent party to the divorce. The marriage is dissolved. The innocent party may remarry.

2. A divorce involving any member of the Church of God (Seventh Day) may be cause to relieve him/her of all church responsibilities and to disfellowship him/her.

3. The Church appreciates the greatness of God’s grace to forgive sins, and she stands willing to receive into her membership those who have been so blessed. The Church agrees to relegate forgiven sins, including those involving divorce and remarriage, to the past. She accepts the true convert as a new creature in Christ and is willing to accord full membership to those who apply. . . .

The Church’s present positions on marriage, divorce, and various areas of Christian living are in our Statement of Faith at cog7.org/about-us/, and are elaborated in *This We Believe: The Teachings of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*. **BA**

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





I Surrender All

by Sarah Andrews

All to Jesus I surrender,/All to Him I freely
give. . . .

More like the Master I would ever be . . .

Trust and obey, for there's no other way/to be
happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

You're probably familiar with these lyrics. We sing them with reverence and good intentions. However, I'm not certain I'm always focused on the words of the songs.

Of course I want to be like Jesus; He was *perfect*! He was praised of God: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Since Jesus is the quintessential standard, He's the one I want to be like.

But . . . am I *really* ready to surrender all to make that happen?

I would love to heal the sick and raise the dead, to discern the thoughts and hearts of those around me. Oh, if I could just tap into the will and the power of the Father! It would be awesome to be like Christ. As a Christian, I'm supposed to make that my aim.

But then, there's that pesky little four-letter word that trips up my carnal heart every day: *obey*.

As the Son of God, Jesus was perfect and righteous; He was also *obedient*. One could say that He was perfect and righteous *because He was obedient* (Hebrews 5:8, 9). He did nothing, said nothing that was not directly of the Father (John 12:49). Obedience is more than a checklist of do's and don'ts. It's more than a regimented, formulated, calculated life of routines. Obedience begins in the heart and is born of a spirit of humility and a willingness to surrender all our goals and aspirations, our pride, our

reputation, our calendar. All of our life.

I have a lot to learn about obedience. For example, I'm struck by how little time I devote in prayer and Bible study. Not knowing the intimate details of others' schedules, I'm loath to assume everyone is as lax as I. However, I've noticed that many Christians seem to have little time for fellowship, corporate Bible study, or any church-sponsored community service. "I'm too busy" is the frequent, and often real, excuse.

But obedience is more than a scheduling conflict. Often our lack of obedience and surrender stems from a heart conflict. Unwittingly, we tell God, in so many words, "I've given you X number of hours or X amount of my heart. This is Your portion, and no more. The rest is mine." But Jesus wants more than our time; He wants our *love*. Keeping His commandments manifests our love (John 14:15).

You know how Jesus' earthly story ended. Though He lived a perfect life and never sinned, He was not hailed as the holy Son of God. He was nailed to a cross as a criminal. And He *let it happen*. The apostles also faced gruesome deaths as a result of their attempts to be like Jesus.

As Christ's followers, we're admonished to "count the cost" (Luke 14:28), probably because surrender comes at a price. It may not cost us our physical lives; then again, it may. In any case, Jesus asks for our lives — our all.

Lord, help us learn to willingly surrender ourselves — our whole selves — completely to Your perfect will. More than just singing a song, let us really surrender all. **BA**

Sarah Andrews attends CoG7 in Spokane, WA, with her husband, three daughters, and several of her extended family.



Questions & Answers



I can't believe God really cares about what we put in our mouths. Aren't unclean meat laws so old covenant?

The Bible is a big book with many pieces of truth. As we study to fit its various pieces dealing with food into a harmonious whole, we avoid over emphasizing one truth-piece while ignoring others. For example, Apostle Paul says the kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking but about joy, peace, and righteousness in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). But four verses later, he advises that we not eat meat, drink wine, or do anything to offend or discourage others. First Corinthians 10:31 adds, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Here we learn that some eating and drinking honors God, while other kinds dishonor Him — think gluttony and drunkenness, for starters (Proverbs 23:21).

The Church strives for wisdom, grace-and-truth balance, and practical value in all of this. Scripture demonstrates God's care for human health (Exodus 15:26; 3 John 2). Much evidence confirms that nutritious food, along with rest and exercise, is the surest path to superior health, and that fruits, vegetables, grains, and nuts are among the best nutrient-rich foods, while fresh, clean water best supplies our need for liquids. Most of us avoid those meats the Bible classifies as unclean, as well as habitual use of tobacco products and alcoholic drink — not for salvation but as another way of glorifying God in our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Yes, the detailed laws of clean and unclean are found only among the old covenant's legal material (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14). However, mention of clean and unclean animals predates the old covenant in Scripture (Genesis

6 and 7). And the New Testament, while not repeating the unclean meat laws, keeps urging us to avoid uncleanness, both of the flesh and of the spirit (2 Corinthians 6:17, 18; 7:1).

I think my family is addicted to their smart-phones. How should I address this problem?

Electronic devices are addictive and damaging to people when . . . their use becomes a way of avoiding people • you hold them in one hand and drive with the other • their use means that you are often inattentive to others • you reach for them reflexively a dozen or more times a day • they are seen as an extension of your hand or public persona • you enjoy them more than the joy of knowing Christ and His people • their use fills more time than your personal interaction with family and friends • your seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness takes second place.

How should you address it?

1) Examine your heart and habits; repent where needed. 2) Confer with your spouse and confess your faults. 3) Together, prepare a family plan with timed goals to reduce use. 4) Include a media/phone fast, starting with mealtimes and Sabbaths. 5) Call a family meeting, address the problem, and propose the plan; get feedback. 6) Provide happy, wholesome activities to fill time previously spent with media. 7) Be prepared for pushback; proceed with patient grace and firm persistence. 8) Set an example; authentic leadership is not just enforcing your authority.

— Elder Calvin Burrell



A look back on changing
the marriage mindset.
by Sherri Langton

I toss my gym bag over my shoulder and head for the exit at the rec center. Normally I tune out sounds from the racquetball court as I pass by it. But this day, the squeaks from shoes on a polished floor and the ricochet of a slammed ball make me stop. My mind suddenly rewinds to memories long forgotten.

On a court like this at a private club, my then-boyfriend, Greg*, taught me to play racquetball. We practiced nearly every Friday night. *A decent, polite Christian guy*, I recall. I met Greg on a singles camping trip one summer. Once we got home, he wasted no time asking me out and making sure we did fun

things together every week.

Though Greg wanted to go out more with me, I wasn't serious about the relationship. I dated Greg because that's what people expected of young women: go to school, graduate, date, and get married. I wanted to fit in with my peers. It felt good to leave the office on Friday afternoons and tell co-workers, "I'm going on a date tonight."

In truth, I had to force myself to be with Greg. Nothing about him attracted me. I couldn't hurt his feelings, so I never turned down a date. But after four months, I'd had enough and broke off the relationship.

When I told Greg, he fumed. Then he stunned me by saying he had planned to ask me to marry him. My thoughts whirled. *Marriage? He must be kidding.* We went our separate ways, and I never heard from Greg again. Burned out, I stayed away from the dating scene.

What if?

