



# THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

The official newspaper of The Church of God International

Vol. 41, No. 1

"Put on the whole armor of God"

Spring 2020

## BEWARE OF FALSE GOSPELS!

There is only one true "gospel," or good-news message, but the one gospel is described in different ways in the New Testament, as we see from the following:

- Gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; Mark 1:14)
- Gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:1)
- Gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24)
- Gospel of God (Romans 1:1; 15:16; 2 Corinthians 11:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:2, 8, 9; 1 Peter 4:7)
- Gospel of the blessed God (1 Timothy 1:11)
- Gospel of His Son (Romans 1:9)
- Gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16; 15:19, 29; 1 Corinthians 9:12, 18; 2 Corinthians 9:13; 10:14; Galatians 1:7; Philippians 1:27; 1 Thessalonians 3:2)
- Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:8)
- My gospel (Romans 2:16; 16:25; 2 Timothy 2:8)
- Our gospel (1 Thessalonians 1:5)
- Gospel of peace (Romans 10:15; Ephesians 6:15)
- Gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4)
- Gospel of your salvation (Ephesians 1:13)
- Everlasting gospel (Revelation 14:6)

The above list does not suggest there are many different gospels, but that the one gospel encompasses the entire plan and purpose of God. The good-news message, with all its features, may be called the "gospel of peace" (Ephesians 6:15), for it is a message of God's plan of reconciliation with

***The "gospel of Christ" is the good-news message the apostles proclaimed. But even during the days of the apostles, false teachers came on the scene and began perverting the message of salvation. False gospels are still with us and are often presented in attractive packages. Beware! Don't let the colorful gift-wrappings fool you!***

by Vance A. Stinson

humankind. It is only by the grace of God that sinful human beings may be reconciled with God and enter His everlasting kingdom—thus, the "gospel of the grace of God" = the "gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" = the "gospel of your salvation" = the "gospel of the kingdom" = the "gospel of peace"!

But be warned! There are false "gospels"—so-called good-news messages—that have been, and are being, foisted upon the masses.

A false gospel is any message that distorts the true way of reconciliation with God, whether a "gospel" of salvation through meritorious deeds or a "gospel" of salvation through faith irrespective of obedience.

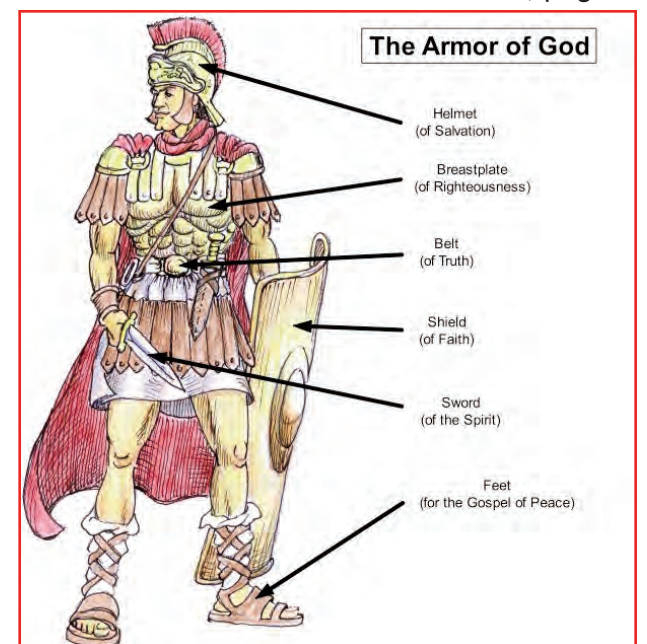
Paul warns:

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 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. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:6–9).

The preaching of the "other gospel" was so serious a matter that Paul was compelled to *twice* warn, "let him be ACCURSED"! This was not merely a dispute over which Old Testament laws were still in effect. In this case, Paul's opponents were teaching that cir-

See **GOSPEL**, page 4



**The Christian soldier's best defense against the schemes of the Devil**

## ISAIAH DEFINES "LEAVEN" FOR OUR DAY

*It was in the year of Uzziah's death that the painful truth of Israel's rotten and corrupted "leavened" condition began weighing heavily on this prophet's mind. He was formally commissioned by God to warn a people that hear but don't understand and see. Nor did they perceive the impending calamities coming their way. What was this message and what can we learn from this prophet today?*

by Bill Watson



Bill Watson

"A sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity [lawlessness], a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.... [T]he whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no sound-

ness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers [foreign nationals] devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers.... And the daughter of Zion is left...as a besieged city" (Isaiah 1:4–8).

In other words, we are clearly being told *the land was full of leaven, figuratively speaking!* It was an evil time, full of

sin. The nation was loaded with graft and corruption—sinister people taking advantage of the less fortunate and profiting off their despair. It was very much like today—growing trends of heathenism—throughout our beloved United States and out and beyond our own borders throughout the rest of the world!

### Calling Out the Elephant in the Room

I don't know how many of you watched the Super Bowl this year (2/2020) and saw the shocking *salacious half-time display* of dozens of young women *demeaning themselves* both in *skin-tight* costumes and dance, accented with very little and seductive clothing, legs spread, and intensified with all kinds of "twinking action" that was periodically compounded with transgender-looking men cavorting on stage and ultimately bowing in mass orgy-style to J.Lo, who was put on a pole with her arms extended to form a "scene of mockery" of Christ on the cross—*somebody tell me how is that entertainment?*

The shamelessness and emboldened arrogance of displaying children in lit-up cages throughout the staged area

See **LEAVEN**, page 2

## IN THIS ISSUE

**"Why Do We Need to Pray?"**  
by Rick Dubler, page 4

**"Is Grace Enough?"** by  
Mike James, page 5

**"Christian Responsibility"**  
by Michelle Algarra, page 6

**"Finish the Race"** by Ken  
Allen, page 8

**"Questions and Answers"**  
by Vance Stinson, page 12

**"Proud to be a Child of  
God"** by George Roper,  
page 13

...and **MUCH MORE!**

[www.cgi.org](http://www.cgi.org)



LEAVEN, continued from page 1

and out on the playing field, with the back-drop and contextual framing of Super-Bowl festivities, which are known to be *one of the largest venues* of child sex-trafficking, prostitution, and escort services for pleasure—some say more rampant than Mardi Gras. *Somebody tell me, how is this entertaining?*

And furthermore, a 50-year-old woman and mother (Jennifer Lopez), billed as the “headliner,” *prancing and dancing* around on the stage in **satanic ritual fashion**, surrounded by all kinds of demonic symbols and illuminati signs from the “*triangular formation and the witchery ring of fire*” stage sets, to the “single eye” on some costumes of the men—I think?—that groped and squeezed this mother (Ms. Lopez) in places that should only be done *in private* by her husband—and, incredulously, all of this done right in front of her young daughter, who also was on the stage being exposed to all this *symbolic “leaven”!* *Tell me, how can this be called entertainment?*



God warns, as He addresses His nation Israel: “What could have been done more to my [God’s] vineyard [nation], that I have not done in it? [Consider how He has given us everything He could—great wealth, prosperity, natural resources, and personal opportunity and blessings—as a **promised birth-righted nation of people who claim the God of Israel**] wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, it brought forth wild grapes [evil people]? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard [nation]: I [God] will take away the hedge [protection] thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: And I [God] will lay it waste” (Isaiah 5:4–6). These are both *stunning and foreboding words* from God to those nations and cultures claiming the God of Israel is the religious framing of their hegemony! And, as they say, “the rest is history” concerning the *original nations of Israel and Judah* some 2,500 plus years ago—they lost their nations and both went into captivity.

But, this *Israelite history* doesn’t mitigate or erase the connection to our present day responsibility and, in particular, the “*leaven*” we saw displayed during the Super Bowl and the shameless exhibition of seduction, lust, and perversion—*essentially, soft porn*—that should cause all of us in God’s Church to pause and consider how this weighs against what God expects from a nation **He providentially blessed**. Peter gives us an example of the kind of women God expects in the course of the narrative, when instructing how wives should treat their husbands.

Notice: “While they [people who are observing] behold your chaste conversation [conduct, behavior] coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be the outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold [bling], or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man [person] of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God a great price” (1 Peter 3:2–4).

When I consider what Peter said, I can’t help but

wonder what he would have thought when comparing his own words to what appeared to be a display of hard, angry, and haughty female arrogance that projected superiority and coveted dominance. Actually, when she originally came on stage, Ms. Lopez was dressed in a very “skimpy,” all-leather outfit as a “dominatrix.” Clearly, this is confirmation about our culture and the subtle permeation of “leaven,” when one recognizes how the American people think this is **appropriate family entertainment!** It’s just incredibly eye-opening, disappointing and very sad—but true!

Isaiah’s Continuing Parabolic Story About God’s Vineyard

“For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression [slaughter] for righteousness [right], but behold a cry [from those victimized]” (Isaiah 5:7).

God is sensitive to the cries of the righteous—from those that are wronged—and so He doesn’t dismiss holding the nation accountable for all the injustice, depravity, degeneracy, and wickedness that go on, just as He did to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. God will hold the people accountable for the depredations, aberrations, and perversions of His ways that have resulted in such harmful evil to so many—*especially the women, children, AND THE UNBORN* of our culture—being trafficked, abused, misguided, and in so many ways violated beyond description, even killed in the case of abortion.

Isaiah continues to warn: “Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink [alcohol]; that continue until night, till wine inflame [pursues, follows, addicts] them! And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine are in their feasts [music and partying]: but they regard not the work of the LORD, neither consider the operation of his hands [instead it’s all about their pleasure and good times]. Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge [of God and His expectations]: and their honorable men are famished [suffer, hunger], and their multitude dried up with thirst” (Isaiah 5:11–13).

In today’s world we see so much of this insensitivity surrounding us. In so many areas of life we see people being merchandised. **Even Christianity today** is a disappointing example of this very thing—of merchandising those seeking truth and righteousness from God through His ministry that are perceived to know the way. Peter warned about this ongoing trend when he said, “And through covetousness shall they [these particular ministries] with feigned [pretending, artificial, fake] words make merchandise of you....” (Read all of 2 Peter 2:1–3). Sadly, as God has said, “my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” They grope for understanding of *what* and *how* to be. The ministry, in so many ways, has *failed to guide the people* correctly and with discipline. Too many wrongs have been *winked* at for the unfortunate purpose of sustaining relationships, personal lifestyles, or growing the organization.

Notice what the prophet Ezekiel says: “And the word of the LORD came

unto me, saying Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel [ministers of Christ, by extension], prophesy, and say unto them...Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves [expensive cars, big homes, large lifestyles]! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks [the people]? You eat the fat, and clothe you with the wool [make sure you get the finest], you kill them that are fed [at the flock’s expense]: but you feed not the flock. The diseased have you not strengthened, neither have you healed that which was sick, neither have you bound up that which was broken, neither have you brought again that which was driven away, neither have you sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty [placing heavy burdens on the people] have you ruled [controlled] them. And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat [victims] to all the beasts [false religions] of the field [world], when they were scattered” (Ezekiel 34:1–5).

*Read the rest of the chapter.* It is a very sobering warning to all the Churches of God and specifically pastors that are shepherding God’s called-out ones (the sheep). God commands them, as Jesus did to Peter, **“Feed my sheep!”** This is the *mandate—to serve* the people of God with a **selfless approach** to their needs, not exploitive or with an intent motivated to merchandise for self-enrichment. Church organizations that are controlling and exploitive and put demands upon the people that result in division of families and friends, or that oppress with attempts to “legislate righteousness,” are all counter-productive to the methods God uses to work with His people—as is compromising the gospel with entertainment to enlarge one’s audience for financial gain. And, unfortunately, there are organizations that operate like this that create *unhealthy environments* for God’s people, making them twofold more the child of hell than themselves (the leaders) (Matthew 23:15).

Back to Isaiah: “His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark [they’re silent to substantive edification]; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber [lazy, lackadaisical, or complacent]. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough [they want your money], and they are shepherds that cannot understand [not sensitive to the needs of the laity]: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter [cf., 1 Peter 5:2–4]. Come you, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink;

DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE: May 15, 2020

Submissions may be sent to either [vancestinson@cgi.org](mailto:vancestinson@cgi.org) or to [lloyd Cary@gmail.com](mailto:lloyd Cary@gmail.com) or, preferably, to both.

THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS is the official newspaper of The Church of God International. World headquarters, Tyler, Texas, USA. Copyright © 2020 The Church of God International. All rights reserved.

Editor-In-Chief: Vance A. Stinson

Editor: Lloyd W. Cary

Contributing Writers: Michelle Agarra, Ken Allen, Rick Dubler, Mike James, George Roper, Vance Stinson, Bill Watson

Production: Lloyd W. Cary, Vance A. Stinson

Business Manager: Benny Sharp

NOTICE: The International News welcomes submissions of articles, features, church news, pictures, or manuscripts. However, it cannot be responsible for the return of unsolicited materials. Materials may be sent through the postal service, but electronic submissions are preferred.

