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Grace and Truth



# Inside

## 2015: Crossroads

### ARTICLES



- 4 Wings | Jason Overman
- 8 Jesus Medley | Willard Hawkins, Roy Keim, Ken Lawson, Roy Marrs, Lázaro Gutierrez, Dale Lawson
- 11 Grace and Truth Quest | Israel Steinmetz
- 12 How Can I Decide What's Right? | Marion Duckworth
- 14 Just Us | Kristina M. Santos
- 15 Potpourri on Grace
- 16 The Puzzle and the Balance
- 18 The Ultimate Question
- 19 Been Thinkin' | Calvin Burrell
- 20 50 Years of Change | Calvin Burrell

### DEPARTMENTS

- 3 First Word — 2015: Best Year Ever!
- 7 Questions & Answers
- 20 Viewpoint — Church at the Crossroads
- 24 Mail Bag
- 30 International Congress — South America
- 31 Last Word — Our Psychology

### COG7 IN ACTION

- 26 NAWM, SWORD, and more

### Scripture quotations

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## 2015: Best Year Ever!

If you've read this page the past seventeen years, maybe you've noticed us trying to steer a positive path for tomorrow. I've never liked to paint the future very dark: My children (three) and grandchildren (sixteen) have to live in it. This year — my 72<sup>nd</sup> — may be my last at this desk, and I'm not trading my high hopes for anything less now.

So why should we think that 2015 could be the best year ever?

- Reading, hearing, and serving with missions in 2014, I've learned that much good ministry has happened and is happening around the world — much more than most of us know about — to complete Christ's Great Commission and prepare for His return (Matthew 24:14). Church, let's do our part to move this momentum forward! My family and I didn't get pumped about missions until we invested some time, talent, and treasure in it. The same can be true for you and yours.

Yes, it's also true that plenty of bad stuff is happening in our world, calling for concerted efforts from Christians who care. As Jesus our Lord did, let's do all the good we can to relieve human misery in 2015. That will make a good year better, for sure.

- Reflecting on how good stuff gets done, I've learned that life-changing prayers are measured more by their tenacity and audacity than by the clock or knee-wear. From a book read repeatedly in 2014 (ten minutes daily), I've learned dozens of insights and incentives for prayer, including this one: "If you want God to do something new in your life, you cannot keep doing the same old thing" (Mark Batterson, *Draw the Circle: The 40 Day Prayer Challenge*, p. 149). Let's pray some fresh, tenacious prayers for our families and our churches in 2015, and get ready for your best year yet.

- Watching CoG7 ride the shoals and rapids of recent years, I see us growing in the grace of Jesus toward each other and toward all people. In the year ahead, we'll have great opportunities to practice what we've preached: faith as a firm foundation for all that makes today worth living, hope that looks forward to a brighter tomorrow, and love that suffers long but never fails.

Will we be up to the test this year brings? By God's grace, we will.

— Calvin Burrell





# Wings

Longing to soar? There is  
a way to newer heights.  
by Jason Overman

I have always wanted to fly. But I lack the wings.

I envy the birds and bees and butterflies that take no thought for gravity. That fundamental force that grounds me is no obstacle for them. With delightful freedom they soar and dip and glide in spite of it.

I look up and marvel at the twin miracle that sits upon their backs. How can it be — those delicate pairs of feather and fiber and filament that lift skyward and defy the earth below. It must be God's doing.

We all wish to fly, to bridge the distance between here and heaven. But had we wings.

Perhaps God will give us some.

## Lord of flight

Fancies of flight have captured human imagination from time immemorial. It's no wonder that the imagery of flight finds profound use in God's Word. The Creator of the wonderful wing is the Lord of flight. He calls us to fly with Him.

The day Israel found herself at the foot of Mount Sinai, Yahweh reminded that newly redeemed host how bondage miraculously gave way to freedom. He described it like this: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself" (Exodus 19:4).

Forty years later the Lord would take up the metaphor again, offering an intimate picture of His tireless dedication to Israel, like a protective mother bird:

For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance. . . . As an

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eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the Lord alone led him . . . (Deuteronomy 32:9, 11, 12a).

Prophets old and new go further, extending the flight metaphor to God's people directly:

But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:31).

The dragon . . . persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent (Revelation 12:13, 14).

God not only carries us on His wings but also promises wings of their own to the patient and the persecuted. But what are these wings, this flight? Spiritually speaking, what do these wings of flight represent?

The contexts of these passages provide important clues. Divinely initiated deliverance and direction, strength and security are bestowed upon people in bondage, in trouble, in distress, in need. These blessed wings — our flight — are a rich and colorful way of expressing the means and experience of God's salvation. In the Spirit, in our songs of salvation, we fly already and will fly further still.

### Mercy and truth

When I think of the wings of God and the flight of salvation,

I can't help but ponder a particular pair of God's attributes. Like wings, they are twins, often found together side by side. In Scripture they are the essential, fundamental disposition of God toward His people. They are His wings — and ours, if we accept them.

This lofty pair of biblical words is *mercy* and *truth*.

When two items are set side by side, we are tempted to compare and contrast, elevate one over the other, and treat them as either/or. When it comes to wings, that will not do. We cannot say that one wing is half as good as two. One wing will not get the job done at all. When it comes to flying, you need left and right. Both are indispensable, or we never get off the ground. We flap in circles.

The same goes for *mercy* and *truth* — two words that go together. David sings that very idea: "Mercy and truth have met together" (Psalm 85:10a). That these two words are complementary, a sort of divine couple, is subtly reinforced by the fact that in Hebrew the first is a masculine noun, while the second is feminine. But the best evidence they are meant for each other is in the gospel, where the two are

intimately present again in the incarnation of the divine Word:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:14, 17).

Consider this choice of words. Of all divine characteristics the Son of God would embody, God's "grace and truth" are chosen as supremely representative of His person, the very qualities that are celebrated together again and again when Israel turns to God in praise and petition.

The "grace and truth" in John 1 and the Greek New Testament correspond to the Hebrew words *hesed* and *emet* in the Old Testament. In the old King James Bible (and NKJV) these are most often translated "mercy and truth" (see Psalm 100:5).

*Hesed* is a robust word that no single English word quite captures, as seen in the many English words used for it: *mercy*, *love*, *kindness*, and *goodness* are the most common. *Hesed* is the very essence of eternal God and encapsulates Yahweh's passionate covenant love for His people. His

The Creator of the wonderful wing is the Lord of flight. He calls us to fly with Him.



merciful, gracious love cannot be beaten or broken. It's an abiding and relentless love that seeks to save, restore, and bless His creation.

Its counterpart, the other divine wing, is *emet*, usually translated "truth" or "faithfulness." *Emet* is not first about *propositional* truth — truth as opposed to error, though that is an important part of it. It is first about truth in the *relational* sense, as in a husband who is true or faithful to his wife. *Emet* speaks of Yahweh's steadfast covenant faithfulness toward His people. God is true in His very person; therefore, His promises and commands are reliable and right.

Jointly, "mercy and truth" gather together all that Israel has come to know as most important about the God who has called and named her as His own. God is merciful. God is truthful. This is what Israel has learned. Therefore, God is to be trusted. God is to be obeyed. Most of all, because God is in no way cruel or capricious, He can be loved. Israel has learned to love God by God's own love.

If ever there were divine wings, it is these two: *hesed* and *emet*, mercy and truth. By these, God Most High flies and we fly

with Him. And something to this very effect is found in Israel's songs of faith, beginning all the way back with Father Abraham (Genesis 24:27) and again at Mount Sinai with God's self-disclosure to Moses (Exodus 34:6). In these seminal passages we learn that mercy and truth are who God is and what God does.

But it is in the insightful poetry of David that divine mercy and truth take on the winged language of flight. The metaphoric language of Psalms 36 and 57, for instance, sings this anthem of God's mercy and truth inhabiting heaven even as David trusts under the shadow of His wings:

Your mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the great mountains; Your judgments are a great deep; O Lord, You preserve man and beast. How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings (36:5-7).

Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; and in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, until these calamities have passed by . . . . God shall send forth His

mercy and His truth. . . . I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing to You among the nations. For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens, and Your truth unto the cloud (57:1, 3b, 9, 10).

When David reflects on God's mercy and truth, His loving-kindness and faithfulness, when he praises the Most High who delivers us and directs us by these, he paints a dramatic picture of flight, of the wings of God and His sending mercy and truth to the rescue from on high. They soar from the clouds, above the confines of earth and the limits of man, to redeem those about to be swallowed by destruction and despair.

These and other texts from Israel's Scriptures reach beyond historical experience and capture a longing that anticipates the ultimate work of God's mercy and truth, which would be embodied in, and revealed through, the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ. Many writers of old leaned forward toward this fulfillment:

He has remembered His mercy and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God (Psalm 98:3).

In mercy and truth atonement is provided for iniquity . . . (Proverbs 16:6).

You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Abraham, which You have sworn to our fathers from days of old (Micah 7:20).

Is there a better way to describe the salvation wrought in Jesus Christ? The Only Begotten, full of grace and truth, has declared the God of Abraham and

*continued on page 24*



**G**od is merciful. God is truthful. This is what Israel has learned. Therefore, God is to be trusted. God is to be obeyed.

