



July - August 2022

A full-page background image of a sunset over a valley. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange and yellow glow that fills the sky and reflects on a winding road that leads from the foreground into the distance. The landscape is hilly with some trees and a fence in the lower left corner.

Truth of the Gospel



Inside

2022: Living the Gospel



ARTICLES

- 4 Despising the Word? | Marcia Sanders
- 7 Seeing as Jesus Sees | Lydia E. Harris
- 8 O Foolish Galatians! | Ramon Ruiz
- 12 'Crowing' the Apostles' Doctrine | Mike Wallace
- 14 Hardening of the Heart | Joseph Willie
- 18 Go Work in the Vineyard Today | Brian Franks
- 20 Bringing Our Children to Jesus | Kelsey Gjesdal
- 22 Tolerance | Bob Blundell
- 24 Healing Hearts and Homes | Diana C. Derringer

DEPARTMENTS

- 3 First Word — But Is It True?
- 11 Questions & Answers
- 16 Romans Road
- 25 Poetry — Lucia Kiersch Haase
- 26 Readers Write
- 27 GC Ministries News
- 28 On Mission — Blueberry Muffins
- 31 Last Word — Come and See

Scripture quotations

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But Is It True?

Welcome to the summer BA! It's hard to believe, but on July 1, I celebrate seven years in the editor's chair. Thank you for your support. It's been an honor to serve the Church in this ministry. Lord willing, we'll do seven more!

As I reflect on this time, I am reminded of the *Bible Advocate's* mission to advance the truth of God's Word to the world. As our Statement of Faith asserts, we believe "the Bible is the only authoritative and infallible rule of faith and conduct for humanity."

But the truth of the Bible, and the gospel it contains, is something we must defend. According to the American Bible Society's annual *State of the Bible* report, 26 million Americans stopped reading the Bible regularly last year. While 77 percent of Americans own a Bible, only 26 percent read it at least weekly. This reveals an odd paradox. While the Bible is by far the best-selling book in the US each year, few read it regularly.

The Bible makes a bold claim about itself and its gospel. It purports to be *the truth*. Not a truth — *the*! The challenge is profound. On one hand, we are contending with a biblical illiteracy that is a hotbed for false gospels to spring up in, and on the other hand, we're dealing with a broader culture that denies the very existence of truth.

We can face the challenge as Paul did. He was tireless in defending *the truth of the gospel* against all imposters and naysayers. We, too, insist that the gospel of grace is also of truth: "you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:5). By advocating the Bible, we assert that the true gospel is the biblical gospel. If shorn from its anchor, the gospel is reduced to every self-serving and sentimental whim.

Though full of grace, the Word of God warns us that the truth of the gospel is a life-and-death matter: eternal life or eternal destruction "on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1:8). The audacity of it! May we be as audacious in proclaiming it. Brethren, read your Bible, and may the "truth of the gospel . . . continue with you" (Galatians 2:5).

— Jason Overman





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Truth and consequences in
the lives of David and Peter.

by Marcia Sanders

Have you ever felt like Peter in Matthew 26, when he loudly and proudly proclaimed to Jesus that even if everyone else fell away, he would remain loyal — that even if faced with death, he would never deny his Lord? We all know the rest of *that* story. Peter not only denied Jesus three times, as Christ had predicted, but even cursed to make his point.

How much we trust our ability to take care of ourselves versus how much we trust God with our lives, our well-being, is a significant part of the cost of discipleship.

Peter faced a dangerous situation and reacted out of fear, rather than faith. Another biblical character did the same.

David's standard

A shepherd boy faced a giant almost nine feet tall. He was the same giant who had sent Israel's great army back to their tents, quaking in fear. Yet this young shepherd assured Saul that the same God who had protected him and his flocks from the bear and lion would protect him against the giant. Shunning the defensive gear that Saul offered, David took his slingshot and five stones and approached Goliath.

In response to Goliath's taunting, young David said, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies

of Israel, whom you have taunted" (1 Samuel 17:45). No fear is evidenced here — only a simple and complete faith in God to protect him.

Later, David again showed his confidence in following the Lord's will as he was being pursued by Saul, intent on killing him. David, fully knowing that God had chosen him to succeed Saul on the throne, continued to recognize Saul's kingship and refused to harm him in any way. The Lord had placed Saul on the throne, and David trusted God to remove him at the appropriate time. Offered several opportunities to take Saul's life, David refused — even while Saul was doing all in his power to destroy David. Such trust during incredibly difficult and dangerous times!

David's sin

Yet once David was firmly enthroned as king, that trust and obedience began to fade, as in the story of Bathsheba. Such a contrast to those two earlier episodes in David's life. Now with riches beyond measure, David looked out one day and saw the beautiful Bathsheba, Uriah's wife. Rather than his previously strong desire to please the Lord, lust filled his thoughts and he determined to have her. Later, when Bathsheba sent a messenger to tell David she was expecting his child, his thoughts still didn't turn to God. Instead, he schemed about how to cover up this sinful deed.

Uriah, though, was more intent on serving the Lord and his king. He refused to comply with David's plan to have him sleep with his own wife to cover David's transgressions. When that plot failed, David basically sentenced Uriah to death by ordering his commander to send him to the front lines of battle, then retreat. Even after Uriah's death, David did not indicate that he felt any remorse over his various acts of disobedience (2 Samuel 11).

David, the one God himself described as "a man after His own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22), had committed both adultery and murder. How does God's description of David align with the actions described above? Let's look more deeply at David's heart.

David's story

At the end of 2 Samuel 11, Bathsheba mourned the death of her husband before David sent for her to come to him to

become his wife. One can't help but wonder if, at this point, David thought he had gotten away with his actions. If so, he was sadly mistaken, since the chapter ends with the words "But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD" (v. 27).

I love how God handled this situation with David. He didn't send the prophet Nathan to shake his finger at David and condemn him. Rather, Nathan shared a story that touched David deeply and caused him to think seriously, reflectively, about his own actions.

It isn't hard to imagine David's face as Nathan related the story.

claimed, "You are the man!" (v. 7, emphasis mine). David must have thought *What? How can that be? I haven't taken anyone else's lambs! What are you talking about?* Then the Lord, through Nathan, reminded David of all He had given to him:

"It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these!" (vv. 7, 8).

"How much did you want,

“Being the Lord's disciple is a complete commitment to His truth. But that doesn't mean we never fall short of that truth.”

A rich man took his poor neighbor's one lamb to slaughter and serve to his unexpected guest, rather than choosing one of his own many lambs. Can't you just see the shock and anger build on David's face as he hears about this outrage? He was ready to execute the guilty party for this egregious act (12:1-6).

Now picture how his countenance fell when Nathan pro-

David?" the Lord seemed to be asking. And then, considering how much David loved the Lord, Nathan delivered the gut-wrenching blow with this question: "Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight?" (v. 9).

Could any word be more hurtful for David than to accuse him of despising the word of the Lord? I can almost see his head hanging in shame as he realized

“The cost of discipleship is a full trust in our Lord, absolute dependence on Him and His Word.”

what Nathan was referring to. This wasn't about sheep; this was about him and his willful, selfish actions with Bathsheba and Uriah — sinful actions that amounted to despising God's word and God himself (v. 10).

But what sets David apart from so many others who sinned is his response: “I have sinned

against the LORD” (v. 13). It's a simple, heartfelt answer that is contrite and repentant. No excuses. No arguments. No self-serving explanations.

