

BA  
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*Sola  
Scriptura*

Revelation



## 2017: Reforming-Transforming



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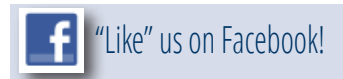
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**Sherri Langton:** Associate Editor

**Keith Michalak:** Director of Publications, graphics

**Sylvia Corral:** Translation

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## Wonderful Words

Welcome, readers! We continue investigating our yearlong “Transforming Vision into Reality” theme. With our identity planted in Christ, we turn to our next topic, and one dear to the BA. The Reformation was by no means monolithic, but if there was one *sola* the movement held in common, it was *sola Scriptura*: The Bible is the final authority for faith and practice, and all believers have the right and responsibility to read and interpret it.

This resonates deeply with our vision to be a Bible-based church. As I write, I recall that my first Bible, a tan KJV, was purchased at a BA book fair at the CoG7 convention in Oklahoma, 1977. I was ten, and the Word has been a light to my path these forty years (Psalm 119:105). As the 2017 convention in Illinois approaches, I rejoice that we are still a church that delights in the Word (v. 47), still responding to the Testament-spanning rule: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3).

Praise the Lord that He has revealed Himself, acting and leaving the witness of the Word to lead us in His Way: “He has made His wonderful works to be remembered . . . Your testimonies are wonderful . . . My heart stands in awe of Your word” (Psalms 111:4; 119:129, 161). Holy Scripture is revelation: It is God’s Word to us, the testimony of Jesus for us. It’s the Holy Spirit’s book — inspired, illuminated, and engrafted in us with full authority over us.

This “us” is so important. *Scripture alone* does not mean “my Bible and me alone.” An unintended consequence of *sola Scriptura* was the rending of the church. As diverse interpretations mounted, divisions abounded. But there is no private interpretation (2 Peter 1:20). The Word of God is for the people of God by the Spirit of God. Let’s read together: “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law” (Psalm 119:18).

Like the Reformers, the church must recover the Word over and over. We see Josiah rediscover it; he tore his clothes upon hearing it (2 Kings 22:11). Ezra reintroduced the Word and left Israel in tears when reading it (Nehemiah 8:9). The crowds heard Jesus preach it and were amazed by it (Luke 4:36).

Let’s proclaim the wondrous Word anew. Our transformation requires it. Enjoy!

— Jason Overman





# Scripture Alone



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Sola Scriptura and the  
rule of faith and practice  
throughout history.  
**by John Lemley**

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**T**he exclusivity of *Christ alone* was the Reformers' answer to the question "How can I be saved?" *Christ alone* is the foundation upon which everything in our Christian life is built.

The emphasis on *Scripture alone* as the only valid standard for determining a Christian's faith and practice, answers the question "How am I, as a saved person, supposed to live?"

## Primacy of Christ

Christ is primary. The apostle Paul was living proof that Scrip-

ture without Christ does not save. He knew the Bible (Acts 22:3) but was lost until submitting his life to Jesus. Jesus acknowledged that the Jews searched the Scriptures (John 5:39), but they failed to recognize Him in those Scriptures.

Scripture without Christ can be simply an interesting conversation starter or the source for a fun trivia game. Our statement of belief regarding the Bible in *This We Believe* says, "The object of our faith is not the Bible itself. A good book cannot save us, no matter how inspired and inspiring. Through the Bible we . . . demonstrate by obedience that Jesus Christ is the true Savior and Lord." The Bible tells us Who to trust and how to obey.

## Primacy of Scripture

At least three times readers are enjoined to treat God's words with utmost care and respect. Moses warned the Israelites to neither add to God's Word nor diminish from it (Deuteronomy 4:2). Agur repeated this warning near the middle of the Bible (Proverbs 30:5, 6). John concluded Revelation with the same reminder (22:18, 19). Again, *This We Believe* says that no part of Scripture may be added to, changed, or "discarded without doing damage to the full revelation of God's will for man." Jesus affirmed the preservation of Scripture, including its smallest parts and particulars (Matthew 5:17, 18). Thus the Bible, and the Bible alone, has always stood as the complete written authority for God's people.

The primacy and sufficiency of God's Word has been challenged since the beginning. Eve heeded

Satan's argument that God's Word was incomplete (Genesis 3:4, 5). Sadly, giving in to temptations to change, add to, and take from Scripture has detoured humanity from following God ever since. Traditions, fear, excuses, and self-justification lead many to set aside adherence to Bible teachings. People convince themselves that their situation allows their belief and behavior to be an exception to "Thus says the Lord."

The time of the judges was characterized by every man doing what was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25). King Jeroboam of Israel ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month to replace the Feast of Tabernacles on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (1 Kings 12:32). By the time Israel was destroyed, they had become a people who "feared the LORD, yet served their own gods" (2 Kings 17:33, 41). Jesus warned His audience of the Pharisees' practice of teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Matthew 15:1-9).

The apostle Paul alerted the church in Galatia of those who preached another gospel and perverted the gospel of Christ (Galatians 1:6, 7). Jude cautioned against certain men whose teachings strayed from the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3, 4). Church history books describe the continuing assimilation into the church of beliefs and practices from paganism, human reasoning, and Greek philosophy. By the sixteenth century these influences had created a huge divide between Scripture's teachings and the teachings of the predominant church at that time.

## Contending of Reformers

The Reformers began speaking out against many of these extra-biblical teachings. Soon the phrase *Scripture alone* spread throughout Europe. In *Church History in Plain Language* (Word Publishing, 1995), Bruce Shelley writes:

During an 18-day debate in 1519 with theologian John Eck at Leipzig, Luther blurted out: "A council may sometimes err. Neither the church nor the pope can establish articles of faith. These must come from the Scripture." Thus, Luther moved from his first convic-

“The Bible tells us Who to trust and how to obey.”

tion — that salvation was by faith alone to a second: that the Scriptures, not popes or councils, are the standard for Christian faith and behavior. . . . To the question where does religious authority lie, he [Luther] answered: not in the visible institution called the Roman church but in the Word of God found in the Bible.

In *History of the Christian Church Vol. 7* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), historian Philip Schaff reports, "All [Reformers] agreed in the principle that the

church has no right to impose upon the conscience articles of faith without clear warrant in the Word of God." Their confidence was in the clarity of the Word and the Holy Spirit's guidance to rightly read and interpret it.

The battle for *Scripture alone* continued throughout the years as leaders and denominations rose and fell.

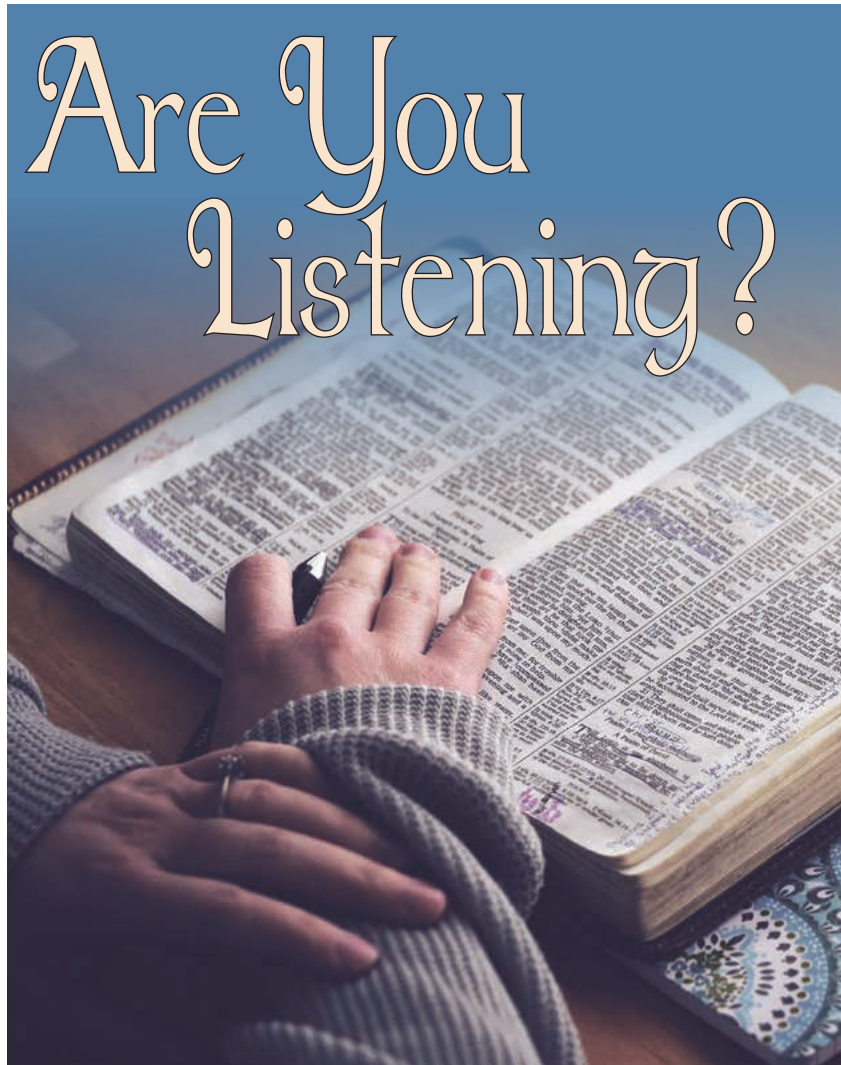
## Our legacy

In the 1850s *Scripture alone* motivated Gilbert Cranmer to leave the church he was with because it included the leader's visions with its teachings. Robert Coulter records Cranmer's words in *The Story of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*: "From that time the Bible has been my creed, with Christ at the head of the Church. I started alone, with my Bible in my hand."

Every revision of the doctrinal beliefs of the Church of God (Seventh Day) included a strong statement that the basis of our belief and practice is *Scripture alone*. Our current statement in *This We Believe* reads, "The Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is God's inspired Word. Inerrant in its original writing, the Bible is the only authoritative and infallible rule of faith and conduct for humanity."

The theme of the International Ministerial Congress in Buenos Aires, Argentina, last October was "The Whole Word for the Whole World." Newly elected secretary, John Klassek of Australia, wrote in his report, "We are a people who are defined by the Word of God. . . ." Commitment to *Scripture alone* continues to serve the Church of God (Seventh Day) as

*continued on page 27*



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Strategies for hearing  
the living Word through  
Scripture.  
by R. Herbert

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**A**ncient Jewish rabbis sometimes disputed which was more important: to speak the Word of God or to hear it. Despite what may have been a well-meaning debate, it's the kind of question common sense might answer "both." But many rabbis agreed that in our personal lives, while speaking the Word of God

is mainly God's responsibility, listening to it is ours.