INTERNATIONAL OFFICES:

- Australia: The Church of God International, PO Box 171, Boonah, Queensland 4310, Australia
- The Church of God International Canada, PO Box 32009–RPO, Northland, London ON N5V 5K
- Jamaica: The Church of God International, 60 Cairncurran Ave., Western Dist. PO, St. Andrew, Kingston, Jamaica
- The Church of God International, Philippines, P.O. Box 2450 MCPO Makati City 1264 Philippines; email: [cgiphils@yahoo.com](mailto:cgiphils@yahoo.com)
- Africa: Kenya: Migori Town Oruba Village, Osingo Aego Village, Ndiwa, Isbania-Mwita, Kisii; Email: [zablonanyumba@gmail.com](mailto:zablonanyumba@gmail.com) and [cgikenya@yahoo.com](mailto:cgikenya@yahoo.com)

CGI Website: [www.cgi.org](http://www.cgi.org)

CGI E-mail: [info@cgi.org](mailto:info@cgi.org)

Phone: (903) 939-2929



and tomorrow shall be as this day and much more abundant [let the good times roll, we are to good and successful to fail]" (Isaiah 56:10–12).

### Staying Clean In a Dirty World

This humanistic world we live in is an endangerment to the well-being of the sincere Christians that want to grow in grace and knowledge, simply because of the potential *spiritual infection*—**this leaven**—that hovers around us with influences of debauchery, combined with the *lukewarmnes* toward the values of God and His standards and laws. And this brings me back to the “*elephant in the room*.”

I just wonder how many of us, if we’re brutally honest with ourselves, would admit to recognizing just how salacious that half-time Super Bowl show really was. Or, how many of us just overlooked it and cut the directors, producers, entertainers, and sponsors some slack, dismissing it as simply entertainment, without even realizing just how our own values have been eroded? *Ask yourself: Did I recognize it?*

The world impacts all of us differently. The effect it has on some of us is often determined by just how close we are to God and our awareness of His terms of right and wrong. There are many Christian churches today that have become very “liberal” in their approach to the gospel of Jesus Christ. They will ordain *active homosexual* men and women ministers. They will endorse and marry homosexuals, claiming these are approved marriages in the sight of God. Regardless of what the Bible might say about certain habits of eating, dress, worship, or other lifestyle matters, they will ignore the plain commandments and insist on having it their way. And, unfortunately, due to the vast majority and legalized legislation of the land, *they adopt* the inappropriate and wrong way for being right and good.



Notice, what Isaiah says about those who claim “moral relativism” is all right to use for deciding what is acceptable or not. “Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter” (Isaiah 5:20)! This is not a good thing. Calling the right wrong and legalizing the abnormal for normal so the culture embraces values and standards that push the limits of propriety does in time, by incrementally tolerating the changes, lead to compromises that will drive a nation away from God—and this is what we have been watching. It goes right back to the words of the apostle Paul: “Your glorying [boasting, flaunting, strutting, swagger] is not good. Know you not that a little leaven leavens the whole lump” (1 Corinthians 5:6)?

The treachery of this is it can be so subtle that you **don’t even realize** how *blinded, hardened and oblivious* you’ve become to the erosion! In a really insidious way, this can sneak up on you without you even knowing. So, often we’re not aware of just how far we’ve fallen from the laws, statutes, and judgments of God until we take the time to review His Word and compare it to what we’ve come to embrace as acceptable!

It reminds me of the story concerning Lot while in Sodom and Gomorrah. The narrative describes Lot as being so blind, hardened, and compromised that

he tried trading his virgin daughters off to a rabid group of sexual deviants in exchange for the safety of the two angels visiting him. Notice: “And they [the sexual deviants] called unto Lot and said unto him, ...bring them [the two angels] out to us, that we may know them [have sex with them]. And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, and said, ...Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man [are virgins]; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do you to them as is good in your eyes [rape and molest them?]: only unto these men do nothing” (Genesis 19:5–8).

Admittedly, this is hard to wrap your mind around! How can a father surrender his *virgin daughters* to a crowd of sexually crazed men to have their way with them is beyond belief, but how do you wrap your



mind around late-term abortion, or brothels that allow you to *pick the animal* you want to have sex with? How do we wrap our minds around affording practicing homosexuals—men romantically (sexually) involved with men, women romantically (sexually) involved with women—the right to legalize their relationships? Or perhaps a future President of the USA kissing his husband on stage as candidate Buttigieg did at a campaign stop? How do we wrap our minds around transgenders reading to 5-, 6-, and 7-year-olds in libraries as a public reading with the parent’s approval? Or how about a mother that encourages her 6-year-old son to dress like a girl, or visa versa, with the father’s approval that ultimately results in *biological “gender reassignment”*? Or how about this one: selling body parts from aborted babies for profit?

These are just a few of the signs of the times we live in that continue to prove moral relativism and post-modern thinking do indeed have a way of influ-



encing not only the hegemony of a nation, but to actually change its laws to *legitimize the aberration* as something to be healthy and good—and to be benefited by. And, frankly, the real sobering thing about this is, we (Christians) can begin to warm up to embracing and accepting some of these “*cultural progressions*” if we’re not vigilant about *watching ourselves*!

### So What’s Expected From Us?

So, what is so serious and frightening about all this

is so many people in our country and perhaps, as mentioned, even some in God’s Church are beginning to *lower the “bar” and accept* these cultural encroachments and changes as admissible.

The world around us is changing—and fast! Things have accelerated so much and in so many areas. Daniel says in the last days, “many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased” (Daniel 12:4). Yes, it would be a time when information and knowledge would be made available on an unprecedented scale—and sometimes this can be good, without a doubt; or it could be just overwhelmingly awful. And, unfortunately, with the World Wide Web at our finger tips, it does indeed network us and make available a lot of *bad information* that many of us would not have access to. But the *leaven of the world* is introduced, exposed, and made accessible to all that have the time, interest, and hardware.

You can spend your “life’s time” in the “Wild Wild West” (a.k.a. the World Wide Web) chasing all kinds of information sites that can subtly, without you even realizing, insulate you from your family, friends, and, most importantly, your God. Keep in mind, brethren, there is an *enormous amount of leaven* in the “Wild, Wild, West,” and the more time you spend there, the greater risk of influence—and *that includes our children*! Over time, this can become dangerous if we allow ourselves to be *overexposed* to this knowledge and persuasive information—it *can actually steal your life away*!

We need to recognize it is he who endures to the end that will be saved (Matthew 24:13). With that in mind, this level of commitment, when considering the intense growth of the “information highway” and pressure from special interest groups to accept the societal perversions that have been legalized, needs reinforcing from God’s Word by each and every one of us. Why? *Because it’s not easy to “stay clean in a dirty world.”* So, if we’d like to see the nation ingra-



tiated back into God’s favor, it becomes incumbent on us to understand what it takes to have a change—a *spiritual revival*—on a national level.

Clearly, that means to *recognize it begins with each one of us individually, one-by-one!* Taking a look at our personal lives and conditions of our families, understanding what our needs are, and required changes to bring our lifestyles in line with the example and model Jesus Christ exemplified while on earth! If the nation’s “*spiritual temperature*” is going to change for the better, it means each one of us must do our *individual part* in *serving the cause of change*. This is done by drawing closer to God and **being a “watcher,”** that is courageous enough to hold onto and “actively contribute” toward the *positive* Christian growth of a society that has its values tethered to the laws, statutes, and judgments of God! *These are causes worth fighting for.*

So let us live lives of repentance, structured toward an effective *unleavened change* in our lives that will contribute to ingratiating our country back into the arms of Jesus Christ, the God of Israel. And “let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” This is what is expected, as Ambassadors for Christ that represent the coming Kingdom of God for the sake of humanity—it really is a responsibility of our calling *now*! So let us be occupied about our Father’s business!



GOSPEL, continued from page 1

cumcision was the doorway to covenant relationship with God. This would mean, of course, that no male could be reconciled with God unless or until he entered the covenant with God through the rite of circumcision.

Paul would have none of this! Justification—reconciliation with God—is *exclusively* through Jesus Christ, and is not the result of “works of law” but of FAITH! The Galatian Christians, though uncircumcised in the flesh, had *already* had their sins blotted out, had *already* received the Holy Spirit as a “downpayment” on eternal life—and it was all received by faith. If these justified, redeemed, Spirit-begotten children of God could be convinced that they have to do something more *to be* justified, then they would first have to be convinced that they had not truly experienced justification through faith in Christ. This is nothing less than an ABANDONMENT of the true faith—hence Paul’s strong warning: “Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised [in order to be justified], Christ will profit you nothing” (Galatians 5:2).

Today, however, many have twisted Paul’s statements on grace, faith, and “works of law,” force-fitting them to their own anti-law “gospel.” These are not unlike the “untaught and unstable people” who “twist [Paul’s epistles] to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:16).

These false apostles who proclaim this particular

false gospel would have us believe that Old Testament laws forbidding and condemning homosexual behavior are not for Christians under the New Covenant. They claim they hold the moral high-ground, and they tend to see themselves as spiritually, morally, and intellectually superior to those of us who cling to the old biblical/traditional standards regarding sex, marriage, family, and gender roles. To them, we’re bigoted holdovers from the Dark Ages—closed-minded, Bible-thumping fundamentalists who are a danger to society.

Their false gospel is just a modern version of a very old heresy, but today’s mutated form of this ancient virus has infected virtually all mainstream churches and has spread all over the Western world.

The degree to which this disease has infected modern societies was well illustrated recently when Franklin Graham, son of the late evangelist Billy Graham, was banned from delivering sermons in the UK for his opposition to homosexual behavior. According to the February 7, 2020 issue of *The Washington Examiner*, “Almost 9,000 people signed a petition started by the activist group ‘All Out’ to prevent Graham from speaking at an arena in [Newcastle] London.” The petition, which “does not cite any specific quote of Graham disparaging a group of people or engaging in ‘hate speech,’” nevertheless states, “Let’s send a clear message to this US hate monger that he is not welcome in London or the UK!”

There can be little doubt that the “serpent of old” is doing what he does best—“deceiving the whole world” (Revelation 12:9)!

The media—from mainstream “news” organizations to the entertainment industry to social media—are fully onboard with the LGBTQ+ agenda and are bombarding our minds and the minds of our children with their ungodly message. If we’re not on guard, we, too, can fall in step and begin calling evil good and good evil (Isaiah 5:20)!

But we need not let that happen. Scripture tells us exactly what we have to do to avoid this deadly infection...

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:10–17). □

# Why Do We Need to Pray?

by Rick Dubler



Rick Dubler

There are a number of reasons we need to come before God in prayer, but informing God of what we need is not one of them as He already knows what we are going to say before we even begin to pray.

David conveys to us the omniscience of God.

*“Before the words are even on my tongue You know it completely oh LORD”* (Psalm 139:4).

Jesus reiterates this same concept.

*“Don’t be like them for your Father*

*knows what you need before you ask Him”* (Matthew 6:8).

One might ask, “Why bother praying when God already knows what we are going to say and what we need even before we conceive of the thought?”

Before we go there, maybe we need to investigate what Jesus meant by “Don’t be like them.” Sounds important, so we need to go back to verse 5. First, we are told not to pray like the hypocrites. This word’s root meaning has to do with acting as in theatrics. This is what we are *not* to do! It’s not intended to be a finely tuned, well articulated, well-rehearsed act to be put on display for men to admire.

Firstly, we can rightly conclude that prayer needs to be sincere and from the heart. Generally speaking, and there are exceptions, prayer is mostly about private time in conversation with our God. There is no one to impress if praying in private in our “prayer closet.”

Secondly, we need to be guarded

against vain repetition and long drawn out prayer—again, with the intention of impressing others. What did Jesus mean by vain repetition? I expect what Jesus wants us to avoid is mindlessly repeating well-rehearsed prayers. I can remember, as a young adolescent after confessing my sins, I was told to say ten “Our Fathers” and five “Hail Marys” as a form of punishment or penance. Hardly what prayer was intended for!

We have here some examples of what not to do, but Jesus goes on to give us a framework for meaningful prayer and a synopsis of some of the central issues, issues of life that we need to generally include in our prayers. It was never intended for us to repeat it verbatim. In a parallel Scripture in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus’ disciples ask their Master to show them how to pray, having heard that John the Baptist gave his disciples instructions on how to pray. I expect

we too can gain much from listening to what Jesus taught them. We have in each of these Gospels what is often called the “Lord’s Prayer.”