# Questions & Answers



**We** are saved because we believe Jesus is the Son of God. How were people saved before Christ's birth, death, and resurrection?

**This** is a very insightful question. You are correct that salvation comes only through faith in Christ, according to these verses:

- "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

- "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

- "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

These are only a few of the texts that show the exclusivity of salvation in, through, and by Jesus Christ.

A simple analogy may help explain how people were saved before Christ. If you purchased a house tomorrow by signing the papers and recording the legal documents with the proper authorities, would you be allowed to move in before the house was fully paid, or only after? The answer, of course, is before. You are at liberty to move in based on a signed contract, even though the house has not been paid for nor has even one payment been made. Amazing! That's the power of a signature and contract law.

Well, God made a promise. He signed on the dotted line, if you will. He made a promise that is far more powerful than any man-made contract. Before time began, God promised that He would give eternal life through His Son to all those who believe (Titus 1:2). Based upon this promise of the coming Savior (Revelation 13:8; Romans 3:24, 25; Hebrews 9:15), God dealt with His people mercifully as though their debt of sin had been paid in full through the future redemptive work of Jesus. Hallelujah!

God who cannot lie nor be stopped, who opens and no one shuts and shuts and no one opens, who works and no one reverses, and who purposes and no one can annul, knew He would provide the payment for the debt of sin, and thus interacted with humanity based upon that reality. In short, God did not impute the sins of Old Testament saints against them — based on the future work of Christ (Romans 4:8).

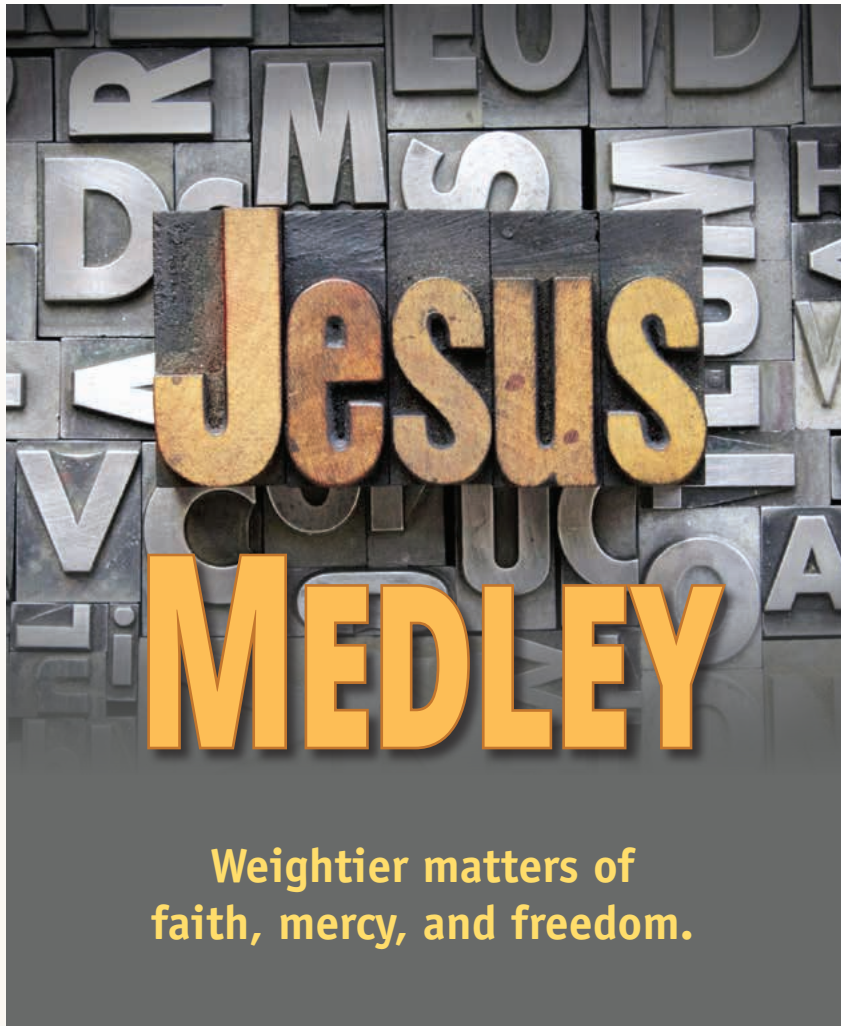
It is critical to understand that those saints, while their understanding was limited, did have a basic understanding of the need for redemption and of the coming Savior (Hebrews 11:13, 6; Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 53; Psalm 130:3; Job 19:25). Like New Testament saints, they are saved only through the blood of Christ. The salient point here is that God interacted with Old Testament saints based upon the following two realities: 1) His unstoppable and sure promise to send the Savior and 2) their faith in the coming Savior (even though that faith was incomplete).

The significance here — and the challenge — is to understand that salvation is by faith in Christ alone, and yet Jesus' work of redemption was, in a legal sense, applied to Old Testament saints who had faith in the living God and in His Word (John 1:1, 14).

We affirm, then, that Christ is the key to salvation and that faith is the key to Christ. Note the connection between Abraham's faith and righteousness (salvation): "He believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).

Yes, there has always been only one way of salvation: namely, by faith in God as Savior! There have never been two salvific systems — one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles, or one for the Old Testament and one for the New Testament. Many people confuse the purpose and role of the old covenant as redemptive, which it is not (Galatians 2:21).

— *Pastor Greg Lincoln  
Harrisburg, OR*



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asked if they could take my family out for lunch the next Sabbath. Because of poor health, his wife couldn't prepare a meal for our family. "No, thank you," I said. "I'm not comfortable eating out on Sabbath." But I was OK with my wife or someone else slaving over a hot stove to fix a meal on the Sabbath.

Later it hit me hard what I had done. I was a Pharisee. I had denied this wonderful Christian couple some fellowship they wished for.

At retirement, my wife and I moved to Colorado's Western Slope. With no CoG7 near, we fellowshipped with other Sabbathkeepers. Observing these well-intended people wrestle over law, I got a clearer grip on God's grace and fully realized who I had been the first half of my Christian life: a Pharisee of the Pharisees.

I have come to a firm conclusion that we are saved by grace alone (John 1:17; Ephesians 2:8, 9). Sometimes I shout, "Hallelujah!" Sometimes I weep with joy when I think of God's amazing grace. This is the abundant life Jesus promised.

— Willard Hawkins  
Evans, CO

## Abundant Life

Jesus came so we could have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10b). "I am the good shepherd," He said (v. 14). The desire of all good shepherds is that their sheep have abundant life — good pasture for grazing, plenty of water, protection, etc. The more we understand God's grace, the greater our abundant life in Jesus. "Grace for grace" in John 1:16 means it is continuous.

God's grace does not make sense to our human thinking. After wasting all his possessions, the prodigal son came to his senses and came home to a lov-

ing father who showered him with love and gifts. That's God's grace!

Raised in CoG7, I accepted Jesus at age 16, was baptized, and became a member. I have great respect for my minister-father and other early leaders of our church. Becoming an adult, I began to question some things. When I realized I could not improve on God's grace by my works, I was ready to enter into the abundant life in Christ, and what a blessing it has been! God's grace was the missing truth in the first one hundred-plus years of our church history.

I became aware of my legalism when an elderly couple

## Principles of Grace

Grace is free (Romans 5:16, 17; 6:23). Though often used as an excuse, this is an important property of grace.

Since it's free, none of the following can be used to gain grace: absolute obedience, understanding all doctrine, holy living, personal achievement,



buying grace, earning it, stealing it, or even petitioning the Lord for it. Because grace is free and universal, you either accept it or reject it. Nothing else works. In accepting Christ as your Savior, you get grace (John 1:17)!

When we accept Christ, we want to become like Him and are transformed to obey the laws and judgments set down by the Father. These laws and judgments cannot be lightly violated without serious consequences. Thus grace is the undoing of sin (Romans 6; 1 John 3:3-24).

Another important principle in understanding grace is humility. The more we humble ourselves, the more grace God gives (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5, 6). Those who struggle against evil are assured by this that they have access to the Lord's abundant grace.

Grace internalizes God's love within us — a miraculous concept. To give the full details of grace and how all parts of the concept are interrelated would require a complete volume. After giving this a lot of thought, my best effort is to define *grace* as the power of the Holy Spirit working through His divine presence and internalizing the love of God in our hearts so that we can externalize His love to our fellowman.

— Roy Keim  
Dodge, TX

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## Truth About Freedom

**F**reedom is a good word. In this land we have intense feelings about freedom. Our nation's

most important documents declare our intent to be a free and independent people.

Personal political liberty in the US is not the most important freedom. If this country somehow lost its freedom, would your faith be weakened or destroyed? Or, in your mind and soul, would you retain the best freedom?

Jesus outlined that greatest freedom: "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36, NIV). Earlier, He told us what we need to be free from: "Everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (v. 34, NIV).

Jesus did not die on the cross so people can live in political freedom in America. He shed His blood to give us freedom from sin. By faith in Him, we are free from the tyranny of our enemy the Devil! Helped by the Spirit of Christ, we can choose to live in His full and precious freedom.