### The Word and His Word

As Christians, we must listen to both the written Word of God, the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16, 17), and the living Word of God, Jesus Christ (John 1:1). In fact, as Jesus himself showed, the one testifies to the other: "You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are *the very Scriptures that testify about me*" (John 5:39, emphasis added here and throughout). But in saying this, Jesus meant that we can

study — even diligently — and still not hear.

The Bible says much about how we listen to the Word and His Word. Just as Moses told the ancient Israelites, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you . . . *You must listen to him*" (Deuteronomy 18:15), so in the New Testament, the four Gospels often show us the connection between the Word of God and our listening.

We see this, for example, when Jesus' divinity was revealed in the Transfiguration: "Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. *Listen to him!*" (Mark 9:7). In the parable of the Good Shepherd recorded in John 10, Jesus repeatedly described His "flock" as those who listen to Him, and He habitually concluded His teaching by saying, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear" (e.g., Mark 4:9).

But one Gospel in particular focuses on our hearing.

### Listening in Luke

Luke stresses listening more than any other Gospel. While all the Gospels show Jesus exhorting people to listen to His message (Matthew 15:10), Luke provides fascinating insights into this aspect of Jesus' teaching. For example, apart from a single instance in Mark 12:37, Luke is the only Gospel writer who remarks (some five times) about whether people *were*, in fact, listening to what Jesus said.

Notice what Luke tells us regarding some among Jesus' audience: "When Jesus had

*continued on page 27*





# Applied Apologetics

by Kelen Caswell

You cannot defend what you do not know. Education is the basis from which we develop our worldview and can stand firmly in those convictions when opposition comes. A church cannot stand firm unless it educates its members in the light of Jesus Christ.

The ability to defend our faith is twofold: knowledge and application. While conceptual understanding is important, real life application is the defendant's most persuasive tool. The changed life — "the implanted word" (James 1:21) — is the most powerful evidence Christians have at their disposal. Education must fit this twofold model. Believers must know not only what to say but how and when to say it.

How do we educate ourselves in this way? And whose responsibility is it to share knowledge? It is the church's responsibility to provide a moral education, with each member doing their part to help the next generation reach spiritual maturity. We accomplish this through Sabbath school, Artios Christian College, Spring Vale Christian School, the *Bible Advocate*, and financial support of these kinds of ministries.

Without application, defending our faith is ineffective. Influencing others' lives happens when we apply biblical principles, when the right concepts have been not only taught but practiced. Defending the faith with words alone will be ineffective unless we first prove it by our actions. Be the kind of person whose lifestyle is the greatest defense of their faith.

As James 1:22 states, "But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves" (NLT). Christians who talk but do not walk their faith are not fooling the world. They are dismissed as intolerant, hateful, and judgmental, and rightfully so.

Before you can stand up for your faith before others, you must take a personal stand. Apply the principles. Walk out your faith. Live the Word. Others will see it, and the relationship between your faith and your walk will be your greatest defense.

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**Kelen Caswell** lives and serves the CoG7 in Owosso, MI.

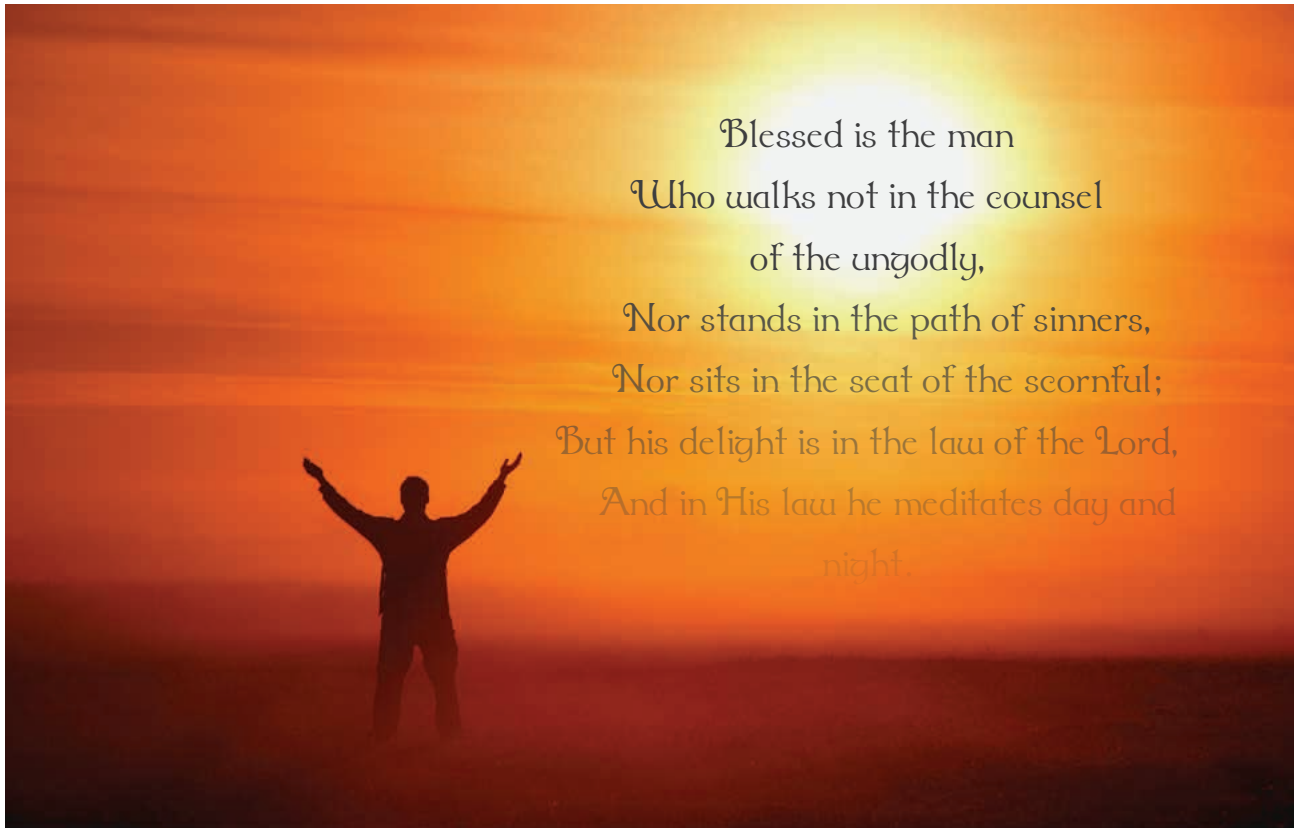
A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of the spine of a Bible. The words "HOLY BIBLE" are embossed or printed on the spine in a serif font. The lighting is soft and warm, highlighting the texture of the cover.

It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter. Here Paradise is restored, Heaven opened, and the gates of hell disclosed.

Christ is its grand subject, our good the design, and the glory of God its end.

It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. It is given you in life, will be opened in the judgment, and be remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labor, and will condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents.

— Author Unknown



Blessed is the man  
Who walks not in the counsel  
of the ungodly,  
Nor stands in the path of sinners,  
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;  
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
And in His law he meditates day and  
night.

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# PRAYING PSALMS

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A guide for devoted  
doubters. **by Ben Ramirez  
and Jonathon Hicks**

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**P**rayer has always been difficult for us. We are pastors and must give advice on how to pray, but we hardly even knew how. It became clear that we needed a guide, both personally and for those we shepherd, because we all find praying to the Invisible hard, torn between devotion and doubt.

This article shares what we have learned about prayer from one hundred fifty “prayers”: the Psalms. These have guided Jewish and Christian saints into deeper relational devotion to God through a plethora of emotions fueled by doubt. Two of us write this article because the Psalms

are *our* collection of prayers, not *my* collection. They are by nature corporate because they are shared.

We will treat this collection in three parts – introductory, lament, and praise – and share insights regarding prayer.

## Introductory psalms

First, let’s lay some groundwork. Psalms 1 and 2 declare blessings to introduce the whole book. Combined, they make up the foundation upon which the rest of the collection stands. Psalms indicates that the one who is blessed prays in surprising



ways that teach the devoted and doubters alike to commune with God.

Psalms 1 declares *blessed* the one who lives fully immersed in “the law of the LORD” (vv. 1, 2). This person forsakes joining arms with the wicked, because their path will surely perish. That is a guarantee, a promise. But for the person whose humble delight is fascination with the Scriptures, the Lord promises provision. Our blessedness is not found in what evils we can simply avoid but solely in the declarations of God. We are called blessed when we live out the Word of God to accomplish every good work, through God’s grace.

In Psalm 2, nations and peoples plot against the Lord, threatening the Anointed One. However, the same Lord is enthroned in heaven, rebuking and terrifying His adversaries because He has installed His King in Zion. The psalmist issues a warning to become a servant of God, for God’s anger is not directed at those who trust Him. God does not reject the ones who come to Him in trust with confession of burdens or praise. He welcomes our burden and our praise because He is the mighty King and cares for us when we depend on Him.

Conversely, plotting and scheming against the Lord in distrust ignite His wrath. It is better to submit and take the psalmist’s advice to kiss the Son, because “Blessed are all who take refuge in him” (v. 12b).

Once we abide in God’s blessings found in delighting in God’s law and trusting in Him, we can move to the rest of the Psalms. If we do not, then the rest of the book will not apply to us.

The blessed find that both lament (which means “complaint”) and praise well up in their soul. The reason is simple. When we are declared blessed, we sometimes receive blessings that we expect, and we praise God for that. But other times we don’t receive expected blessings, and we lament to God because of that.

### Psalms of lament

Due to these expectations, it has been our experience, in our lives and when reading Psalms, that lament comes first. Although Psalm 3 follows the declaration of blessing in Psalm 2, the psalmist begins by stating that many people claim that God will not bless him through deliverance.

deliverance. A marvelous lament is this first psalm to follow the introductory songs. The psalmist here echoes many of our experiences. His hope was for the immediate blessing of deliverance, but it was not so immediate. Thus, he waits and laments.

This honest complaint in Psalm 3 is a surprise after we’ve trod through the introductory psalms’ optimistic declaration of blessedness. We would imagine that life for those who are blessed would be wonderful and that their prayers would be ceaseless praise. However, we find that the life of the blessed person is a struggle and that they take this struggle to God in prayerful lament. The psalmist’s

“Psalms indicates that the one who is blessed prays in surprising ways.”