David and discipleship

David's example is good for us to follow. Being the Lord's disciple is a complete commitment

to His truth, not despising it. But that doesn't mean we never fall short of that truth. It does mean that we own up to those errors and humbly ask for God's forgiveness. Peter wept bitterly when he realized that he had, indeed, denied his Lord — not once but the three times Jesus predicted (Matthew 26:75).

David, too, found repentance for his sin with Bathsheba. Psalm 51 is the record of his powerful prayer (see sidebar).

The cost of discipleship is a full trust in our Lord, absolute dependence on Him and His Word — and a heartfelt confession when we fail in that dependency. We are called to a life of faith in God's protection and provision. He will fight our battles and lead us in His truth.

When we maintain, as Peter and David did, an unwavering confidence in and honesty before the God of our salvation, then He forgives our failures. They become an occasion to lead others to not despise but rejoice in God's truth: “Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You” (v. 13). **BA**

Psalm of Repentance

Be gracious to me, God, according to Your faithfulness; according to the greatness of Your compassion, wipe out my wrongdoings. Wash me thoroughly from my guilt and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my wrongdoings, and my sin is constantly before me. Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in guilt, and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, and in secret You will make wisdom known to me. Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean; cleanse me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness, let the bones You have broken rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins and wipe out all my guilty deeds. Create in me a clean heart, God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit (51:1-12).

Marcia Sanders

writes from Fort Smith, AR, where she attends the Church of God (Seventh Day) with her husband, Randy. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.



Seeing as Jesus Sees



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by **Lydia E. Harris**

My to-do list was too long: trips to the post office and grocery store, housecleaning, and birthday party prep. Could I complete everything before guests arrived at noon to celebrate our granddaughter's first birthday?

I rushed to the post office, only to discover it wasn't open yet. Determined to finish all my tasks, I skipped to my next errand, raced through the grocery store, then swung by the post office again. What a morning! Feeling frazzled and frumpy, I noticed an attractive, well-groomed lady dropping off mail.

As I left the post office, the woman passed me. Hesitating, then smiling, I said to her, "You look beautiful. When I first saw you, I asked God to help me look more put-together."

Smiling, she thanked me, and we got in our cars. Then she glanced my way, stepped out of her car, and walked toward mine. "Your compliment blessed me," she said. Then her voice cracked. "My son was just diagnosed with acute leukemia, and I'm headed to the hospital."

My heart ached for this stranger. "I'm so sorry. May I pray with you?"

She paused. "If you want to." I reached through the open window, grasped her hand, and prayed a heartfelt prayer for her son, the doctors and medical team, and for her.

When I finished, she wiped away tears and said, "That was beautiful. I wish I could do that."

"You can," I assured her. "It just takes practice." She talked more about her thirty-seven-year-old son's serious situation and her prayers for his spiritual growth. After listening, I shared how God had comforted me in my own battle with incurable cancer. We said goodbye, and she drove away. I didn't even get her name.

Driving home, I rejoiced that God had used me to encourage the woman. But I also wondered how often I miss opportunities like this by rushing through my days.

Verses in the Gospels came to mind, reminding me that Jesus saw the people He passed. For example, Matthew 9:36 says, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (NLT, emphasis mine).

Jesus wasn't focused on His to-do list, staring blindly ahead and ignoring those around Him. He didn't hurry to His next appointment, trying to avoid interruptions. Instead, He saw those in need and took time for each one.

Too frequently I allow my busy schedule to make me inflexible, rushing by those God places in my path. How many people do I pass every day without really seeing them? How often do I miss the blessing of sharing Jesus with others?

I'm thankful God helped me notice the lady at the post office and nudged me to do what Jesus would have done: reach out to her.

Once home, God helped me to get ready on time for the birthday party. And the divine encounter made watching my granddaughter lick fluffy frosting from her birthday cake all the more special.

So now I pray, "Dear Father, open my eyes and heart to those around me. Please help me to really see others as You do and to show Your love to those You send my way." **BA**

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



O Foolish Galatians!



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Proving the superiority of
the gospel of Christ.
by Ramon Ruiz

Of all the Pauline writings, which represent almost half of the New Testament books, the letter to the Galatians is the best defense against those who seek to “complement” the gospel of Christ with other practices, doctrines, or philosophies. It is a different kind of letter, where the apostle showed his total indignation at the attitude of the Judaizers, who were troubling the churches of Galatia. For Paul, the true gospel is non-negotiable.

Historical context

There is no doubt that Paul is the author of this letter. He wrote it between AD 55 and 58 to warn the Galatians of the danger that heretics and false teachers represented. These troublemakers ignored Paul’s authority, though he and Barnabas planted this church during his first missionary journey (Acts 13).

Among the heresies that threatened the church in the first few centuries were these:

Greek Docetism. This false teaching claimed that Jesus was not a real man but simply seemed to be. It denied that Jesus had a body of flesh and blood like any human being. According to the Greeks, no god would become human, because for the Docetists, matter was bad in and of itself. The concept of Docetism undermines not only the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus but also the atonement for our sins.

Marcionism. Marcion, a second century Gnostic, accepted only parts of the New Testament and disassociated himself from the Old Testament. He rejected that the God of creation and Israel was the same God as the Father of Jesus Christ. This deeply undermined the unity of God and the authority of all Scripture.

Esoteric Judaism (also *gnosticism*). This was a kind of occultism in which only certain enlightened ones could reach full knowledge of the Supreme Being — something similar to what is known today as the Jewish *kabalah*. Esoteric Judaism undermined the free gift of salvation through Christ to all who believe.

Problem in Galatia

In addition to these, the Galatian church faced a heresy of another kind.

Some leaders did not recognize Paul's apostleship, arguing that since he was not one of the original twelve apostles, his teachings were not authoritative. Against this, Paul wrote in the first verse of the letter that he was chosen as an apostle: "Not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead" (1:1).

But Paul was not that concerned about his prestige. He devoted only a verse about that. What really concerned him was the dangerous influence of the false leaders who sought to lead the churches to practice certain Jewish rites as a means of salvation. This was the heart of the problem that the apostle faced, and it amounted to a false gospel. Paul wrote, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel" (1:6; cf. 2:4).

Paul's indignation

"O foolish Galatians!" Paul chided (3:1). For the apostle, it was incomprehensible that having known the gospel of Christ,

these believers should think something more needed to be done. He strongly warned them that there is no other gospel, going so far as to say, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (1:8; *accursed* is *anathema* in Greek and means "to be cursed").

There are at least three reasons for Paul reacting so strongly. First, the entire old covenant was superseded by the new. This does not mean that the Old Testament scriptures are worthless. Far from it; all Scripture is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:15-17). Also, it is recognized that the New Testament cannot be rightly understood apart from

only Jews could be saved, Paul explained where this teaching leads: "I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law" (Galatians 5:3).

Second, like David long before, Paul recognized that God's law was not given for salvific purposes: "[We know] that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ" (2:16; cf. Psalm 143:2). Paul denied that justifying righteousness was possible through the law: "For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (vv. 19, 20). Paul warned that we dare not assign to the law, or our-

“For Paul, the true
gospel is non-negotiable”

the Old, nor it without the New, since they both relate and correspond in unity as God's Word (unlike Marcion claimed).