That was more than three decades ago. I've logged in a good number of years being my sole support, and I'm happy as ever with my family, career, and ministry involvements. Still, I'm aware of the passing of time, shown in smudges of gray at my temples and creases around my eyes.

A thought surprises me. *What if Greg and I had married?* I picture us as regulars at the racquetball club, dining out, and traveling to nice places. Greg made good money and often flew down to the Gulf Coast just to swim in the warm waters. Another salary would have made a comfortable lifestyle for us both.

An unfamiliar pang strikes my heart. Had I been mistaken about Greg? In those days, I didn't think of life later on, the season I'm in now. Choosing singleness meant that I would have no one to grow old with who could help me "in

sickness and in health," until death parted us. Did I make the right decision?

Desires

Answers to my questions take deeper introspection than I can give while standing outside a racquetball court. As I consider them for weeks, Psalm 37:4 comes to mind: "Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart." I used to think this verse was a blank check: If you ask God for anything you desire, He'll give it to you — like a genie in a bottle. A sermon or something I read corrected this impression. The psalmist David is actually saying that God places His desires within you so that your deepest yearnings are His. What He desires becomes your desires.

Psalm 37:4, in part, answers my questions on whether I did the right thing in not marrying. I realize my cooled and conflicted feelings for Greg while we dated signaled that God did not desire this relationship for me. What desires did I have, then? To be with family, to serve God. I desired the "pure milk of the word" (1 Peter 2:2). As I grew in it daily, God made me wise. I no longer wanted to fit in with my friends at work. Nor did I want to pretend I liked a guy I really didn't like.

Bigger picture

My mature self snatches the sense of regret and further ponders married life with Greg. We probably would have been active and financially secure. But would we have been happy? The future I imagine centers on

what I remember most about Greg: the things we did together, not on love or companionship. Rather than follow the crowd, my heart was compelled to follow the counsel of God (Proverbs 12:15). I had to face the truth that, though he was nice, Greg was not a man I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. I also sensed the need to tune in to my feelings of dating burnout and not pursue a relationship with another guy.

1 Corinthians 7. It eased the stigma I felt against being unmarried. But the broader view through Psalm 37:4 gave me freedom to be who God called me to be.

Unexpected news

I'm at church and stop to talk to Nadine, a friend I haven't visited with for a while. "Guess who called me the other day?" she asks.

Greg.

“As I grew in the Word daily, God made me wise. I no longer wanted to fit in with my friends at work.”

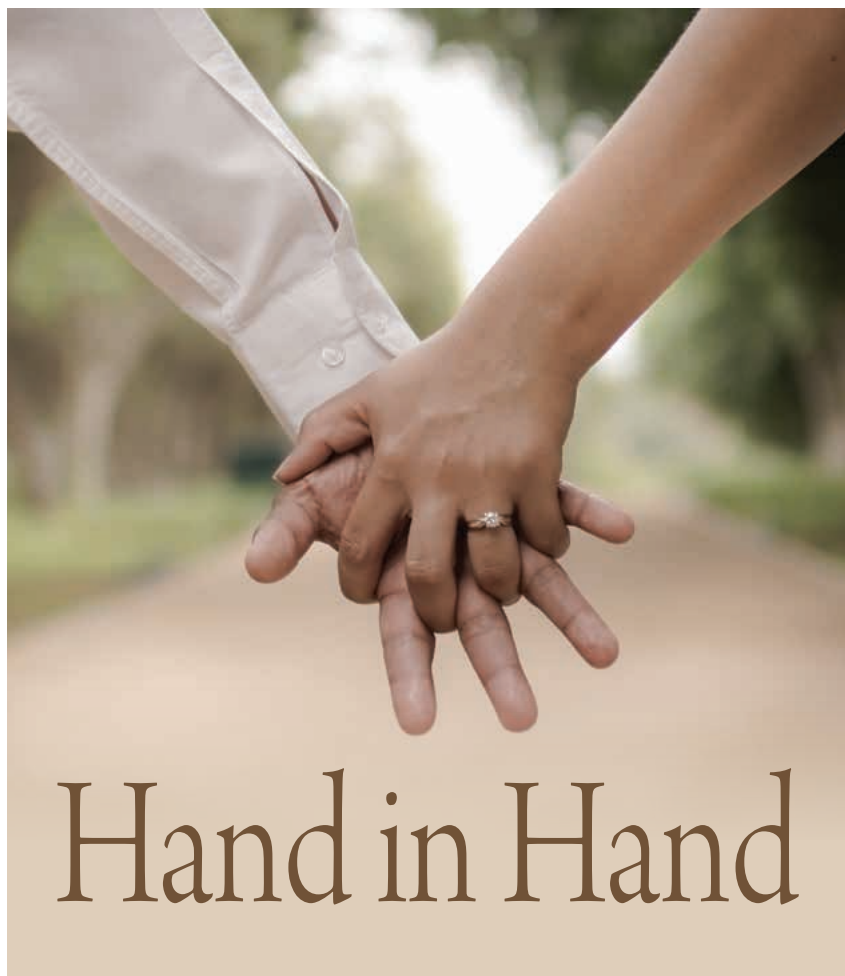
I also think of how married life would have altered my relationships with family. My nephew Ryan was born around the time I broke up with Greg. I exchanged date nights for playtimes of baseball, Hot Wheels, and Hide and Seek. When my second nephew, James, came along eight years later, I did the same. His lack of a father meant even more time together than I had with Ryan — summers with a ball and glove in an open field and splashing in the swimming pool, snowball fights in the winter. Even today, James wants to spend time with me and talk about his problems.

I had always taken comfort in the Bible's validation of singles in

My heart lurches. I haven't heard his name at church for a long time. This friend has no idea about my heart's recent musings. Nadine goes on to tell me things I never knew about my former boyfriend. Before he and I dated, Greg harassed her with phone calls. "After you broke up with him, he drank and got in trouble with the law," she says.

I can't hide my shock, and my thoughts once again whirl. *Greg? That gentle, quiet man who opened doors for me and told me how nice I looked?* I suddenly realize that my lack of desire for Greg had been more than God's will for me; it had been

continued on page 22



Hand in Hand

Glorifying God for a milestone in Christian marriage.

by Lydia E. Harris

A popular song of my day claimed that Catalina was the island of romance. I laughed at that silly notion. I was going there to learn more about the Bible and witnessing, not for romance. But God had a surprise for me.

Near the end of the summer month of Christian training, our college group hiked over hilly terrain to the beaches of Avalon to witness. As I struggled up a

steep slope, Milt, a student from my campus, took my hand and helped me up the trail.

One year later, I took Milt's hand again — this time in marriage. That was fifty years ago. As we've journeyed hand in hand together, God has guided and strengthened our relationship. Looking back, we can see His hand of love throughout the seasons of our marriage.

Love triangle

"You make a cute couple," a teacher at our daughter's high school recital said after the program. "I want a marriage like yours."

We thanked her and then looked at each other. We knew

it wasn't Milt's balding head or my plain-Jane appearance that prompted her compliment. Perhaps she noticed us holding hands and saw the joy we shared during our daughter's performance. But we knew the real source went deeper.