He proceeds to remind all that God has been a good shield and answers when he calls out (vv. 3-6). In verse 7, these two sections collide in a lament: “Arise, LORD! Deliver me, my God!”

There is a problem in this psalm that the psalmist initially dismissed, as if it were only the “many” who think, “God will not deliver him” (v. 2). In reality, the psalmist feels doubt and at the end in verse 7 pleads to God for

delight in the law and trust in God as King allows him to pray his lament.

But let’s not stop here; the lament psalms grow in number and amplitude with each page we turn. Psalms 39 and 88 are without a doubt the darkest in this prayer book, and they show us that lament doesn’t have to end in pietistic niceties.

At the conclusion of both of these laments we hear, “[God] Look away from me, that I may

enjoy life again before I depart and am no more" (39:13) and "You [God] have taken from me friend and neighbor — darkness is my closest friend" (88:18). These show that sometimes those residing between devotion and doubt are so consumed with doubt that they must let their prayers end in dismay, because that is where their heart is.

We must repeat, though, that the sheer fact that this deep dismay is spoken to God demonstrates that the psalmist trusts Him and has been meditating

hear the first reverberations of praise in Psalm 8 that will eventually conquer the landscape in chapters 145-150.

The themes in praise psalms are intertwined in Psalm 8. YHWH is "our Lord," and His name is majestic "in all the earth" (vv. 1, 9). Furthermore, we see that this majesty is displayed in history throughout the cosmos. In the case of Psalm 8, creation itself displays God's majesty as Creator and Sustainer (vv. 2, 3, 7, 8). Lastly, we see the theme of humanity being just another

praise will in the end be the last song: "Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD" (150:6). Although by the conclusion of the Psalms readers are brought to praise, they are allowed to abide in lament when God's promises are not evidenced in their life.

## Guided through Psalms

For those struggling somewhere on the spectrum of doubt and devotion, the book of Psalms provides a guide for how to approach God in prayer. The psalms teach us to express our lament to God so that our relationship with Him will be strengthened during times of struggle. A foundation of trusting in Him and delighting in His ways allows for honest communication and relationship with our Lord. This naturally leads to praise because He is the good King.

We commend you, wherever you fall on the spectrum of devotion and doubt, to be found as blessed, to pray praises and laments until that day when only praise comes — when He wipes every tearful lament from our eye and all His promises are fulfilled. On that day we will all corporately sing praise. **BA**

“The blessed find that both lament and praise well up in their soul.”

on His law. If the psalmists of Psalms 39 and 88 were not living out Psalms 1 and 2, then they would have sought other ways to soothe their depressed and doubt-filled souls. We see that once we reside within the first two psalms, downcast souls speak to God, and yet they are not changed quickly.

## Psalms of praise

As one trusts in God and lives according to His ways, it is not all bleak; God fulfills His promises. We see this in the psalms of praise as flashes of joy begin to fill the book. Although the beginning of the collection is dominated by lament in Psalms 3-7, we

work of God's fingers. Yet in God's plan, humanity is raised to a position just below the angels (vv. 4, 5).

The understanding of humanity within this plan brings the psalmist back to worship and praise of the majestic Lord. For the one who trusts God and considers His words continuously, God's greatness is fully realized, and thus, worthy of praise.

But again, let's not stop there. Beginning with Psalm 8, praise eventually overtakes lament. The end of this prayer book is dominated by six praises. The promises are fulfilled; there is no more doubt, and praise alone remains. For the one who abides in God's declared blessedness,

### Benjamin Ramirez

pastors the CoG7 in Stockton, CA, and

### Jonathon Hicks

pastors the Lodi, CA church. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



# Questions & Answers



**Driving** through Dallas recently, I saw a First Baptist Church billboard saying that they are Bible based. How does that differ from your claim to be a Bible-based church?

**Your** question offers another opportunity to think and talk about a few of our favorite things: the Bible, the church, and the agreements and disagreements among Christians and churches over doctrines.

The claim of a Baptist church to be Bible based is not essentially different from the same claim made by Church of God (Seventh Day) — also known as CoG7. Though Baptists arrive at different conclusions than we do about what the Bible actually teaches on several topics, our claims to be Bible based are equivalent. We both agree that Christian faith and practice should be firmly grounded in the Holy Scriptures as our final authority. This principle, found in the Law and Prophets, runs throughout God's Word (Deuteronomy 8:3; Isaiah 8:20; 1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Baptist and CoG7 churches share several faith traditions rooted in Scripture and in the Protestant Reformation. Five hundred years back, Reformers adopted a few Latin phrases to summarize their differences with Catholicism. One such phrase was *sola Scriptura* ("only Scripture"). And so it was that most Protestant churches, in varying degrees, took up the cry of *sola Scriptura* and the claim that their different teachings were all based on "Thus saith the Lord" in the Bible.

The Roman church of that period also based its faith in the Bible and still does — but not in the Bible alone. Catholics acknowledge an-

other source for their creeds and teachings: the church, with its centuries of accumulated knowledge and tradition.

Likewise, some Christian sects that grew up in the mid-to-late nineteenth century (like Mormons, Christian Scientists, and Jehovah's Witnesses) were formed around the extra-biblical writings and/or revelations of their early leaders. This became a problem for Michigan CoG7 pioneer Gilbert Cranmer, who for a time attempted to work with a movement greatly influenced by the visions and dreams of one of its founders. Cranmer broke fellowship with that movement in 1858 and set out, as he later put it, "with my Bible in my hand." Since then, the singular authority of Scripture has been oft claimed by us, even while we admit that we are not alone in claiming it.

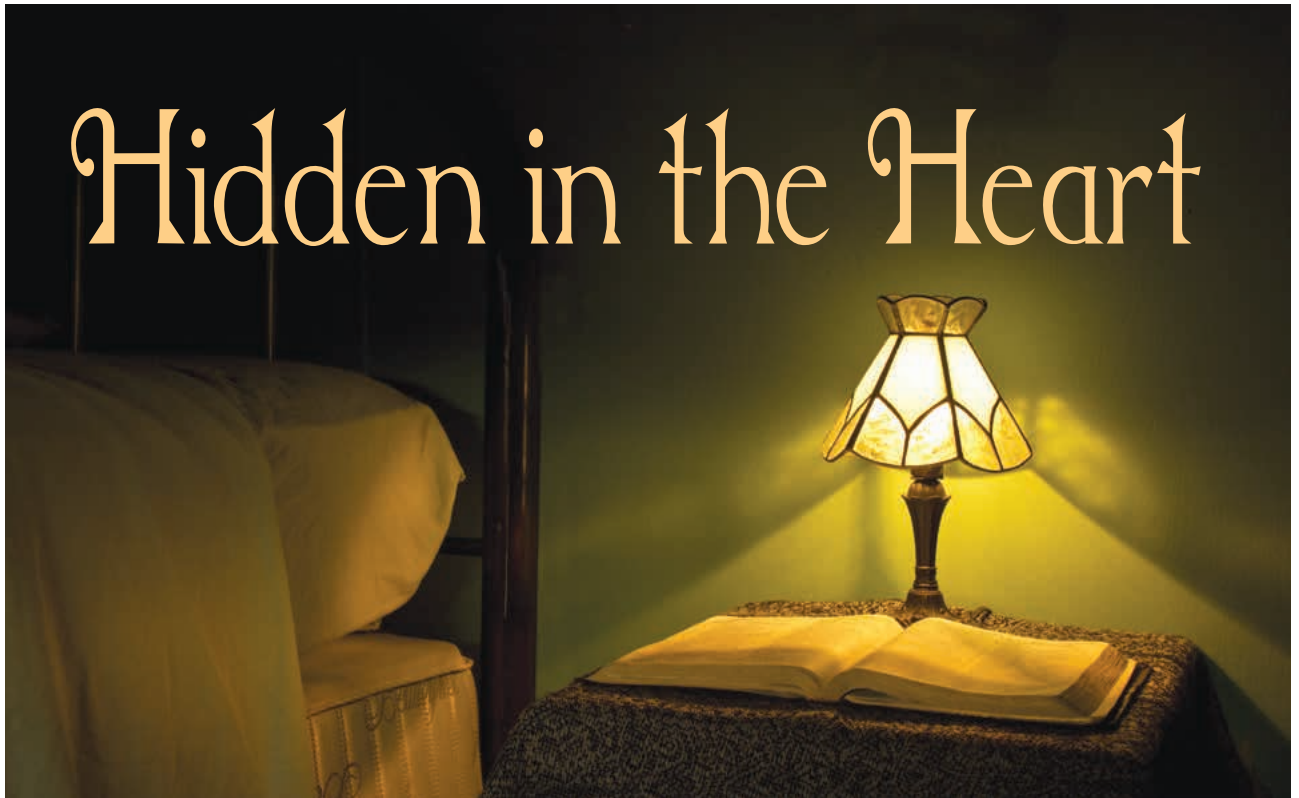
Whether we are Baptist, CoG7, or another in our affiliation, we must also admit that our claims to be Bible based have limits. No one can say that their own personal, hands-on, unassisted search of Scripture — all sixty-six books of it — has led them to all they believe about the Bible, that they are not in the least influenced by other writings, by their ancestors, by their teachers, or by any church. While no one and no group should claim to be fully free from outside influence and thus absolutely Bible based, Scripture remains the true standard for Christian teaching.

We may learn more about Jesus — His awesome grace and truth — from many Bible-based sources. Still, only the written Word taught by the Holy Spirit serves as final arbiter in differences among Christians over matters of faith and lifestyle.

— Elder Calvin Burrell



# Hidden in the Heart



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## Method and meaning for memorizing Scripture.

by Shirley Brosius

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I've done my part to keep the Bible at the top of the bestseller list year after year. At least twenty copies of God's Word line my bookshelves, and I've read them all. I've also memorized lengthy passages, providing even deeper insight into the meaning of the Bible.

The Bible has so much to offer. The Old Testament contains history that tells of the Israelites, prophecy that foretold what would happen to them, and wisdom literature that gives guidance for discerning good and evil. The New Testament contains four Gospels — eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection — along

with letters and accounts written by early Christians to elaborate on His teachings.

In Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible, the psalmist writes of how he delights in Scripture and why we should study it: to keep us from sinning (v. 11); obtain strength, hope, and peace (vv. 29, 49, 165); find wisdom and guidance (vv. 98, 105); and preserve life (v. 50) — to name only a few reasons.