But the old covenant given to Israel was clearly superseded by the new redemptive work of Christ. This included the rite of circumcision, by which one was initiated into the Jewish religion. This was at the heart of the false teaching in Galatia. And aside from the implication that

selves, what only Christ can do: "I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain" (v. 21; 3:21).

The law does have a role to play in God's plan. Paul articulated three purposes:

- to reveal the perfect character of God (Romans 7:12);
- to reveal human sin and transgression (v. 7);
- to function as a guard, or tutor,

who leads to Christ (Galatians 3:19-25); the word *tutor* in verse 24 is from the Greek word *paidagōgos*, meaning someone who guides or educates children.

The third reason for Paul's strong reaction — and the most delicate of all — is the fact of believing that the sacrifice made by Christ on the cross of Calvary is not enough for salvation, that it must be completed with self-righteousness and "good" works.

This constitutes a sad and painful heresy, since a human being naturally lives in sin, and the only way to be freed from this condition is to live in Christ. The extent to which we remain in Christ is the extent to which we are justified (and sanctified!).

ficient by itself. A full definition needs the precision that only the Bible imprints on the word. The gospel of Jesus Christ resolves the sinful condition human beings live in. This is not just one piece of good news among others; it's *the* good news because it addresses our greatest need. By it we hear that salvation is found in *Christ*. And only Christ.

Furthermore, *the gospel is the act of God in Jesus Christ*, not of human origin nor of human power. It is God who takes the initiative and gives His only Son as a sacrifice for the salvation of all believers. And it is Christ who willingly gives His life for all humanity (John 3:16; 10:18). It's a pure gift of God, and we humans can receive the gift only in faith

Christ Jesus our Lord" (6:23). Because it is a historical event determined by God, the gospel cannot be changed.

Finally, as an act of God, *the gospel is perfect and complete*. God loves humans so much that He totally assures their salvation, with the perfect and finished sacrifice of His son Jesus Christ. What is perfect in its nature cannot be improved, increased, or refined, because it is already complete in itself. For all this, and much more, the apostle Paul categorically denied any so-called gospel and defended the superiority of the gospel of Christ against the harassment of the Judaizers. They futilely tried to justify themselves, but Paul adamantly taught this truth:

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified (Galatians 2:16).

When we face so many false teachings about Jesus and the Christian faith in our own day, may Paul's bold defense of the true gospel be our defense too.

BA

“The gospel is the act of God in Jesus Christ, not of human origin nor of human power.”

When someone rejects or departs from Christ, pretending to be justified on their own merits, they are brutally exposed with all their sin before God and, unfortunately, remain under condemnation.

What the gospel is

First, *the gospel is glad tidings from God*. The literal translation of the Greek *euangelion* as "good news" is generic, insuf-

and humility (Ephesians 2:8; see "Q & A," p. 11).

Additionally, *the gospel is a historical event*. It happened two thousand years ago. On the outskirts of Jerusalem, on the hill called Golgotha, Christ was crucified, paying the price for sin. The law ordained the price, and Jesus paid it, as Romans says: "For the wages of sin is death." And from His death for us comes life: "but the gift of God is eternal life in

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Questions & Answers



How do we reconcile divine grace and human responsibility in the work of salvation?

Ephesians 2:8 is maybe the best verse for understanding the divine-human dynamic in the work of salvation. Through this text we can assert, by introduction, that these two are reconciled within a particular covenant relationship. Let's look: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."

This simple text lays out in order the proper relationship and mutual responsibility that bring and sustain salvation. First is God's grace. The covenant relationship is always initiated by God; it is a divine gift. Second is the human response, faith. Trusting and believing, we humbly receive God's gift, knowing that salvation, and faith itself, is beyond ourselves.

Volumes can be, and have been, written about the power and beauty of these two wonderful words: *Grace! Faith!* Residing at the heart of salvation and the divine-human relationship, we can plumb their depths by attending to two more words in the broader context of Ephesians 2:8: *Jesus Christ!*

The reconciliation of the divine-human relationship rests in Jesus. He is the foundation of God's grace and human faith, as seen in verses 1-7. While all of us were "dead in trespasses and sins" and defined by disobedience, lusts, and wrath (vv. 1-3), God's rich mercy and great love for salvation were revealed in Jesus, so that we might be made "alive together with Christ" (vv. 4-6). We exclaim, based on Apostle Paul's words, oh "the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (v. 7)!

We truly understand the profundity of grace

and faith only by attending to our Lord Jesus Christ. As both human and divine, Jesus perfectly demonstrated God's grace toward man and man's faithful response to God. That's how a new covenant relationship has been established in His blood. While the divine-human relationship was always defined by grace and faith, we know from the old covenant that on our side of the equation, faith and faithfulness has always been faulty.

While God's gracious faithfulness is always reliable, from Adam to Israel, we learn that the same cannot be said of human beings (Numbers 14:11; Deuteronomy 1:32; Psalm 78:22, 32; 106:24; Romans 10:16; Hebrews 3:18; 4:2; Jude 5). Before Jesus, broken relations were what defined the divine-human relationship. But as Hebrews 11 illustrates, there was always a remnant of faith: Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses. These faithful pointed to the One "True and Faithful" (Jeremiah 42:5; Revelation 19:11), and now our "obedience to the faith" is experienced only in, and through, Him (Romans 1:5; 16:26). At the cross, in Christ, God's grace and human faith meet in perfect union. Relationship is reconciled, and sin and death are defeated.

Let's return to Ephesians 2, where the consequences of this grace and faith in Christ are shown. While human working and boasting are set aside in simple submission to Christ, God's grace continues to work through faith: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (v. 10).

The same grace and faith that bring salvation bring our sanctification too. That is the result of the ongoing work of God, in Christ and in us. It's a sobering truth: Our responsibility is to walk in Him as He works in us (Romans 8:1; Colossians 1:29).

— Elder Jason Overman

‘Crowing’ the Apostles’ Doctrine

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A changed Peter shares the good news.
by Mike Wallace

It was beyond chaotic. Crowds had gathered at night around the central courthouse and watched as the government condemned the Man. Such a trial was against the law of the land, but circumstances were so threatening to the government, the leaders believed they needed to try this Man.

Without any counsel presented for the defense, they proceeded to mock and deride Him. His crimes were considered so outrageous that only the death penalty would suffice. Up until that very day, throngs had shouted His glory and triumph. Then those same people turned against Him.

Fortunately, this isn’t the end of the story. As we’ll see from Scripture, one of the men closest to Jesus would fail Him in His darkest hour. But his turnaround encourages us to spread the gospel, no matter our weaknesses.

Peter denies

Earlier that evening, one of His young followers had sworn allegiance to Him. This same man lost faith when he saw and heard the crowds of mockers, and he watched as they beat and whipped his friend. The disciple was even ashamed and afraid as the government put Him on trial.

Peter turned cowardly — chicken. Jesus had told him, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me” (Luke 22:34). Later in the evening, however, after witnessing the trial and mockery of God in the flesh, Peter denied Jesus

for a third time. Then he heard the rooster crow. “So Peter went out and wept bitterly” (vv. 54-62). He repented!

Peter waits

It was a long and heart-wrenching fifty days after the murder of Jesus. Much had happened since Peter had “gone chicken.” Jesus was crucified. He lay in the grave for three days and three nights, then was resurrected and glorified to God. He had become our ultimate sacrifice for our eternal salvation (Hebrews 9:11-15).