I wrote a note to the teacher. Drawing a triangle with the point on top, I jotted my name by one lower corner and Milt's by the other. At the triangle's peak, I wrote *God*. I explained that as Milt and I drew closer to God, we also drew closer to each other.

Anger management

Twelve years later, our son had finished college and was getting married. "Do you have any marriage tips?" he asked. I gave him Ephesians 4:26: "Do not let the sun go down on your anger" (ESV). Milt and I had applied that verse many times throughout our marriage, making sure we resolved quarrels before going to sleep.

I remember one night when Milt did something that upset me. I slipped into bed and built an invisible wall between us. Icy silence replaced our usual friendly chit-chat. Restless and unable to sleep, I prayed, "God, what does Milt need from me?"

"Unconditional love," the Holy Spirit quickly prompted. As I lay awake, rehashing Milt's bad behavior and justifying mine, God's Spirit softened my heart and nudged me to apologize.

Finally, I rolled over, tapped Milt on the shoulder, and said, "Honey, my attitude was wrong. Will you forgive me?" My peace-maker husband asked forgiveness too.

The wall crumbled. We hugged and slept peacefully, again experiencing the truth that “a happy marriage is the union of two good forgivers.” But we knew it was God who helped us forgive each other.

Keeping love alive

After my husband’s cataract surgery, he needed drops in his eyes four times a day. As instructed, he kept his eyes closed for a minute after each drop. During that time, I’d kiss him and tease, “Guess who’s kissing you.”

One day when our three-year-old granddaughter visited, she wanted to play along with us and take turns kissing Grandpa while his eyes were shut. The next time we saw her, she asked me, “Are you still kissing Grandpa?” I assured her I was.

I smiled, too, knowing “love is of God” (1 John 4:7) and that God’s love flowing through us to each other kept us kissing and holding hands.

Sustained in sickness

In my late fifties, I received shocking news of incurable cancer. Thankfully, it was treatable. This began a medical merry-go-round that shook our marriage and nearly took my life. My husband faithfully drove me to oncology appointments, chemotherapy treatments, and trips to the emergency room, where I wondered if I would return home. Milt chose to retire early to be there for me.

Since we weren’t certain we would make it to our fiftieth wedding anniversary, we planned a special fortieth anniversary party. Family and friends joined us to

celebrate God’s love to us and our love for each other.

A decade after my devastating diagnosis, Milt developed serious life-changing medical problems, and I became his caregiver. Deeply saddened by his unexpected health prognosis, I added many tears to the bottles in heaven where God is storing them (Psalm 56:8). My motto became “kiss more and criticize less.”

Recently, I have been reading the book of Job to gain perspective on hardship and suffering. No matter how much Milt and I struggle, we have experienced little hardship compared to Job’s grief. His attitude in adversity inspires us. Although it’s not

ing hands, we literally hold each other up (Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10). As we age, God’s hand of love continues to fortify our relationship, and He helps us deepen our love. At medical appointments, when Milt’s doctors ask him if he has fallen lately, he always replies, “Not that kind of fall. Only falling more in love with my wife.”

In our seventies, we have decided to consider this season of life as our second honeymoon and do fun things together as often as possible. After our grandkids heard this, one of them asked, “What did you do on your honeymoon today?”

“We had a pillow fight,” I

“Milt and I experienced the truth that
“a happy marriage is the union of two
good forgivers.”

easy, we want to embrace Job’s outlook: “Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” (Job 2:10, NIV); “Blessed be the name of the LORD” (1:21).

Deepening love

One day, as we walked arm-in-arm into church, a gentleman asked, “Still holding hands?”

“Yes,” I replied, “for forty-six years, and we hope for many more.”

Now with arthritic knees, we not only express love by hold-

replied. Perhaps we are in our second childhood. And sometimes I say to Milt, “Come sit by me, because we still make a cute couple.”

I’m glad I took Milt’s hand years ago. He continues to help me up the steep slopes of life as we journey together hand-in-hand with God. **BA**

Lydia E. Harris
writes from Lake Forest Park, WA.





Healthy Incompatibility

by R. Herbert

Recent statistics from the American Psychological Association show that as many as 40-50 percent of marriages in the United States end in divorce, and the situation is similar in a number of other developed countries. Divorce statistics for second and third marriages are even higher. Sadly, many of these divorces were undoubtedly preventable.

The majority of divorcees claim “irreconcilable differences” for dissolving their marriage bond, but this is just an expensive way of saying “incompatibility.” In most cases where incompatibility is cited as an issue, it was evidently not present at the beginning of the relationship. Marriage partners feel it “happened” as time progressed.

The truth is, incompatibility between a man and a woman never just “happens”; it is below the surface all the time. Marriages falter when couples focus on their incompatibility. A century ago, G. K. Chesterton put it this way in his book *What’s Wrong with the World*:

I have known many happy marriages, but never a compatible one. The whole aim of marriage is to fight through and survive the instant when incompatibility becomes unquestionable. For a man and a woman, as such, are incompatible.

These wise words are based on the fact that most marriages occur because “opposites attract.” But when marriage begins, we focus on the “attract.” As it progresses, if we’re not careful, the focus switches to dwelling on the “opposites.” Our point of view shifts, and we start to see our relationship as different. And as we do, problems develop.

Simple as it may sound, the quality of every marriage depends on how we look at our partner. It’s not that beneath the attraction are differences we must somehow try to suppress, but that the differ-

ences are often the cause of the attraction itself — not just sexual attraction but the full range of psychological, spiritual, and physical attraction.

A happy marriage is, then, always one of managed incompatibility. We can do what we can to make it easier for our mates to deal with our differences where they are problematic (Romans 14:19), but both mates must concentrate on how they see each other. We must continue to look at the attractive things about the other. In the words of the apostle Paul, whatever things are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, “if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

We render this advice useless if we do not see it as the potent marriage problem-solver it really is. If we apply Paul’s words to our relationship with our mate — in constantly looking for, affirming, and complimenting the good things we appreciate about each other on every level — the matter of incompatibility increasingly becomes a non-issue.

The truth is, incompatibility does not destroy marriage; it serves as the healthy tension forming the basis of meaningful marriage relationships. The more we see each other in a positive way and keep our focus there, the more we see attraction and the less we see opposites. We can celebrate our incompatibility — and good things happen when we do.

Genesis tells us that when God created the first marriage partners, “He created them male and female, and blessed them . . .” (5:2). God blessed marriage not as a bond of like pairs, but blessed us as male and female — in our differences. **BA**

R. Herbert is a pen name. He holds a Ph.D. in ancient Near Eastern languages, biblical studies, and archaeology.

The Reality of Marriage

Before I got married,
I didn't know the reality
That the easiest thing to grow
Would be apart.
Apart a little at a time
Until it makes a hole.

Before I got married,
I didn't know the reality
That the hardest thing to grow
Would be a part.
A part a little at a time
Until it makes a whole.

Now that I am married,
I have learned this reality
But don't always act as though
I want hardships, not a free ride.
I want to bridge and not divide
The hearts we pledged to tomorrow.

Now that I am married,
I am learning the reality:
The process has just begun.
A little at a time, part by part,
Bridge by bridge, heart to heart.
"Two shall, by grace, become one."