Truth sets us free! God's grace sets us free! The Holy Spirit's power keeps us free! Our Lord Jesus Christ did the work that makes us free indeed. Free from the tyranny of the serpent's lies. Free from the old covenant legalism and ritual. Free to live without the tangling slavery of sin. Free to live in heartfelt joy, exuberant hope, guaranteed assurance of eternal salvation! Every day of our "free" lives, we

should get on our knees and thank the One who fought and died for our true freedom. Thank You, Jesus!

— Ken Lawson  
Cottage Grove, MN

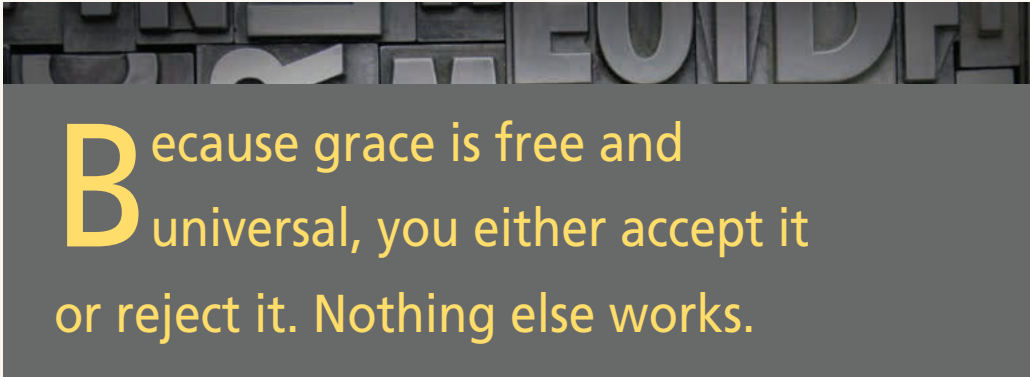
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## Fullness of Grace

**W**hen John says that the *only* begotten Son of the Father is "full of grace and truth" (1:14), he is saying, by implication, that God's *other* sons are not full of grace and truth. Only God's *begotten* Son is full of those characteristics. He also implies that Christ's being full of grace and truth leaves no room for ungraciousness or falsehood in Him.

When John says that we have all received "of His fullness" and "grace for grace" (v. 16), I think it means becoming more like Christ, becoming more truthful and gracious. As Christians exchange our worldly grace for godly grace, we become more like Him. He is where we get any graciousness that we may have.

— Roy Marrs  
Lodi, CA



**B**ecause grace is free and universal, you either accept it or reject it. Nothing else works.

## Amazing Grace

I am grateful to write on this wonderful topic from John 1:14: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father . . .” — especially on the final part of the text: “full of grace and truth” (NIV).

The Father’s love for His creation was expressed before our fall in the garden, and after it. God made His love real in human form: His Son Jesus Christ! Even now, if we breathe, it is by His grace and truth. Thank You, Lord, for the ultimate expression of Your great love!

The amazing but difficult thing to explain is this transition from the infinite (God) to the finite (man), from the eternal to the non-eternal (time), and from the invisible to the visible. In this transition, this incarnation, we see more clearly the divine salvation. No other angel, human, or creature could do this.

The divine-to-human transaction still happens today, through our own encounters with God through Jesus. Only in this will we truly see God’s grace in the way, the truth, and the life!

“Full of grace and truth” shows

perfect balance. Grace can never separate from truth, nor can truth be apart from the ineffable grace of God. Glory to God!

— Lázaro Gutierrez  
El Paso, TX

## Jesus, God’s Gift

Having no merit at all, we were redeemed from sin by the sacrifice of God’s perfect Lamb. Because the wages of sin is death (and all have sinned), that sacrifice brings us trembling to the cross of Calvary. We think about it, sing about it, and tell about it. The broad brush of Christ’s blood covered the apostles, who carried His kingdom message. It covered the thief who died on the cross beside our Savior. The brush of grace was inclusive of crooked tax collectors, prostitutes, a despised Samaritan woman, self-righteous Jewish leaders, and sinners of every other kind.

Through the ages, this grace has been and will be experienced over and over until the day that John describes like this: “Behold, a great multitude *which no one could number*, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the

throne and before the Lamb . . . crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (Revelation 7:9, 10).

The brush of His grace through Jesus is unlimited for those who kneel at His feet. The title of the wonderful hymn, “His Grace Reaches Me,” personalizes the phenomenon of every repentant sinner being saved by grace. That grace is the reason for the joy that floods our heart and increases its rate when we sing all manner of “Amazing Grace.”

The thought of Jesus being “full of truth” comes into sharp focus when He says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). This much is clear: Jesus is the only way to the Father.

Even in some “Christian” circles, the thought today is that one may connect with God through any of the great world religions. The reality, however, is that Christ is the only true access we have. This gives urgency to His Great Commission to preach the gospel around the world, because “he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15, 16).

“Full of truth” has another important meaning: Not only is Christ the embodiment of God’s truth, but every word He spoke and every sermon He preached is absolutely true. No false thing or false word is in Him. We can count on His word to put us on the right path. Any other path is wrong. **BA**

— Dale Lawson  
Turner, OR

“Full of grace and truth” shows perfect balance. Grace can never separate from truth, nor can truth be apart from the ineffable grace of God.

# GRACE AND TRUTH QUEST

Insights from Israel Steinmetz

**Q** What does John mean when he says the only begotten Son of the Father is “full of grace and truth” (1:14)?

To fully appreciate John’s words, go back to Exodus 33-34. There Moses asked God to reveal His glory (33:18). God honored Moses’ request, passing before him and declaring His attributes, including that He is “abounding in lovingkindness and truth” (34:6, NASB throughout). This is synonymous with John’s description of Jesus being “full of grace and truth.” It is the centerpiece of John’s claim that when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, the glory of the Father’s only begotten was seen (John 1:14, cf. Exodus 25:8; 40:34) and the unseen God was revealed (John 1:18). It is John’s way of saying what Jesus later told Philip: “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (14:9). When John says God’s only begotten Son was “full of grace and truth,” I believe he restates what he said in the opening line of his Gospel – that this incarnate Word is God himself.

**Q** What does it mean to receive “of His fullness” (John 1:16)? What does “grace for grace” in that verse mean?

Again, we are called back to Exodus 33-34, where Moses saw God’s glory, but in *limited* fashion. Moses was hidden in a cave; God didn’t reveal His *face* but covered the cave’s open-

ing with His *hand*, allowing His *backside* to be seen (33:21-23). This language indicates the *limited* nature of God’s revelation to Moses. Conversely, Jesus represents the *full* revelation of God’s glory on earth. “Full of grace and truth,” Jesus is the embodiment of all that God is. As Paul says, “In Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9). Unlike the prior messengers and means of God’s *partial* revelation, Jesus is the “radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature” (Hebrews 1:1-3).

Those who recognize Jesus as the fullness of God in human flesh receive “grace upon grace” (John 1:16). That is, they receive grace without end from an unlimited supply. New Testament scholar F. F. Bruce compares this to an ocean: “This plenitude of divine glory and goodness which resides in Christ (cf. Col. 1:19; 2:9) is an ocean from which all his people may draw without ever diminishing its content . . . What the followers of Christ draw from the ocean of divine fulness is grace upon grace – one wave of grace being constantly replaced by a fresh one. There is no limit to the supply of grace which God has placed at his people’s disposal in Christ” (*The Gospel of John*, p. 43).

**Q** In what way did “grace and truth come through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17)?

The God who is “abounding in lovingkindness and truth” (Exodus 34:6) only partially revealed Himself in the covenant given through Moses (i.e., the law). This covenant was temporary (as emphasized in Hebrews 8, 9, and 10) and ultimately functioned to lead God’s people to Messiah (Galatians 3:24). When this Messiah arrived, He embodied the full revelation of God’s glory, the full complement of grace and truth. What was only shadowy and dim in the law was now full and radiant in Jesus the Messiah!

By contrasting what came through Moses (the law) with what came through Jesus Christ (grace and truth), John is contrasting the old covenant with the new, the former prophet with the final Prophet. This contrast continues throughout John’s Gospel as Jesus reveals Himself to be the fulfillment of all that God did in the old covenant. John 1:17 cautions us against associating the “truth” revealed in Jesus with the “law” given through Moses. “Truth” in John’s Gospel never refers to the content of the law, but rather to the Person (e.g., 14:6) and doctrine (e.g., 5:33; 8:40-46; 18:37) of Jesus,\* who fully reveals the “grace and truth” of God. This goes far beyond what was revealed through Moses to a new and better covenant in Christ. **BA**

\* On rare occasions in John, *truth* refers generically to factual information.

# How Can I Decide What's Right?



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God helps us bring His truth into daily decisions.  
**by Marion Duckworth**

A middle-aged woman should *know* how to make good moral choices. Then why, I asked myself, was I having so many problems?

I didn't face everyday issues that required mental gymnastics. It was obviously wrong to take merchandise home from the store where I worked without paying for it. Both God's law and man's law forbid stealing. It was also wrong to take God's name in vain or slander my neighbor; the Bible warned against it.

But what about moral issues not addressed in the Bible? For example, how did I decide which television shows, films, and videos to watch? Which books to read? How to spend my money?

## Great Commandment

I hadn't come up with a way to make such decisions when my husband and I moved away for three months to begin a church. During our absence, a woman's group offered to take over my ministry in a nursing home where many residents were mentally challenged.

When we returned, a representative of that group told me, "We've decided not to do this anymore." When I asked why, her answer shocked me. "Because you can't evangelize those people."