Peter and the other disciples spent forty days with Jesus after His resurrection, learning all things about the kingdom of God. They were commanded to wait in Jerusalem for the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon them (Acts 1:3, 4, 8).

Peter preaches

On the Day of Pentecost, the disciples waited together in Jerusalem, and miracles of God began to happen. A mighty wind rushed into the house where they were gathered, and divided tongues of fire sat on the head of each disciple. At that moment, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (2:1-4). Joel had prophesied this event long before, and now the Spirit of God was being poured out on all humanity (vv. 16-21). Being filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter changed. Just fifty days before, he lost faith and became a chicken in his heart.

But Peter became the rooster that day. He crowed and awakened Jerusalem. Standing up with the Eleven, he raised his voice and gave the greatest sermon of his life. What Peter preached became known to the first century church of God as the “apostles’ doctrine” (v. 42).

Peter’s message

The message Peter gave on that first new covenant Pentecost is the same message we must crow about today. In reviewing his sermon in Acts 2:14-36, we see the apostles’ doctrine spelled out for us, step by step:

- He put Christ into the biblical and cultural context of his day.
- He confessed that Jesus is Lord and His kingdom was coming.
- He proclaimed that the Holy Spirit had come to guide the church of God.
- He stated that the Holy Spirit was introduced to all peoples for salvation through Jesus, as we repent and are baptized for the remission of sins.

What a remarkable transformation for the apostle Peter! On that day, three thousand people repented, were baptized and received the gift of the Holy Spirit (v. 41). Peter, from chicken to rooster, crowed the gospel of God: Jesus Christ, Him crucified and raised after three days and three nights to God’s glory for the propitiation of *our* sins, for our salvation.

Peter’s example

This same message of the apostles’ doctrine is repeated throughout the New Testament. Peter, James, John, the deacon

that He was seen by Cephas” (1 Corinthians 15:3-5). Here, Paul repeated the apostles’ doctrine, recorded in Acts 2:42. At the end of his life, about thirty-five years after the crucifixion of Jesus, Paul ended his apostolic time on earth “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him” (Acts 28:31).

The apostles and leaders of the first century church of God “crowed” the gospel of Jesus Christ and His kingdom. Let us all crow the message of Jesus Christ crucified, risen from the dead

“The message Peter gave on that first new covenant Pentecost is the same message we must crow about today.”

Stephen, and Paul continued to share a version of this original sermon.

Peter repeated the message of salvation through Jesus to only the rulers of Judea in Acts 4:8-12 and again to new Gentile converts in Acts 10:34-48. Stephen preached it in Acts 7 — and was killed for it.

Paul wrote, “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and

for our salvation to all humanity. Let us all have the faith from the Holy Spirit to change and tell the world about the wonderful coming King of the earth: Jesus our Lord and Savior! **BA**

Mike Wallace is the senior spiritual advisor for the Colorado Springs, CO church and coordinator for the CoG7 in Montana. He lives in Florence, MT, with his wife, Bonnie.





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Hardening of the Heart

A fatal spiritual condition that requires a divine remedy.

by Joseph Willie

Arteriosclerosis is a physical health condition brought on when plaque and cholesterol form in our arteries and cause them to harden and lose their elasticity. Over time, arteriosclerosis can completely close an artery, thus depriving the body of vital oxygen-rich blood and leading to physical death. However, if discovered in the early stages, the condition can be slowed or corrected through diet, medication, exercise, or open-heart surgery. Sometimes a combination of those four options is recommended.

Then there is spiritual arteriosclerosis. As the term implies, it's a condition that can deprive us of the vital life-giving Spirit, leading to our spiritual death. The Bible calls this a *hard heart* and gives two main causes of it.

Divine and human

Our sovereign God brings hardening on a particular person or nation for a specific purpose. One well-known example is Pharaoh (Exodus 5:2), whose heart God hardened so that His name and power might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth (9:16; Romans 9:15-18). Another example is the partial hardening of the physical nation of Israel, which has happened until the fullness of the Gentiles has been accomplished (Romans 11:25).

More to the point of this study, hard-heartedness is brought on by an individual when they persist in partaking of a harmful spiritual diet of deceit and darkness. A good example of this is when Adam and Eve knowingly and willingly rejected the God-approved and perfect diet of the Tree of Life. They chose instead to partake of the

harmful and deadly Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, offered by the crafty serpent, Satan (Genesis 2:9, 16, 17; 3:1-7; Revelation 12:9). That fateful decision opened their eyes but also immediately clogged and cut off their lifeline to their Creator (Genesis 3:7, 17-19; Romans 5:12, 15-19; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

Human condition

This first hardening led to hard hearts in Adam and Eve's descendants, for people in general, and even for Israel as a nation. Psalms and Proverbs warn of the condition:

Do not harden your hearts,
as in the rebellion, as in the
day of trial in the wilderness
(Psalm 95:8).

Happy is the man who is
always reverent, but he who
hardens his heart will fall into
calamity (Proverbs 28:14).

Jesus encountered and confronted this human state in Israel, and even in His disciples to varying degrees of seriousness (Mark 3:5; 6:52; 8:17; 10:5; 16:14). We see it when people, or groups of people, fail to understand — or totally reject — the call of God to them (Matthew 11:28-30; Hebrews 4:6, 7). For example, in John 5:39, 40, the Jews rejected Jesus along with the eternal life that only He could offer (cf. John 6:63; 14:7; Matthew 11:27). In Matthew 19:21, 22, a young rich man, because of his riches, rejected the calling from Jesus to follow Him.

Divine remedy

While hard hearts are evidence of the fallen human condition, we need not despair. The

cure for spiritual arteriosclerosis, or hardening of the heart, has been revealed in the incarnation, perfect life, sacrifice, and resurrection of Jesus Christ himself (Romans 5:1-11).

By the grace of God, those precious events grant us the vital redemption, vital reconciliation, vital justification, and vital sanctification necessary for true and lasting spiritual life and health. They forever remove any and all obstructions that clog or cut off our lifeline to God (John 3:16, 17; Acts 4:10-12).

Continually keep our eyes open and focus on Jesus Christ and the spiritual things above (Hebrews 12:1, 2; Colossians 3:1-4). We need to eat and digest a balanced spiritual diet centered on the perfect Bread of Life, Jesus Christ (John 6:27, 32-58; Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29). We should not forget about daily exercise, which revolves around walking in the love and light of God (Ephesians 5:1, 2, 8; 1 Corinthians 16:14; John 13:34, 35; 8:12; 1 John 1:7; Ephesians 5:8).

Just as He asked His disciples,

“The incarnation, perfect life,
sacrifice, and resurrection of Jesus
forever remove all obstructions that clog
or cut off our lifeline to God.”

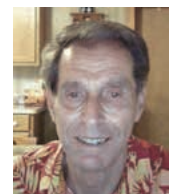
Urgent caution

While the New Testament delivers this great remedy in Christ and the Spirit, it also continues to caution believers to not neglect their salvation, their faith in Christ, nor grieve the Spirit (Hebrews 2:1-3; Ephesians 4:30). We should experience life as we walk in faith and the Spirit (Romans 4:12; 8:1).

Our new and open spiritual relationship (arteries) with God our Father and Jesus Christ our Savior requires maintenance as we run the race of life that stretches out in front of us. We must con-

Jesus asks us, “Do you have a hardened heart?” (Mark 8:17, NASB). If we have this spiritual arteriosclerosis, we can find the one and true cure in Jesus. We can diligently heed God's divine prescription, guaranteed to be spiritually energized and feel like brand new people in no time (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:10). **BA**

Joseph Willie writes
from Folsom, LA.