At the onset, we are reminded from the very first word “our” that prayer is not all about me but to be inclusive of the community of believers. We see this throughout this model prayer. We are then reminded that we believe not just in a God but in *The* God—Yahweh the Creator and the God who is sovereign, who resides in a heavenly realm—and yet, amazingly, we are invited to call upon Him as Father. This is not a distant nebulous God, or first cause, but a loving and personal One whom we acknowledge as Father, Abba, and who acknowledges us as His children.

Our prayer is a reminder that in His personal name we associate with His marvelous attributes, the more we diligently seek Him the more we recognize Him as a benevolent God and His

*Continued next page*

All of our materials and services are offered to the public **free of charge**. Many naturally ask us how we can afford to send out thousands of booklets and CDs each month. The answer is simple: On a regular basis, prayerful friends and members of the Church of God International voluntarily support us with tithes and offerings to further the advancement of the gospel to the world. No financial obligation is ever demanded, but if you are moved to support this work, donations are gratefully accepted. Simply click on the “donate” tab on the homepage ([www.cgi.org](http://www.cgi.org)) and follow the links to donate via credit card, or you can mail a check or money order to the following:

Church of God International  
3900 Timms Street  
Tyler, TX 75701

## Holy Day Calendar for 2020

- New Testament Passover: April 7 (Observed at sundown)
- Feast of Unleavened Bread: April 9–15
- Pentecost: May 31
- Feast of Trumpets: September 19
- Day of Atonement: September 28
- Feast of Tabernacles: October 3–9
- Last Great Day: October 10

Holy days are observed beginning at sundown the previous evening and ending at sundown on the days listed. Passover is observed at sundown on the day listed.



name is glorified in the manner in which we live our lives.

In this model prayer, we are reminded of His promises, of His plan, and our ultimate goal to seek first His kingdom, the very thing that Jesus looked to as the joy that was set before Him which sustained Him during His unimaginable suffering (Hebrews 12:2). We too need to be reminded daily of this same vision of that joy set before us, in order that we too can endure whatever the cross is that we are called to bear. We need to remain focused on a time when the will of God will be done on earth as it is presently done in heaven—a time of right living, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

We are also reminded in this model prayer that God is our Provider and we

ask not only for our own daily needs (daily bread) and provisions but for the needs of others who hunger or who are suffering, struggling, and some even dying. We approach His throne petitioning Him with empathy for those less fortunate than ourselves. Amazingly, we can at times influence our Almighty God to even change His mind.

We are reminded in our prayers of God's love for humanity, of the forgiveness He provides as a free gift to those who repent, but at a great cost to our Father and Jesus Christ. For God so loved the world that He gave His Son that those who believe in Him might have life everlasting. We have in this statement of the unveiling of the great love of God who is not willing

that any should perish, but through this sacrifice we are offered a means of redemption from the penalty of sin. We are also reminded that this all comes with a condition, the willingness to forgive others. This is our reasonable response to the enormous price paid in order that we might be forgiven.

In this framework for prayer, Jesus reminds us there are powerful but subtle unseen forces (Ephesians 6:12) that can influence us, seduce us to venture down dangerous paths, the path of sin and death. We live in a society that is under the influence of those evil unseen beings, and that very society in turn can lead us astray. We are reminded to turn to God and Jesus who strengthen us and will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can with-

stand (1 Corinthians 10:13).

So back to our original question: Why pray when God already knows what we are going to say and what we need before we even ask? There are many reasons to pray, but one of course that becomes apparent as we use this model prayer as our guide is that **in the process of vocalizing and sharing our thoughts with our Father we are necessarily reminded daily of the very issues that are central to life.**

What a way to start our day by aligning our spiritual compass and setting our priorities! Thank God for the gift, the miracle of prayer, and for our High Priest who makes it possible for us to come confidently to our Father's throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16).

## Is Grace Enough?

by Mike James



Mike James

One of the debates we often hear between the Church of God and other Christian denominations is in regard to grace. Some accuse us of not believing we are saved by grace alone. They argue that we teach we must do works and have God's grace to be saved. This is not true. We believe we are saved by grace alone (Ephesians 2:5–8). But we do promote obedience to God and His law which includes good works (Ephesians 2:10). Having faith in God's grace should move us to perform good works. Let's try to understand this confusion.

To better understand the confusion about grace we will take a look at the concept throughout Christian history. Let's start with the actual word in Hebrew which is *hen*. *Hen* simply meant favor. Some examples of the use of this word in the Old Testament can be found in Genesis. In Genesis 6:8, grace is used as goodwill toward another person. In Genesis 33:15, grace is used as approval, delight, or joy. Genesis 39:4 talks about grace in a master/servant relationship.

In the Greek the word for grace is *charis*. Grace here means salvation freely given by God to undeserving sinners. In Ephesians 2:5–8 we see the use of grace to mean salvation freely given. In Galatians 2:17–21 grace is likened to a gift.

Turning to history we will see how

this tension between law and grace played out. The first major dust up in Christian history on this topic occurs in the fifth century between Augustine and Pelagius (British monk). Augustine taught we are guilty from birth due to "original sin." The Church of God International does not believe in the concept of original sin. Because of this guilty from birth concept Augustine believed we need to be baptized as babies to rid us of original sin. Through baptism and prayer we get grace from our sin and are transformed. Pelagius on the other hand felt human will was sufficient to live a sinless life, but God's grace assists our good works. Augustine thought when we hear the law we resent it and obey out of fear, so that is why we need grace. Pelagius thought when we hear the law we can obey. The question would then follow for Pelagius: If man can do it on his own why do we need Christ. Pelagius denied some of the things others said he preached.

Augustine was a major influence on Roman Catholic theology which developed on this subject of grace. Roman Catholics believe grace is favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to His call to become children of God, adoptive sons, and partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life. Catholics believe God grants his grace in many ways. One of the primary ways are the sacraments (marriage, baptism, etc.), but also prayers and good works.

The Eastern Church had a different idea on grace. They opposed Augustine's concept of original sin and Calvin's idea about the total depravity of man and God's irresistible grace. To the Eastern Church grace was identified with the uncreated energies of God. Grace helps us partake of the divine nature (II Peter 1:4). Fasting and prayer don't help us build merit, but they are good to help us avoid being enslaved by our passions. The Orthodox Church believed it was pos-

sible for human will to cooperate with divine grace.

The Lutherans believed in faith alone and grace alone. They were reacting to the Catholic practice of indulgences which could augment a Christian's store of sanctifying grace. Martin Luther felt that acts of piety did nothing for you. In other words, we can do nothing in regard to grace; it's all from God.

The Calvinists (Presbyterians) believe some get divine grace while others will not. Calvin believed humans were in a totally depraved state. God provided an unconditional election for some of us (some would be saved through no action on their part). Others were born to have no chance at salvation. God knew they would never accept Him. God then uses irresistible grace on those He is going to save. There is no choice in the matter for the saved; they can't stop God's grace from saving them. So they believed once you were saved you would always be saved.

John Wesley (Methodist Church) and Arminian theology teaches that God makes the initial move toward man, but human beings are free to respond or reject God's graceful initiative. According to this view, humans have prevenient grace from birth which enables you to recognize God's justifying grace and accept it. Justifying grace is the grace God gives us to achieve salvation. We can either accept or reject this grace from God. They also teach sustaining grace which helps you move on in grace toward perfection. You can fall and backslide, but sustaining grace helps you try to get better and better.

Those are some of the major takes on grace within Christianity, so how does what CGI teaches on grace stack up against this? Well we teach that grace is favor from God, its unmerited pardon for sins we have committed or will commit. God gives it to us because of His mercy and forgiving

nature. But we can't disregard or disobey God's law because of it. Neither can we earn salvation through our works. We must maintain our faith in God's grace, and works are a consequence of that faith. We can't think there is no work for us as Christian's (Jude 4).

But on the other hand, our work does not have anything to do with our gift of grace from God. Think of it like this: When a president goes out and pardons a criminal, the criminal can't just go out now and do the crime again.

Knowing what God's grace does for us should motivate us to be obedient to the ways of God (Matthew 7:21; Luke 6:46).

### Sources:

*The History of Christian Theology*, Lectures 1–18, Phillip Cary, The Teaching Company, 2008.

*Saved by Grace Alone? Or Are There Works Required for Salvation?* CGI, 1997

## ANNOUNCEMENT

The Church of God International will be hosting a Feast of Tabernacles site in New York this year. Information about the site can be found at [cgi.org/fot](http://cgi.org/fot) and at [cginyork.org/fot](http://cginyork.org/fot). For additional information, you may contact Mike James by email. His address is: [mhjames6044@gmail.com](mailto:mhjames6044@gmail.com).



FEAST OF TABERNACLES NEW YORK



# CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY

by Michelle Algarra



Michelle Algarra

True Christianity involves learning to take responsibility for our actions. Society imposes limitations on spiritual freedom, with overwhelming influences to compromise and break God’s commandments. In the true church, there is pressure to choose the right over the wrong, on learning to differentiate between good and evil, and choosing the good over the evil.

Psychologists and even Protestant Christian counsellors often make the mistake of blaming others for the problems and inadequacies individuals experience or go through in life, rather

than placing responsibility on the person who has his or her share of guilt. The mistakes of parents and other relatives in upbringing, wrong values taught by the media, reprobate peers, and various authority figures like teachers and government leaders, employers, and others do influence behaviour to a certain extent, but individuals were endowed by God with free will, for which reason each holds responsibility for one’s actions, good or bad. One can choose to do right, even when pressured by others through temptation or insidious means like deceit, with one’s cognitive capacity defining the parameters conscience formulates.

The church teaches the right tenets and principles of God through evangelistic pursuits and by way of written and oral expositions of Scripture (e.g., Bible studies, seminars, sermons, TV and radio broadcasts, and abundant literature).

Christians are taught by the Bible to grow in grace and knowledge and to bear fruit by applying God’s Word to thoughts, words, and actions—character growth coupled with increased understanding of the Scriptures

through reading and study.

Faith without works is dead. Works involve obedience to God’s commandments, statutes, and judgments, inclusive of the manifold ways one can serve God and others through doing good deeds. One must continually seek God’s forgiveness for shortcomings and the offenses one commits against others. Also, one must learn to forgive the self for mistakes and failures in an irremediable past.

Though external influences have a bearing on the kind of person a Christian becomes, becoming a Christian is the recognition that God is the ultimate parent who teaches right behaviour or actions through the Bible and the sanctity of the church.

The sins and mistakes other people have committed against an individual does not have to determine psychological effects such as deviant behaviour (e.g., use of drugs, promiscuity, criminality, etc.), for each person, ultimately, has the responsibility towards God to form the outcome of his or her life.

For example, even if the world propagates immoral behaviour and human sexuality as idols or gods, a true Christian can choose to be chaste and moral. Also, self-respect and esteem for people who have integrity and a spirit of resilience in the midst of adversity are counter-acting forces in a

society filled with pessimism and failure.

God, not human authority figures, is the ultimate judge of all circumstances. He can transform broken individuals with a marred past into righteous, successful, or triumphant Christians.

### Suggested Reading:

*When Your World Makes No Sense* by Dr. Henry Cloud

### Scriptural References:

- Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.”
- Ephesians 2:8–9: “By grace are you saved through faith, not of works, lest anyone should boast. We are God’s workmanship, created by Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has ordained that we should walk in them.”
- 2 Peter 3:18: “Grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.”
- 2 Timothy 2:15: “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth.”
- 2 Timothy 3:16–17: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness. That the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”
- 1 John 5:3: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous.”
- Philippians 3:12–13: “I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

# CONTENTMENT AND FAITH

by Michelle Algarra

Contentment and complacency are two different concepts. The Bible teaches contentment, not complacency. Contentment is learning to be thankful for all of God’s blessings and provisions, even in the most adverse circumstances, even if we do not have everything our heart wants and desires. Complacency is just sitting around waiting for God to solve your problems without exerting any effort yourself, the lackadaisical attitude with no hope for a better future.

A minister in the church said, “God will not do for you what you can do for yourself.” Every trying circumstance or situation is a test of faith, for we must rely on God to solve all our problems, knowing that He is ever-merciful

and all-powerful, and there are no problems too great for Him to solve.

When experiencing serious problems, such as health, employment, financial, intellectual, and other trials, one must be continually grateful to God for the blessings He provides, for there are always blessings even when we seem to have lost everything important to us, including loved ones through death.

God allows true Christians to go through severe trials as a test of faith, for we must rely on God to solve all our problems for us, and He expects us to believe He can do all things, provided we do our part.

Contentment means we appreciate both big as well as small blessings that

come our way, most of which cannot even be quantified monetarily or in terms of achievement/accomplishments. There are many things in life God grants us for free, without our having to do anything, materially and otherwise.