For weeks, her answer reverberated in my head. Was she right? Had I been wasting my time? I prayed, searched the Scriptures, and reflected on what I read. One thing I realized right away: Nursing home residents *could* respond to Jesus' invitation to become children of God. On one of my visits, a mentally challenged young man picked up his Bible and held it out. "This book tells about Jesus Christ. If we accept Him, we'll live with Him for eternity."

I also knew that not all New Testament ministries were evangelistic. Didn't Jesus himself heal bodies as well as souls? Hadn't the apostles chosen deacons to handle the daily distribution of food (Acts 6:1-6)? Wasn't Dorcas described as someone who was always doing good and helping the poor (9:36)?

Still, nursing homes didn't exist in Bible times. As I studied and reflected, I realized that while the Bible doesn't give specific commandments for every decision we make, it does give principles or general statements that apply in various cultures throughout the centuries.

The Great Commandment was the one I knew best: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). Wasn't I trying to love my neighbors in the nurs-

ing home by visiting them and baking birthday cakes?

Based on that biblical principle and others, I continued my nursing home ministry. But I realized that by forcing me to decide about its legitimacy, God had taught me a valuable lesson. The way to make moral choices that weren't spelled out in Scripture was to find an appropriate biblical principle and act on it.

Would I always reach an absolutely correct conclusion? Maybe not. My responsibility was only to decide honestly and prayerfully and keep listening to the Holy Spirit.

### Golden Rule

God gave me another opportunity to follow that course. In the store where I worked, we received European-style bread in twenty-pound loaves, cut it up, and sold it by the pound. Since we received it every two weeks, I began to worry that, even though it did have a longer shelf life than the ordinary kind, maybe I was selling stale bread.

I decided to say something to my supervisor, though it could cost me my job. First, I found the biblical principle in the Golden Rule: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

If I put myself in the customer's place, would I want to buy bread that the salesclerk no longer considered fresh? Would that be doing to others what I would want them to do to me? The answer was obvious.

Before I could act on my decision, my supervisor told me to throw away the bread when I decided it was no longer fit to be sold. I didn't have to endure the painful consequences of standing on a conviction.

### Scripture search

I know now that God hasn't left us to guess the right thing to do if the subject isn't directly addressed in His Word. When a new moral issue arises, instead of simply doing what "feels right," I look up key words in my study Bible or concordance until I find an appropriate principle.

Customs may have changed throughout history, but the standard we use to determine right and wrong has not. We have God's principles to guide us and the Holy Spirit to apply them personally, so we are equipped for whatever is ahead. **BA**

#### Marion Duckworth

writes from Vancouver, WA. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



**T**he way to make moral choices that weren't spelled out in Scripture was to find an appropriate biblical principle and act on it.



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In our anti-grace world, a little love and kindness go a long way. **by Kristina M. Santos**

On a summer day I visit my mother-in-law in the nursing home. I sit beside her on the bed, holding the vanilla milkshake I've brought while she takes small sips. At ninety-eight years old, she's confined to bed and needs help eating.

Her roommate Zelma is in her wheelchair by the window, the remnants of lunch on a tray on her bedside table. The other roommate, Lela, sleeps fitfully in her bed. Now and then, she calls, "Look out . . . look out!"

Zelma pulls against her restraints, trying to get up. Her long, gray hair falls forward, hiding her face that is still pretty with its pale ivory skin and striking violet-blue eyes. She is in constant motion — tugging, bending, reaching for the bedside table.

Zelma is sometimes confused, sometimes not. She tends to mumble to herself. One of her favorite sayings is "Let's go, let's

go." She will repeat this over and over in an urgent voice. Once, in the middle of this familiar litany, I heard her pause, and then in a clear, thoughtful voice, she said, "Please, Lord, help us go."

Now my mother-in-law looks at Zelma and says, "What's she doing? Trying to get out? She makes me nervous."

I go over to sit beside Zelma. "You need anything?" I ask. "You OK?"

She looks up, stops struggling. A sweet smile lights up her face. "No, I'm OK. But stay here awhile."

So I stay. I tell her about the hot weather and how nice the air conditioner in the room feels. I compliment her slippers: leather-looking moccasins. She is pleased. Clearly she likes them.

A nurse's aide comes into the room — a friendly, gentle young woman. She tells Zelma she needs to check her vital signs. She helps her sit up straight, but then Zelma resists and refuses to give her arm for the blood pressure cuff. "I'll come back later," the aide says as she lifts the lunch tray and carries it away.

I say in a soothing voice,

"That's OK, Zelma . . . that's OK."

She snaps back, "No, it's not OK. It's not OK."

And suddenly it hits me too. It's true. All the troubles in life — Zelma's, my mother-in-law's, mine, the world's troubles. A sea of troubles all around us. I say, "You're right, Zelma. It's not OK. Life is sad, hard. Definitely not OK."

I return to my mother-in-law's bedside. We are quiet together. She drinks more milkshake. Then she asks me about some of my worries, which are some of hers too: We're awaiting results of my husband's biopsy for prostate cancer, and my son is going through a divorce. And then she says she will worry with me, which is a comfort.

A few minutes later, Zelma looks up, motions to me, and says, "Come here."

I sit beside her again. She puts her hands on the bedside table in front of her and tells me, "Put your hands here. Place all your frustrations here."

I lift my hands next to hers, lift my frustrations there, too, alongside remnants of squashed string beans and a chunk of canned peach. Tears come to my eyes.

Zelma starts talking in a friendly, dreamy voice: "We took a drive to the mountains yesterday. It was so pretty. The flowers were so pretty. The pine trees were so green."

I say, "Oh, did you go with your husband?" (The nurse told me he died some years ago. Maybe Zelma is remembering something they used to do together.) She nods and smiles. "Yes, but we didn't hike."

A gentle, whispery peace pass-

*continued on page 24*

# Potpourri on Grace

**1 home verse:** “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Genesis 6:8) — and escaped the judgment of the Flood. The next 25 Old Testament verses in which the word *grace* appears use it in the same sense: undeserved goodwill from another.

**2 definitions:**  
Grace is the unmerited favor of God — **God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.**

**3 issues to clarify:**

- Grace in salvation past. Reconciliation and rebirth came to us only by God’s grace in Christ’s death and resurrection on our behalf (Romans 3:20-26; Galatians 2:16, 21; Ephesians 2:8, 9; Titus 3:4-7).
- Grace in salvation present. Growth in grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus comes as we yield to the Holy Spirit’s work within (Romans 6:1ff; 1 Corinthians 15:10; Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:12, 13; Titus 2:11-14).
- Grace in salvation future. The finished work of Jesus for us and the Spirit’s present work in us will be consummated by God’s grace at Christ’s return (Philippians 1:6, 7b; 2 Thessalonians 2:16; 1 Peter 1:13; 5:10-12).

**4 A’s of amazing grace:**

- Abundant to sinners (1 Timothy 1:14, 15)
- Abounding more than much sin (Romans 5:20)
- Ample to suffice in human weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9a)
- Able to impart all we need for every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8)

**5 benefits to celebrate:** Grace saves us (Ephesians 2:8), teaches us (Titus 2:11-14), creates us for good works (Ephesians 2:10), empowers us with spiritual gifts to serve others (1 Corinthians 12:4ff), and makes us generous (2 Corinthians 8:1-9).

**6 texts that warn** us against abuse, misuse, or even loss of God’s grace:

- by legalism — embracing the law for justification and salvation (2 Corinthians 6:1; Galatians 2:21; 5:1-4);
- by license — rejecting or neglecting the moral law and good works (Romans 6:1-23; James 2:9-26; Hebrews 10:28, 29).

**7 splendors of grace:**  
The Bible’s presentation of grace is manifold (1 Peter 4:10b), with many shades of meaning. It can mean favor and goodwill (Genesis 6:8); empowerment and enablement (1 Corinthians 3:10; 15:10); gratitude and thanksgiving (2 Corinthians 9:15), as in a table “grace” to God or the word *gracias*. Other meanings of *grace* in Scripture include beauty-elegance-refinement, gift or generosity, and a joyous greeting. Grace is truly a many-splendored thing!

**Grace church:** In the book of Acts, church members . . .

- were saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (15:11); believed through grace (18:27); gave testimony of, and commended people to, the word and gospel of His grace (14:3, 26; 15:40; 20:24, 32); saw God’s grace and were glad (11:23); continued in grace (13:43); and great grace was upon them all (4:33)!

# The Puzzle and

The Gospel of John opens with a preamble that contains a puzzle that calls for balance. Soaring for eighteen verses, the preamble introduces us to the Word who was with God and was God in the beginning. It reaches its zenith (v. 14) by saying that this divine Word took human form (Jesus), that His glory was seen (God's Son, our Savior and Lord), and that He was "full of grace and truth."

Now *grace* is a lovely word. It has an elegant and irresistible appeal to it. More than any other word, *grace* speaks of God's love, mercy, acceptance, and forgiveness all packed into one. Sooner or later, most of us come to sense how much we need the riches of God's grace.

*Truth* is another awesome word – just as lofty but less lovely than *grace*. Echoing of all that's right, holy, just, and good, calling for justice and judgment, truth can set you free – or it can condemn you. We all want it, but not too much of it.