Romans Road to Justification

1

By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight,
for by the law is the knowledge of sin (3:20).

2

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law,
that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before
God. . . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (3:19, 23).

3

Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound.
But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more (5:20).

4

For the wages of sin is death,
but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (6:23).

5

Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood (3:24, 25).

6

But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly,
his faith is accounted for righteousness (4:5).

7

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God
has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (10:9).

8

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our
Lord Jesus Christ (5:1).

Romans Road to Sanctification

1

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? (6:1, 2).

2

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (6:4).

3

Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin (6:6).

4

For just as you presented your members as slaves of . . . lawlessness . . . so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness (6:19).

5

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death (8:2).

6

That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (8:4).

7

So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you (8:8, 9).

8

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors — not . . . to live according to the flesh. . . For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God (8:12, 14).



[Leadership]

Go Work in

by **Brian Franks**

One of Jesus' shortest parables has always stuck out to me — even haunted me. Just these few verses make me examine myself to see who I really am as a Christian, and often, I don't like what I see.

"What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first" (Matthew 21:28-31).

This passage didn't bother me until I understood it more fully. Which son did the will of the father? The one who went, the first one. What each son said is irrelevant to the command. The first said he wouldn't go but did, in fact, do the will of the father. The second one said he would but didn't go after all.

It also stands out that both

sons clearly knew the will of the father: "Go and work in the vineyard today." Each gave a verbal response, and each did the opposite of what he said.

But that's not what haunts me. It's who Jesus was talking to and what they thought of themselves.

Jesus' audience

Jesus was speaking to the "chief priests and elders" of Israel (v. 23). They asked Jesus by what authority He was doing the things He was doing: the miracles, the teachings, the signs and wonders. Jesus set them up to either acknowledge the only place His authority could come from (God) or declare Jesus' works were from human authority (blasphemy). The religious leaders were not willing to do either. Jesus then shared the parable of the two sons.

What terrifies me the most is that the religious leaders were Jews who were committed to keeping the letter of the law: resting on the Sabbath, not eating unclean meat, tithing even the smallest seeds (23:23). What diligence! They should have

been saved and loved by God for these practices, right?

Yet in both Matthew 21 and 23, Jesus rebuked the religious leaders. The rest of His teaching in Matthew 21 reads "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you" (v. 31). And in Matthew 23, Jesus warned, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others" (v. 23). How much more weighty are justice, mercy, and faithfulness than the smallest seeds of harvest?

Serious accusation

The implication of the two sons in Matthew 21 is that the chief priests, elders, and those like them are the second son who says he will do the father's will but doesn't. Ironically, the tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the kingdom before these religious folk. The reason? The leaders didn't believe John the

the Vineyard Today

Baptist's message of righteousness, but tax collectors and prostitutes did (v. 32).

That should have been a sign of the power of God, that the traitors and the despised of that day were turning to God. Jesus said the unmentionables believed God's message, and because of that faith, they would enter the kingdom before the religious folks. They were like the first son, who said he would not obey God's call but then did. People like this have nothing to lose, nothing that gets in the way of living a life sacrificed to God. There is no pride to break down. They are already reviled by most, so becoming a Christian just gives them a good purpose for which to be reviled.

Personal probe

This is what haunts me. Am I the first son, who did the will of the father, or am I the second, who just said he would but didn't? Do I have more in common with the religious leaders who counted a tithe of the smallest seeds but didn't have time for the weightier matters of justice,

mercy, and faithfulness? These Pharisees kept distinctive doctrines that are dear to us in the Church of God (Seventh Day), but Jesus rebuked the religious leaders as unfaithful, unmerciful, and unjust.

Ouch! I might excuse myself and say, "But I believe in Jesus, so I'm better than they." But what do I believe about Jesus? Do I believe He died and saved me, that He was resurrected? Yes! But do I believe Him when He says all authority has been given to Him, so go and make disciples, baptize them, teach them all I have commanded (Matthew 28:18-20)? Does this move me to a changed life, to work in the vineyard today?

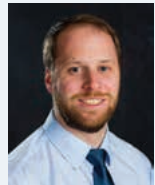
Working for God means more than being comfortably religious, since Jesus didn't deem that enough for the priests and elders of His day. It means we actually have to go and sweat out in the sun, *working in the harvest today*. We must carry out the weightier matters of the law, as well as all the rest we know to be true (our distinctives).

The good news is God gives us all we need to accomplish

His command to go work in the vineyard today. This relieves me. I don't have to be haunted. I can be the faithful son who hears the call of the Father and replies, "I will go."

By the power and grace of God, I go. **BA**

Brian Franks is pastor of the congregation in Tulsa, OK, where he lives with his wife and four children. He is also the dean of Academic Affairs at Artios Christian College. Scripture quotations are from the *English Standard Version*.



Online Extra

Has God ever interfered with your plans to present a better way? One woman experienced this with teaching her children the Bible. Read about her challenges and triumph in this issue's "Hijacked by God."



Bringing Our Children to Jesus

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Lessons learned from
children's ministry.
by Kelsey Gjesdal

I was in the middle of teaching a lesson on creation, an overview introductory lesson. I had prepared a fast-paced, high-energy class with videos, games, and activities.

While all those things did take place, I was blown away by the depth of conversation in this class. I was asked questions about why the world was so broken when God originally made it perfect, why God didn't force Adam and Eve to love Him, and how we know if we will live with God one day.

These were questions from children ages 4 - 11 — deep questions many teenagers are afraid

to voice, but children are brave enough to ponder out loud. Children have remarkable faith and trust in God's goodness to pray for the little things, from owies to pets. They also have remarkable acceptance of the good news when they hear it.

Facing challenges

I've been blessed to serve in children's ministry for many years through Vacation Bible School, children's church, summer Bible programs, and most recently a leadership position at my church. Over and over, I am amazed at how much the mind of a child can comprehend. I am encouraged by the depth of questions children freely ask about the Bible. I am convicted by the enthusiasm they have to learn about God and talk to Him. I wonder at how they can thank God for the things that adults consider insig-

nificant. I have rejoiced to hear one child tell another about the gospel or encourage a friend to consider being baptized.

Psalm 8:2 tells the truth: "From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength because of Your adversaries, to make the enemy and the revengeful cease."

Children truly are a blessing from the Lord, but sadly, current events have demonstrated how our culture does not treasure them. According to research done by Live Action, 2,363 children are killed via abortion every day. Child Abuse Statistics state that child abuse is reported every ten seconds. And according to Statista, in 2020 more than 618,000 victims of child maltreatment were identified.

Social media promotes selfish parenting styles and portrays children as burdens. Most recently, the closure of schools for the

pandemic shows how quickly children are pushed to the backburner. As a counseling psychology major, I know the psychological damage of isolation and masking on children.

Restoring values

Do we value children as God values them? Children are our future, the next generation. Who is leading them to the gospel? Who is preparing them to face spiritual battles? Who is training them to shine for Christ in a dark world? Electronics have replaced good parenting for many children. It is time we make needed changes based on how Jesus treated young ones:

They were bringing even their babies to Him so that He would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they began rebuking them. But Jesus called for them, saying, "Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all" (Luke 18:15-17).