Bethany Waters



Relationship

by Amber Riggs

Let's face it. When a Christian leader considers their ministry to-do list, it's the equivalent of swiping through a newsfeed on a smartphone. Barring Jesus' return, that list is never, ever going to end.

To press the metaphor further, there's a word for getting so lost in your smartphone that you ignore the physical people sitting next to you. It's called *phubbing*. And if we're honest, there's an immense temptation to *phub* our way through leadership as well — to become so drawn to need after need, so focused on being as efficient, effective, and efficacious as possible in our "kingdom work," that we neglect the people closest to us. We disregard both their need for us and our need for them.

Single leaders may find that they're too busy to experience the restorative company of friends. Married leaders may find that the relationship with their spouse suffers. We forget that both singleness and marriage are gifts, and we should recognize how enjoying these gifts can help us be better leaders.

Ironically, when we neglect these relationships, it's often a failure to recognize that leader-

ship isn't a checklist, but a matter of imaging God through our *whole life*.

Bearing witness

In *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, Pete Scazzero notes the shaping roles that singleness and marriage play in how we image God:

Our whole life as a leader is to bear witness to God's love for the world. But we do so in different ways as marrieds or singles. Married couples bear witness to the *depth* of Christ's love. Their vows focus and limit them to loving one person exclusively, permanently, and intimately. Singles . . . bear witness to the *breadth* of Christ's love. Because they are not limited by a vow to one person, they have more freedom and time to express the love of Christ to a broad range of people. Both marrieds and singles point to and reveal Christ's love, but in different ways. Both need to learn from one another about these different aspects of Christ's love.

Scripture is full of examples of single adults who bore witness to the fullness of Yahweh's attentive love. These include Ruth and Naomi's care for one another;

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-Fueled Leaders

Jeremiah's prophetic ministry; the roles that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus played in Jesus' life; and Paul's apostleship and explicit encouragement regarding singleness. Most notably, of course, is Christ's life lived out in anticipation of the unity that will come when He returns to welcome the church as His covenantal "bride."

Marriage, on the other hand, is consistently painted as an up-close-and-personal shadow of God's covenant faithfulness. In Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Hosea and Gomer, Mary and Joseph, and others, we see the enduring richness of God's mercy and long-suffering.

Living healthy

Since both singleness and marriage point beyond themselves to Christ, Scazzero further asserts that a singleness or marriage that is dedicated to God is a sign and a wonder. By extension, how well you love in these contexts becomes your loudest gospel message.

Therefore, Scazzero boldly encourages leaders to make either a healthy singleness or a healthy marriage their first ambition, adding, "We cannot bear witness to the Lord Jesus unless we have rearranged our lives to abide deeply in him. This means we

must slow our pace and activities in order to intentionally cultivate our oneness to Jesus."

How then can we make the invisible love of God visible in our own lives so that we can lead out of an overflow?

First, *practice delight in God's presence*. What do you thoroughly enjoy doing with God just for the sake of doing it? David found delight both in making music and dancing before God. Some Christians meet with God while they garden or fish. One of my favorite delights is bringing my thoughts before Him as I enjoy a slow walk down the country lane in front of my house. Since I appear to be talking to myself, quite possibly in an animated fashion, a neighbor once directed her husband to follow me in his truck and make sure I didn't need help!

Next, if you are single, *prioritize time with your closest friends or in cultivating friendships through hospitality*. Or if you are married, *prioritize time with your spouse*. If this time isn't set aside, it will surely be taken over by more pressing responsibilities. What can you do together that will leave both parties feeling refreshed and restored? While all deep relationships have both serious and light-hearted dimensions, remember to be inten-

tional about activities that create delight in the relationship.

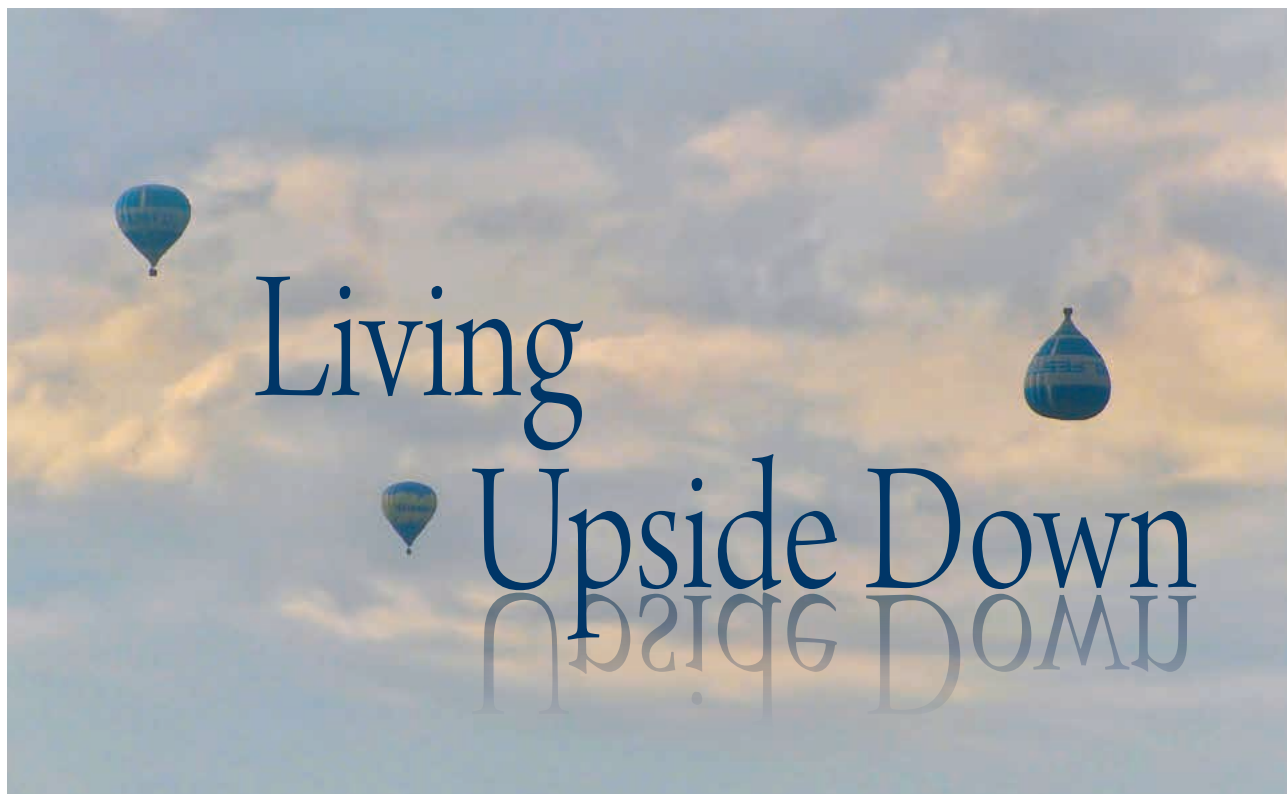
Finally, *practice self-care*. Steward your physical and mental health. Remember that self-care is not selfish. For example, as an introvert, I need to be alone at times in order to think clearly and make good decisions. I've also discovered that exercising in the early afternoon and reading before I go to bed not only restore my mind and body but also bring energy to both my relationships and my ministry responsibilities.