Some churches claim to be strong on God's truth but don't leave much room for His grace. Other churches talk a lot about grace but don't show much zeal for truth. These two words are enough different that they are often seen as mutually exclusive, if not contradictory – a paradox. How can Jesus or His followers be full of them both? That's the puzzle.

The grace-and-truth puzzle is related to, but not identical with, other Bible paradoxes. Each of the Bible pairs below is closely linked. They must be rightly distinguished, never fully separated. Here's the balance:

- Law and gospel: The law says "do"; the gospel says "done."
- Trust and obey: The gospel says "trust"; the law says "obey."
- Faith and works: The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to those who believe (i.e., have faith). Good works and obedience to the commands of God and Christ are evidence that faith is alive and working through love. We are not saved by faith *and* works but by a faith *that* works.
  - Standing, walking: We stand 100 percent right with God – justification – by faith, as Christ's righteousness is ever imputed to our account in heaven (Romans 3, 4, 5). Our walk with God – sanctification – is never 100 percent right, although Christ's righteousness is increasingly imparted to our hearts by the Spirit (Romans 6, 7, 8).
  - You are, you ought: Indicative verbs declare what God has done for us in Christ and who we are in Him (Ephesians 1, 2, 3; Colossians 1, 2). Impera-





# d the Balance



tive verbs command our response to God's grace and our walk in the Spirit (Ephesians 4, 5, 6; Colossians 3, 4).

- New covenant: Sins are forgiven in Christ and remembered against us no more (Hebrews 8:12; 10:17); God's revealed will (i.e., His commands) is written on our hearts so that we desire to obey – from the inside out (8:10; 10:16).

- Grace, works: We are saved by grace, not works; we are created for good works (Ephesians 2:8-10).

- Forgiveness, repentance: Jesus didn't condemn the sinner woman but told her, "Sin no more" (John 8:11).

Each of these has its proper place in Scripture and in life. Through careful study and thought, we can be clear about the role of each.

Like God's moral law, truth upholds all that's right, holy, just, and good. Grace finds its universal need in the reality and truth of that law, but finds its greatest glory while redefining *truth* in personal terms (see p. 18), apart from human obedience.

How do we become people of grace – of love, acceptance, and forgiveness toward others – while also becoming people of truth, pursuing the highest levels of right understanding and faithful response to God?

By practicing good balance. By holding ourselves to the highest standard, yet cutting a lot of slack for everybody else. By imitating Jesus the ultimate Man, full of grace and truth. **BA**

Truth-oriented Christians love studying Scripture and theology. But sometimes they're quick to judge and slow to forgive. They're strong on truth, weak on grace (p. 17).

Grace-oriented Christians love forgiveness and freedom. But sometimes they neglect Bible study and see moral standards as "legalism." They're strong on grace, weak on truth (p. 17).

Jesus wasn't 50 percent grace, 50 percent truth, but 100 percent grace, 100 percent truth (p. 16).

– Randy Alcorn

The Grace and Truth Paradox:  
Responding with Christlike Balance

# The Ultimate Question



Pilate asked; Jesus answered.

**B**rought before Pontius Pilate, Jesus spoke of His spiritual kingdom and bore witness to the truth (John 18:28-37).

“What is truth?” Pilate scoffed (v. 38).

This question sounds a note of deep skepticism. That note is echoed by the “wise men” of our day who conclude that no such thing as absolute truth exists — all persons have a right to their own truth.

Jesus, on the other hand, was full of truth, a word that fell often from His lips as recorded in John’s Gospel. According to Jesus, truth is connected to God the Father, to Christ the Son, to the Holy Spirit, and to the written Word in the closest possible way.

What is truth, according to Jesus in John?

• **I AM.** “I am the . . . truth

. . .” (14:6). By this we understand that truth is not mere statements of reality, not just provable facts nor accurate principles, although it encompasses these. All the above have been embodied in the Son of God — truth personified! No human brain or super-computer comprehends a tenth of all God knows. But heaven’s truth and way to eternal life become clear to those who trust and obey . . . simply Jesus. Truth is incarnate and personal!

• **The Spirit.** The Holy Spirit is “the Spirit of truth” (14:17; 15:26; 16:13). From His dwelling place within God’s people, the Helper-Comforter reminds us of the truth taught by Christ, glorifies the Son by giving us what belongs to Christ, and guides us onward into all the truth of Christ. Though its applications

are down-to-earth, truth revealed by the Spirit of truth is heavenly and spiritual indeed.

• **Your word.** Jesus said to the Father, “Your word is truth” (17:17). This statement may refer directly to the words He spoke to the Twelve (vv. 8, 14), but its wider implication is to every word that proceeds from God’s mouth. Truth has been revealed and is now recorded in Scripture for our learning.

• **Father God.** Just as the Devil is the father of lies (8:44), so God in heaven is the Father of truth. Scripture introduces us to the God who reveals Himself as true Father in heaven, as Son who spoke truly and declared Himself to be the truth on earth, and as the Holy Spirit who leads us into all truth.

Comparing other verses in John, truth is what Jesus said and told, which, when known and done (practiced), brings people to the light, sanctifies them, and sets them free in Christ (3:21; 8:32, 36, 45, 46; 16:7; 17:17, 19; 18:37). Nowhere is the gospel truth about Jesus codified and enumerated like Old Testament law; it lives in creative tension with the law and the prophets (5:45-47; 6:32-34; 8:6-8, 11; 8:56-58; 15:10).

An earnest attempt to paraphrase what the Gospel of John says about truth is compressed in the five paragraphs just above. The sure way to get at this truth is to come to Jesus for ourselves — He who was full of truth and the truth personified. Love Him, learn from Him, and continue in His light!

Or we can return to Pilate’s doubtful “What is truth?” and stumble on in darkness.

— BA



Corel Photos

by Calvin Burrell

Now that November elections have come and gone, I've been thinkin' more about public issues. Several Church friends joined us for Sabbath lunch talk recently. We shared views of current affairs and how Christians can best respond to our misguided culture, like recreational marijuana in Colorado.

I've been thinkin' about public opinion shift on morality and traditional marriage. More and more American states have approved marriage between persons of the same gender. I think the definition of marriage is a matter that rightly belongs to the church more than to the state. I'm even thinkin' civil unions for homosexuals would have been a better option for all concerned than rewriting the Genesis-old definition of marriage between one man and one woman. What do you think?

Duty-bound by Scripture and conscience not to recognize other configurations of human sexuality as true marriages, the church must be both wise and harmless in this new legal landscape. I've been hopin' more of

us Christ-followers would find ways to share faith and love with people whose sexual orientation isn't straight — like Jesus would. We do this with "straight" folks whose heterosexual lifestyle is askew. Why not learn to treat homosexuals as neighbors and friends too?

I've been thinkin' about other matters of morality. The flood of political ads in Colorado that disguised killing unborn children as "women's rights" was painful to endure. I'm thinkin', though, that public opinion has ebbed slowly toward our right-to-life view as more states have limited the "right" of late-term abortion-on-demand. Whether or not the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision (January 22, 1973) is overturned, people with convictions about the sanctity of unborn human life are being heard and are making a difference. Shouldn't we support them?

About pornography, I'm thinkin' that the public's thirst for the lewd and obscene is not likely to be slaked by more of the same. Let it be replaced instead by a thirst for something more satisfying and productive of personal well-being and social stability than this sexually salacious

society offers. Let widespread renewal of human minds and spirits happen, by the grace and Spirit of God!

And I've been thinkin' about racial equality and justice. A friend and I spent a half-day in downtown Birmingham, Alabama, recently. We visited sites and walked march routes that made news in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. This grew our understanding of, and compassion for, what many black Americans endured for a hundred years after the Civil War ended legalized slavery in this country.

Now, fifty years after the Martin Luther King era, observant and caring non-blacks agree that more progress in race relations is needed. This moral imperative is underscored by the discrepancy between African-Americans and the rest of the country regarding income levels, home ownership, and poverty. Unemployment and incarceration rates among our black citizens are about twice that of the national average.

Recalling our Lord's commands of love and the Golden Rule, shouldn't Christians be leading the efforts for equality in education, voting, and job opportunities for the most disadvantaged among us, just as Dr. King and other Christ-followers led the movement fifty years ago?

Are you thinkin' about these issues, too, with a concern for equity and justice? Don't wait until the next election. Vote now with your feet, your hands, your words, your time and treasure. Republican, Democrat, or neither: Do what you can in 2015 as the year opens before us. Do it in the name of Christ and for His kingdom's sake. **BA**



by Calvin Burrell

The Church of God (Seventh Day) of the mid-1900s differed from the Church we now experience. We should not be greatly alarmed by most of these changes. After all, living things change. When we stop changing, we're dead.

Here's how I recall the Church of my childhood (1940s, '50s):

- It was a much more rural church than today. Large congregations were in small towns like Stanberry, Missouri; Marion, Iowa; Freeland and West Olive, Michigan; or in farm communities like Bassett, Nebraska; Eureka, South Dakota; Alfred, North Dakota; Acme, Alberta; and Fairview, Oklahoma — my hometown. Few large cities had a CoG7 congregation in 1950.

- It was a church of ministers and laymen who were lovers of Scripture, well versed in the Church's distinctive doctrines like the law, Sabbath, and state of the dead. The teaching of Bible prophecy, like the return of Israel and the soon return of Christ, was common back then.