Contentment is learning to be happy or joyful, not only when everything seems to go well with us but even when the chips are down. No matter the trials and temptations, always have a hopeful attitude, thanking and praising God for His direct and indirect help. God helps Christians through many ways, sometimes through the people we encounter and the abundant provisions He has bestowed on us for free—the very air we breathe, the intelligence He gave us, the church, along with everything else.

The most important blessing God gave human beings is His very own

Son Jesus Christ, who sacrificed His life in order to grant human beings opportunity for an eternal existence with the great beings of the universe and all other potential beings in the God Family.

### Scriptural References:

- Philippians 4:11–13: “Not that I speak in respect of want; for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”
- Hebrews 11:1: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”
- Philippians 4:6–7: “Be anxious for nothing, but everything in prayer and supplication make your requests be known to God, and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding shall guard your health and minds in Christ Jesus.”
- 1 John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

# NOTES ON BASIC WORLD VIEWS

by Michelle Algarra

A book entitled *The Universe Next Door: A Basic World View* by James W. Sire discusses some basic notions or philosophical views regarding the world. Basic classifications are inclusive of the following:

1. Christian Theism
2. Deism
3. Naturalism
4. Nihilism

5. Existentialism
6. Pantheistic Monism
7. The New Age
8. Postmodernism

Metaphysics is the study of being while epistemology is the study of knowing. These are the two basic branches of philosophy.

Philosophy seeks to answer the following basic questions:

1. What is prime reality?

2. What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?
3. What is a human being?
4. What happens to a person at death?
5. Why is it possible to know anything at all?
6. How do we know what is right and wrong?
7. What is the meaning of human history?

Christian Theism rests on the following presuppositions: God is infinite, personal, transcendent, omniscient, sovereign, and good (or goodness is the essence of God’s charac-

ter). God created the cosmos ex nihilo, to operate with a uniformity of cause and effect in an open system. Human beings are created in the image of God and possess personality, self-transcendence, intelligence, morality, gregariousness, and creativity. Human beings can know the world around them and God Himself. Logically, intelligence, rationality, and meaning are all inherent in God. God reveals Himself through general and special revelation. Theism declares that God can and has clearly communicated with us. History is lineal, a sequence of events leading to fulfillment of God’s



purposes. The God of the universe communicates through Christian tradition and history is a form of revelation.

Deism is the belief that God exists but did not have a direct hand at creation and is not directly involved in the affairs of human beings. He is an impassive, impersonal God. Some of deism's proponents are John Locke and Voltaire. According to deism, God is not immanent or providential. The inconsistencies within this world view and impracticability of its principles show it is not Christian or Jewish, but neither is it atheistic or agnostic.

Naturalism proposes God does not exist, that matter exists eternally and is all there is. Its proponents include John Locke and Carl Sagan, astrophysicist. Naturalists believe in the inexorable laws of chemistry and physics. The cosmos is a uniformity of cause and effect in a closed system. Humans are merely complex machines, animals capable of conceptual thought. Death is extinction. History is a linear stream of events with no overarching purpose. Its two forms include secular humanism and the big bang theory. Other proponents include Julian Huxley, Charles Darwin, and Hegel.

Nihilism believes questions and answers are mutually exclusive, that matter is all there is and is eternal. There is a uniformity of cause and effect in a closed system or cosmos. For naturalism, nothing exists outside of the system itself. There is loss of meaning, or the meaninglessness of human existence. Two of its proponents are Nietzsche and Hemingway. Nietzsche ended in an asylum, while Hemingway eventually committed suicide.

Existentialism has two basic categories—atheistic existentialism and theistic existentialism. One of the former's believers is Dostoevsky, who stated in *The Brothers Karamasov* that God is dead or does not exist, and matter exists eternally.

Theistic existentialism has the following propositions: God is infinite and personal, transcendent, immanent, omniscient, sovereign, and good. Ethics is transcendent and based on God's character. Human beings who, when they come to full consciousness, find themselves in an alien universe; whether or not God exists is a tough question to be solved not by reason but by faith. The self is valuable. Neo-orthodox theologians of the Bible are proponents of theistic existentialism, as Kierkegaard, Jean Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus.

Pantheistic monism is the notion that there is only one impersonal emergent causal reality. These religious philosophies include Zen Buddhism, Hinduism, and transcendental meditation by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. There is belief in oneness with the cosmos, a pure conscience being the divine being—Brahman is the one.

The New Age is eastern mysticism with belief in a separate universe. One of its chief proponents is Shirley Maclaine. There is a belief in the evo-

lution of the human mind and a quantum leap in the progress of mankind. There is the immersion in new states of consciousness through utilization of psychedelic drugs. Movies involving New Age metaphysics were produced by Steven Spielberg and George Lucas. New Age is highly syncretistic and eclectic. Each of us is a kind of universe. The natural universe is inhabited by spirit beings. The universe has a personal diversion but not an infinite personal Creator God. There is a unity of life.

Basic tenets of new consciousness involve the following: whatever the nature of being (idea, matter, energy, or particle), the self is the kingpin—the prime reality. As human beings grow in their awareness and grasp of this fact, the human race is on the verge of a radical change in human nature. Even now we see harbingers of transformed humanity and prototypes of the New Age. The soul is the integrated, central essence of each person, and is the prime reality. One can create one's own reality and utopian euphoria. The subjective certainty of self, no reason or objectivity—you are the cosmos. There is only cosmic consciousness; ordinary categories of space, time, and morality tend to disappear. Appearance is reality and there is no illusion. New Age occult involves complete dissolution of language and conceptual relativism. God is just the structure of the universe. Form of epistemological nihilism is its logical conclusion.

Postmodernism is a pluralism of perspectives, a plethora of philosophical possibilities, and cultural anarchy seems inevitable. It doubts the existence of cause and effect as objective reality, and views language as power. Proponents include Friedrich Nietzsche, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and G.F.W. Hegel. There is a metanarrative of universal reason and being without God—postmodern view. Two key notions of modernism and postmodernism involve the following—1) the cosmos is all there is, and 2) the authority of human reason.

#### Concluding Comments

The notes above were all taken from the aforementioned book by James W. Sire. These popular world views are some of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil partaken by our first parents, Adam and Eve. These are contemporary philosophers' views about God or the absence of God and whether or not life has any meaning. The most relevant propositions are taken in Christian theism and theistic existentialism, because the Judaeo-Christian God and Christian conscience is examined and a world-view based on the moral and biblical perspective is taken into consideration. The Christian theology is based on erroneous concepts of God as a Trinity of the triune nature of God, the "fall" of man, and other traditional or professing Christian beliefs.

Conversion to the true Christian religion, the Jewish Christian perspective, is the view of the true nature of God as a Family and involves the literal and contextual understanding and interpretations of the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures, or the Bible in its entirety—the Old and New Testaments. Proper understanding of the Scriptures involves a relationship between the individual and the true God through a world view gained from the godly Christian perspective radically different from common philosophical world views that do not comprehend the true meaning of human existence or the purpose of life. Christianity understands that human life, transitory as it is, is a preparation for eternity, and is a spiritual, rather than purely materialistic, perspective. Human concerns are placed in the background of God's existence and His reality in human beings' personal lives. There is an examination of con-

science and logic/reason is used to delineate this perspective.

#### Scriptural References:

John 1:1–3, 14 (ESV): "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we have seen His glory, the glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Jude 3 (ESV): "Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."

Titus 3:9 (ESV): "But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless." KJV: "Shun profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so-called."

Psalms 14:1 (ESV): "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'"

## Visit us on the Web!

### Log on to [www.cgi.org](http://www.cgi.org) and...

- Visit our newly updated website!
- Subscribe to *The International News* and other periodicals.
- Listen to or view past editions of the *Armor of God* program!
- View our CGI webcasts and our archives.
- Read our CGI blogs.
- Keep up to date with our youth services and activities.
- Download lessons of our *Home Bible Study Course*, or send for a hard copy.
- Download iTunes hymns from our hymnal.
- Read the Bible online in over 25 versions and in many languages, including the Hebrew and Greek.
- See and hear our online *Web Chats*.
- See/hear thousands of archived sermons, booklets, and articles.
- Peruse our online literature library!
- Make prayer requests!
- Find local church congregations using unique scalable maps.

**Watch for more to come!**



Ken Allen

The history of the Olympics and other athletic competitions is full of stories of heroism, good sportsmanship and dogged determination. The athlete who, against all odds and setbacks, gets back up and painfully struggles on to the finish line inspires us. He knew he couldn't possibly win but would not stop until he had finished the race.

Such is the case of Derek Redmond of the UK who was favored to win a medal in the 400-meter semi-final race at the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona, Spain. One hundred and fifty meters into the race, he suddenly suffered a hamstring injury and fell down on the track writhing in pain as the other competitors raced on. Determined to finish the race despite the torn hamstring, Derek got back up clutching his right leg and proceeded to hop along the track.

Derek's father, who was among the thousands of spectators, broke through security, got on the track and gave his son a shoulder to lean on as he hopped along. He tried telling Derek he didn't have to do this but Derek insisted on finishing the race. His dad continued to support him until shortly before the finish line he left him to complete the race. As Derek crossed the finish line, the 65,000-strong crowd rose to give him a standing ovation. *He did not win the race, but he finished it* (in the eyes of the cheering crowd) and left us with an inspiring moment in Olympic history.

The Christian life is much like a race; only the object is not on winning the race but going all the way to the finish line. We have our heavenly Father and our elder Brother and Coach, Jesus Christ, helping us to run and finish the race. And all who finish the race will receive their reward.

We can learn a lot from the metaphor of the runner that will equip us to safely navigate the course, finish the race and receive the prize (reward).

#### Elements of the Race

All those whom God has called are participants in the race. We are running along the track called life, heading for the Kingdom of God, where the prize of eternal life and rulership (service) awaits all those who finish the race.

#### Dangers, Distractions, Delays, and Devils

The race we are running is a difficult one beset with dangers from within

# Finish the Race!

by Ken Allen

and without. The adversary persecutes and lays stumbling blocks in our way. Sometimes we yield to temptation and suffer as a result (James 1:14-15). The cares and the pleasures of this life also distract us (Luke 21:34). Like the Corinthians, we sometimes run towards things we should be running away from such as illicit sex (1Cor 6:18). Some of us endanger our effort to finish the race when we make material pursuit and worldly success our first priority (see 1 Tim 6:6-12; Prov 13:7). And like Derek, we sometimes simply get weary or afflicted and fall down. But although "righteous man may fall seven times" he will "rise again" and finish the race (Prov 24:16).

With all the dangers and distractions we face, how can we finish the race victoriously? Here are some keys from God's word.

#### Throw off the unnecessary baggage and look to your Coach!

*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith* (Hebrews 12:1-2).

To run effectively we have to shed the load or anything that would weigh us down and instead keep focused on the goal. First Peter 2:1-2 shows us some of the destructive attitudes and habits we need to lay aside so our race will not be negatively impacted.

#### Train persistently and regularly

Just as regular physical exercise is good for our bodies, spiritual exercise is profitable for our whole being (1 Timothy 4:7-8). We must exercise our senses to discern between good and evil (Hebrews 5:14) and submit to God's chastening (training) if we wish to succeed (Hebrews 12:11).

#### Exercise self-control and be ready to make sacrifices

Good athletes practice self-denial and restraint so they can keep in top mental and physical shape. Paul underscores the need for self control and running our race with purpose.

*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest,*

*when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified* (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

Our challenge is to bring your bodily urges under subjection to the Holy Spirit.

#### Play by the rules

Like a good soldier we must be willing to endure the rigor of warfare and not get caught up in civilian affairs. As athletes we have to play by the rules (God's commandments) if we hope to stay in and finish the race. And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules (2 Timothy 2:5).

#### Follow God's plan for your life and go at his pace

As we continue in the race, we have to be willing to go at God's pace. Don't try running when you should be walking or vice versa. At different stages of the race we go at different pace. As Isaiah says, there are times when we just wait. At other times we will run at fast speed and sometimes

we simply have to walk (or just hop along like an injured runner). But God promises to give us the strength we need to finish the race (Isaiah 40:28-31). When we operate according to his program he will make it all work out for us. Psalm 37:3-6 assures us that when we commit our plans, dreams and ways to God he will work it out for us.

#### The Finish line

If you remain faithful to the end of the race you will receive, not a crown or medal that will fade away but a crown of eternal life (James 1:12), an imperishable crown (1 Corinthians 9:25). You will be greeted with the words:

*Well done good and faithful servant!* (Matthew 25:21, 34).

If you stay in the race and make it to the finish line you will be able to say with confidence:

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing* (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

May God help us all to keep our eyes on the prize and on him who is able to help us finish the race.