Mirror and magnifier

The demands of ministry will always threaten to fill all of our time. And yet, God has graciously designed our lives so that each component has the potential to reflect His goodness. In both marriage and singleness, God provides us with relationships that serve to mirror and magnify His love. They aren't distractions from the gospel but embody the gospel themselves. **BA**

Amber Riggs is dean of administration for Artios Christian College. She lives near Eugene, OR, with her husband, Bryan, and their four daughters.





Understanding how
Christian reality runs
counter to the world.

by **Robert E. Thomson**

We live in an upside-down world.

Although most of the general population probably would not agree, Christians affirm it wholeheartedly. The Bible, with clarity and certainty, declares this to be true.

“When I am weak,” said the apostle Paul, “then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). In his first letter to the same church, the apostle said that God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong and that He chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise (1:27).

Throughout Scripture, we see many examples of human thinking being at odds with God’s wisdom. Consider these five areas.

Power

In the eyes of the world, power is a top-to-bottom value. The boss is more important than the employee. The colonel gives orders that are obeyed instantly by the buck private. The slave (and there are slaves, even in the twenty-first century) is subservient to the slightest whim of the master. The Bob Cratchits of the world buckle under the demanding requirements of the Ebenezer Scrooges.

To be on top is to have control. Or so it seems. Jesus said, “The last will be first, and the first will be last” (Matthew 20:16). He illustrated this by telling the story of an ill, hungry beggar who scavenged for scraps of food that

fell from a rich man’s table. After both men died, the beggar found himself in Abraham’s bosom, while the rich man was in Hades, begging for just a drop of water on his parched tongue (Luke 16:19-31).

In the long run, the beggar turned out to be blessed, while the rich man suffered in torment.

Economics

As far as money is concerned, especially for those who exist at a poverty level or lower, it seems that the person who has the most is always at an advantage. But that’s not how it works in the economy of the kingdom. Often, less is more.

On one occasion, Jesus and His disciples were observing worshippers placing gifts in the temple treasury. Many people put in large donations. “But a poor widow came and put in two very

small copper coins, worth only a few cents" (Mark 12:41, 42).

Jesus said to His followers, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others" (v. 43). Her gift, though tiny, was worth more than the huge gifts because the widow gave out of poverty, with love.

An unknown poet has written:

But Heaven's arithmetic
mystifies man

When the answer is faith
and a prayer.

To get you must give, and
to add you divide,

And to multiply things
you must share.

Ethics

King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, said, "There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death" (Proverbs 14:12).

This "everyman" Solomon describes is not a blithering fool, casting all caution to the wind and choosing to live without thinking or concern for the future. This is a reasonable individual who makes what they consider to be solid, sane choices that will lead to happiness on earth and to eternal life.

But something is wrong with the equation. This person believes their generosity to the poor, the choice to tell the truth on most occasions, regular attendance at church, and an equal opportunity view of others are right choices that will bring happiness now and later a place in the kingdom.

But Solomon's conclusion is that all of this "good" activ-

ity leads to death. The missing ingredient for this individual is a recognition that "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23) and need a Savior. That Savior is Jesus Christ, of whom it is written, "There is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

The truth is that we are not saved because we're good. Rather, we're good because we're saved.

Value of life

Nothing is more valuable to human beings than life. Americans spend millions of dollars every year on medical care in order

of a sacrificial life bearing fruit. But Christian literature is replete with stories of individuals who have died to self and reaped rich rewards for the kingdom — some tenfold, some an hundredfold.

Reality

If the topsy-turvyness of the world is evident in such things as power, economics, ethics, and life values, it is even more so in the realm of reality itself.

The apostle Paul made an astounding statement in his second letter to the Corinthians. He wrote, "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is

“It is the unseen — faith, trust, love, and the Almighty himself — that are real and will last for eternity.”

to extend the length of their lives. But Jesus said, "Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25).

Prior to this, the Master explained His statement: "Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (v. 24).

Mother Teresa of Calcutta is perhaps the best known example

temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (4:18).

We're used to trusting in things we can see and touch.

We sit in a chair because, from sight and feel, we know it will support us.

We look at the ocean, and we assume it always will be there.

We stand in awe of towering mountains and sense that nothing ever could destroy them.

We view ancient buildings, hundreds of years old, and never

consider that one day they will collapse.

But Paul tells us that, because we can see these things, they are temporary.

It is the unseen — faith, trust, love, and the Almighty himself — that are real and will last for eternity.

The apostle Peter revealed that at the end times “The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare” (2 Peter 3:10). But the permanent things, the unseen things, will remain.

Different reality

Within a few years of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, Paul and Silas set out as evangelists. In Thessalonica, things went well for three weeks. Then

a group of envious men and their followers went to the city authorities complaining that the Christians had “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6, KJV) and were now disrupting the peace of their city.

It was true. Christians did turn the world upside down in the first century. Thank God, the situation has not changed. God’s people today live with a different reality than the world. We have discovered that God’s way, though it may seem contrary to human reason, always is best. **BA**

Robert E. Thomson writes from Palm Harbor, FL. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



No Regrets

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protection against a man I really didn’t know, but God did (1 Samuel 16:7). I might not have discovered the real Greg until after we married. What heartache did I avoid in not marrying him?

Settled

It’s been several years since I talked with Nadine, and I’m celebrating my birthday. Another opportunity to take stock of my life and thank God for His faithfulness. I scroll through Facebook and read the list of good wishes from friends and family. One in particular catches my attention — from Ryan. Now a husband and father with three kids of his own, he hasn’t forgotten our times together. He thanks me for playing baseball with him as a kid, for liking rock music. I smile to myself, give it a “thumbs up,” and breathe a word of thanks to God.

I see James later that day. Also an adult now, he gives me his patented “best aunt in the world” hug. We grab our gloves and a baseball and head outside for a game of catch. On this birthday, I realize the richness of my life as a single, of being an aunt, of following God’s plan for me.

Did I do it right? You bet I did.

BA

** Name has been changed*


Sherri Langton is associate editor of the *Bible Advocate*.



**EXTRA!
EXTRA!**



Have you seen our BA Extras at baonline.org? These are articles you won’t find in the print version. For the July-August issue, we’re featuring an article by our Australian brother, John Klassek, and Betts Baker’s story on trusting God in tough financial times. Also, be sure to read Stanley J. Kauer’s “Not of This World,” which originally appeared in the February 3, 1936 BA.



Biblical Canonization

How were the books of our Bible selected? Part 4 in this series explains the process.

by Gordon Feil

Last time in our study of Scripture's authority, we examined biblical *inspiration* and the challenge of how God communicated His message through the text (see baonline.org). In this article, we turn to *canonization* and the problem of recognition. Do you ever wonder who selected the sixty-six books of Scripture? Why are those books in there, and not some others?

The *canon* refers to the list of books in the Bible, while *canonization* refers to the process of creating that list. *Canon* derives from the Greek word *kanon* (and the Hebrew *qaneh* before that) and originally referred to a straight rod or reed used for measuring. The common meaning of the word can be seen from the few times it appears in the New Testament, where *kanon* is typically translated "rule," "measure,"

or "limit" (2 Corinthians 10:13-16; Galatians 6:16; Philippians 3:16).