- It was a church that loved hymn singing and preaching,

whether at Sabbath services, campmeetings, or revival meetings — when our favorite preacher came for a week.

In seventy years, I've seen our beloved church move from its rural roots to the mid-sized cities and large metropolitan areas of North America, from mostly hymnbook singing to more contemporary Christian music. We've become more racially and ethnically diverse.

Though most of the Church's early doctrines are still intact, I've seen our focus on a few favorite doctrines (pagan holidays and unclean meats, for example) and on personal micro-ethics (hair-do's, card games, etc.) shift over time. We're more occupied now with weightier issues, like what is the gospel? How do we view the Church? Who is Jesus Christ? Our understanding on these issues has grown notably.

I've seen the Church move from a sect that often insulated itself from other Christians (especially from "Sundaykeepers" — could they even be saved?) to a denomination that's free to recognize and fellowship with other Christ-followers where we find them. For some, this may

recall the pain of dear friends or family who left our fellowship for one that embraces less truth, as we see it. If only we'd been more emphatic about our beliefs, about the importance of the right church, would they have stayed?

To depart from Bible accuracy is regrettable. To equate departure from a church organization with departure from Christ is even more regrettable. We now recognize that the church of the Bible is a spiritual body built by Christ — an organism, not an organization.

In the last fifty years we've also grown "in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," as 2 Peter 3:18 urges. In the Church of my childhood, we didn't hear or talk much about the g-word: grace. That has changed. More and more we see that God gives two favors we could never earn: forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Less and less do we see our obedience and personal holiness as the *root* of salvation, though they are vital as its *fruit*. No longer just people of the "whole law," we have come to value even more being people of Christ — a faith that works by love.

And who is Jesus Christ? He's all the Bible says He is: the Word before time; brightness of God's glory; express image of His person; Son of God by whom the worlds were made; Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace; Emmanuel, I AM; the crucified, resurrected, ascended, and returning One; King of kings, Savior, and Lord of all.

Thank God for an open creed that permits the Church to change together. **BA**



## Church at the Crossroads

by Israel Steinmetz

As we begin 2015, our organization is in the midst of monumental change. Three transitions are occurring that place us at an unprecedented crossroads.

Calvin Burrell has accepted a position with G. C. Missions and will step down as editor of the *Bible Advocate*, a post he has held since 1997.

In 2013 our membership called for a committee to review and propose revisions to our bylaws. A first draft of this proposal has been shared with the membership in preparation for a vote on the final draft at our 2015 convention.

Whaid Rose has announced his resignation as Conference president, effective at the 2015 convention, after serving in that role since 1997.

Monumental change indeed! To appreciate how significant a crossroads we face and to travel through it with wisdom by God's grace, we must understand what's at stake with each of these transitions.

### More than an editor

An editor need not do any more than solicit, review, and publish materials. In over seventeen years as BA editor, Calvin Burrell has done far more than this. In an era when our doctrines and church culture have evolved notably, Elder Burrell has used the BA as a platform to inform and inspire us to become a church committed to our statement of faith and effective in fulfilling our mission. His selection of writers and materials, keen eye for improving content, development of annual themes, and above all, insightful and practical writing have allowed the BA editor to provide unique *pastoral* leadership to our entire denomination. Elder Burrell's years as G. C. and NAMC president, his work at the local levels and in our schools, and his ongoing interna-

tional service distinguish him, in my eyes, among our living churchmen.

With unprecedented challenges ahead, who will fill these shoes to become the next BA editor? Print magazines must adapt to the digital age. The BA's most faithful readers and supporters are aging. Will a new generation be drawn to the BA? With cultural changes all around and new bylaws proposed within, will the BA continue to provide the information and insight needed to guide us forward together? The editor's task ahead will be different, but no less challenging. Is it time for a team approach to this enormous role?

Prayer is needed for an editor, but we also need an awakening to the fact that ministry is for more than pastors and preachers. Ministry is editing, formatting, publishing, writing, and web design. Ministry encompasses the work of the BAP staff and so much more. As our young people enter diverse emerging fields, they must be engaged to offer these talents to God in service. To move past this crossroads will require a broader vision of ministry and a recognition that we can no longer rely on so few to do so much. This relates to our structure.

### Why new bylaws?

I often compare our church's structure to a one-room farmhouse built in the late 1800s. Over time, as the family inhabiting it grew and new technologies arose, rooms and features were added on. A bedroom here, indoor plumbing there. Then a second story, now wireless Internet. No master plan guided its development. It evolved in response to the needs of the moment as each generation did its best to adapt and grow. But guiding this evolution were various driving forces, things that make up the DNA of our organization. Among these forces are

a commitment to distinctiveness, a cherishing of autonomy, and a propensity for smallness.

Our commitment to distinctiveness, both in doctrine and organization, has given us the boldness to stand apart, upholding our convictions despite what others say. But at times it has caused us to be different for the sake of being different. We have often neglected the good work of those before and around us in favor of continually reinventing the wheel. At times, we've been so committed to designing our own wheel that we've ended up with something oblong or square, and then congratulated ourselves for not making something round like everyone else!

We must take care that our commitment is first to Christ, not to distinctiveness. When our commitment to Christ requires that we be distinct from the world, or even from other Christians, then we must be distinct. But oftentimes our commitment to Christ will cause us to resemble other Christians, not only in belief but also in organizational structure. At present, our complex hybrid of church organization presents a host of problems.

The proposed bylaw revision is designed to help us move beyond some of those problems. But these beneficial changes could be derailed by accusations that we are becoming "Adventist," or worse, "Catholic." Please don't listen to this propaganda and fear-mongering. If we are to move forward, we must be willing to do what is right and best, rather than avoiding certain changes for the sake of being distinctive.

The commitment of some, both past and present, to au-

tonomy at every level poses an obstacle to positive change. I recall touring the Museum of Westward Expansion beneath the St. Louis arch and reading this journal entry by Lansford Hastings, a pioneer on an Oregon Trail wagon train in 1842: "We had proceeded only a few days travel . . . when the 'American character' was fully exhibited. All appeared determined to govern, but not to be governed."

**What you read here is published as a "Viewpoint" — one member's opinion. In two future issues, BA will publish other respectful opinions on the G. C. bylaws revision question, both pro and con. Readers may write their views on choices facing CoG7 in 2015 and submit them by January 20 (for the March-April BA) or by March 20 (for the May-June BA).**

— *Editor*

Such is the nature of autonomy: Everyone wants to be in charge, but no one wants to submit to authority. This "American character" is a far cry from the biblical model of spiritual authority that calls for leadership to practice loving oversight and followers to loyally serve. Such a model includes mutual accountability, not veto power, at every level. It allows for leaders to lead and followers to follow, rather

than the chaos in which there is no leadership and everyone does what is right in their own eyes. For us to move forward, we'll need to adopt a structure that enables us to work together, rather than pull in every direction. We need an architectural plan, rather than simply adding another dead-end hallway to the farmhouse.

Our propensity toward smallness has many causes. And the effects are not all bad. Traveling the country as I do, each place feels like home, and there are seldom too many people to greet in the span of thirty minutes following the service.

But as warm and inviting as our small, family churches may be for us, I want to encourage us to look beyond ourselves and ask some hard questions. Why have we remained so small for so long? Why do many other congregations in the US planted in the past fifty years surpass our entire denomination in membership, ministries, budget, and kingdom impact? Can we stop claiming that it's because we preach the unpopular "truth" and that growth must be a sign that others are doing something wrong? Can we humbly acknowledge that our smallness is caused by small thinking about God, His kingdom, and the power of the gospel? If we can, perhaps we'll have the courage to design a structure that empowers us to grow, rather than cling to one that keeps us small.

I am asking us to be willing to change and build something better for the future. And I have no doubt that the Bylaws Committee's work can be improved by feedback from the membership. But we must be willing to engage

the process and move beyond our haphazard little farmhouse. We must design something that works for the future, thereby honoring the hard work and dedication of those in our past.

## End of an era

The year 1997 was a turning point in our history. In that year a new church administration began with the selections of Loren Stacy as board of directors chairman, Whaid Rose as Conference president, and Calvin Burrell as BA editor. We've enjoyed the leadership and stability of this group for seventeen years, but more change is coming. President Rose has said he will step down at convention this year.

As a young teenager, I met Elder Rose shortly before he became president. I remember thinking, *I want to preach like that when I grow up!* As I've traveled the continent preaching with him the past three years, I still think the same thing. Elder Rose has been president for as long as I've known our church had a president. It's hard for many of us to imagine anyone else doing the job. For just the third time in fifty years, we'll have a change in that office. Some of us are wondering, *What will that mean?*

It's common to hear our conference's Vision for a Vibrant Twenty-first Century Church referred to as "Whaid's vision." President Rose formulated it and brought it to the board of directors. But when the board adopted this vision in 1998, it became the vision of the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day). *As members*

*of the Conference, it's your vision and it's mine.* Our organization doesn't depend upon one person or position. While we change presidents from time to time, our organization doesn't start fresh when this occurs. We still have our elected leaders serving on the board. We still have our vision guiding us forward.

It is that leadership and vision that provide unity and stability as the board seeks a new president.