Derek Redmond and his father



# ANSWERING CALVINISM

## Which Comes First: Faith or Regeneration?

by Vance A. Stinson

Calvinists claim that, because of the fall of man, human beings come into this world as spiritual stillborns. They are dead, spiritually *dead*! Just as a physical corpse is incapable of doing anything, a spiritual corpse is totally incapable of doing anything to please God. Being dead, he is incapable of expressing genuine repentance or exercising true faith. Before he can come to a faith unto salvation, he must first be vivified—made alive—by the operation of the Holy Spirit. This, Calvinists say, is what the apostle Paul means when he says, “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins.... [W]hen we were dead in trespasses, [He] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)” (Ephesians 2:1, 5).

But does Paul *really* mean to imply that all human beings are born spiritually dead and completely unable to respond in true repentance and faith until they are “made alive” by the Spirit.

First, the expression “dead in trespasses” appears to be one of several biblical metaphors for the sinful condition that, if not changed, will result in eternal death. Christians were once “dead in trespasses and sins” but have been “made alive” with Christ. Or, to use a different set of metaphors, Christians were once “slaves to sin” but have been “set free” to “become slaves of God” (Romans 6:22; cf., John 8:31–36). Jesus equated “sinners” with “those who are sick” (Mark 2:17) We were sick but made well, slaves but set free, dead but made alive. All these biblical metaphors are useful—unless we fail to recognize them as *metaphors*.

Second, we’re not born “dead”; we “die” when we begin sinning. Paul affirms, “I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died” (Romans 7:9). This shows that “death” occurs *after* we acquire the ability to recognize right from wrong and then choose to do what is wrong. As James says, “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:14–15). Death does not bring forth sin; sin brings forth death.

Third, repentance and faith are the conditions for, not the result of, regeneration (vivification, or being “made alive”). Upon hearing Peter’s message, many were “cut to the heart” and wanted to know what they should do. Peter said, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Faith and repentance preceded regeneration. The same sequence is seen in the conversion of the Samaritans (Acts 8:14ff), of Saul (Acts 9:17ff), of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:44ff; 11:14ff; cf., Acts 15:7–8), and of the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:30–31).

Regeneration—the raising to life in Christ—does not precede faith and repentance. Scripture presents just the opposite: faith and repentance, *then* regeneration.

### Are We Passive in Regeneration?

Calvinists claim that, while we play an active part in certain applications of the redemptive process, “we are passive in regeneration,” playing “no active role at all” (Wayne Grudem; *Bible Doctrine*; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, p. 300). Support for this position includes passages such as Ezekiel

36:26–27: “A new heart **I will give you**, and a new spirit **I will put within you**; and **I will** take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And **I will** put my spirit within you, and **cause you** to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.” This sounds like the “monergistic regeneration” Calvinists talk about. But is it?

No! Calvinists assume that the transformation described above occurs unconditionally. But if that were true, why did God continually plead with the Israelites to repent of their sins and return to Him, when in fact all He had to do was give them a new heart? What did Jesus mean when He lamented, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Matthew 23:37)? Did He really want to gather her children together? If He did, why didn’t He just make them willing? Doesn’t God always do what God wants to do?

In Deuteronomy 29, God warns the Israelites of the curse that will come upon them if they forsake the covenant He has made with them; He will drive them out of the land and scatter them among the nations. However, once scattered among the nations, if they call to mind His commandments and return to Him, He promises to reverse the curse.

“[When you] return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you.... Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers” (Deuteronomy 30:2–3, 5).

No one denies that these promises of national restoration and material blessings are conditional. But notice what else is included in this list of blessings:

“And the LORD your God **will circumcise your heart** and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (verse 6).

Did you catch it? The promise of verse 6—God’s promise to “circumcise your heart...to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul”—is *conditional*. This transformation of the heart is preceded by repentance—the resolve “to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments” (verse 16).

Indeed, God does promise to give us new hearts and spirits, but this internal transformation is something He does *with* us, not merely *to* us.

### Is “Faith” the “Gift” of Ephesians 2:8?

Citing Ephesians 2:8–10, Reformed theologian R.C. Sproul states: “Considerable debate has ensued regarding the meaning of the first sentence. What is the antecedent for the word *that*: *grace*, *saved*, or *faith*? The rules of Greek syntax and grammar demand that the antecedent of *that* be the word *faith*.... Faith is a result of the Spirit’s sovereign work of regeneration. It is no accident that the

statement concludes a passage that begins with Paul’s declaration that we have been ‘quickened’ or ‘made alive’ while we were in a state of spiritual death” (*What Is Reformed Theology?* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, pp. 156, 157).

People knowledgeable of Greek grammar don’t always agree with each other on precisely how the rules apply. That’s why there’s been “considerable debate” over the “meaning of the first sentence.” So rather than argue about syntax, let’s take a closer look at what the passage actually says and consider Paul’s own use of these terms.

Ephesians 2:8–10: “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.”

The “that” which is “not of yourselves” is 1) “the gift of God” and is 2) “not of works.” (Note that the expression “not of yourselves” parallels “not of works.”) As we shall see, the phrase “and that not of yourselves” refers back to “you have been saved.” **Salvation**, not the faith by which it is received, is the “gift of God” Paul has in mind here.

Since Paul elsewhere insists on faith rather than works as the means of receiving the free gift of salvation, it would make little sense for him to say that faith itself is the free gift that is not a result of works. Faith, by definition, is not “of works.” Paul is here speaking of something that is received by faith *rather than* by works.

Paul elsewhere declares that salvation is through faith, not by works. He writes: “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith [Recall Ephesians 2:9: “not of works, lest anyone should boast”]. Therefore we conclude that a man is **justified** by faith apart from the deeds of the law” (Romans 3:27–28). He asks the “foolish Galatians,” “Did you **receive the Spirit** by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” (Galatians 3:1–2), and explains that “the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be **justified** by faith” (verse 24).

So what is the “gift of God” that is “not of works”? *Salvation!* By omitting the phrase, “and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,” we can easily see that Paul is saying what he has said so plainly elsewhere: “For by grace you have been saved through faith...not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

As Sproul points out, this statement comes at the conclusion of “a passage that begins with Paul’s declaration that we have been ‘quickened’ or ‘made alive’....” Indeed! Being “quickened” or “made alive”—*salvation*—is the subject! And “that” salvation is the gift of God we receive by faith.

The faith through which we are saved is our own faith. Enabled by grace, it arises within us as a response to the gospel. It is through this faith that we, with empty hands, reach out to receive the free gift of salvation.

### Are Individuals Drawn of the Father Unconditionally?

In the December 13, 2016, episode of *The Dividing Line*, Calvinist James White explained why he believes “synergists” have to insert something

*Continued next page*



### Continued from previous page

into the text of John 6 to make it fit their synergistic soteriology. A straightforward exegesis of John 6:35–45, he claims, strongly supports a Calvinistic soteriology and rules out any synergistic system such as Arminianism or Southern Baptist Traditionalism.

Citing John 6, with special reference to verse 37—“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out”—White says that “the synergist recognizes that this text cannot be allowed to stand on its own, because if this text is allowed to stand on its own, the result is going to be that the giving of the Father is primary to everything else.” The passage is clear, White says; the Father’s giving of the individual to the Son obviously precedes the individual’s coming to the Son.

White points out that it’s important to recognize that these words were spoken to a crowd of people who had put considerable effort into seeking out Jesus (verses 22–25). They witnessed the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. They crossed the lake to get to Jesus. They certainly appeared to be believers. Yet, it was to these very “Jesus seekers” that the Lord said, “But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe” (verse 36). They had not come to Him in genuine faith; they were not true believers. Why? Because they were not among those the Father had given to Christ (verse 37). “No one,” says Jesus, “can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day” (verse 44).

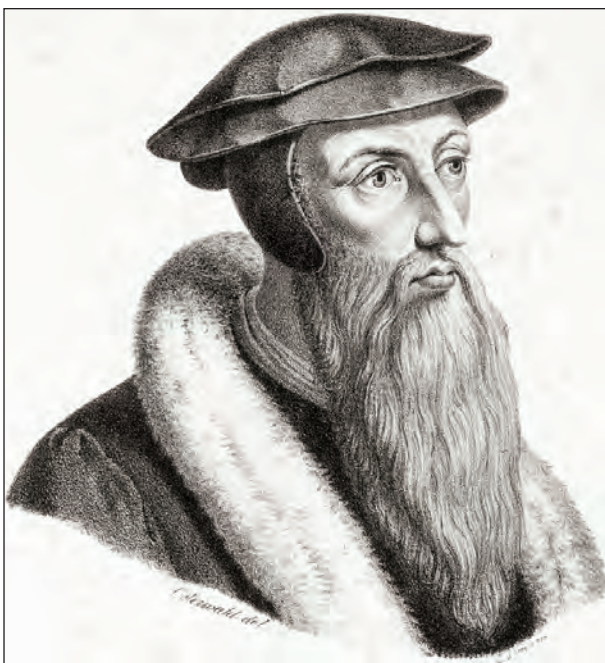
White insists that we exegete the text, allowing it to stand on its own, without inserting something from other scriptures into it. Very well—let’s do just that.

The people Jesus addresses in verse 36 (see above) are the same people He addresses in verse 26: “Jesus answered them and said, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.’”

White’s Reformed colleagues say this about verse 26: “Although they saw the miracle of the loaves and fishes, they did not recognize it as a sign identifying Jesus as the Messiah. It was merely as an opportunity for a meal to them” (*The Reformation Study Bible*, R.C. Sproul—General Editor, p. 1521). So they sought and came to Jesus, but their seeking/coming was “for the food which perishes,” not “for the food

which endures to everlasting life” (verse 27). They came to Jesus, but they did not come to Him in genuine faith; they came for the wrong reasons.

White is correct: The Father first gives, and then those He gives come to Christ. But White *assumes* that the Father’s selection of those He gives to the Son is unconditional. He also *assumes* that it involves a mystical internal transformation—a supernatural changing of the will—though he has to insert that concept into the text, meaning that he’s



John Calvin

guilty of doing the very thing he claims his synergistic opponents do.

John 6 tells us that the Spirit’s life-giving work comes through Jesus’ “words” (verse 63). Jesus’ “words” are **from the Father**, and those drawn to Jesus for the “words” rather than for the food that perishes are drawn by the One who speaks through Jesus. That’s the meaning of “drawn of the Father.”

Let’s notice the different ways Jesus speaks of those who come to Him in genuine faith.

- “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.”
- “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day” (verse 44).
- “It is written in the prophets, ‘*And they shall be taught by God.*’ Therefore everyone who has heard

and learned from the Father comes to Me” (verse 45).

- “And He said, ‘Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father’” (verse 65).

The above four verses speak of the same people and of the means by which they come to Christ in genuine faith. **To be given/drawn to Christ by the Father requires one to hear from the Father!** But how does one hear and learn from the Father? *By hearing and learning from the One through whom the Father speaks!* “For I have come down from heaven,” says Jesus, “not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (verse 38). “My doctrine is not Mine,” says Jesus, “but His who sent Me. **If anyone wills to do His will** [this sounds *synergistic* to me!], he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God [the Father] or whether I speak on My own authority” (John 7:16–17, emphasis added). Simply stated, the Father draws and gives to Christ only those who *choose* to do His will and thereby recognize the Source of Christ’s teaching. **To hear Christ is to hear the Father.** This hearing—not just hearing words spoken, but *understanding* and *embracing* the life-saving truth that is spoken—must precede coming in true faith to Him.

The problem with those who saw Jesus but did not believe (verse 35) was that they sought Him for the wrong reasons (verse 26). Had they come to Him to hear and learn from the One who sent Him, they would have been led to come to Him *in faith*, and by no means would He have cast them out. That is the heart of the message of John 6! White reads the tenets of Calvinism *into* the text. That’s eisegesis, *not* sound exegesis.

Interestingly, White points out that the phrases “comes to Me” and “believes in Me” (verse 35) mean the same thing and speak of an *ongoing action*, not a one-time event. That’s important—and true—for it suggests that a person’s salvation is secure **as long as his or her faith is ongoing**. No believer who faithfully continues partaking of the “Bread of Life” (verse 35) will be cast out. But to make John 6 align with his Reformed theology, White has to insert point five of the Five Points of Calvinism (Perseverance of the Saints) into the text. Once again, James White does what he accuses synergists of doing; he reads outside ideas into the account of John 6. □

## Is God the Author of Evil?

Scripture assures us that God is righteous and just (Psalm 36:6), and that His mercy endures forever (Psalm 118:2–4). John tells us, “God is love” (1 John 4:8), and James tells us that God is not the author of sin or the source of temptations that lead to sin but is invariably the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:13–18).