Jesus called the children to Himself, but notice that first the parents were bringing their children to be touched by Him. Are we bringing our children to the feet of Jesus? Are we modeling excitement for God's presence and His Word? Are we teaching by example thankfulness for God's blessings and faith in the

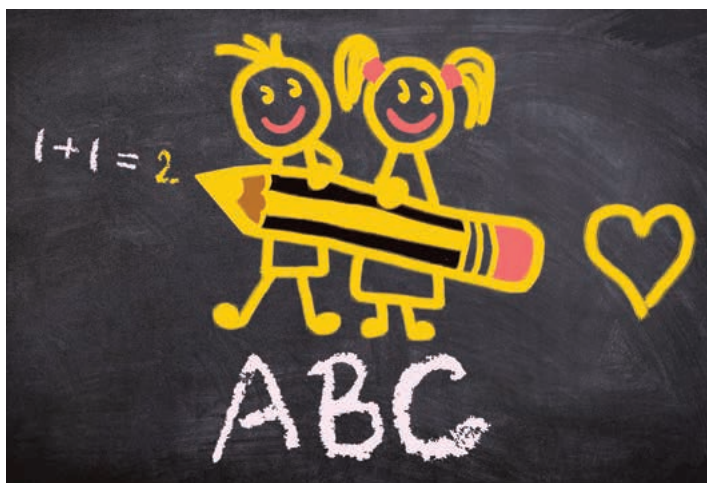
power of God to answer prayer?

The Psalms repeatedly say how we are to teach the next generation the wonders of our God:

This will be written for the generation to come, that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD (102:18).

Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD (34:11).

We will not conceal them from their children, but tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wondrous works that He has done (78:4).



Starting at home

Teaching children the praise, fear, and wondrous works of the Lord does not start in the children's ministry department at church. While we certainly want to teach those things to the kids who come through our doors, the Bible calls for this teaching to start at home: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

I love to teach children about

the Bible, to study and memorize God's Word, and encourage them to pray and ask good questions about the Bible. But I am not the parent. Many of you are. Bring your children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Show them what godliness looks like, what humility looks like, what trusting God looks like. Lead them to our Rock, our Fortress, our Deliverer.

Though I cannot speak to you as a parent because I've never been one, I can speak to you as one who is passionate about children's ministry. Learn what it means to disciple your children. Know the gospel well for yourself and teach it to them.

What a blessing you have been entrusted with! May the church and her families take Psalm 127:3-5 seriously:

Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed

is the man whose quiver is full of them; they will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate.

BA

Kelsey Gjesdal

writes from Albany, OR, where she attends the Marion Church of God (Seventh Day). Scripture quotations are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*.





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Speaking up for our
beliefs in a godly way.
by Bob Blundell

According to Webster's dictionary, *tolerance* is a willingness to accept behaviors and beliefs that may be different from your own. At first glance, that appears to be a good thing, as most of us could benefit from being more tolerant of others.

But tolerance may not always be the most appropriate response when dealing with certain issues, like faith. Being tolerant doesn't imply Christians should turn their backs on words or actions that contradict the basic tenets taught in the Bible. Nor does it remove our responsibility

to respond to un-Christian behaviors when we are confronted with them.

This raises the question: When should we step forward and acknowledge our beliefs, and when should we remain silent, being open-minded toward others' words and actions?

Example

I recently attended a wedding for a young couple in their thirties. Throughout the course of the ceremony, I noticed that references to faith, prayer, and God didn't make their way into the service. After the vows were exchanged, I spoke with the pastor who performed the marriage. He sheepishly explained that the bride and groom had insisted on excluding any references to God.

I was taken aback by this response. Should he have been

tolerant of that, as the minister? I don't know, but I chose to pray the Lord would open that couple's eyes to the truth.

These young people weren't the first, nor will they be the last, to turn their backs on their Creator. But most students of the Bible would tell you, straying from God's teachings didn't fare well for many of the Israelites in the Old Testament.

Challenges

Our modern-day world is tumultuous, entwined in social unrest, political sensitivities, overreactions to cultural differences, and belief and worship of things other than religion. You don't have to look far to see something that would have been unimaginable fifteen years ago: for example, the recent infatuation with LGBT culture and how

those behaviors are mistakenly characterized as courageous; our idolization of performers, professional athletes, and others in the public domain who lead lifestyles based on decadence, pride, and licentiousness.

Perhaps, as the apostle Paul wrote in 2 Timothy, we are approaching the last days, when “People will love only themselves. . . . They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful” (3:2). Regardless, these examples suggest we have drifted away from, if not entirely off, the spiritual grid.

Reactions

To be clear, I harbor no ill feelings toward anyone of the LGBT community, nor any of those poor, confused individuals who can’t seem to figure out what sex they identify with. But God’s words and intent are reflected in the Bible. And in a book known for its metaphors and symbolism, human sexuality is one topic where there is little ambiguity.

On the front page of a major newspaper was an article about an incredible milestone our country had achieved: the day the first US passport was issued to a citizen who claimed to identify with *neither* of the sexes God created. This was heralded as a breakthrough for rights of all those who have chosen, or will choose, to be *sex/less*.

Upon reading the headline, I had two reactions. The first was indignation, that a journalist or any media would view such an event as newsworthy, all for the sake of being perceived as politically astute. The second reaction

was profound sadness as I realized how far we have stepped away from God’s teachings.

Convictions

Recently I was dining at a restaurant with several colleagues. One member of our party noticed two men in the adjacent booth engaging in amorous activities, and he made a remark about their behavior. A second person at our table confronted him, suggesting he was imposing his personal beliefs on the two in question.

The first man responded. “It’s not *my* belief,” he said. “It’s written in Scripture.” An uncomfortable silence settled over the table like a dense fog, and I sat there



quietly along with the others, hoping someone would change the subject.

But as I later processed the conversation, I remembered a passage in Matthew’s Gospel. It’s a reminder of God’s expectations for us as we bear witness to sin and deviation from what He has taught us: “But everyone who denies me here on earth, I will

also deny before my Father in heaven” (10:33).

I realize now, instead of being embarrassed by my friend’s remarks, I should have supported him. In that moment, he displayed what I lacked: the courage of his convictions to acknowledge God.

Courage

How often have you witnessed un-Christian behavior and chosen to remain silent, fearful of appearing judgmental or touching a nerve in the politically correctness arena? In the case of the wedding, the couple’s lack of faith hurt only themselves. But we are surrounded by deviant behaviors every day. Just turn your TV to a mainstream news channel, and I’m sure you’ll get your fill of them and more.

So, how should we respond when confronted with words or actions we find morally and spiritually offensive? I can do nothing about my lack of action months ago when my colleague crawled onto political thin ice and articulated his beliefs. But going forward, I will remember the scripture in Matthew’s Gospel and the passage from James 4: “It is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it” (v. 17).

The next time I am confronted with words or actions I find morally offensive I will pray for God’s direction in my response. Whether that manifests itself in my words, actions, or prayers for the individual(s) involved, I am resolved to *not* deny Him through my silence. Silence only condones those behaviors, allowing them to grow and fester.

continued on page 26

Healing Hearts and Homes



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by **Diana C. Derringer**

Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23, 24).

The telephone rang at 2:00 a.m. “This is the police department. We’ve picked up a mother and three children. The kids are in pretty bad shape.”

Once again, I forced myself out of bed, picked up my well-worn list of foster families, and started calling. My goal: to find a family who could provide a safe, nurturing environment, as well as keep the children together. Although on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, I was thankful I could return to bed once I found that placement. The foster family’s work had just begun.