**I invite us to imagine life twenty or fifty years from now. I want to look back at this crossroads and say, "By God's grace, we moved forward with wisdom."**

We envision a future with someone else presiding from the Denver office; providing leadership to superintendents, ministries directors, and Conference staff; touring the continent in support of Conference initiatives; and everything else Whaid Rose has done to incarnate the leadership and vision of our Church for nearly two decades. It breaks my heart to see him go, but I'm excited to see what God has in store for us.

## Looking back on today

We're easily consumed by the present. But I invite us to imagine life twenty or fifty years from now. I want to look back at this crossroads and say, "By God's grace, we moved forward with wisdom."

I want us to embrace a new BA editor with prayer and a re-imagining of all that ministry entails. Let us demonstrate this broader vision by supporting LifeSpring and its commitment to equip all of our diverse members for ministry.

I want us to work together at the coming convention to adopt a new blueprint for the General Conference. Rather than remaining content with the limitations of yesterday, let us build something together that empowers us to function as one today and tomorrow.

I want us to eagerly anticipate a new president, but not hang our hopes on one person. Rather, let us each take ownership of our shared vision, follow our elected leaders, and commit ourselves to President Rose's legacy by becoming truly Christ-centered, Distinct – not exclusive, Sabbath-observing, Spirit-formed, Bible-based, Passionate in Worship, Compassionate in Service, Aggressive in Witness, Strong in Fellowship, and Committed to Discipleship.

We are a church at a crossroads. Let us move forward in wisdom, by the grace of God.

**Israel Steinmetz** serves as dean of Academic Affairs for LifeSpring School of Ministry.



# Mail Bag



## Applause for November-December

One of the best issues ever. I loved both Q & A responses (p. 7) concerning microchips and the mark of the beast. Super great. And of course, the article by my pastor, Dirk Anderson, was equally well written (p. 15). Good job!

A. D.  
Facebook

I just downloaded the new BA, and what a great issue it is! Congratulations, and thank you again for all the work you put into my own article. The layout looks great, and your editorial touches deftly transformed the text in many positive ways.

I know from experience how much work is involved in publishing a journal fascicle, so I hope that you have time to catch your breath a bit now.

R. H.  
E-mail

Love this magazine with its content.

D. S.  
Facebook

I really like "The Savvy Samaritan" (p. 20) and agree with it.

G. R.  
Facebook

## Wings

continued from page 6

Moses and David. He descended for us that we might ascend with Him. He came low that we might fly. Now as His disciples, we are lifted and led, delivered and directed. We trust His grace and obey His truth — the only response left to us in the face of this great flight.

## Final flight

And so it is by Jesus' merciful grace and faithful truth that the Lord of the birds and bees and butterflies frees us from the miry pit of sin and death that sucks us downward, and with outstretched wings He lifts us up that we might fly free, heavenward, far above our reach or right. Jesus is coming back soon, and on that day, we will be caught up to meet Him. On that day, we who have flown in faith will fly indeed.

May we know these wings firsthand. Through the word of the gospel, may we find that hope laid up for us in heaven and come to know "the grace of God in truth" (Colossians 1:3-6). Looks like we don't lack the wings after all. **BA**

**Jason Overman** pastors the Jasper, AR church and is general manager of the *Harrison Daily Times*. In the photo, he prepares to baptize his twelve-year-old daughter Tabitha in the creek behind the church hall.



## Just Us

continued from page 14

es through me. I feel as if I am there — in the mountains — and the flowers and the green trees are around me.

And now, the room is quiet. Zelma is smiling. My mother-in-law's eyes are closed, and she appears to be dozing. Lela is serenely asleep now.

And we are all peaceful together. We have created a safe space, a holy place, a deep-breathing space.

Here is an answer to Zelma's prayer, to all of our prayers: Surely the Lord does help us go all along the way of our lives. Prayers are answered in our love and care for one another. Life may be sad; it may be difficult. But we are here for each other. This is what we can always do, even with our own personal weaknesses and our worries that weigh us down so much. We can make do with what we have: a bedside table, a kind voice, a listening ear, our hands, our hearts, our tears.

It doesn't seem like much . . . just us, here together, in this small, humble way. And yet, here and now, it is everything. All of our faith, hope, and love is here.

Jesus tells us "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

And so we do . . . and so we do. **BA**

**Kristina M. Santos** writes from Patterson, CA.







## *True Beauty*

*A Sonnet*

*The snow fell lightly through the night as I,  
Upon my bed and truly unaware,  
Dreamt hopefully of things afar and nigh,  
But nothing knew of dark and frigid air.*

*This morn the world around me is the scene  
Of trees and lawns, all covered as by light,  
In pallid beauty, delicate, serene,  
For which we longed as nature's children might.*

*Does not true beauty merit patience well,  
That in its time and proven, veiled way,  
It may of many charms and graces tell,  
And all our expectations then repay?*

*Be patient for some likeness yet to come,  
Else be content with part, but not the sum.*

*James Vasquez*



## LeRoy Dais — Asleep in Jesus

LeRoy Dais began his work with the Church of God (Seventh Day) Publishing House in Stanberry, Missouri, back in 1956 at age 20. He finished his 79-1/2-year journey in this life on December 1, 2014, with his devoted wife, Hope, and their four loyal children — Bryan, Susan, Craig, and Linda — at his side. In the next BA (March-April issue), we plan a full-length tribute to this dear man who has been a most faithful servant to this magazine and to our church.

*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord . . . that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them (Revelation 14:13).*

## North American Women's Ministries

**Grace Sanchez, Director**

Sitting at my window, writing, I am in awe of God's constant reminders through nature. The trees in our yard are arrayed in many hues. One tree has given up most of its shimmering gold and strewn my walkway with an abundance of gold, reminding me we'll one day walk on streets of gold.

Other reminders of our great God came through a number of events last year. One was the 2014 national retreat in Englewood, Colorado, where we celebrated our women's seventy-five years of service to the Church. Many NAWM programs were recalled and names of past officers read. A short history of *WAND* magazine for women was given by one-time editor Hope Dais, and *Seekers* for youngsters (ages 8-12) was reviewed by Mary Jean Knoll, one of the program's designers. Pastor Whaid Rose expounded on the book of Ruth, helping us understand that "All She Ever Wanted" was not just a walk with Naomi but with the Lord.

The Hispanic Women's Retreat in Chicago continued recent success in rallying women for a time of retreat and reflection. CoG7 ministries were presented, and attendees were encouraged to identify their heart's passion in a chosen ministry. Women were instructed on how they might use their time and talents to support their chosen ministry. Brother Ramón Ruiz, president of the IMC, was the keynote speaker.

In partnership with the Church-wide focus on worship, the theme for Women's Ministry Day in March 2015 is "W.O.W. (Women of Worship)." I am encouraged to learn of the many congregations who celebrate Women's Ministry Day by setting aside a Sabbath for women to share their unique gifts in ministry.

*Afterglow* continues to be a vehicle in keeping hearts connected, informed, and encouraged. News and articles come from far and wide, but the task of working on the publication is lovingly done by our sisters in Texas and Alberta.

We covet your prayers as NAWM is challenged to explore new avenues of funding to support its ministries. On Women's Ministry Day, we ask that you remember our beloved ministry with a love offering.



## Sierra Leone: Ebola Update

With daily support from the G. C. Disaster Relief Fund toward Ebola victims since the virus outbreak, we have done a lot in helping Church members and in winning more souls. Hundreds of members in Freetown, Kailahun, Kenema, Grafton, Four-Mile, Moyamba Junction, etc., have worked voluntarily, with the support you gave, to sensitize people about Ebola. This has yielded good fruit. Six motorbikes were bought for Kailahun and Kenema to provide transport for the participants, shirts were printed (see photo, below), and Bibles were purchased.

Although we continue striving to sensitize members, we are still caught with the dangers of Ebola. Dozens of members have succumbed to the disease. Many more were infected, but God's healing hand stretched over them, and they survived.

These are the late numbers:

- Kenema and Kailahun - 31 deaths, 45 survivors, 351 total



## SVA Goes International

Spring Vale Academy completed the certification process to enroll international students and now has two – from China. Sonze Guo (or “Tom,” as he is known



by his classmates) is a senior and Guanqiao Zhao (“Zoo”) is a junior. SVA is uniquely equipped to host international students in the dorms due to its low staff-student ratio and personal guidance to students. International interest is strong, and more students are expected from other countries. Contact Admissions Director Scott Fischer for information about the semester that starts January 13 on the Owosso, Michigan campus.

quarantined, and five currently sick with Ebola;

- Moyamba Junction and Pitema – eight deaths, 100 quarantined presently, and ten currently sick;
- Freetown – 0 deaths, 40 presently quarantined, three sick.

Our head pastor in Moyamba Junction lost both parents to Ebola, and his entire family is presently quarantined.

We have many members who are falling sick, especially our Daughters of the King. Two of them in Freetown have tested positive for Ebola, but one will be discharged soon. Another is an orphan who has also tested positive.

All hospitals are out of normal operations. They have become either Ebola holding centers or Ebola treatment centers. For

other various ailments, we have to hire private doctors.

– Victor Bangura  
CoG7 Ministry Secretary  
Sierra Leone, West Africa

[baonline.org](http://baonline.org) Read Victor Bangura's full report on the Church in Sierra Leone at [baonline.org](http://baonline.org).