So the canon represents the books recognized as measuring up to the standard as God's Word. Let's begin with the Old Testament.

Something Old

The selection of books in the Law and the Prophets is of an ancient tradition, a collection a thousand years in the making. Jewish scribes knew even the middle letter of the Torah (the five books of Moses) — a difficult feat if the books were uncertain. The rabbis who gathered at Jamnia the generation after Jerusalem's destruction (AD 70) critically evaluated each book of the Tanakh (Christian Old Testament). Some were questioned, like Song of Solomon, due to its theme; Esther, because it didn't mention God; and Ecclesiastes, because it seemed secular.

Yet after the rabbis' lengthy deliberation, the long recognized traditional collection, and the same we have today, was formally ratified.

In the middle

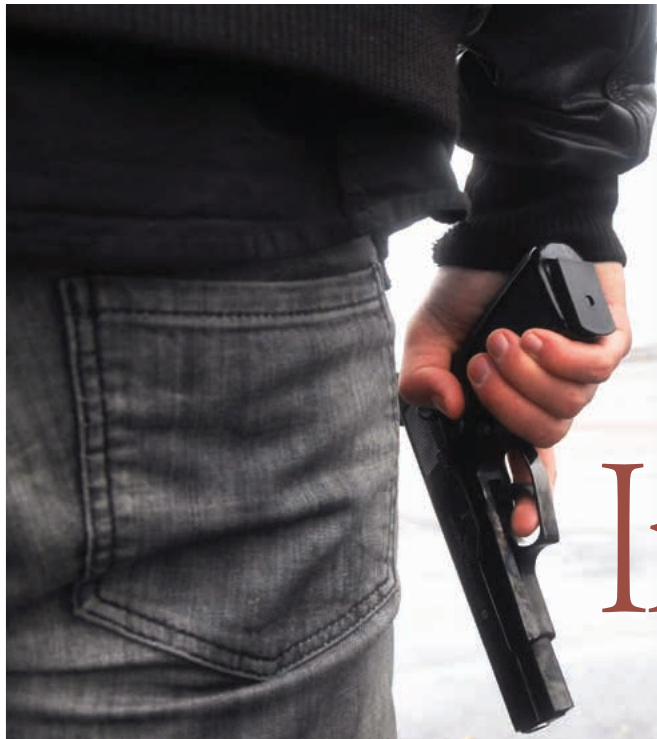
The Apocrypha fared differently. In reaction to Reformers, this collection of fourteen books from the period between the Old and New Testaments had been regarded by Catholics as Scripture since the Council of Trent (1540), but not by Jews or most Protestants. Even the Dead Sea Scrolls marked a difference. When apocryphal books quote Scripture, they say, "It is written."

Purgatory isn't taught in the Bible, but is supported by 2 Maccabees. And there are other doctrinal problems in the Apocrypha: praying for the dead, salvation by works, the use of magic, sinless lives of Old Testament personalities, geographical errors, and factual contradictions with Scripture.

Something New

Unlike the Old Testament, the books of the New Testament emerged quickly while circulating independently of each other for a long time. A tradition was established around the recognition

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Inside Job

God can set anyone free
from inner pain and
unforgiveness.

**by Wendi Johnson
as told to Karen Foster**

I pulled my baking sheet out of the oven and inhaled the sweet scent of chocolate chip cookies. When I bit into a warm one, my tears came — again. These cookies were bound for the male inmates in one of our state prisons.

Would one of the three men who'd killed my husband be eating them? I hoped so. But I never would have believed that thought was possible.

On September 27, 2005, my twenty-year-old son, Brandon, left a message at work for me to call him. I presumed he wanted

to talk about a job interview he'd had that day.

I was wrong. Without explanation, he said, "Auntie Dawn is coming to get you."

My heart froze. "Why is my sister picking me up?" Brandon dodged my questions, but right before he hung up, he said, "Don't worry, Mom. I'll take care of you."

My stomach lurched. I thought of calling my husband, Kim, but started shaking. What if something had happened to him? I pressed my hand over my mouth and ran to the restroom.

Horrible news

My sister arrived, her eyes red and puffy. "Where's Kim?" I grabbed her hand. "Is he dead?"

She nodded. The room swirled, and I collapsed into her arms with a gut-wrenching scream. How could my husband be dead? I'd talked with him on

the phone during lunch. Didn't Kim say he'd left work early and was home?

Was it a heart attack? What if the gun he'd been cleaning for the hunting season had accidentally gone off? His final words — "I love you, darling" — squeezed my heart. I leaned against my sister and urged her, "Get me home!"

Yellow caution tape sealed off my street. I stretched my neck to see beyond the police cars. "Where's my son?" I cried, pacing back and forth. "I want my son!"

Just then, Brandon ran up to me. Chests heaving, we clung to each other and wept. My son told me he'd come home and found Kim, his stepdad, lying on the basement floor in a pool of blood. He'd been beaten and shot in the head. Many of our electronics and guns were gone, including the handgun used to kill my husband.

Two days passed before the police allowed me to go into my home. I was numb as they escorted me through the house and questioned me. When I entered our master bedroom, I gasped. The blue-gray T-shirt Kim wore the last time I'd seen him was splayed across our bed.

I grabbed the shirt and breathed in his clean scent. Tears flooding my eyes, I slumped like a rag doll on the bed and wept.

Unsettled

After Kim's funeral, I moved back into the house with Brandon. We installed a burglar alarm, but it didn't alleviate our fears. What if the murderer was someone we knew? I kept the alarm's panic button with me at all times.

Nights were the worst. Unable to sleep, my mind searched for answers. I listened for the slightest sound, rushed to Brandon's bedside whenever nightmares woke him up and he needed me. My only comfort was prayer and Deuteronomy 31:6: "Be strong and courageous . . . for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you" (NIV).

A year after Kim's death, the handgun was found, leading to the arrest of three men. However, relief morphed into impatience as I waited another year and a half for the trial.

Desiring justice

During that time, Kairos Prison Ministry came to our church to organize an intensive weekend Bible study at one of our state prisons. They asked for volunteers to bake cookies for the prisoners.

I crossed my arms. I wasn't going to bake cookies for some criminal. *Preach the gospel if you like, but I want justice.*

I rushed out of church and drove home. Although the men were behind bars, I double-bolted the door and threw my car keys on the granite kitchen counter. *Bake cookies?* I breathed deep and listened to Christian praise music to calm my nerves.

And then I had to face my enemy. For seven days in Septem-

Tears and anger

I'd never seen the crime scene photographs until the trial. Now, seeing the horror of Kim's final moments crushed my heart. I wept countless tears. My anger grew. I kept waiting for the men to face me. Beg for my forgiveness. Even when I was on the witness stand and excused myself because I became sick to my stomach, their cold, dark eyes stared straight ahead as though I were invisible.