In almost thirty years as a social worker, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse or severe neglect colored my world. Drug abuse, mental illness, economic pressures, lack of support systems — a never-ending stream of dysfunction filled every day. Anger burned as I viewed bruises, burns, broken bones . . . a horrific mix of unimaginable scars inflicted by out-of-control adults. Sorrow followed as many children learned the defense “I’m gonna hurt you before you hurt me.” Their behavior spoke more loudly than words. Without intervention, they could easily follow their abusive parents’ pattern.

I worked for a government agency. Nevertheless, that agency, along with nationally recognized trainers, shared in great detail and with

eye-opening examples the biblical truth that in order to give love, we must first receive it. I dare say many of those specialists would have been shocked to realize how consistently their words matched those of Paul’s: “receive one another, just as Christ also received us” (Romans 15:7).

A frequently used expression that matched those words: “We must parent the parents.” Many of the adults in my caseload had never experienced genuine love and acceptance. They didn’t know how to appropriately care for a child. Someone had to teach them. Words alone could not do the job. They had to see it and live it for themselves.

Yet I often faced the temptation to go through the motions without genuine love and respect. Like onions, these families covered their brokenness with layer upon layer of defensiveness. Finding a core of neediness under all that attitude demanded staggering amounts of patience and effort. Labeled as hopeless cases by more professionals than they could count, many had accepted that label and given up on themselves as well.

I wish I could say I consistently saw the potential God gave, or loved as God loves. In reality, I’m also a work in progress. But I did learn that when I allowed God to love through me — to change me — I increased the likelihood of lasting change in both parents and children. My training about the power of pain, illness, addiction, and negative thought and behavior patterns was never enough. I had to acknowledge everyone’s inclination, including my own, to hurt others. By confessing my brokenness, I could more effectively minister to theirs.

continued on page 26

A photograph of a field of purple coneflowers (Echinacea) at sunset. The sun is a bright, glowing orb on the left side of the image, casting a warm, golden light across the scene. The flowers are in various stages of bloom, with some fully open and others as buds. The background is a soft, hazy landscape with more flowers and a distant horizon line. The overall mood is peaceful and inspirational.

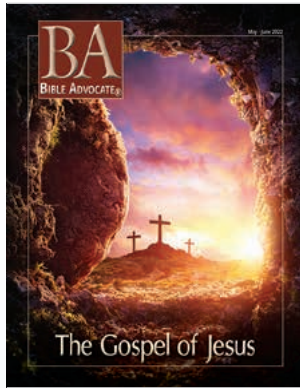
Living the Gospel

Reach out each day, extend your hand —
as though a bough upon a trail.
Let nature of His way command
the sharing of your heart — a sail
from copse to sea and further on —
from shore to shore. With every hour,
reflect His love with each new dawn.
Be His example . . . shine His power!

Lucia Kiersch Haase



Readers Write



BA blessings

I received your May-June issue and really liked the centerfold of Romans 1:16, 17. I will frame that enlarged Scripture.

P. V.
Winston Salem, NC

Thank you for your faithful ministry of faith and inspirational messages. Praying that our great God provides abundantly for all your needs!

Y. K.
Bend, OR

BA outreach

I am sending a check to help with keeping the *Bible Advocate* in print. I look forward to it arriving in my mailbox. Since I am 90 miles from the [Kansas City] church, I love reading it. I am 88 years old and can't drive that far to attend church. I have gotten involved in the Colorado Springs church group and am enjoying them and their services [online]. The *Bible Advocate* also gives me memories. My mother ran the linotype for years to print in Stanberry publishing house. I have good memories of the dif-

ferent people who worked there to edit and publish it. God bless.

M. L. A.
Slater, MO

Live lesson

Today we were in Sabbath school, and a middle-aged man walked in. He was welcomed and even participated. When the question was brought up about what would be your way to share the gospel, Eric raised his hand and said that he just got out of prison and had until Monday to be on tether. He was just out for a walk around the church, and as someone was walking in, he asked if there was a service today.

As he came upstairs, he was welcomed by the pastor and handed a quarterly and a Bible. He said he wanted to be prayed for, as he was seeking a better life and knew he needed Jesus. He then got up and excused himself because his time was up to be away from his confined area, but he wanted to be prayed for. He knelt, and [one of our men] prayed for him.

Eric left but said next week he could stay the entire service because he would be off tether. Everyone agreed that our lesson was very much alive today!

This quarter has been asking some difficult questions. I pray that we not be hearers but doers of God's Word.

Thank the good Lord for the *Bible Advocate* and Brother Jason for the hard work and inspiring questions.

E. W.
Saginaw, MI

Tolerance

continued from page 23

Perhaps it is as simple as acting prudently and with conviction when the opportunity presents itself. The late Dr. Martin Luther King reportedly stated this when he said, "My obligation is to do the right thing. The rest is in God's hands." As we go forward, I pray the Lord provides each of us the wisdom to understand the meaning of tolerance in our lives and the courage to take action when tolerance may fail. **BA**

Bob Blundell writes from Friendswood, TX. Scripture quotations are taken from the *New Living Translation*.



Healing Hearts

continued from page 24

Only when we acknowledge our personal imperfections can we point others to God's love, which heals the brokenness in us all.

My prayer, then as now: O God, work through me, love through me, heal through me. **BA**

Diana Derringer writes from Campbellsville, KY.



GC Ministries News

ARTIOS • MISSIONS • PUBLICATIONS



Paper, Prices, and Postal Service

You might have noticed that the last few issues of the *Bible Advocate* have felt and looked a little different.

The paper is lighter, and the printing quality not as good. This, unfortunately, is beyond our control. Because of shortages nationwide, our printer has been forced to go to a lower grade of paper for the BA. We are also struggling to keep paper supplies for *Churchright*.

Besides this, paper costs have doubled in the last two years, putting a strain on our budget. We so appreciate our readers who have sent their financial support. Thank you!

The BAP has also been informed of delays in shipping the magazine to foreign countries. We have checked with our US distributor, and it looks like breakdowns are happening with postal service in other countries. Remember, you can access the current issue, past issues, and much more at

baonline.org anytime you want. You won't miss a thing!

We know this is a frustrating time, so thanks for your patience. We are trusting our God to get us through — and He will!

— BA Staff



Tabitha Overman, daughter of BA editor Jason Overman, records the May-June issue for the AudioBA. Have you listened yet? Just go to baonline.org (Sections), and scroll down to AudioBA. Listen online or download the file.



The Artios Center for Vibrant Leadership
is pleased to announce its 2nd annual

Virtual Summer Seminar on Gospel-Centered Preaching

Date and Time: Sunday, August 28, 2022 (1-3 p.m. EDT)

Featuring Loren Stacy, Ramon Ruiz, and Whaid Rose,
along with Artios staff — Brian Franks and Loren Gjesdal

Mark your calendars and watch for more details.

center.artioscollege.org/events





Blueberry Muffins



Learning how to become a
welcoming church.
by Moises Capetillo

To make the Great Commission an achievable goal for the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day), God has placed in the heart of our leadership a desire to focus on four distinct areas of engagement: personal evangelism, small group studies, welcoming churches, and Sabbath school classes.

While each of these is of equal importance and needed in our local congregations, and while each will present its own challenges and rewards, we must raise the awareness of being a welcoming church.