**Manado City, Indonesia church board.** Pastor Ferdi Suoth is second from left.



***Texas SWORD:** Praise and pizza, fun and games, and fellowship were all part of the Saturday night event for Houston-area young adults, hosted by the Pasadena church in November. Southwest District SWORD coordinator Dan Melgoza gave an interactive message challenging everyone to live on a higher plane, be a devoted disciple of Christ, and do church right! A council of YAs from the many area congregations is planning for more SWORD activities to come.*



*The church in Faisalabad, Pakistan, celebrated its seventh year in November under the leadership of Pastor Shamas Pervais (second from left), here with his son, wife, daughter-in-law, and grandsons.*



*Ninety brothers coming from eight NED CoG7 congregations in Connecticut, New Jersey, Maryland, and Virginia were edified at men's retreat last August. Guest speaker Elder Ezra Viveros, from CoG7 in Mexico, taught on masculinity and integrity in the Lord. — Elder Johny Solorzano, pastor of hosting church in Stamford, CT*

## CoG7 Calendar

Southwest young adult singles and youth retreat, Midlothian, TX - January 1-4

LifeSpring winter classes begin - January 11 ([lifespringschool.org](http://lifespringschool.org))

Second semester starts at SVA - January 13 ([springvale.us](http://springvale.us))

Annual G. C. board of directors meet in Denver - February 1-4

LifeSpring spring course registration opens - February 9

Pacific NW Super Sabbath, Jefferson, OR - March 14



**Lord's Supper Service  
in every church  
Thursday evening,  
April 2**

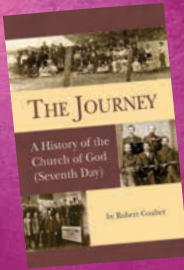
SHINE mission to Aguascalientes, Mexico - April 12-18

SW SWORD Retreat, Hawkins, TX - May 29-31 ([sword@cog7.org](mailto:sword@cog7.org))

Dover Family Camp at Camp Cimarron, Kingfisher, OK - June 14-21

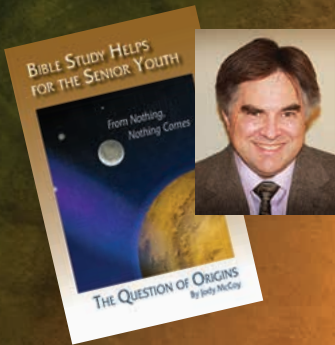
General Conference Convention in Milwaukee, WI - June 30 — July 4 (see back cover)

## CoG7 History Book



*The Journey: A History of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*, by Elder Robert Coulter, is still available for purchase. At 500+ pages and in hard cover, the book's cover price is \$29.95 + postage.

Order by e-mail (*bap.orders@cog7.org*), online bookstore (*cog7.org*), or mail: P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233.



Addressing one of the most stimulating questions of our times, a new Sabbath School curriculum for youth — *From Nothing, Nothing Comes* — has been produced by the Bible Advocate Press. It was written by Jody McCoy of Austin, Texas, as an adapted part of an entire book that he plans to release in mid-2015.

# REBOOT

We are an ever-changing generation.  
The time is now:  
Refreshed - Renewed  
It's time to Reboot!

Jacqui Melgoza, Director

Has your young adult ministry crashed?  
**Reboot it!** We can help.

Win a \$200 grant to REBOOT the young adult program in your local church! This boost can help you plan retreats, conferences, Super Sabbaths, small group studies, and other events in your town. Possibilities are endless. Apply today at <http://goo.gl/forms/WpD5xSyhGA>.

The application deadline is Friday, January 30. Winners will be announced via our National Young Adult Ministries Facebook page and notified via e-mail on Monday, February 2.

Let's impact high school grads and college and career students. For help in starting or restarting your young adults, visit [sword.cog7.org](http://sword.cog7.org).





@ Pariwattip—Dreamstime.com

# International Congress

## South America

By God's grace, Zone 3 (South America) Ministerial Council in Bogota, Colombia (October 11-15, 2014), started with Sabbath services — very meaningful to all in attendance.

On Sunday morning, Zone 3 Representative Jorge Gillig gave the opening declaration. IMC President Ramón Ruiz presented the biblical perspective of the council's theme "We Are One in the Lord" and shared an update of the international Church, answering questions from the audience. Reports by country followed: Chile and Bolivia, by Enrique Vega; Argentina, by Gustavo Hultgren; Colombia, by Jorge Forero; Ecuador, by Luis Lendeta; Paraguay, by Waldemar Patzer; Peru, by Rudy Gonzalez; Uruguay, by Richard Skorubski; and Venezuela, by Jose Caballero.

Sunday night began a three-day training on these subjects: Security of Salvation, Distinctives of the Church of God (Seventh Day), A Biblico-Theological Response to New Religious Movements, Do Apostles Exist Today?, Ecstatic Prophecy in the Church, and Pastoral Functions and Their Significance. Instructors were Ausencio Arroyo from Mexico, Israel Delgado from Uruguay, and Edgardo Rindfleisch from Argentina.

Resolutions included the



following: to support the new work in Santa Cruz, Bolivia (nine baptized members); to sponsor Jorge Olmos as a Cristo Viene missionary for this first Bolivian church; to support a ministry for children and homeless mothers in Colombia; and to host the 2015 SHINE Medical, Dental, and Evangelistic mission in Bogota, Colombia. Jorge Gillig and Ausencio Arroyo and his wife visited the church in Bucaramanga, Colombia, where they shared God's Word with great results. In a moving closing ceremony, Elder Ruiz thanked God and the Colombian church for this important event.

— Ramón Ruiz Garza  
IMC President

### Other IMC notes

- All IMC member conferences are requested to complete the annual report form for 2014 (received by e-mail) and return it to President Ramón Ruiz in February or March 2015.
- SHINE plans to conduct two Medical, Dental, and Evangelistic missions in 2015 — one in Aguascalientes, Mexico, and one in Bogota, Colombia.
- IMC officers have appointed Bryan Cleeton of Denver, Colorado, to serve as executive director for a two-year term. As field representative, he will serve the seven world zones.
- Buenos Aires, Argentina, has been selected as the site of the next congress session in October 2016. More information will be provided soon.



Photos on this page reflect the Zone 3 event in Bogota.  
— Editor



## Our Psychology

The countdown is on. I have only four more visits with you on this page, including this one. I'll miss our times together, but all good things must come to an end. There's a time for every season. This is the season for transition.

So what shall I talk about this time? Jesus, politics, morality, church and state, faith in the public square, religious freedom, Ebola, ISIS — you name it. Hot topics abound.

This one doesn't fit the "hot topics" category, but it's worthy of our consideration.

Every church has its unique personality and culture. Every movement has a "spiritual DNA" that informs its structure, a psychology that drives its behavior. It isn't difficult to figure out the psychology of the movement that gave birth to the Church of God (Seventh Day). The chief passion of its early pioneers was Christ's imminent return. Their aim was therefore to be ready. To be ready is to be right. And to be right is to be living in obedience to God's Word.

The question is, How right does one have to be? The answer: as right as possible. And to be as right as possible, one should be at least more right than other Christians.

Identity was therefore found, not in being in Christ but in being different from other Christians. Commandment-keeping, another passion of our pioneers, focused mainly on the Sabbath, the command that most set them apart from other believers. As a result, a higher premium was placed on doctrinal truth than on preaching the gospel, and proselytizing, rather than evangelism, was the main goal.

Furthermore, aversion to human creeds and prescribed modes made our pioneers less inclined toward standard rules of hermeneutics. The mantra "The Bible and the Bible alone" was an assertion of the right of individuals to their private interpretation of Scripture. Faulty doctrinal

conclusions resulted, which explains groups with like-minded beliefs discovering one another during the early years. Their shared beliefs resulted from their shared method of biblical interpretation.

Thus, being ready, being right, being different, and being commandment-keepers, with emphasis on the Sabbath, became descriptive of the CoG7 psychology for much of its history. Not surprisingly, Jesus was denied His rightful place, and being small was evidence that the world doesn't want the truth we have.

But that's not the whole story; there's more. Our pioneers practiced an open-creed approach to doctrine. Perhaps motivated by a desire to protect the right to private interpretation, it injures to our benefit, nonetheless. An open creed allowed a younger generation the freedom to ask tough questions about hermeneutics, Christ's deity, the gospel, salvation, Sabbath, the role of obedience, and more.

To the glory of God, wrestling with these questions has reshaped the CoG7 mindset. An awakening to grace, increasing commitment to Jesus and the gospel, passion for Spirit-fullness, worship, discipleship, missions, vision for the Church's future, and much more now describe the psychology that drives us.

The journey continues; traces of the old mindset remain. The path is like a light that shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day (Proverbs 4:18). Longing for that day, and with what limited light they had, our pioneers gave their best to this cause. Following in their train, may we do even more as the day draws closer and the light shines brighter.

— *Whaid Guscott Rose*



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GENERAL CONFERENCE  
CONVENTION  
2015

June 29 - July 4

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

You – each and every one – are warmly invited to the big CoG7 family reunion this summer. Worship services, special meal times, business sessions, and more at the Wisconsin Center, with accommodations at the Milwaukee Hilton City Center. For more details, see the December-January *Churchright* or visit [cog7.org](http://cog7.org).