Yet, some passages seem to say that God is the author of evil and that He sometimes acts unjustly: He “turned [the enemy’s] heart to hate His people, to deal craftily with His servants” (Psalm 105:25). “He turns [the king’s heart] wherever He wishes” (Proverbs 21:1). He “has made all for Himself, yes, even the wicked for the day of doom” (Proverbs 16:4). “He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens” (Romans 9:18). The model for “whom He wills He hardens” is the Egyptian Pharaoh of the time of the Exodus (verse 17). In Exodus 4:21, God explicitly states, “I will harden his [Pharaoh’s] heart” (cf.

Exodus 7:3; 10:20).

If, as James says, God is not the author of sin or cause of temptations, how can He make the wicked for the day of doom, turn hearts to hatred, or harden men’s hearts? Are these passages contradictory?

The key is in understanding *how* God hardens men’s hearts. He hardened Pharaoh’s heart by sending and withdrawing plagues and by issuing commands through an agent for whom Pharaoh had little respect. This does not mean that God directly put a rebellious spirit (hardness) in Pharaoh’s heart; it means that a rebellious spirit arose within Pharaoh’s heart in response to God’s actions of sending and withdrawing the plagues and of speaking through Moses. Put simply, **Pharaoh’s heart was hardened in response to God’s actions in Egypt**. In one sense, then, God hardened Pharaoh’s heart; in another sense, Pharaoh hardened his own heart. In fact, the text states that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (see

Exodus 8:13, 32; 9:34; cf. 7:13, 22).

An employer may make an employee angry by refusing to give him a promotion he thinks he deserves, but the anger arises within the employee’s own heart; it’s not put there by the employer. Similarly, God turns the hearts of kings by performing actions that cause kings to turn their own hearts. He hardened the heart of Pharaoh by performing acts that caused Pharaoh to harden his own heart.

But what about Proverbs 16:4? How does God make the wicked for the day of doom? The Amplified Bible brings out the correct meaning of this passage:

“The LORD has made everything [to accommodate itself and contribute] to its own end and His own purpose—even the wicked [are fitted for their role] for the day of calamity and evil.”

God doesn’t make men wicked; He makes sure wicked men receive punishments appropriate for their deeds.

Vance A. Stinson



# THE UNLEAVENED HEART

*The Passover season is fast approaching, and this means that the “deleavening” of homes will begin taking place soon. What is the meaning of this custom?*

by Vance A. Stinson

In past years, we have said that the Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures the lifelong process of “putting sin out of our lives.” And while it is true that the Feast teaches us that we must put sins out of our lives once we become aware of them, the Feast does not actually *picture* “putting sin out” over one’s entire life as a Christian.

Imagine this scenario:

You collect all your leavened products and divide them into seven portions, ranging from largest to smallest, with the seventh one being nothing more than a cupcake. And then, on day one of the Feast you dispose of the biggest portion of leavened stuff. On day two you put away the second biggest portion, and on it goes from day to day until you come to the seventh day, at which time you chuck the cupcake.

Now, is that what you do every year? After all, wouldn’t doing it that way be a more accurate picture of the lifelong process of putting sin out? You start with the most obvious sins and then, over the course of your life as a Christian, you continue putting sins out until you come to the end of the journey. By that time, hopefully, the sins in your life are in the “cupcake” range.

Of course, that’s *not* what you do; rather, you get rid of your bread and other leavened items *before* the Feast of Unleavened Bread begins, and you *come into the festival already completely unleavened*. In fact, this **unleavened condition** is a *requirement* for keeping the Feast!

Now, of course, putting sin out of our lives is, without a doubt, consistent with the meaning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, but that’s not exactly what the Feast pictures. Instead, **it pictures the IDEAL of living sinlessly in Christ Jesus!**

Let’s take a closer look at how the conversion process take place.

The apostle Paul says that Christ has “wiped out the handwriting of requirements [or “certificate of debt”—NASB] that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”

Under Roman law, it was customary to write out the law a condemned criminal had broken and nail the inscription to the cross above the head of the person being crucified. So if the commandments of God were in some sense “nailed to the cross,” they were put there to show which laws we broke that resulted in our condemnation.

But sometimes the inscription included a description of the crime itself. This, no doubt, is what Paul has in mind. Our *record of sins* has been nailed to the cross, figuratively speaking, and if we are “in Christ,” then His death counts for our death. Do you want to know what the Feast of Unleavened Bread is all about? *That’s it!* If we are “in Christ,” *we ARE unleavened!* That’s our *status* before God; *but now we’re called upon to see to it that our lives conform to the status we have in Christ.*

The Feast of Unleavened Bread, then, pictures the **ideal** Christian life—that of living both *legally* and *actually* without sin. **We “put sin out” along the way because we’re striving for the ideal.** But it’s important to realize that we repent of our sins—we resolve to stop sinning altogether!—*before* the journey begins.

Just as we put leavened products out of our homes *before* the Feast begins, we repent of all our sins

*before* we are immersed into the watery “grave” of baptism. Therefore, entering through the “narrow gate” is possible only for those who meet the entry requirement—those who come to the gate with “unleavened” HEARTS.

## The Beatitudes

Some students of Scripture apparently believe that one of the primary purposes of the Beatitudes (and the entire Sermon on the Mount, for that matter) is to demonstrate the utter helplessness of the human condition. From this point of view, the Beatitudes represent a standard so high no one can possibly live up to it, and this serves the purpose of showing us that we cannot through anything within ourselves be made right with God.

But is that what Jesus had in mind? No!

If we are “in Christ,” *we ARE unleavened!* That’s our *status* before God; *but now we’re called upon to see to it that our lives conform to the status we have in Christ.*

Some Dispensationalists say the whole Sermon on the Mount was for the Jews of Jesus’ time, not the Church.

Is that true? No—it’s *utterly absurd!*

Perhaps most of us think Jesus was establishing the *ideal* for which we must aim, showing that we must aim high and, hopefully, eventually—between now and our death or the Second Coming—at least come close to attaining it.

Is *that* the purpose of the Beatitudes?

No, not really.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus is not speaking of those who have come to the end of a lifelong struggle against sin. No, instead He has the *beginning* of the journey in mind. He is speaking of those who have the kind of heart in which the seed of God’s Word can take root—the kind of heart that responds to the gospel with genuine repentance and faith. In other words, He is speaking of the UNLEAVENED HEART!

## Humility is the Key!

The people who turn to God in faith upon hearing the gospel are the people who do not trust in themselves, whose lives are not consumed with the wealth they have amassed or the fame they have achieved or the “glory” associated with their own accomplishments. This is the message of the Beatitudes. Jesus is saying that the people described by the Beatitudes are the kind of people who will receive the gospel and be converted.

The “poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3) are those who have the *disposition*, or *attitude*, of a poor person. Wealth is generally associated with power, influence, and fame, and these things can be “addictive,” or very hard to give up. The poor person, on the other hand, is generally better able to see his need to depend on God and not his wealth or fame. To be “poor in spirit,” then, is to be *humble*. It is the opposite of pride, arrogance, and self-importance.

Those who “mourn” (verse 4) are those who expe-

rience genuine contrition, not mere attrition. The former is the opposite of being “puffed up” (see 1 Corinthians 5:2); the latter means sorrow for the wrong reasons—for example, not sorrow for the wrongs committed, but sorrow for getting caught.

The “meek” (verse 5) are obviously the lowly. They are not full of pride and vanity or self-glory in any sense. Because of this disposition, they are teachable.

Those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (verse 6) are not confident in their *own* righteousness. They do not arrogantly declare themselves to be “gracious” and “loving” because of their acceptance of behaviors God calls “abominations.” They do not “hunger and thirst” for wealth, fame, power, etc. Their affections are set on the things of God; they want His will for their lives. And they “hunger and thirst” for *true justice*—not the *fake* justice we’re all too familiar with today—to prevail in the world.

The “merciful” (verse 7) do not expect too much of other people but are willing to give them a break when they see their flaws. They can do this because they do not have a false self-image based on pride and arrogance, but can see themselves as they truly are. It is the self-centered and self-serving, the arrogant and prideful, who *receive* mercy but then turn around and refuse to *be* merciful.

The “pure in heart” (verse 8) are people who are not double-minded; they see themselves for what they truly are. Their evaluation of their own motives is pure, not self-deceptive. As M. Scott Peck, in his book, *People of the Lie*, says, the “people of the lie” are not psychopaths who have no conscience, but rather are people who *do* have a conscience but do not give the conscience its due. They are double-minded; their self-evaluation is not pure. This is a spirit totally opposite of the spirit of humility.

The “peacemakers” (verse 9) are the people who seek peace with God and receive it. Knowing that reconciliation (peace) with God comes from His merciful kindness, they willingly and gladly extend it to others. This is a spirit opposite of the spirit of pride and arrogance.

The Beatitudes are obviously not a random list; there is a theme here. All these good qualities grow out of the soil of *humility*. They describe the person who is not high-minded or double-minded; is completely honest with himself; doesn’t create or require a phony image of himself; recognizes his need for forgiveness, so is forgiving; experiences real contrition, not attrition.

This person is, in a word, *humble*. And this is the person who enters the narrow gate.

But there’s also a message here for those of us who have already entered. To stay on the way that leads to eternal life, it is absolutely essential that we walk continually in humbleness of mind and not allow pride to enter—we must maintain the “unleavened heart” we had when we began the journey.

How do we do that?

We do it by filling our minds with the things of God as revealed in Scripture, by staying close to God in prayer, and by *humbling ourselves* before Him the moment we realize pride has taken root.

Humility is the key!

“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord,” writes James, “and He will lift you up” (James 4:10).



# Questions & Answers

by Vance A. Stinson

## Q: Are the Gifts of the Spirit for Today?

**A:** The question of whether the gifts of the Holy Spirit are for today is a point of division among Evangelicals. Those who believe the gifts are for today are called continuationists. Those who believe the gifts ceased with the completion of the New Testament are called cessationists.

According to the cessationist view, the gifts of the Spirit were given for the purpose of confirming the ministry of the apostles, helping establish the New Testament church, and guiding the early disciples until the completion of the New Testament.

Several scriptures are used to support the cessationist view. One of the most popular is found in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians:

"Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail [will be fulfilled and thereby cease]; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away [in the sense that partial knowledge will be replaced by full knowledge]. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away" (verses 8–10).

The cessationist says that tongues, prophecy, and other gifts ceased once the New Testament was completed. Now that we have the entire Bible—the full revelation of God—the gifts are not necessary. The apostolic ministry has accomplished its task, the New Testament church has been firmly established, and Christians no longer need new revelations for guidance. Therefore, there is no longer any need for the gifts of the Spirit.

One of the problems with using 1 Corinthians 13 to support the cessationist view is the assumption that when Paul speaks of the coming of "that which is perfect," he is speaking of the completion of the New Testament. He clearly is not! Rather, he is speaking of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Paul writes, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known" (verse 12). Paul can't possibly be saying that he will have to settle for imperfect knowledge until the time when the New Testament epistles (including his own writings) will be available for him to read. He is obviously talking about the perfection he expects to obtain at the coming of the Lord.

Support for this understanding is found in the same epistle. In his introductory comments, Paul expresses his hope that the Corinthian believers would "come short in no gift" as they eagerly awaited the coming of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:7–8). In fact, throughout the New Testament, even during times when great signs and wonders were accompanying the apostolic ministry, there is an abundance of evidence that the early disciples anticipated the coming of the Lord. Obviously, they did not think in cessationist terms.

In addition, many of the gifts of the Spirit are *always* useful to the people of God. The gifts are "for the profit of all" (1 Corinthians 12:7). God "gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11–12; cf. Romans 12:6–8; 1 Peter 4:10–11).

Surely the body of Christ today needs no less edification than the early church needed. The availability of the Scriptures is a great advantage in this regard, but there is still a need for people gifted in understanding and the ability to rightly divide the Word of Truth, for people with pastoral and evangelistic gifts, and for people with Spirit-enhanced managerial skills.

All the gifts of the Spirit are not needed all the time, but there is no scriptural reason for believing that there is ever a time when no gifts are needed. God grants gifts according to the need; but Christians, as they see the needs of the people of God, should "earnestly desire the best gifts" (1 Corinthians 12:31).

## Q: Did Jesus Condemn Homosexuality?

**A:** Today, it is not unusual to hear arguments such as this one: "Jesus did not say anything about homosexuality. He taught much on love, forgiveness, mercy, justice, and refraining from judging and condemning others, but said nothing about homosexuality. Since the matter was not an issue for Jesus, shouldn't it be a non-issue for those who claim to be His followers?"

It may be true that Jesus never specifically mentioned homosexual practice in any New Testament account, but why should we assume that Jesus approved of every practice He did not specifically name? Many sinful practices may be grouped as a specific *type* of sin; so when Jesus condemns the type, He condemns all sinful practices included in the type.