The psalmist had it right. In the Bible, Christians find a pattern for righteous living — if they read it and apply it to their lives. They also find the call to learn and remember it (vv. 7, 52, 176).

The difference between reading and memorizing Scripture is as big as seeing television in color rather than black and white. And the benefits are many.

## Benefits

For example, in committing Scripture to memory, we notice every single word and become aware of the writer's word choice. In Philippians 1:29 Paul writes, "For it has been *granted* to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him" (emphasis mine throughout). Paul's choice of the word *granted* makes suffering sound like a privilege. I never thought of suffering that way before.

We also notice similarities of wording and phrasing when memorizing the Bible. For instance, Paul thanks God for the Philippians (1:3) and prays that their love will abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight (v. 9). In the same manner, he thanks God for the Ephesians and prays that God will give them the Spirit of wisdom and

revelation so their hearts are enlightened (1:16-18). Paul's main thrust in prayer seems to be that those he nurtured will mature in the faith. Perhaps I too should pray more for the spiritual well-being of people I teach and lead.

As we memorize Scripture, we find opportunities to give it away — another benefit. We can pull verses from our minds to encourage others when they need an uplifting word. When I teach at church, I offer dramatic presentations of the passages I've memorized. Presenting Scripture verbally pulls listeners into the story and touches their hearts in a fresh way.

When I discovered I could remember passages, I looked for one that would minister to my heart if I ever can't handle God's Word for myself. I chose Philippians because though Paul wrote this letter while under house arrest in Rome, he included sixteen references to *joy* or *rejoicing* in the book. He never let his circumstances get him down but looked for God behind them. That's what I want to do.

One of the most important ways the memorized Word of God blesses my heart is the peace it brings when I go to bed troubled by a problem. God may use a little-noticed verse to speak to a situation as I run Scripture through my mind.

## Methods

People may say, "I'm not good at memorization." But we memorize song lyrics quite easily as we hear them over and over. So it is with memorizing Scripture. We simply need to find a time when our hands are busy but our minds are free.

I memorize while I walk. I write a verse on a 3 x 5 card and say it out loud, with the same rhythm and phrasing each time I repeat it. The next day, I review that verse and add a second one — and so on until I've mastered a chapter or a short book of Scripture.

As I memorize, I notice words with similar sounds. For instance, Philippians 1:17 reads, "The former preach Christ out of *selfish* ambition, not *sincerely*, *supposing* that they can *stir* up trouble for me while I am in chains." As I

that I'm publicly presenting Scripture, I try to be accurate. But for personal edification, it doesn't matter.

## Changeless Word

I began reading Scripture when I received a Bible at age fourteen, and my determination to live according to it saved me from making wrong choices in my young adult years. Many decades later, God's Word is just as relevant to my life.

As was the psalmist's practice

“The difference between reading and memorizing Scripture is as big as seeing television in color rather than black and white.”

repeat the verse, I emphasize the *s* words, helping my recall.

I also sometimes notice the alphabetical position of a series of words: "Whatever you have *learned* or *received* or *heard* from me, or *seen* in me — put it into practice" (4:9). In my mind, I see a ball bouncing from the *l* position in the alphabet down to the *r*, then back to the *h*, and on to the *s*.

Don't worry about being word perfect. Does it really matter if we remember *Jesus* or *Christ* or *Jesus Christ* or *Christ Jesus*? Now

of hiding the Word in his heart (119:11), memorizing Scripture is not a mechanical exercise but a heart habit that leads to a deeper relationship with its Author and brings God's Word to life. **BA**

**Shirley Brosius** writes from Millersburg, PA. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.





# Bible Beauty

www.designpics.com

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How we reflect Christ on  
the inside and outside.  
**by Sonya Orr**

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**W**hen you hear the word *modesty*, what comes to mind? A woman covered from head to toe?

Our minds should go to the words of Paul and Peter:

Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness (1 Timothy 2:9, 10).

Your adornment must not be merely external — braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imper-

ishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God (1 Peter 3:3, 4).

These verses are directed to Christian women who “make a claim to godliness” regarding how we should adorn ourselves. As we look in the Word, I pray this will give us a better picture of what biblical modesty is.

## Definitions

Let’s begin by defining a few key words. The first is *proper*. According to *Strong’s Concordance*, it means “orderly, of good behavior, modest.” The second word is *modestly*, which can mean “bashfulness (toward men), modesty, or awe (toward God), reverence.” The third key word, *discreet*, describes someone who is sober minded or self-controlled.

God’s Word says that our inner adornment, or “the hidden person of the heart,” should be

the imperishable quality of a gentle (humble) and quiet (peaceful) spirit, precious to God. In other words, true beauty begins from within. When our hearts are consistently transformed by God’s Spirit and Word, our lives will consistently line up with His ways.

Immodesty goes beyond scanty clothing. Our two texts also refer to costly garments, hairstyles, and jewelry, as well as attitudes that detract from true beauty. Paul and Peter addressed this issue back in their day. Women used their fashion to draw attention to their worldly wealth and status. God calls that vanity.

## Inside and out

So does this mean that women should neglect their outer appearance? The answer is in 1 Peter 3:3’s reference to “not merely external.” While we should make the inside our priority, we



shouldn't neglect the outside. Cleanliness and exercise, for example, care for the body the way God intended. But the key is to glorify God in our bodies while not glorifying our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). We need balance.

The virtuous woman (Proverbs 31) is one of the greatest examples of true beauty, strength, and modesty of appearance and heart. She is excellent, trustworthy, submissive, a godly homemaker, a good steward of her time and money, hardworking, compassionate, kind, gentle, humble, a doer of good, wise, joyful, and clothed in strength and dignity (self-respect). Today's society views a lot of these qualities as weaknesses, but the Bible describes them as spiritual strengths (v. 30).

### Personal evaluation

My wardrobe and attitude regarding modesty have evolved throughout my years of walking with the Lord. In my early teens and as a new babe in Christ, I was approached by a young Christian man regarding my immodest attire. What he said still remains with me today: "Why is it that you talk a lot about Christ but dress this way? Don't you know that you can be a stumbling block for other men?" (Romans 14:13).

Taken aback, I thought, *If a man has a problem with lust, it's not my fault. It's his! Simply look away!* But I knew deep down that God used this young man to rebuke me and help me see the real issue of my heart.

Regarding modesty, Pastor John MacArthur writes in *Grace to You* (gty.org):

How does a woman discern the sometimes fine line between proper dress and dressing to be the center of attention? The answer starts in the intent of the heart. A woman should examine her motives and goals for the way she dresses. Is her intent to show the grace and beauty of womanhood? . . . Is it to reveal a humble heart devoted to worshipping God? Or is it to call attention to herself, and flaunt her beauty? Or worse, to attempt to allure men sexually? A woman who focuses on worshipping God will consider carefully how she is dressed, because her heart will dictate her wardrobe and appearance.

worldly, flashy, sensual way, to get attention? Let's spend time in prayer and allow God to search our hearts and thoughts. Let's evaluate our wardrobe through the eyes of Scripture. Here are a few questions to help us: "Is this outfit a good representation of my faith? Does it show my love and respect for God and others? Am I drawing attention *toward* God or *away* from God?"

This issue of modesty is not only for women. Men too must guard their eyes and minds from lust and vanity. Parents and churches are responsible to address this issue in love and truth. What we wear and what we do reflect our hearts and represent

“The key to beauty is to glorify God in our bodies while not glorifying our bodies.”

Nancy Lee DeMoss, from *Revive Our Hearts* (reviveourhearts.com), says, "You cannot be responsible for governing the eyes of the men around you, but ladies, we can be responsible and — here's the challenge — we are responsible for governing our modesty."

### Challenge

Dear sisters, I challenge us to do a quick heart check. Are we dressing and accessorizing in a

our faith. It matters to God, and it should matter to us! **BA**

**Sonya Lopez Orr**, her husband, Aaron, and their two daughters live near Houston, TX, and attend the CoG7 in Willis, TX. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.





# The Morning Star

by Whaid Rose

“Dawn’s Early Lights” – forerunners of the Protestant Reformation – were highlighted last time. We now turn our attention to the man nicknamed for the brightest object in the sky (after the sun and moon) that appears just before dawn: John Wycliffe (1330-1384), the Morning Star of the Reformation.

A Catholic priest and Oxford professor, Wycliffe became increasingly frustrated by the politics and greed that marked the religious system of his day. A corrupt papacy, an intoxicated priesthood, and the Bible written in a dead language and chained to the cathedral pulpit fanned his passion to translate the Latin Vulgate into English.

Wycliffe believed that the Bible should be accessible to the common people and that the job of the priest was to carefully study and communicate it so all could understand. It disturbed him greatly that failure to live up to this ideal was intentional on the part of the religious establishment, aimed at concealing the gospel in order to perpetuate the spiritual ignorance that hung like thick darkness over the church. Wycliffe and his followers therefore labored diligently to translate the Bible into the language of the people, the first copy completed in 1382.

For this Wycliffe was labeled “heretic,” stripped of his credentials, and forbidden to preach. Though he died a natural death, his bones were exhumed thirty years later (by papal command) and burned, and his ashes cast into the river Swift.

But as historian Phillip Schaff notes in *History of the Christian Church, Vol. 6* (Eerdmans, 1995), Wycliffe’s scattered ashes symbolize the far-reaching impact of his efforts: “They burnt his bones to

ashes and cast them into Swift, a neighboring brook running hard by. Thus this brook hath conveyed his ashes into Avon, Avon into Severn, Severn into the narrow seas, they into the main ocean. And thus the ashes of Wycliffe are the emblem of his doctrine, which now is dispersed the world over.”

Morning Star is an appropriate epitaph for John Wycliffe, for he appeared before the Reformation dawned and, by unleashing Scripture, brought light to a dark world. Just as stars merely reflect the sun’s light, Wycliffe merely reflected the light of the Son, Jesus, the light of the world (John 8:12). The Bible testifies to His light and is the switch that turns it on: “The entrance of Your words gives light” (Psalm 119:130). Thus Scripture is the ultimate standard for the Christian life, and to obstruct or obscure it threatens the very life of the church.

This conviction is the spark that ignited the Reformation. The Roman Catholic Church agreed that God’s Word has ultimate authority, but also taught that God’s Word can be found in places outside of Scripture, including tradition and the church’s authoritative teachings. To this the Reformers objected, laying down their very lives for what came to be known as *sola Scriptura*: The Scriptures alone are the Word of God and, therefore, the only infallible rule for life and doctrine.