Learning experience

As I write this, I am sitting in a local coffee shop in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The pandemic has afforded me ample opportunity to work remotely, and this shop has become a favorite of mine to enjoy a cup of coffee as I work on daily deliverables. I keep coming here because of an experience I had the very first time I came to this establishment.

It was a normal day before the pandemic, and I had some writing to complete. I decided to try this place, expecting nothing more than a coffee, a pastry, and a place to type away the afternoon. What I received instead was something that brings back warm feelings when I remember the day.

Several workers were tending the counter and register. I waited my turn as I contemplated the hard decisions between tea or

coffee, muffin or scone. When it was my turn, I had not made up my mind. I was greeted, as I have been in many coffee shops across the country. I smiled and replied in kind. Then I leveled with the barista behind the counter. “I need to type for a few hours, and I can’t decide what from your menu pairs well with that task.”

His name was Sebastian, and he seemed energized by the challenge. Sebastian engaged with a smile and genuine suggestions of his favorites and reasons for them. Then he excused himself for a few seconds and came back with joy in his eyes. “I just confirmed that the cook has fresh blueberry muffins coming out of the oven in two minutes. That would go great with a chai latte.”

I could not resist. Of course I wanted the fresh-out-of-the-oven

muffin with a latte. As the barista started to commit this decision to the register, he continued to tell me about the process of making the chai latte. He then asked if I would like some butter on the side for my muffin.

I had not considered the possibility of butter melting on my fresh muffin, but this was now my number one culinary desire. Then he offered me some ice water and suggested a place to sit where the Wi-Fi connection was strongest and traffic was minimal.

Wow, what just happened?

Practicing hospitality

Comparing customer service to church hospitality might be a useful tool to paint the illustration in the congregation's mind. In customer service, the store owner expects to treat guests a certain way — like Sabastian did with blueberry muffins. There is a reward to carrying out the company standard in guest interactions, and a payoff from the customer when they decide to return to the place of business.

Looking at it from that 10,000-foot level, we might find a dotted line to what biblical treatment of church guests should embody. As the church that carries the name of Christ as an identifying banner, it behooves us to understand that we, too, have an expectation, reward, and payoff should we treat our guests the way the Scriptures encourage us to do.

Borrowing from Hebrews, we find two statements in chapter 13. The first: "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels

without knowing it" (v. 2). The second is in verse 16: "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (ESV).

In these two passages, we see the biblical expectation (show hospitality, do good, and share); the reward (potentially entertaining angels); and the payoff (pleasing God).

I dare not compare our call to become a welcoming church directly to customer service. That would bring many uneasy connection points and less-than-comparable comparisons. However, we can boil down the necessity of our churches to grow into welcoming churches to one concept: hospitality. Genuine hospitality is not only appreciated but also routine-altering, and it leaves a lasting impression that could lead to an interest in the gospel.

Heartfelt hospitality is scarce in today's society. If it were to be found in our interactions with guests who walk into our churches, we could create the impactful interaction that provides the opportunity for salvation. Peter writes, "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each

of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:9, 10).

Rules vs. authenticity

As we wait for the Welcoming Church manual to be finalized and distributed (written by my brother, Pete Capetillo, and me), we keep coming to a recurring theme. The welcoming church principle cannot be a set of rules that we follow and expect visitors to feel welcomed. Too many other establishments, churches, and places of commerce do that. People have become desensitized to greeters at the large food store and the bank. The pre-recorded automated voice tells us that our call is important to them. Meanwhile, we wait on hold, seemingly opposing the message now playing for the twenty-seventh time.

We have all been customers at some point. We have been in the hospital with a loved one and noticed the endearing nurse, or at the retail store where someone takes the time to walk with us to find an item. Not only that,





but we understand what it feels like to have a true connection with a person when we are in desperate need of it. Our prayers should focus on needing to accept the inverse role.

Now we have the opportunity to be the welcoming party, the people who can make a connection with the guest walking in with trepidation. Pray that every church member will answer the call to be like Sebastian so that the name of God may be glorified (Hebrews 13:16). We can shed our uncertainty, remove our timidity, and embrace the opportunity to be a testimony-

impacting church focused on salvation of the next person who walks into our local church.

That is what the welcoming church effort will invite us to be — to recognize that God is honored when we stop merely attending church services and become a contributing member, to fall in love with being the person who makes the next guest visit a unique experience. We want to be the reason they come back for a second cup of coffee, continue the conversation, and listen to the second sermon in the series that God placed on the heart of the speaker that day.



Embracing the Great Commission

I'm certain that we can be a church full of God-honoring, people-connecting, testimony-impacting servants as we embrace the Great Commission in our local churches in our time. God designed us for His glory (Isaiah 43:7), and our Savior directed us to join in His mission (Matthew 28:19).

Paul sums it up well:

Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God (Romans 15:5-7, KJV)

We are designed and directed to be a church full of Sebastians who offer "blueberry muffins" to others. May God help us do our best to serve them.

Moises Capetillo

serves as senior pastor of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Albuquerque, NM, alongside his wife, Victoria, and six children. Scripture quotations are taken from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.





Come and See

The Gospel of John, chapter 1, shows us how some of Jesus' very first disciples were called. Upon seeing Jesus, John the Baptist proclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (v. 29, NASB throughout). The next day, standing with two of his disciples, John the Baptist pointed them to Jesus and said it again: "Behold, the Lamb of God!" (v. 36). Those two disciples began following Jesus, asking Him where He was staying (v. 38). Jesus' invitation to them was "Come, and you will see" (v. 39).

The next day, Jesus called Philip, who then told his brother, Nathanael, that Jesus of Nazareth was the long-awaited Messiah (v. 45). Nathanael famously responded, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see" (v. 46).

That simple invitation, "Come and see," has much to recommend it as a friendly, non-threatening approach to sharing the good news about Jesus Christ. It was also used by the Samaritan woman Jesus met at a well near the city of Sychar. So impressed with Jesus, she ran into the city and invited everyone, "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?" (4:29). And because of her invitation, "Many more believed because of His word; and they were saying to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world'" (vv. 41, 42).

We, too, can say, "Come and see" as we share the gospel, and all the wonderful promises of God and His Word to those who believe, with

those God brings into our lives. Does God exist, and if He does, what can be known about Him? *Come and see.* Do I truly face God's judgment, and if I do, is there a way that I can be rescued? *Come and see.* Can I learn to effectively share the gospel myself? Can my local church develop nurturing family and/or common interest Bible study groups? Can my local congregation intentionally become a welcoming church? *Come and see.*

The theme encompassing our entire General Conference evangelism initiative is "Come and See." All the training opportunities and materials being made available by our three teams — Personal Evangelism, Small Group Ministries, and Welcoming Church — and by our Publications ministry are (or soon will be) available to you and your congregation. *Come and see.*

This is also the theme for our 2023 General Conference convention, scheduled Monday evening, July 10, through Saturday night, July 15, 2023, in Covington, Kentucky. The primary purpose of GC conventions is to allow our adult members to gather and conduct the business of the General Conference as required by our by-laws. That gathering also allows us the opportunity to worship together, be instructed by God's Word together, fellowship together, and learn and grow together as the Church of God (Seventh Day) — United States and Canada.

Should you involve yourself and your congregation in the GC evangelism initiative? Is it worth the time and expense to attend our GC conventions? *Come and see!*

— Loren Stacy



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