The Greek word *porneia*, for example, covers a wide range of sins of a particular type. The term is used of adultery, fornication, homosexual practice, and other such sins. Here's what Jesus says about *porneia*:

"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man..." (Matthew 15:19–20).

The term "fornications" is translated from the Greek *porneia*. It is rendered "sexual immorality" in several modern English translations. Since "adulteries" is distinguished from "fornications" in this passage, the latter must refer to unlawful sexual relations other than adultery, including homosexual activity.

There is additional evidence that *porneia* includes homosexual activity.

The apostolic decree of Acts 15:29 instructs Gentile Christians to "abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality [*porneia*]." This list summarizes, *in order*, the instructions set forth in Leviticus 17 and 18. Chapter 17 forbids pollutions of idols and the use of blood and strangled animals as food, and chapter 18 gives a list of sexual sins. Since this section of Scripture almost certainly forms the underpinning of the apostolic decree, the list of sexual sins (chapter 18) shows what the term *porneia* meant to the first-century Jew. Leviticus 18 condemns incest, bestiality, adultery, and homosexuality. *Porneia*, then, includes all these unlawful sexual unions.

It is true that the Gospels supply no record of Jesus specifically condemning homosexual practice. But then, there is no specific mention of bestiality in the Gospels or, for that matter, anywhere in the New Testament. The lack of specificity says nothing about whether the unnamed act is sinful.

Had the push to legitimize homosexual practice been a reality in Jesus' day, as it is in ours, you can rest assured that Jesus would have openly opposed it through sound teaching and a call for repentance. His followers today must do no less.

## Q: Are the Gospels Anti-Semitic?

**A:** In the spring of 2004, shortly before the release of Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ*, a good many expressed concerns that the film's portrayal of the Jews as those responsible for the brutal treatment and death of Jesus would result in an outbreak of anti-Semitism. Of course, it never happened. But it did call attention to the fact that a number of biblical critics *do* consider portions of the New Testament as anti-Semitic. It is claimed that Matthew's Gospel, for example, is a Christian critique of Judaism. So the historical record of Christian anti-Semitism—repression of the Jews, forced conversions, and the like—is often connected with Jesus as He is presented in the Gospels.

With attention drawn to passages such as Matthew 21:43; 27:24–25; and the whole of chapter 23, I can understand how some Jewish persons might conclude that the Gospels are anti-Semitic. However, the same Jewish persons ought to look more carefully at their own prophets in their own Scriptures. If we define "anti-Semitism" as any polemic against Jerusalem or the Jews, then *one of the most anti-Semitic books of all is the Old Testament—the Jews' own Bible!* A sample text is Isaiah 1:2–15, where the Jews are a "sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who deal corruptly" (verse 4).

This is exactly the same kind of prophetic critique we find on the lips of Jesus in the New Testament. In fact, Jesus draws statements right out of Isaiah's prophecy and applies them to the religious leadership of His time. Jesus came in the spirit of the prophets. His polemical style strongly resembles theirs. He was that "Prophet like Moses"—the Prophet par excellence—who was the summation and fulfillment of all the prophets who preceded Him. So if the Gospels are anti-Semitic, so is the Old Testament.

But "anti-Semitic" is the wrong word. Scholars have noted that the strong polemical rhetoric Matthew attributes to Jesus—as in Matthew 23, for instance—is typical of Jewish polemics in ancient times. Davies and Allison offer helpful comments in this regard:

"The ferocity of rhetoric in Jewish texts, and especially the volatile language of the Dead Sea Scrolls, shows that Matthew's polemic need not signal a break with Judaism. So far from that being the case, we indeed deny that Matthew is a Christian critique of Judaism. It is rather a Jewish-Christian critique of Jewish opponents—and therefore no more 'anti-Semitic' than the Dead Sea Scrolls" (W. Davies and D. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC, Vol. 3, pp. 260–61).

## Q: Is the Bible inconsistent in reporting on the number of animals taken into the ark?

**A:** According to a note in the New American Bible (Saint Joseph Edition), "The combination of the two sources [Yahwist and Priestly] produced certain duplications [in the story of the great flood]...also certain inconsistencies, such as the number of the various animals taken into the ark" (p. 9). But are these really inconsistencies? Do they support the documentary hypothesis and weaken the traditional view of Mosaic authorship?

Let's see...

For the number of animals taken aboard the ark, the NAB ascribes Genesis 6:19f and 7:14f to the Priestly source, and Genesis 7:2f to the Yahwist source.



There are at least two ways of understanding these texts without assuming inconsistencies. Here’s one way:

In Genesis 6:19–20, God tells Noah that all creatures brought aboard the ark are to be brought in mated pairs—“two of every sort...male and female” (verse 19). This general instruction emphasizes mated pairs but does not necessarily restrict the number to only one pair of each kind of animal. In 7:2–3, more details are given. Noah is told to take seven pairs of all the clean animals and birds, and two of all the unclean animals. The “pairs” instruction given earlier still holds true, but now we learn that there are to be seven pairs of certain animals, only two of others.

A second option is to understand Genesis 7:2–3 as an addendum to the original command. If “seven each” is understood as seven animals (rather than seven mated pairs) and “two each” as two animals (rather than two pairs), there would be three pairs and one unmated animal (probably to be used as a sacrifice later) of the clean animals boarding the ark, and only one pair of the unclean animals. Genesis 7:9 and 7:15 tell *how* the animals went into the ark—“two by two”—but not *how many* of each type of animal went in.

The NAB scholars’ premise that Hebrew editors pulled together documents from different periods of history to create the Pentateuch leads me to ask this question: Could the editors have failed to notice that one story says two and the other says seven? It seems unlikely that the talented scribes who weaved diverse sources together so skillfully as to produce an amazingly unified document would have failed to notice such a glaring inconsistency—especially when the contradictory numbers are placed so close to each other in the finished text. It’s far more likely that the author understood 7:2–3 as additional, but not contradictory, to the information supplied in 6:19–20.

The numbers given in the narrative do not lend one iota of support to the documentary hypothesis.

**Q: Does Genesis Present Two Conflicting Creation Stories?**

**A:** Critical scholars claim that the Genesis 2 story of the creation of man is much older than, and contradictory to, the creation narrative of Genesis 1. This conclusion is based partly on alleged discrepancies in the two sections and partly on clues that the two sections were drawn from two separate sources, one much older than the other. The differences in the two narratives are said to support the documentary hypothesis, or theory that the narratives making up the five books attributed to Moses were taken from documents representing different periods of Israel’s history.

However, the seeming conflicts between the two sections can be easily resolved without resorting to the highly problematic documentary hypothesis. Critics claim that the order of creation in Genesis 2:4–7, 19 differs from the order presented in Genesis 1:1–27 in that the former has the creation of man preceding the creation of other living organisms, and the latter puts man’s creation last. However, if we understand Genesis 2:5 as a reference to the curse of Genesis 3:17–19, the seeming conflict is resolved. The plants and herbs “of the field” (2:5) are the plants and herbs man would harvest after leaving the garden (3:18). Originally, man’s habitat was the Garden of Eden. He was to “tend and keep it” (2:15) and “freely eat” of “every tree of the garden” (verse 16). He acquired food through toiling in the field *after* he was driven from Eden.

Genesis 2:19 does not necessarily mean that God made the beasts of the field and birds of the air *after* He made Adam, as a plain reading of some translations would indicate. The Hebrew construction permits the NIV’s rendition of the verse:

“Now the LORD God *had* formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them...” (emphasis added).

The expression “*had* formed” suggests that God had made these creatures at some point before He brought them to Adam for naming. This agrees with the Genesis 1 narrative.

I don’t have a problem with the theory that biblical writers used documents handed down from their forefathers. Just as the Spirit-inspired writers of the New Testament used the inspired Old Testament as they composed their accounts and epistles, the men God used in composing the Old Testament could have used documents handed down from previous generations of God’s people. The Holy Spirit guided the entire process.

I *do* have a problem with the notion that many of the historical narratives (narratives presented as historical) of the Pentateuch are traceable to myths and legends previous generations of Hebrews had picked up from their heathen neighbors. Unfortunately, this form of biblical criticism has gained wide acceptance, and many who embrace it reject any other approach to the Scriptures. This tendency to reject the supernatural has done considerable damage to the historical critical method as a useful tool for serious biblical studies.

**Q: Does James contradict Paul on the role of faith and works in salvation?**

**A:** James says a person is justified by works, not by faith alone (James 2:14, 24), but Paul says a person is justified by faith apart from works (Romans 4:4–6). On the surface, this appears to be an obvious contradiction. But is it?

Let’s begin with Paul’s comments on faith, works, and justification:

Paul writes, “Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt” (Romans 4:4). A worker who does the job he was hired to do earns the wages his employer agreed to pay him. But justification is different; it is not a wage one can earn through working.

Paul continues, “But to him who does not work [to gain salvation, as if it were a wage] but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness” (verses 5). Justification is a *gift*, not a wage that God owes us. To receive it, one must “believe on Him who justifies the ungodly.” This is “saving faith.”

Now let’s compare James’s statements on faith and works:

James asks, “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?” (James 2:14). He goes on to say that “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (verses 17, 20), affirming that “a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (verse 24). This seems to be just the opposite of what Paul says. But is it?

The key is in understanding how the two writers use the word “faith.” James defines the kind of faith (belief) he has in mind by way of a clear example: “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble” (verse 19). The demons are believers! *What* they believe—that God is one—is a good belief; yet, theirs is a belief that does not produce obedience to God. Similarly, many people believe God exists, believe the Bible is His inspired Word, and believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but their belief is nothing more than intellectual assent. It does not produce anything. Their lives remain unchanged.

Saving faith, on the other hand, is *faithfulness*, not merely a belief that God exists. It is an internal quality that expresses itself in obedience to God, trust in Him, and wholehearted acceptance of His provisions for salvation. It is a life-changing quality—a *trusting conviction*—that fills the heart and exerts a powerful influence on the things we say, think, and do. This is the faith Paul speaks of in Romans 4.

We see, then, that there is no conflict between Paul and James. It’s simply a matter of understanding that Paul uses the word “faith” to describe a trusting conviction, while James uses the same term to describe intellectual assent.

James and Paul are also addressing two different subjects. James speaks of the difference between a dead faith and the faith that pleases God. Paul addresses the erroneous notion that justification is comparable to a wage God owes us for the good deeds we accomplish. Justification, he says, comes to us through trusting God to deliver what He has promised, not as a wage for our deeds. (Paul has certain “deeds of the law” specifically in mind [Romans 3:29], though his analogy of working for wages applies to any work seen as a means of earning justification.)

Paul, however, never suggests that one’s behavior is unrelated to the trusting conviction he calls faith. On the contrary, he urges, “Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good” (12:9), and underscores the primacy of love, stating that “love is the fulfillment of the law” (13:10).

Our conclusion is that James and Paul are in perfect agreement. James is not saying that justification is earned by works, and Paul is not saying that justification is granted through believing as the demons do. Both affirm that saving faith—the faith that pleases God—is a faith that produces good works.

**Q: Are all whose names are in the Book of Life eternally secure and immune to apostasy?**

**A:** According to Calvinist John MacArthur, the Lamb’s Book of Life “is the registry in which God inscribed the names of those chosen for salvation before the foundation of the world” (The *MacArthur New Testament Commentary*: Revelation 1–11, p. 50). All whose names are in the registry are said to be secure, their salvation certain. For them, apostasy cannot happen.

But let’s look more carefully at what the New Testament actually teaches.

The apostle Paul says the names of his fellow workers “are in the Book of Life” (Philippians 4:3). The Book of Life will be opened in the final judgment, and anyone whose name is not found in it will be “cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:12, 15). Indeed, only those whose names have been “written in the Lamb’s Book of Life” will be permitted to enter the Holy City (21:27).

The unregenerate who marvel at the “beast” are described as those “whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world” (17:8). Presumably, this is the text MacArthur had in mind when he wrote the above, since this is the only text that connects the “Book of Life” with “the foundation of the world.” He and other Calvinists apparently think this verse indicates that the names of all the elect were recorded in the heavenly registry *before* the world was created. But the text doesn’t actually say that. It speaks of those whose names have *never*—from the foundation of the world *onward*—been recorded in the Book of Life.

But what of the person whose name is in the Book of Life? Is he unconditionally secure in his salvation? Is apostasy impossible for such a person?

To the spiritually dying Christians of the church in Sardis, Christ says, “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and

*Continued next page*



before His angels” (Revelation 3:5; cf., Exodus 32:31–33; Psalm 69:27–28).