Bible-based churches owe much to Wycliffe and his followers. And their cause continues. In our age of words (e.g., *relativism, pluralism, modernism*), increasing biblical illiteracy (even among believers), and the substitution of feel-good theology for solid Bible truth, we must dare to protest – to “earnestly contend for the faith” delivered in Scripture alone!

## Psalm 39

And every man's a vapor and all  
our days a span

Concludes prophetic poet and  
contemplative man

When God rebukes iniquity the  
wicked melt away

No wonder lest I sin with words I  
muse and choose restraint

And people walk as shadows,  
heaping wealth in vain

So lest I trust this haziness, Lord,  
make me know my days

— Janet Barr







# Scripture in

■ [Vibrant leadership]

by Amber Riggs

**A**lone with the unknown creature, the blind man caressed its skin, memorizing each wrinkle and marveling at the gentle strength of the tall, snakelike animal. “Come! Come see this animal! I’ve never met anything like it!” he called to his friend as he backed away to give the friend a turn.

The friend, also blind, approached the animal from a different angle. Instead of silently marveling at a tall, snakelike creature, his hands examined what felt like a living tree trunk. Still, he was amazed and passed on the excited invitation to a third blind friend, backing away to give the friend a turn. Approaching the animal from a third angle, what this man discovered was a weak, rope-like animal with wispy, bad smelling hair.

Leaving the creature behind, the men excitedly talked about their experience. Inevitably, an argument ensued. And so goes the ancient story of the blind men who encountered an elephant.

## Alone with Scripture

I wonder if we don’t sometimes approach Scripture the way these blind men approached

the elephant: alone yet confident that we can comprehend the intricacies and vastness of the very breath-of-God-made-Word, without the accountability of collaborative reflection.

Yet as followers of Jesus, we have become leaders — bearers of God’s image entrusted with communicating the ways of God through both our words and our actions (Romans 15:18). Thus, we are responsible to approach our study from a place of humility.

Although Scripture alone is recognized as the sole infallible authority for faith and practice, God never intended us to habitually study Scripture in relative isolation. While it’s true that communion with and guidance from the Holy Spirit never leaves us completely alone, this is not the only gift He has given us. Indeed, the theme of community flows throughout the entire Bible, consummating in the significance of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-14).

The reality is that each of us brings our own presuppositions and biases to Scripture. The more similar we are in our starting point of view, the more similar our conclusions will be. However, the body of Christ is gifted with diversity (1 Corinthians 12). As we approach the vastness of God as the blind men



# Community

approached the elephant, we put ourselves in a position to discern the character of God alongside one another.

## Shared study

Each of us should invite at least four distinct groups within the body of Christ to join us in our study of the Word.

### Great cloud of witnesses.

These believers were the original recipients of each passage of Scripture. We are wise to get to know them. What was going on in their lives when they received this word from God? How did they understand it? How did they apply it? The *IVP Bible Background Commentary* is an excellent source for this information.

**Christians from diverse backgrounds.** Have you noticed how people from different backgrounds often live out their faith in different ways? Ethnicity, geographic location, socio-economic background, gender, generation, and denomination all influence the angle from which we approach Scripture. Each of these groups will have unique insights and applications based on how God has revealed Himself within the context of their particular reality. Do you have Christian friends who fit this description? Spend time studying the Bible with them. *ChristianityToday*.

*com* is an excellent resource for Christian articles and books that provide valuable insights from diverse believers.

**Mature guides.** These respected Christians have been trained to study Scripture as objectively as possible and are discerning in how universal theological principles unite the original audience and Christians from diverse backgrounds. Mature guides are also marked by a commitment to embody what they have learned. They continue to learn from studying God's Word and applying this wisdom in practical contexts. We most benefit from mature guides we can engage with on a personal level. Do you know any such believers? How are you learning from them?

**Peers.** We all benefit from interaction with individuals who have shared values and commitments. When peers come alongside us in our quest to study Scripture together, we can allow ourselves to be challenged and grow in a safety net of accountability and support. Who are your peers in this pursuit?

## Invitation

As a follower of Christ, you are a leader — a bearer of God's image entrusted with communicating the ways of God through both your words and your ac-

tions. How you approach Scripture directly impacts how you will influence the people around you.

Within the body of Christ, God has invited you into a community, past and present, of God-seekers who want to discern Him and His ways. Only together can we break past our own points of view to discover the depths of a Savior whose ways transcend time, demographics, and culture. **BA**

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**Amber Riggs** is dean of Administration for Artios Christian College. She and her husband, Bryan, have four young daughters and are members of the Eugene, OR congregation.



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Dead Sea Scrolls — Lucidwaters—Dreamstime.com

# Integrity of Scripture

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Confirming the reliability of the New Testament.  
by David Ross

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Christianity is a truth claim about reality. A Christian believes that the Bible is the Word of God, that it rightly records the origin of the universe and all that exists in it. The Bible also reveals God’s divine interventions into the affairs of people. Of particular interest is the record of God’s accomplishment of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Orthodox Christianity not only asserts the Bible as revelation from God but also states that anything opposed to its teachings is false. The absolute nature of truth requires the exclusion of any claim that opposes what is found to be true. By claiming the Christian worldview is true,

we are simultaneously claiming that every opposing worldview is false.

In evangelism, it is extremely difficult to convince a person to accept the Bible as true if they have no apparent grounds for accepting the historical reliability of its surviving manuscripts. Therefore, our duty as Christians is to defend the reliability of Scripture if we are to convince unbelievers to accept as true what is conveyed through it.

## A defense

Defending the Christian worldview has biblical basis. First Peter 3:15 says, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” The word *defense* in this passage is translated from the Greek *apologia*, which basically means “to give a rational defense of an opinion

or belief” — that is, to provide reasons for how one thinks or believes. Christian apologetics, then, is the rational defense of Christianity as an accurate truth claim. Several other scriptures corroborate the biblical mandate to defend Christianity (Acts 17:2; Philippians 1:17; Titus 1:9; Jude 3).

Christianity’s legitimacy depends on the integrity of the Bible — specifically, the New Testament, the record of Jesus Christ’s miraculous birth, life, death, and resurrection. The New Testament assumes the reliability of the Old by referencing it often. In fact, Jesus quoted the Old Testament verbatim. If the New Testament is not historically reliable, our religion — contained in both Testaments — crumbles because Jesus Christ is the central figure of our faith. Therefore, one of the best ways to defend the Christian faith is to defend the reliability of the New Testament.



## Manuscript accuracy

The primary lines of evidence supporting the trustworthiness of the New Testament are the accuracy of its surviving manuscripts and the reliability of its authors.

To support this evidence, we must assert two facts: 1) The New Testament has earlier, more numerous, and more reliable surviving manuscripts than any other book from antiquity; 2) The people recording the events and teachings in these manuscripts were reliable. This claim is validated by the number of concurring writers<sup>1</sup>; the historical and archaeological confirmation of the people, culture, and places listed in the New Testament; and the critical examination of legal experts regarding its acceptability and credibility.

I mention the latter because when we say the New Testament is historically reliable, we are not claiming to prove the events recorded in it but that the New Testament record is true *beyond a reasonable doubt*, based on the reliability of the text. We must assert this distinction and remind those with whom we dialogue that empirical “proof” is impossible with regard to any historical document. As Christians, we trust that the New Testament tells the truth — that what was recorded really happened.

## Manuscript quantity, dating

The number of New Testament manuscripts is overwhelming compared with other books from antiquity, which typically range from ten to twenty copies. By contrast, the New Testament has approximately 5,800 surviving Greek manuscripts. The most for any other ancient book is

Homer’s *Iliad*, with 643, according to Norman L. Geisler in *Christian Apologetics 2nd ed.* (Baker Academic, 2013).

In addition, the lapse of time between the composition and the earliest copy of a book from the ancient world is roughly a thousand years. Contrast this with the earliest manuscript of a writing from the New Testament, the John Ryland Papyri (AD 117-138). This manuscript survived within a generation of the time scholars believe it was written (c. AD 95). Entire books (the Bodmer Papyri) are available from AD 200, only a little over a century after

## Historicity of Acts

The date and authenticity of the book of Acts is necessary to establish when discussing the credibility of the New Testament’s record of early Christianity. If Acts was written before AD 70, while the eyewitnesses were still alive, then it has great historical value and accurately informs us of the earliest Christian beliefs. Furthermore, if Acts was written by Luke, who was the companion of the apostle Paul, the writing came forth from the apostolic circle of Jesus’ earliest disciples.

Furthermore, the author of Acts conveys his detailed knowl-



1, 2 Peter manuscript, 3rd - 4th century

the New Testament was completed. The entire New Testament is actually available in the Codex Vaticanus, which dates from AD 325 to AD 350. Geisler says it was completed within 250 years of the original writing, still much less of a time lapse than any other book from antiquity.

No other book from the ancient world has as small a time gap between composition and earliest manuscript copies as the New Testament.

edge of the historical names, places, persons, and events of the times in which he wrote the book, such as the correct title of the emperor (25:21, 25), general facts of navigation, and points of Judean topography or Semitic names (1:12, 19, etc.). He gives specifics on the organization of a military guard (12:4) and mentions the part played by Troas in the system of communication (16:8). In Acts 17:1, Amphipolis and Apollonia are known as stations on the Egnatian Way, from Philippi to Thessalonica.

This is not an exhaustive list exhibiting Luke's accuracy in recording people, places, and customs of the first century Roman Empire. It does, however, demonstrate Luke's knowledge of the Greco-Roman world during this era.

### Archaeological confirmation

Luke also records historical events and peoples who have been verified by general historians and archaeologists. He says

“A Christian must know the reliability of the text our worldview comes from.”

Jesus began His ministry “in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee [AD 29], his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests . . .” (Luke 3:1, 2). It is noteworthy that Luke gives both an exact date (AD 29) and names of eight people, all known from general history to have lived during this era.

Geisler states that altogether, the Gospels mention over 30 verifiable historic figures who existed in the time and place the New Testament locates them.

Geisler also says that in addition to the overwhelming histori-

cal support for the people and events of this period, references in the Gospels are also supported by archaeological finds, such as the Siloam pool, the pool of Bethesda, the synagogue in Capernaum, the foundation of Herod's temple, Pilate's praetorium, the vicinity of Golgotha, and the garden tomb. Even the bones of a first century crucifixion victim, Yohanan, support the Gospels' presentation of Christ's death.