“I wasn't going to bake cookies for some criminal. *Preach the gospel if you like, but I want justice.*”

ber 2008 I sat in the courtroom behind the two men who killed my husband. The third man had already pled guilty and testified at the trial. As I listened to the prosecuting attorney, I learned the men had needed money, mistook our house for someone else's, and thought the place was empty.

"If only's" replayed in my head. If only the seventeen-year-old who pulled the trigger had stayed in school that day. If only they'd entered our neighbor's house, my husband would still be alive. If only Kim's pistol had been in the gun safe.

The jury found the men guilty of first-degree murder, and they each received a life sentence.

End of story, or so I thought. Negative thoughts consumed me. I tried to forget the past for the sake of my family and health. I even volunteered to bake cookies for Kairos Prison Ministry. As I stirred the chocolate chips into the dough, tears rolled down my cheeks. What would Kim say if he saw me baking cookies for convicted felons? I wiped my eyes and set the oven timer. *Lord, make my spirit as sweet as these cookies. Use them for Your glory.*

I prayed for the men, by name,

who killed my husband. They weren't evil. The poor decisions they'd made in life had a domino effect that led to Kim's death. Now they suffered the consequences.

Maybe I could forgive them, but my heart needed more time than it took to bake several dozen cookies.

Unforeseen answer

My prayers were answered, but not in the way I expected. My son had become addicted to

month to get accepted.

When our visitation ended, Brandon stood up to leave and looked back at me over his sunken shoulders. His pleading eyes yanked my heart. I bowed my head and sobbed. I loved my son, but only the Lord could save him. He needed God's grace — the same way I did.

I thought of the other men sitting in prison. Where was their hope? Did they know about God's grace? Visiting my son in jail roused my compassion for prisoners. In addition to baking

“I thought of the other men sitting in prison. Where was their hope? Did they know about God's grace?”

prescription pain pills he'd taken for a sports injury, and he wanted something stronger to purge the memory of finding his murdered stepfather on the floor. Six years to the day of Kim's death, Brandon was arrested for the possession of illegal drugs. He called me from jail. “Mom, get me out of here.”

When I saw the dark circles under his hollow eyes, I had to look away. A thick glass window separated us, so we used a phone to hear each other. I offered to post bail, provided he went to a Christian rehabilitation program. Brandon agreed but realized it would take about a

cookies, I hosted an annual hayride and invited the community to bring toys for the Angel Tree Program.

Granting forgiveness

But my heart wouldn't rest until I wrote the men who murdered my husband. “God loves you, regardless of what you've done,” I said. “I've forgiven you, and God's willing to forgive you if you turn to Him.”

The following month, I gasped when I opened my mailbox and saw the envelope's return address. My hands shook as I read the prisoner's handwritten letter. “I'm sorry for all the pain

I caused you and your family. Thank you, Wendi, for your letter. I prayed for a sign that I'd been forgiven.”

I clutched the letter to my chest. All along, this man had been praying and waiting too. The young man who pulled the trigger also replied with heartfelt words that made me weep. God had been working in all our lives to heal, redeem, restore.

Sharing a story

When Forsyth Prison Ministry asked for volunteers to participate in their services at Cherry State Prison, my hand went up. On a summer evening in 2014, I walked through the metal detector of that prison with a plate of cookies and a heart filled with praise. The next year, I shared my story in front of a hundred inmates. Some of them wiped their eyes. Others slowly shook their heads.

“For all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory,” I said, referencing Romans 3:23. “No one is beyond God's love and grace.” The men gathered around me to shake my hand when I finished speaking.

People ask how I could forgive the men who killed my husband. Sometimes, I ask myself that question when I see Kim's shirt tucked in my dresser drawer. Or when I bake chocolate chip cookies for prison ministry.

I tell them God's love softened my heart, one batch of cookies at a time. **BA**

Karen Foster
writes from Auburn, CA.



Biblical Canonization

continued from page 23

of those that were truly inspired by God. Eventually, in the fourth century, that tradition was formally described.

The basic criteria by which books were recognized and elected into our canon of Scripture include, at least, the following rules. Each book must . . .

Be apostolic. It should be written by an apostle or a close associate (Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; Hebrews 1:1, 2). Jude teaches us that “the faith . . . was once for all delivered to the saints” (v. 3). “Once for all” means no more is coming! This is confirmed when Revelation takes us right out to eternity and ends by telling us that no one has anything more to add to it.

Be orthodox. Each book must agree with the teachings of the church. By *church*, we do not mean a corporate denomination but the body of believers founded by Christ, beginning with the apostles and prophets and seen in the criterion of Scripture agreeing with Scripture among believers from the start.

Have the character of Scripture. A mature believer knows whether the Word rings true as the Word of God. The Bible warns novices not to be swayed by every wind of doctrine but to heed mature believers. If God has been working in you for many years, you know the truth when you hear it. The sheep know their Master’s voice (John 10:27, 28).

Be widely used throughout the church. Each book should demonstrate that believers rec-

Patterns of Perfection

Just for fun, there are 22 books in the Tanakh, the same as our 39, because some are combined. Twenty-two plus 27 from the New Testament makes 49, which is seven sevens — a perfect number. And if we number the Old Testament 39 books and add 27, that’s 66.

Perhaps the most complete book of theology in the Old Testament is Isaiah. It has 66 chapters: the first 39, about sin and judgment, and the last 27, about the Messiah and our response to Him.

These patterns may or may not affirm the canon. Either way, we can rest assured that the biblical canon is not the product of time or chance, but of inspired recognition and selection among the first churches, guided by the Spirit.

ognized it as inspired by God while it was circulated among them. Sometimes the question concerned how wide that circulation was or how immediately it was recognized in the earliest days. On some occasions when a scroll was read for the first time, the whole audience would break down and cry. Imagine the thrill of having Scripture delivered to them when they had very little.

Be a clear and consistent testimony to the person and work of Jesus Christ. With each book focused on our resurrected Savior and Lord, we can be confident that as the Holy Spirit inspired the very words of Scripture, so He inspired their recognition and collection.

Test of time

The God who inspired the words and writing of the Bible is the same God who inspired the collection and transmission of them. Two thousand years later, these sixty-six books are loved and trusted by billions of Christians as God’s Word to us and the sole rule of faith and practice.

BA

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



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Mail Bag



Eye on Israel

Does modern Israel still command the Church's attention now, seventy years after her national rebirth? Robert Coulter asked this question in the Nov/Dec '17 BA, and J. G. replied in the Mar/Apr '18 "Mail Bag."

To them, and to this question, I say, *Yes!* Israel should receive our notice today, two generations after the United Nations approved the Jews' return to Palestine and their nationhood in 1948. Here's why.

- Because there she is — Israel in the Promised Land again, as the Torah promised (Genesis 13:14-17; 17:8; 35:12; 50:24); as the prophets predicted (Isaiah 11:11, 12; Jeremiah 30:8-11; 31:35-37; Ezekiel 37, 38, 39; Joel 3; Amos 9:11-15; Obadiah 17-21; Zechariah 12, 13, 14); and as the Messiah implied (Matthew 19:28; Luke 21:20-24). We may dispute the precise meaning of these texts or the DNA of the Israeli citizenry, but we can hardly dispute that Israel is back home — a tantalizingly near match, if not a perfect one, with the scriptures above. Read them again — for the first time.