But what about the spiritually dying believer who does not “strengthen the things...that are ready to die” (Revelation 3:2), does not “hold fast and repent” (verse 3), does not overcome (verse 5) his sinful behavior but persists in it? Christ’s promise to not blot the name of the faithful overcomer from the Book of Life suggests that the believer who does not overcome, but persists in his sins, may in fact have his name blotted out of the Book of Life. This is consistent with Paul’s admonition to the Gentiles who had been “grafted in” to God’s “olive tree”:

“Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches [unbelieving Israelites], He may not spare you [grafted-in Gentiles] either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again” (Romans 11:20–23).

Notice the conditional element here: “*if* you continue in His goodness...*if* they

do not continue in unbelief....”

In Paul’s “olive tree” analogy, the natural branches that have not been broken off are the Israelites who make up the “remnant, chosen by grace,” the “elect” who obtained the salvation Israel sought (Romans 11:5, 7). The rest, symbolized by the branches that were broken off, are the Israelites who “were hardened” (verse 7). They have been given “a spirit of stupor, eyes that should not see and ears that should not hear” (verse 8). They are clearly *not* a part of the elect body! They are in fact *contrasted* with the elect remnant.

Yet, Paul makes it clear that these spiritually blind, deaf, and hardened Israelites—the broken-off branches—*can* come to faith in Christ and be added to the elect body. He also makes it clear that members of the elect body can be “cut off” if they do not continue in faith.

To put it another way: The names of the believing Gentiles have been recorded in the Book of Life, but if they do not continue in faith, their names will be blotted out. And if the unbelieving Israelites turn to God in faith, their names will be added to the Book of Life. Election, then, is conditional.

## Proud to be a Child of God

by George Roper



George Roper

**G**enealogy subtly influences everything about our present and future. Genetic traits handed down through our ancestry shape our appearance. Our genotypes carry the blueprint for how all facets of our body and mind will operate in tandem. Culture is also a derivative of our ancestry. Contemporaneously, culture is reflective of the customs and traditions specific to the microcosms of our own families, whereby shared practices and beliefs are reinforced amongst kindred in the same communal space. These aspects show the scope of influence that DNA and familial culture can have on who we become. Just as genetic traits and culture influence who we are physically. Our spiritual pedigree is to make a lasting impression on us as well.

DNA composes the building blocks of who we are; likewise our spiritual composition reflects our familial bond with God. As God calls an individual (John 6:44), upon repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38) and the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17), one receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. In receiving the Holy Spirit, the spiritual gestation begins in an individual whereby one starts to take on the character and moral outlook of God (Romans 12:2), ultimately leading to attaining a whole new spiritual composition.

Christ explained this process in a conversation with Nicodemus, one of the religious leaders of his day, who had privately approached him in confidence.

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”

Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:3–8, NKJV throughout unless otherwise indicated).

Christ compares this spiritual process of development to its physical counterpart of birth. Christ explains to Nicodemus that essentially the process of being born must be done over. However, this time, instead of the building blocks of amino acids and DNA, the genetic material will be spirit. Christ referred to this gestation period as being born again—a phrase which many have incorrectly attributed to a state of mind rather than to a literal transition in the future.

Paul also described the same gestation period and the corresponding birth that Christ spoke of.

“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:50–53).

As we reengage our relationship with God, we find ourselves challenged with shedding one culture that presently defines us for a new culture that reinvents us as we take on the mind of God. One example of traversing from one culture to another can be found in the experience of a young woman, Kamiyah Mobley.

On July 10, 1998, Kamiyah Mobley was abducted from a Florida hospital

eight hours after her birth. She was raised by her female abductor who had no association with Kamiyah’s biological family. The abductor raised Kamiyah as her own under a different name. In January of 2017, Kamiyah was located and identified by DNA testing. Kamiyah had been separated from her biological family for 18 years. In being reunited with her biological family Kamiyah faced the challenge of having to shift from one family paradigm to another family paradigm.

Likewise, in our spiritual development, part of the conversion in going from flesh to spirit involves a shift in the culture that we identify with—just as Kamiyah had to orient transitioning from the family culture of her abductor to the family culture of her biological family. So, we must change from the culture and mindset of this world to the culture and mindset of God. During the spiritual development process, in the spiritual gestation period, we are taking on the spiritual culture of God and shedding a physical orientation and morality. This morality of man is a culture that is diametrically opposed to the culture of God (Romans 8:7).

Paul explains the contrast between the two cultures,

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:12–14, KJV).

Paul acknowledges the differences in the two schools of thought. He further elaborates on the need to shift from one standard to another in our spiritual development, in yet an additional passage.

“With the Lord’s authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because

they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him. They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity.

“But that isn’t what you learned about Christ. Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy” (Ephesians 4:17–24, NLT).

We are tasked with adopting God’s culture into our thinking and behavior in lieu of the culture of the world that we were raised with. In so doing, we will come to behave and ultimately look like our natural progenitor, God.

Genealogy does indeed influence our present and our future, as our spiritual DNA comes from God. Our spiritual genealogy is validated by God imparting His Spirit to us, thereby affording us promising things to come. Having been sired by God, we embark upon the spiritual maturation process, during which time God’s Spirit transforms our minds as we transition from our default carnal mindset to a mindset governed by God’s culture—a culture where we identify as sons and daughters of God. The apostle John called upon us to recognize who we are in his writings to the church.

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:1–3).

Under the auspices of God have we received such positive affirmations. So, let us be thankful for our spiritual lineage, grateful for our spiritual heritage, honored by our spiritual pedigree, eager to reflect what God is in character and aesthetically, and proud to be sons and daughters of God.



# In Loving Memory

*But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18).*

## James E. Barnes January 29, 1943 – August 9, 2019

LAKELAND, FLORIDA—On Friday, August 9, 2019, James E. Barnes, Sr. passed away at Lakeland Regional Medical Center with his loving family by his side.

James was born in Bassett, Arkansas on January 29, 1943 to parents Lillie Irene Smith (Kelly) and James Robert Barnes (Arab, Alabama). He had been a resident of Polk County, Florida for over 65 years.

He was survived in death by his wife of 54 years, Shirley Bowers Barnes; his two children, Pamela Barnes and James E. Barnes Jr. (Lisa Neely Barnes); three grandchildren, Jay Barnes, Heather Barnes, and Gavin Chastain; brothers, Jerry (Helen), O'Neal (Sharon), Donnie (Debbie), and David (Pansy); sisters, Stella (Gene), Wanda, and Donna (John); and numerous nieces and nephews.

His sisters, Marva (M.C.) and Joan (John) preceded him in death.

James was a deacon and longtime member of the Church of God International



James Barnes

in Auburndale, Florida. He enjoyed attending church every Sabbath and was an avid reader of his Bible. He found great joy in speaking about Christ with others.

He was a Boilermaker with Local #433, and had received his 50-years-of-service pin. He enjoyed a great camaraderie with his fellow Boilermakers and took great pride in his work. After retirement he stayed busy with his tractors and heavy equipment. He enjoyed working on his land and seeing to his cows and dogs. He spent many hours riding his land on his all-terrain vehicles with his wife. Most times you would find him in the outdoors enjoying God's creation.

One of his greatest loves was for his wife and family. James was the oldest son of 10 children, so family was very important to him.

James and Shirley spent 54 years together in a strong marriage that centered around God and family. Shirley was his constant companion and helpmate. James was a friend to all and will be missed greatly by all who knew him.

## James Howard Pollitte (March 22, 1941 – January 8, 2020)

JAMES HOWARD POLLITTE, 78, an ordained minister with the Church of God International, died on January 8, 2020, at his home in Maysville, KY.

James attended the University of Kentucky and was a graduate of the Eastern Kentucky University where he received his Bachelor Degree. He was the owner and operator of the Maysville Surveying and Engineering Company.

James was born in Harlan, Kentucky on March 22, 1941, the son of the late William Howard Pollitte and Lillian Broyles Pollitte.

Survivors include his wife, Carol Pollitte; his brother, Richard Aaron Pollitte of Maysville; his sister, Rebecca Todd (Henry) of Tampa, FL; several nieces and nephews; and many cousins.

All of us who knew and loved James are truly saddened by his passing. His life reminds us of how a Christian lives and the power of loving God and each other. James and Carol were drawn to the CGI through a special meeting in Indianapolis in the 1980s. That particular day represented a "Damascus Road" conversion for them. They felt compelled to seek fellowship and become a part of the Church. They learned there was a congregation about an hour from their home, one pastured by Bob Tackett. This began decades of wonderful friendships that provided an introduction to the responsibilities of



James and Carol Pollitte

ministering. James was mentored by Bob, having been received and loved by the Morehead, KY congregation. It wasn't too long until it was obvious that James was gifted to serve as an ordained minister.

For many years Bob and James worked together. They were instrumental in finding and developing the Land-Between-the-Lakes Feast site, a location we currently use. James also served on the CGI Board of Directors. His financial insights and his approach to serving were vital to the success of the mission of our Church.

James was a pillar of hope against the winds and rains that occasionally stormed against the Church. He was intrinsically convinced that God would have His way and "everything would work out okay." His assurances proved to be right.

James was a friend to just about everyone he met. He was without guile, possessed of a gentleness born from discipleship. We know from the Bible that in Jesus' day one of His disciples was James. We know from our experience that Jesus has another disciple named James. That James, our James, has fallen asleep in Christ and awaits the resurrection of the saints. Those of us who knew James have been richly blessed by his friendship and made better through his influence. We miss him. He will forever be remembered by those whose lives he touched.

## Remembering Pastor James Pollitte

On January 8, 2020, 8:00 a.m., I received a telephone call to inform me our beloved pastor, James Howard Pollitte, age 78, had passed away.

James became a member of CGI in 1985. He was later ordained and assisted Mr. Bob Tackett with his pastoral duties and as coordinator for the Feast of Tabernacles at Land Between The Lakes, Kentucky. He later accepted full responsibility for both.

To those who did not have the pleasure of knowing James I can only let you know him through my personal experience.

When I came into the Church I first received a letter giving meeting place and time details. James Pollitte signed that letter. When I walked into that meeting place the first time it was James' smiling face and warm hello that greeted me. That was the summer of 2004. James never changed.

Over the years I had many petty questions that I took to James for answers. Sometimes, upon hearing my questions, he would tell me to do what I thought was right. He didn't have a Scripture reference for it, and at times it frustrated me. But James was teaching me that with God's help I was changing my life

and I must study, learn, and take responsibility for my decisions. But he would help me understand Scripture. He was kind enough to let me know if and when he saw a difference in me for the better.

Our friendship included lots of talk about University of Kentucky (UK) basketball. We were both avid fans. James had some really interesting stories from his time at UK and the basketball team under Coach Rupp. We also enjoyed giving each other a hard time. Sometimes a visitor took my kidding for disrespect, but James knew better and would reassure them. Most, but not all of the time, James being James, would let me get the better of him. He enjoyed a good joke.

James will always be remembered as our pastor of the Morehead, Kentucky Church of God International congregation. But he was more than that. He was our friend. I'm a few years older than James and we always kidded that he would never catch me. How I wish that wasn't true. Maybe I should just spend this extra time being better. Just trying to catch up and be more like James.

James was short in height, but it will take a big man to fill his shoes. Needless to say, our congregation loved and respected Pastor James Pollitte.

Submitted by Alice Edwards Lauria



# CGI Summer Family Retreat

Medina, OH  
July 23-26

**spark** *the interest*

**ignite** *the passion*

**infuse** *the spirit*





The Church of God International is pleased to announce that our first ever 2020 Family Summer Retreat will take place at our Medina, Ohio church July 23–26. Come join us as we re-energize our youth programs. Hotel accommodations will be at the Holiday Inn Express for the special rate of only \$99 per night. To make reservations please call **330-722-6006** and reference that you are with the Church of God International.

There will be classes to spark the interest of children up to age 12, interactive studies to ignite the passion for teens 13–18, and dynamic workshops to infuse the spirit of young adults 18–30. We are also planning interactive games, a family outing at Hinckley Lake, family-sized inflatables, Family PEP (Praise, Education, and Prayer) services, and more.

All activities and all meals from Thursday dinner to Sunday breakfast will be provided at no additional cost to your family! Please make plans to join us this year at the 2020 Family Summer Retreat. Please register at **cgi.org/fsr** to let us know that you will be attending, would like to volunteer to help, and to receive **Family Summer Retreat** email updates.

Church of God International, Medina  
3398 OLD WEYMOUTH RD  
MEDINA, OH 44256

Holiday Inn Express  
5185 GATEWAY DRIVE  
MEDINA, OHIO 44256



**THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS**  
**3900 TIMMS ST., TYLER, TEXAS 75701**  
Published by The Church of God International  
[www.cgi.org](http://www.cgi.org)

NON-PROFIT ORG  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
Texas 75701  
Permit No. 254

## Spring Issue

Check us out on the Web: [www.cgi.org](http://www.cgi.org)