### Legal opinion

Legal experts are trained to determine the credibility of testimony in the courtroom. That testimony, if accepted, has life and death implications. One of the most respected legal experts in American history was Simon Greenleaf (1783-1853), professor of law at Harvard University. This man composed much of the text of *A Treatise on the Law of Evidence* (1853), still used today to train attorneys. When asked to apply the rules listed in the *Treatise* to the New Testament witness, he composed *The Testimony of the Evangelists* (Kregal Publications, 1995). Greenleaf concluded that in a court of law the evangelists' testimony would be accepted in their entirety as

credible, ancient documents. His verdict called on readers to be honest and objective in their assessments of the Gospels, which, based on his legal expertise and objectivity, demands that the evangelists' accounts be regarded as legitimate historical documents.

Greenleaf isn't the only one to endorse the New Testament as trustworthy. Attorney Lee Strobel, in *The Case for Christ*, and Supreme Court attorney Irwin Linton, in *A Lawyer Examines the Bible*, came to the same conclusion in their critiques of the New Testament. We can conclude, then, that the New Testament witness would have withstood the cross-examination of the opposition to its testimony. Therefore, beyond a reasonable doubt, the testimony recorded in the New Testament is reliable and ought to be believed as fact.

### Anchor

A Christian must know the reliability of the text our worldview comes from. Without any anchor in history, our faith is blind, which means as rational people we must suspend a judgment call regarding the validity of the biblical record.

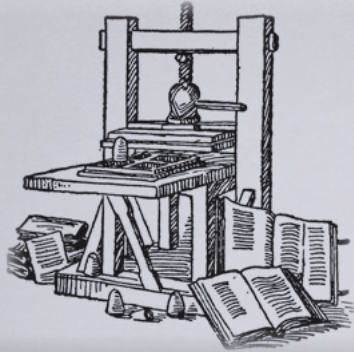
But we have an anchor, so “be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks.” **BA**

**David Ross** and wife Makayla pastor the CoG7 in Owosso, MI.



1. Most of the documents from antiquity have one writer, which allows for subjectivity in their writings. The number of writers matters most in terms of accountability.





# Did You Know?

## “Transforming Vision into Reality”

Christ Centered  
Spirit Formed  
Bible Based  
Sabbath Celebrating  
Distinct Yet Inclusive  
Passionate in Worship  
Compassionate in Service  
Engaging in Witness  
United in Fellowship  
Committed to  
Discipleship

- Martin Luther's famous summary of the Reformation spirit is the essence of *sola Scriptura*: “Here is the sum of the matter: let everything be done so that the Word may have free course.”
- Erasmus of Rotterdam, who believed that the future of the church depended on a biblically literate laity, published his text of the Greek New Testament in 1516, just one year before Luther sparked the Reformation in 1517. It caused a storm by calling the Latin Vulgate translation — and so the clergy — into question at key points.

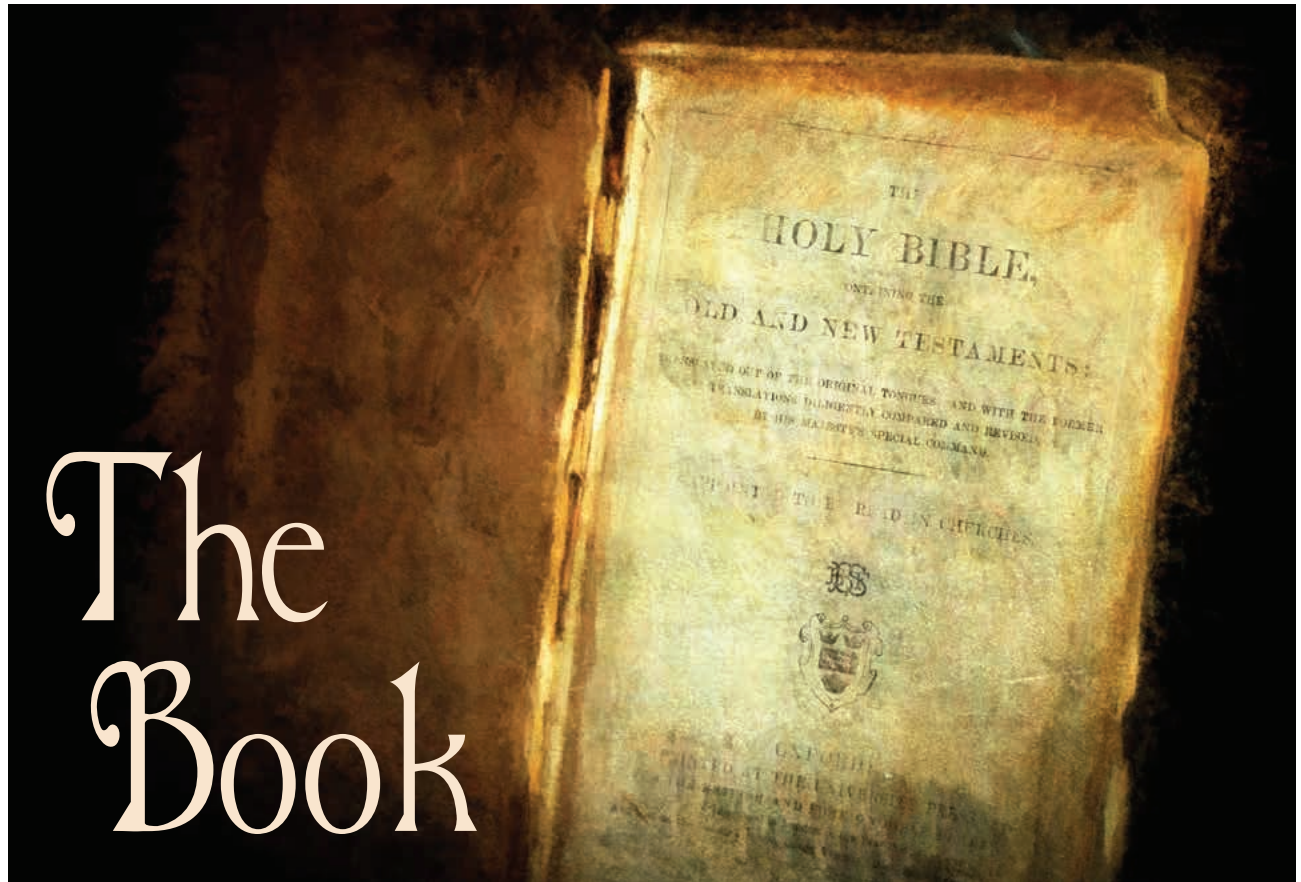
- The Latin translation of the Bible (*Vulgate*) by Jerome was commissioned by Pope Damasus in 382 and completed in 425. It was the definitive Bible in the West for over one thousand years and the first book printed on Gutenberg's press in 1452. At the Council of Trent (1545-1563), it was declared the official Latin translation of the Catholic Church in response to the Reformation.
- Without the technological advancement of the printing press in the fifteenth century (Gutenberg's press), the Reformation and the Protestant movement that followed would likely have not occurred. The average Christian prior to this time could neither read nor afford a Bible. This all changed with the Reformation.
- Martin Luther's insistence that all Christians be able to obtain and read the Bible for themselves was a boon for literacy and private spirituality and politically explosive. Well over a century earlier, English religious reformer John Wycliffe famously noted the democratizing effect of public access to the Bible: It would give rise to “government of the people, by the people, and for the people.”
- Luther's translation of the New Testament into German appeared in 1522 and helped shape the German language for generations to come. William Tyndale's English translation, published in great secret in Cologne, Germany, and smuggled into England, followed in 1525. Both translations were social sensations.
- When the now classic King James Version appeared in 1611, it was something of a commercial flop. England much preferred the Geneva Bible, translated by English exiles in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1560. Considered the finest translation of its time, the Geneva Bible's popularity during the reign of James I was due mostly to its extensive marginal notes. You could say that the Geneva Bible was the world's first “study Bible.” It addressed an urgent need brought on by the Reformation and the wide dissemination of Bibles in the vernacular: the proper interpretation of the Bible amid a great proliferation of competing interpretations and denominations.

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The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, F. L. Cross, editor (Oxford University Press, 1993).

Alister McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea* (Harper One, 2007), 37-55.





# The Book

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Come, enter the actual and fantastical world of the Bible.

by **Jody McCoy**

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**I**magine . . . three children arrive at an old mansion to spend their summer with stodgy relatives. Left to themselves on a rainy afternoon, they discover a colossal attic with giant maps and colorful flags draped on its walls. They find tribal masks from Africa, stone statues from India, a dragon costume from China, a World War II fighter cockpit, and dozens of trunks filled with other treasures. They try on costumes, masks,

and scuba gear, fly the airplane and paddle an old canoe, imagining themselves on glorious adventures.

Hours go by. Then they see it: There, at the far end of the room stands a lonely pedestal. On it is a large book, hundreds of years old. Its pages reveal captivating landscapes with mountains, waterfalls, forests, and castles. But hold on: The castles are flying flags that look just like those in the attic! The children flip back to the first pages and read that this book can take them to these wondrous places; just tap a picture twice. The book tells them to explore with courage, for only death can transport them back to the attic, ready for a new adventure.

What a great fantasy. But soon the children have to get back

to the boring, real world, with school, homework, and chores — a place where no magical books or adventures exist.

Ah, but wait. That's not true! There *is* one Book unlike any other on earth, and it holds the secret to eternal life. It can transform mortals into immortals and transport us to a glorious kingdom of unfathomable majesty, towering mountains, crystal blue rivers, indigo skies, and rolling green hills with vibrant flowers, birds, and butterflies. This kingdom echoes with the sounds of nature, the giggles of children, and the symphonies of worship. It blossoms with the fragrance of flowers and forests. It is, in a word, perfect.

The King in this kingdom is perfect too, as are the people, the lands, and the waters, teem-

ing with life. There is no death here, no sorrow, and no pain. The joy and love are indescribable. This kingdom is eternal — and it's real.

This Book can take you there. And it's no fantasy.

## No fantasy

This book, your Bible, isn't hundreds of years old but thousands. It's bound into a single volume, but it's really a collection of 66 smaller books written by more than 40 different authors. Let's meet a few.

Moses, the adopted son of a Pharaoh, lived in the Egyptian Empire. Daniel, the second in command to King Nebuchadnezzar the Great, lived in the Babylonian Empire. Nehemiah, the cupbearer to the Persian king Artaxerxes, lived in the Persian Empire. Matthew was a tax collector; Luke, a physician; Peter, a fisherman; and Paul, a Jewish Rabbi.