"Coincidence," you say. How likely is that, given the many other dramatic and enigmatic Bible signs of these times? More likely it is that Israel's presence and prominence on the world scene is *confirmation* of the Word and its over-arching trajectory of truth as seen in these texts.

- There she is again — Israel in the midst of it all. In the geographic middle of the largest, most populous land on earth: Europe-Asia-Africa. In the chronological middle of earth-time: Abraham (Israel) came 2,000 years after Adam and lived in the land 2,000 years in the land before being scattered the last 2,000. In the middle of the Bible (Psalm 122), its covenants (Genesis 12:1-3), and our faith (Abraham and Israel gave Christians our roots, most of our Scripture and morality, and our Savior-Messiah). In the middle of Jesus' prophetic teaching (Luke 21:20-24) and Paul's premier epistle (Romans 9-11, especially 11:2, 25-29).

- Modern Israel is also in the midst of her enemies. Anti-Semitism has a long history among the nations, including Christians from Justin Martyr to Martin Luther to the 21st century.

Now in the land God promised and in the middle of so much that matters, modern Israel still has a place in God's heart and His plan for the nations. As followers of Jesus and Paul (1 Corinthians 11:1), we retain their support for God's old covenant people, Israel. Read Paul again on this topic (Romans 9:1-5; 10:1; 11:1, 2a, 25-32), and recognize that sympathy for

our elder "faith-brother," blinded though he be, is in our spiritual genes.

The last seventy years have taught us that Israel's being back home is not the key to the year of the Lord's return as we once thought. Beginning in 1948, the new nation fought for her existence: in 1956, 1967, 1973, and every few years since. To many Christians, any or all of these conflicts seemed to shout, "The end is near; Christ is at the door!"

Now, much more than the generation our Lord said would not pass before all these things would be fulfilled (Matthew 24:34), how should we view Israel in that ever-volatile part of the world?

Though we identify with modern Israel through biblical linkages, we err if we fail to affirm that nation's responsibility, in harmony with the Torah itself, to exercise loving concern for strangers, aliens, and neighbors (Arabs, Palestinians, etc.) within her gates and across her walls-borders.

At the same time, we constantly celebrate the benefits and advantages of the new covenant in Christ's blood — far better than the old covenant with Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai.

C. B.
Stayton, OR

Editor's note: For more prophetic teaching of the Church of God (Seventh Day), see the upcoming November-December "Kingdom Come" issue.



G. C. Ministries News

ARTIOS • MISSIONS • PUBLICATIONS



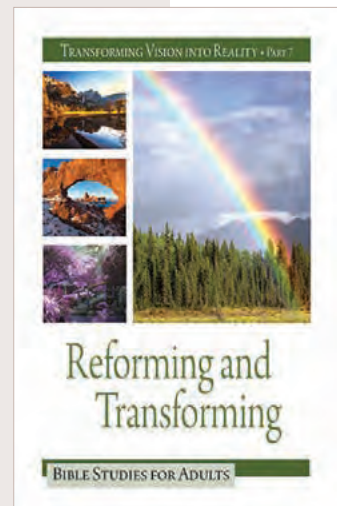
Bryan Cleeton (left, G. C. Missions) and Jason Overman (Publications) join IMC President Ramon Ruiz (center) in Monterrey, Mexico, for the annual District 4 Leadership Congress, April 28-29. Over 300 local leaders worshipped and fellowshiped together while attending workshops on church edification and evangelism training. It was encouraging to participate in an event of this kind and magnitude and to see so many local leaders — from pastors to Sabbath school teachers — committed to the gospel and excellence in ministry.

— Jason Overman, editor

Third Quarter 2018 Lessons

Reforming and Transforming, written by Jody McCoy and Jason Overman, promises to challenge students on how to remain true to their faith in today's world. Paul's famous words to the Romans form the basis of this quarterly: "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (12:2, KJV).

In this *Reforming and Transforming* quarterly, we will identify a variety of worldviews that seek to conform our minds to the world and its values. In each lesson we will contrast the idols at the root of these ideologies with the worldview of the Bible and the lordship of Jesus Christ. With renewed minds, we hope to better understand how we are sanctified by God's Spirit and set apart from the world for His eternal purposes.



Coming soon! Children's Sabbath School Teachers Forum at the new publications.org website.

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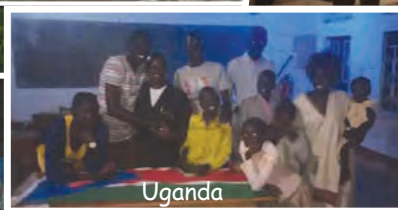
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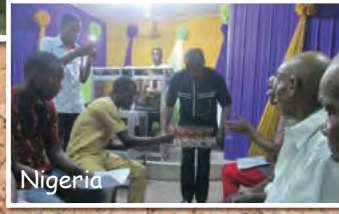
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Mozambique



Pakistan



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Faithful!

Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful (1 Corinthians 4:2, NIV).

Inspired by God to pen that sentence, Paul was writing specifically of the trust given to him and a few others to serve Christ and the early church as apostles. However, this principle applies to everyone who wishes to build and maintain good relationships.

A person who is faithful is loyal, steadfast, and trustworthy. Without faithful behavior, there cannot be long-term trust. Without long-term trust, there cannot be long-term good relationship. Faithfulness, therefore, is critical. In our relationship with God himself, God demands it. In our relationships with others, God commands it.

Any discussion of Christian living falls short of being complete if it does not include the vital component of faithfulness. What is *living* if not the conduct of the many relationships we all experience to one degree or another? Family, community, church, employment and professional relationships, friendships and acquaintances — all of these and more tell the stories of our lives. And what is *Christian* if not that which imitates the example of Christ and obeys His teachings? And what was the example of Christ, and what were His teachings, if not the greatest call to proper and faithful relationships that God has ever sent to humanity?

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” taught Jesus in word and deed. “This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37-39, NIV). “If you love me,” said Jesus, “you will obey my commands” (John 14:15, NCV). “A new command I give you,” instructed

Jesus. “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (13:34, 35, NIV). Faithfulness in relationship with God and in relationship with other people: This is at the heart of Christ’s example and teachings.

God has proven Himself to be faithful; we, too, must be faithful. With regard to God, we are called to be faithful: to Him, personally; to His written Word; and to the Great Commission we have been given. “Go and make disciples of all nations,” Jesus commands us, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19, 20a, NIV). With regard to other people, we are called to be faithful in every proper relationship. We are called to faithfulness as parents and children. We are called to faithfulness as husbands and wives. We are called to faithfulness as employers and employees, as leaders and followers, as government officials and citizens, as teachers and students, as brothers and sisters in Christ. Without godly faithfulness, there can be no godly relationships and, ultimately, no *Christian living*.

I love Psalm 37:3 as it is translated in the *New American Standard Bible*: “Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.” That phrase, “cultivate faithfulness,” paints a picture of intentional effort. Faithfulness doesn’t just automatically “grow” in our lives; it has to be nurtured. Please join me in cultivating faithfulness in every proper relationship. In Christ, we have received a trust. It is required that we prove faithful.

— Loren Stacy





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