The Bible contains accurate details of ancient peoples, cities, empires, and battles because its authors were there. They actually lived throughout the Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian, and Greek empires, and much of the Roman. This is the vast perspective of a Book that took 1,600 years to write.

We can visit the pyramids in Egypt. We can see the remains of Babylon in Iraq, home of the tower of Babel, the fiery furnace, and the lions' den. We can climb Mount Carmel, where Elijah called down fire from heaven. We can go to Jerusalem and see the temple mount, the Garden of Gethsemane, and the actual streets where Jesus walked. We can sail the Sea of Galilee where

He walked on the water. It's all here, just as the Bible described it, because it's *real* history.

## Fantastic

The Bible is the living Word of God (Psalm 33:6-9; Hebrews 4:12). *Bible.org* says its pages declare "God said" or "Thus saith the Lord" over 3,800 times. It was written by human authors guided by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20, 21). From its divine perspective, this Book reveals the entire history of the world. Genesis tells us how the world began, and Revelation explains

*studies.org*, including a global flood, divine plagues, the Red Sea parting, miraculous healings, resurrections from the dead, walking on water, and a talking donkey. Fantastic — yes! Fantasy — no. Miracles reveal a Creator who cares for His creation and intervenes on their behalf. The Bible isn't a litany of commands; it's a book of relationships. From beginning to end, its stories show the Creator patiently guiding self-willed people into a loving relationship with Him. It's a Book of sacrificial love, forgiveness, and restoration.

So is there any evidence these

“The Bible contains accurate details because its authors were there.”

how it will end. This Book tells the single unfolding story of paradise lost in Genesis, becoming paradise regained through Christ in Revelation. Its authors didn't understand all they penned because they also wrote accurate prophetic details about Jesus a thousand years before He was born (e.g., Psalm 22; Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 53; Micah 5:2). According to *reasons.org*, the Bible validates its divine authorship with, by some counts, as many as 2,000 fulfilled prophecies.

The Bible also testifies of over 200 miracles, says *creation*

miracles actually happened? Perhaps the greatest evidence comes from the reaction of the Jewish people. They've always revered these writings as the words of God, passing them from generation to generation for 1,500 years. They carefully preserved these texts through the gauntlet of some of history's worst persecutions, sieges, destructions, annihilations, exiles, and utter chaos.

Now consider this. These texts contain bold testimony of fantastic miracles occurring in full view of all the Jewish people. They were there. They knew whether

the ten plagues happened or not. They knew whether the Red Sea parted or not. They knew if there was a cloud by day and a pillar by night. They knew if the mountains thundered and quaked when Moses delivered the Ten Commandments. They knew if there was really manna for 40 years.

If these miracles never happened, then all two million of Moses' followers knew his writings were lies. Could two million people conspire to perpetuate these lies, pawning them off onto their own children as the actual word of God with no one ever finding out the truth? Would they?

lief of the Jewish people in their relationship with God. Over and over, the Bible calls them unfaithful, hard-hearted harlots wandering after other gods.

Why would any people carry these words faithfully through unspeakable hardships from generation to generation for 1,500 years, claiming that they are the words of God? . . . unless they knew that these were the actual words of God because God actually confirmed His word through the awesome miracles they actually witnessed. We are greatly indebted to the Jews for their integrity in faithfully preserving the Word of God, unaltered, for us all.

Who needs more? Let's con-

tinued, condemned, burned, and banned. Why? Because it exposes evil and bares people's souls. Some defy the Book to change them, yet they know it will. So they try to extinguish its light.

In today's world, modern biblical criticism says we must analyze the Bible objectively, just like any other book. Its scholars cast unverifiable suspicion on the dates and authorship of the biblical books. They question whether prophecies were written after the fact, and note the similarity of biblical miracles to myths and legends of other ancient cultures. Is such skepticism warranted, or is it a ruse orchestrated to emasculate the Bible?

The Bible speaks for itself. For thousands of years, it has undeniably transformed billions of lives. Its truth resonates throughout the deepest caverns of their souls. They feel God's love permeating their being and flowing through them as they share God's grace with others. A few ancient texts confirm that Jesus was a real person, but no other book tells us who He was, what He did, what He said, and why He came. The Bible is that book. It transforms mortals into immortals because it is the actual Word of God.

If you think real life is boring, read this Book again. Your great adventure is happening right now, whether you realize it or not. On its pages, you'll discover Jesus. He's the secret to eternal life. He's the King in that perfect kingdom. What a glorious adventure awaits! **BA**



## Reliable

Suppose the Jews wanted to portray their ancestors as legendary heroes. After all, the Bible calls them "God's chosen people." But does the Bible offer a glorious Jewish legacy? No! These writings testify to shameful sins and embarrassing breaches of faith in the people's respected leaders. And even more to the point, these writings testify of the continual disobedience, abysmal infidelity, and unrelenting unbe-

lieve. The Bible exceeds 6 billion copies "sold" — a perennial best-seller and by far the best-selling book in history, according to [guinnessworldrecords.com](http://guinnessworldrecords.com). Most books are printed in a single language; the Bible, or portions of it, has been printed in over 3,200 languages, [Wycliffe.net](http://Wycliffe.net) says. There is no other book like this one.

## Transforming power

Throughout the centuries, the Bible has been ridiculed, demon-

**Jody McCoy** is executive director of the General Conference. He lives in Austin, TX.





## Scripture Alone

continued from page 5

an organization and its people as individuals.

For over one hundred fifty years, our members have sacrificed much to maintain allegiance to the teachings of the Bible. Conviction to Bible teachings identifies who we are. My own family searched for eighteen years for a church that truly taught *Scripture alone*. Over the years I have met many who, as a result of the same passion, became a part of the Church of God. We believe firmly that saved people live by *Scripture alone*, plus nothing. **BA**

**John Lemley** and his wife, Lois, live in Vancouver, WA, and attend CoG7 in Kalama, WA.



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## Are You Listening?

continued from page 6

finished saying all this to the people *who were listening . . .*" (7:1). A little earlier he records how Jesus himself commented, "But to you *who are listening* I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you" (6:27). This clearly shows that Jesus knew some people were listening to what He said, while others were perhaps hearing but not listening.

In fact, Luke indicates that Jesus may have paced His teaching according to the degree people really paid attention to what He said: "While they were listening . . . he went on to tell them a

parable . . ." (19:11). Precisely because people were paying attention in this instance — really listening — Jesus extended His teaching to give them more understanding.

## Strategies for hearing

We can apply this principle in at least two aspects of studying God's Word. First, we must listen and not just read. Despite the best intentions, we can merely sit and read the Bible without really hearing what it says, just as our minds sometimes drift when we listen to someone speaking. The primary safeguards against reading and not hearing are to pause frequently to analyze or summarize what we read, and review it when finished.

Second, we should ask ourselves questions about what we are hearing — a principle we see in the life of Jesus: "After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46). Listening and asking questions in our own study helps us go beyond simply reading.

This kind of intensely focused study isn't always necessary, of course, but the more often we do it, the more it can help us effectively listen. If we genuinely desire to understand more of God's Word, we need to frequently use strategies that focus on listening at the deepest level.

## Making it meaningful

Another aspect of listening to God's Word is meaningful Bible study. It should always begin in submission and end in transformation because ultimately, true listening implies accepting and

applying what we hear. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for *hear* (*shema*) also means "obey." After Moses recited the laws of the covenant to Israel, the people replied, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey" (Exodus 24:7). But the original Hebrew literally says, "All that God spoke we will do and we will *hear*." We find the same connection between hearing and doing many times in the New Testament (e.g., Matthew 7:24; Luke 11:28; James 1:22).

This is vital because God listens to those who listen to Him (John 9:31). And our listening must be ongoing. Throughout the ages, many Christians have found that if we stop applying what we learn at any point, we often will not learn more until we apply what we already know. The more we apply, however, the more we come to understand.

Truly listening to what we hear is vital to our spiritual growth. We should always remember the striking words of Christ in this regard: "Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they think they have will be taken from them" (Luke 8:18). It's a cardinal principle of successful study of the Word of God: We may have been given much, but only to the degree that we listen will we be given more. **BA**

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**R. Herbert** (a pen name) writes for a number of Christian venues as well as for his websites at *LivingWithFaith.org* and *TacticalChristianity.org*. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



# Mail Bag

## Explaining the body of Christ

Regarding the last paragraph on page 31 ["Last Word," September-October '16], please ask Pastor Loren Stacy to explain who the "universal body" is that he is referring to. What does he mean by "organizational affiliation"?

A. D.  
E-mail

*Response from Loren Stacy: Regarding the "universal body," my understanding of Scripture is that the body of Christ exists, not as some identifiable organization of man but only in the mind of God. God alone knows who is saved and who is not. Everyone who has been saved in the past, who is saved in the present, or who will be saved in the future is made a member of the body of Christ. I call Christ's body "invisible" because it is not in its totality a visible, identifiable, man-created organization or religious denomination. I refer to saved people as being a part of the "universal" body of Christ, because this body encompasses all of them — past, present, and future.*

*By "organizational affiliation," I had in mind the many different religious denominations. No one is saved by being a member of a certain denomination, such as Baptist, Presbyterian, or the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day). We do not believe that every member of the General Conference is saved or, conversely, that in order to be saved, one must be a member of our denomination. No, salvation is by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ Jesus alone.*

*If my responses have answered your questions, great! If I've only made things more confusing, please say so and try again; I'm very willing to discuss these matters with you until we fully understand each other.*



## Applause for "Solo Christo"

A very inspiring read indeed [January-February '17]! On point and encouraging in my own walk. I agree, focus is the "key." Thank you, Grace [Carpenter], for sharing this heartfelt writing ["Identify Yourself," p. 7]. I encourage you to produce many more — maybe even a book!

L. Z.  
BA Online

I really needed to hear all the identity affirmations of who we are and, even more, to read Loren Stacy's affirmation on who the church says Jesus is. "He is our Lord and our God." Praying for continuous revival of the church!

J. H.  
Facebook

Today we stopped at our mailbox, and when I unlocked it, I said, "It is only the BA." When I was finally settled in my spot on the couch, I opened it up, scanned through to see the titles and who wrote, and I began to get excited! Then I went back to the editorial and started reading. When I was through reading Jason Overman's "Reform - Transform," the potential and impact of our "Transforming Vision into Reality" hit my heart and soul in a whole new manner, and tears slid down my cheeks!

Another quick scan through the BA made me feel that I was hold-

ing in my hand the best and most important BA of my entire life! I felt an urge to write to the leadership in this district and share what I was feeling, and appeal to you, to take the new BA and read it, and may God's Holy Spirit touch you as deeply as it did me.

K. L.  
E-mail

I was delighted to receive the gift of an article by my brother, John Lemley ["Christ Alone," p. 4]. He is my favorite instructor of all time (he was my professor at LifeSpring) because he has always been honest and direct. I found his article to be easy to follow in that his point was clearly defined and explained. Some writers weave a ponderous web of prose to disguise faulty logic, but Brother Lemley writes the truth with clarity. Thank you so much for this blessing, and I hope you can persuade him to contribute more to a grateful readership.

R. C.  
E-mail

## Studying the BA

Your choice of selecting Ephesians 4:4-6 as the main theme for the 2016 publications was certainly inspired of the Holy Spirit. I read each issue thoroughly and use it as my main study, Sunday-Friday, looking up each verse of Scripture used in an article. I am an early riser, generally up between 3:00 - 5:00 a.m., depending on my work schedule, so I look at the article the day before so I can pray for its author during my prayer time upon rising . . . May God continue to guide and direct all of you at the BA and CoG7 headquarters.

R. M. R.  
Florida



# G. C. Ministries News

ARTIOS • MISSIONS • PUBLICATIONS



## G. C. Convention July 3-8, 2017

### Worship Speakers



Jody  
McCoy



Tim  
Steinhauser



Greg  
Lincoln



Ismael  
Martínez



Whaid  
Rose



Loren  
Stacy



## Lord's Supper Sunday, April 9

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- For children from Preschool to Grade 6
- Flexible and easy-to-use
- Lots of hands-on activities
- 3-year curriculum for each of the 3 age levels

**Curriculum Overview:**  
Preschool and Primary students will go through the Bible, learning about God creating the world, through God sending Jesus as our Savior, to Jesus returning a second time. Intermediate students will study in-depth lessons on "The Armor of God," "The Beatitudes," "Promises," and many other important topics.

**Components:**  
Scope and Sequence, Teacher's Guides, Student Handouts, Activity Worksheets, Teacher's Resources

Published and Distributed by  
Bible Advocate Press  
a ministry of the  
Church of God (Seventh Day)

### Children's Sabbath school teachers:

If you're not using the BAP children's curriculum in your home church, e-mail [bap.orders@cog7.org](mailto:bap.orders@cog7.org) for a sample. Written with CoG7 teaching in mind, preschool, primary, and intermediate (kindergarten to 6th grade) lessons are available. Print a flyer, download sample pages, or order at [baonline.org/study-guides/](http://baonline.org/study-guides/).

\* \* \* \*

Submit local and district events and news  
to be posted in [churchright.org](http://churchright.org).

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### Attention, International Subscribers!

The Bible Advocate is conducting a lapsed reader/address purge. If you would like to continue receiving the BA in the mail, please call 303-452-7973, e-mail [bap.orders@cog7.org](mailto:bap.orders@cog7.org), or send a note to Bible Advocate, P.O. Box 33677, Denver CO 80233. Don't forget that you may view and download the magazine anytime at [baonline.org](http://baonline.org).





## Ministry Through the IMC

### Zone ...

**1** In December, Seth Oxley officially opened the first CoG7 congregation on the island of Barbados, with support from Elders Whaid Rose and Chip Hinds.



**2** Baptisms took place in Panajachel, Guatemala, where the Cristo Viene ministry actively supports evangelists to preach the good news.



**3** Through the Compartiendo Amor "Sharing Love" ministry in Misiones, Argentina, youth encouraged those confined to hospitals and homes.



**4** Nearly 60 students completed their first year of evangelistic training at CoG7's Bible seminary in Faisalabad, Pakistan, with Pastor Shamas Pervaiz and support from G. C. Missions.



**5** To better support the rapidly growing ministry of Pastor Alexandre Masumbuko and CoG7 in Burundi, this cassava mill was purchased for \$1,300 to generate needed funds.



**6** Pastor Junjie Saliring baptized seven new converts in Mindanao, Philippines.

*Support G. C. Missions with your prayers and offerings to reach the world with the good news!*





## People of the Word

"All Scripture," says God via Paul's second epistle to Timothy, "is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16, NASB).

We, the members of the Church of God (Seventh Day), believe this testimony about God's written Word, the Bible, with all our hearts. We are people of the Word – God's Word. We look to the Bible, rightly divided (2:15, KJV), as the only reliable source for our beliefs and practices. Neither the teachings of those who have gone before us nor the claimed revelations of those who walk beside us are acceptable to us, unless they agree with God's written Word, accurately interpreted and applied. We are people of the Word – God's Word.

For this reason, the battle cry of the Protestant Reformation – *sola Scriptura* ("Scripture alone") – resounds with us. Back then, *sola Scriptura* was a response to a church that claimed authorities and established doctrines that were nowhere taught by God's holy Word. In this, we agree: Scripture and Scripture alone must be our authority. We serve God. To know God and to know His will, we go to God's Word. We submit to God and to the authorities His Word instructs us to submit to. We are people of the Word – God's Word.

Comments often heard while discussing the Holy Scriptures, such as "I feel that this passage means . . ." or "To me, this passage means . . .," are anathema to us. We are not swayed by personal feelings or interpretations. This is God's Word, not ours; we are interested only in what God means. Theological opinions offered without biblical reference are likely to be confronted

among us by the gentle request, "Chapter and verse, please." As we say within our Vision of a Vibrant 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church, we are Christ Centered, Spirit Formed, and Bible Based. We are people of the Word – God's Word.

To "rightly divide" God's Word – to determine to the best of our Spirit-guided abilities what God means by what He has written – we follow a simple, but sometimes difficult, process. Devoting ourselves to prayer and using all resources available, we endeavor to ask and answer four questions suggested by Duvall and Hays in their textbook *Grasping God's Word*: 1) What did the text mean to the original audience? 2) What are the differences between the biblical audience and us? 3) What is the theological principle in this text? 4) How should Christians today apply that theological principle in their lives? The prayer and study required to accurately ask and answer these questions take time and effort, but it is time and effort we willingly give to this worthy cause. After all, we are people of the Word – God's Word.

I learned from *The Navigators* to picture the benefits of God's Word, expressed in 2 Timothy 3:16, as a journey on a railroad. Scripture will put us on the right track. If we get off, Scripture will stop us and return us to the right track. As we return and stay on the right track, Scripture will lead us where we need to go.

Our goal is to know God and do His will. Therefore, we are people of the Word – God's Word.

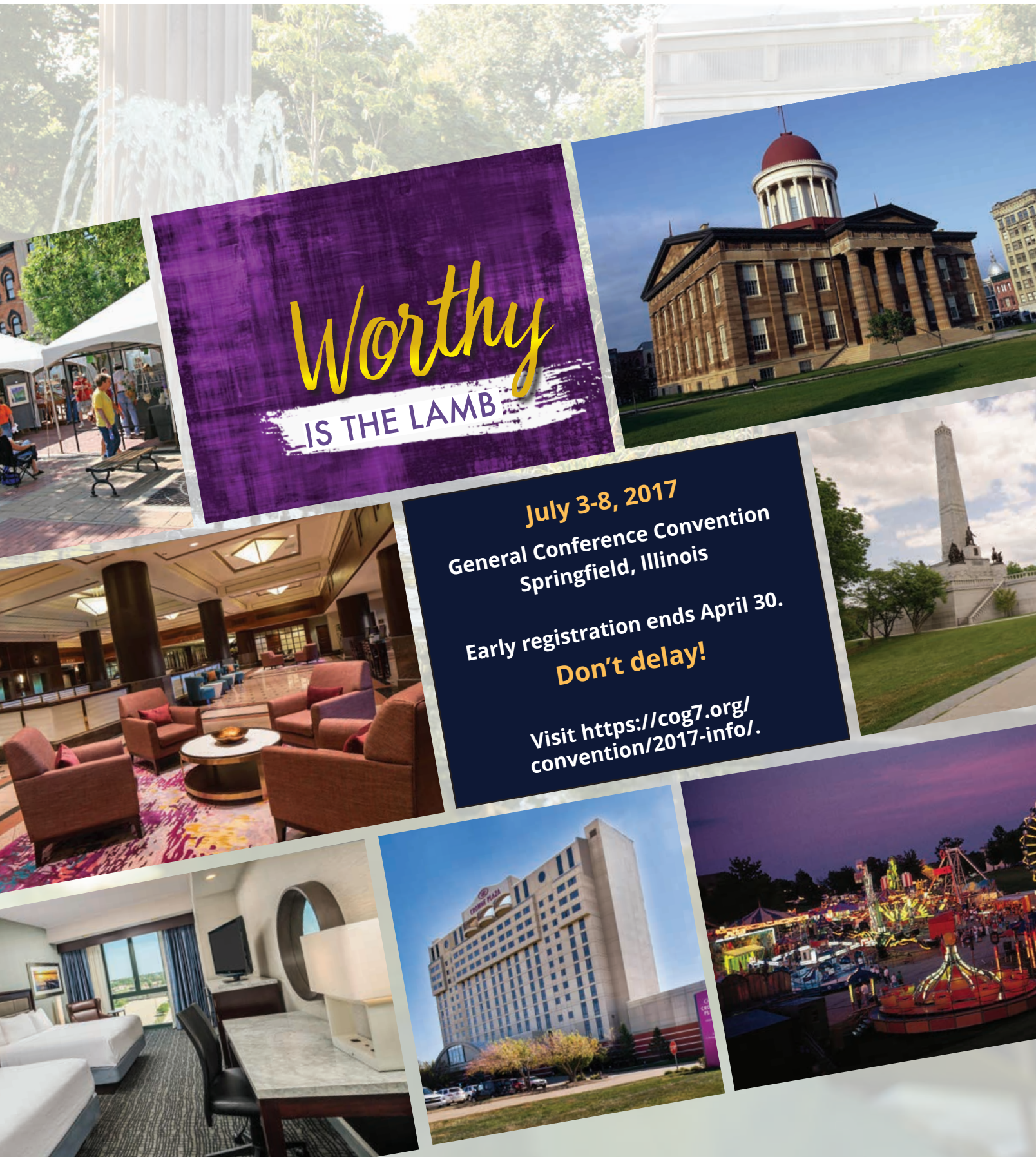
– Loren Stacy





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