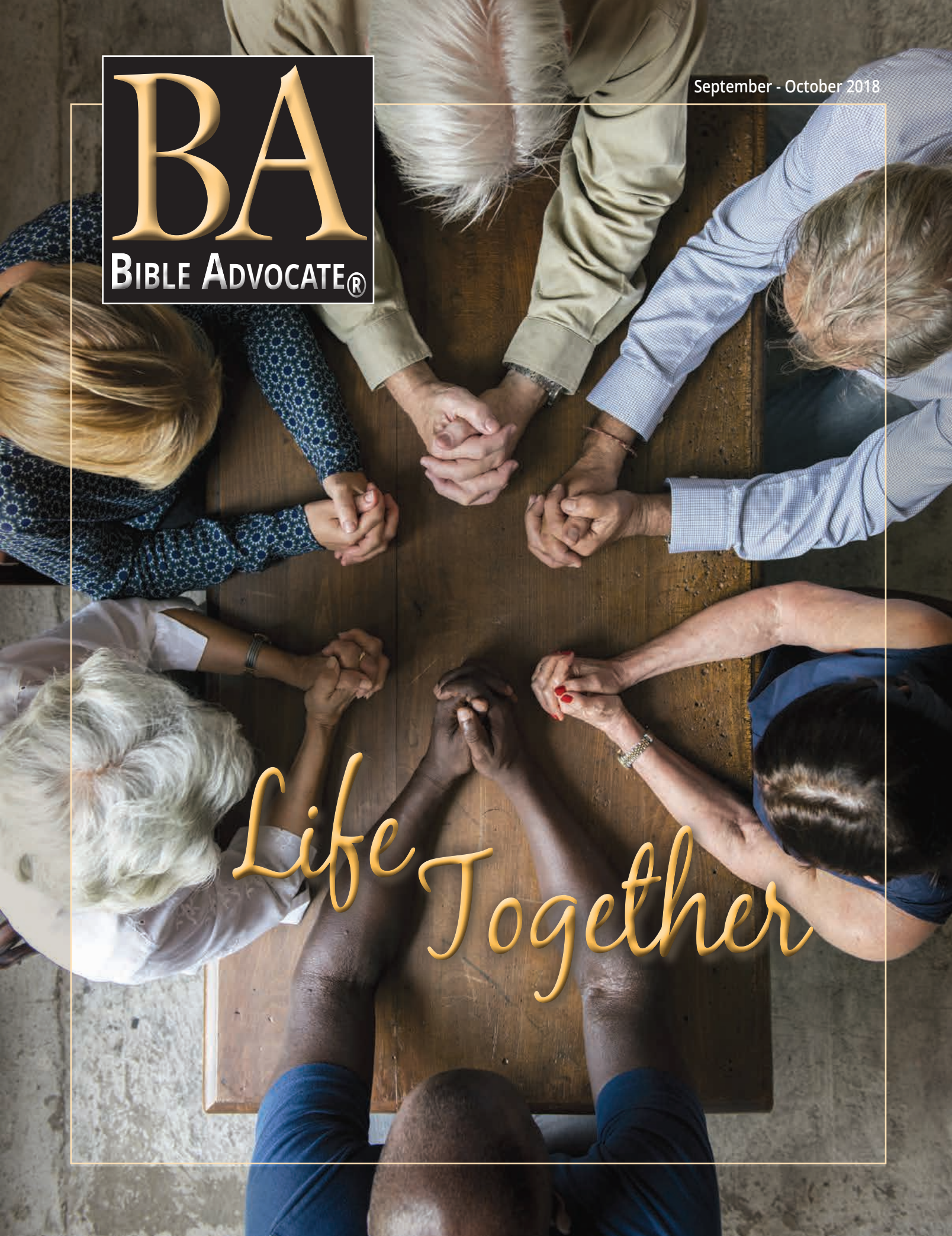


September - October 2018

BA
BIBLE ADVOCATE®

Life Together





2018: This We Believe

ARTICLES



- 4 This We Believe
- 8 What's in an Ordinance? | Robert Coulter
- 10 Divine Interruption | Jeanette Levellie
- 12 Never Alone | Judy Gann
- 14 An Unusual Congregation | Roy A. Borges
- 16 Our Job Description | R. Herbert
- 18 Practice Makes Possibilities | Amber Riggs
- 20 Why Church? Part 1 | John Klassek
- 23 Wheels of Old Age | Carol Kehlmeier
- 24 Koinonia and the Cross | Jonathon Hicks
- 27 Biblical Preservation | Gordon Feil

DEPARTMENTS

- 3 First Word — Care for the Church
- 11 Questions & Answers
- 17 Poetry — Jewell Johnson
- 29 G. C. Ministries News
- 30 Around the World — Ministry Through the IMC
- 31 Last Word — Nothing Like the Local Church

Scripture quotations

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Jason Overman: Editor

Sherri Langton: Associate Editor

Keith Michalak: Director of Publications, graphics

Sylvia Corral: Translation

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Care for the Church

She's been there as long as I can remember. From the first time I recognized her, I loved her. Napping on a pew in Tacoma at age three, singing in children's choir in Stanberry at age seven, attending Sabbath school with friends in Hammondville. There, at ten years old, I knelt in the backseat of our family car one Sabbath afternoon and confessed my faith in Jesus and desire to serve His church.

Claremore, Joplin, Jasper; church schools, youth camps, baptism, marriage. I still love her — the local congregation of everyday life. When I was a child, it was the comfort and belonging; as a teen, the purpose and accountability. At each stage of my life she has nurtured me in the grace and truth of Jesus. In my pastoring, that love matured into *care* — the same concern for her welfare that Paul confessed: “the care of all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:28, KJV).

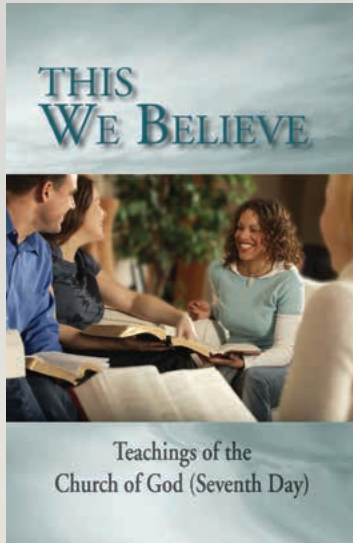
God has high expectations for her: glorious bride of Christ and holy temple of God (Ephesians 5:25-33; 2:19-22). These promises shape our own expectations. We aim to be a vibrant 21st century church, or, as Jesus called us, “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). But is this possible without our love and care, without contributions or submission to one another and God's vision for His people?

There is cause for concern. People are leaving churches in droves, and many who remain enjoy her social benefits with superficial faith, knowing little of the truth God entrusted to her. Enemies are within and without. Secularism is largely to blame. Its individualism has no need for God, church, or the commitments they demand of our freedom. And the church can be petty, competitive, and hurtful on her own. But these concerns are not new. The corrupting effects of carnality and culture were warned of at the start (Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 3:3). Here we are still, and with a decision.

We decide if we'll love and care for her. *Do you?* We decide if we will submit and contribute to her health. *Will you?* Since taking the editor's chair three years ago, I've dedicated the September-October issue to *the church*. It's an indication of my care. As we review This We Believe this year, we come to our teachings on the church and her ordinances. *Our life together*. Don't neglect that. Love her!

— Jason Overman





This We Believe

In Part 5 of this series, we feature our teachings on the church and her ordinances, taken from *This We Believe: Teachings of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*.

Statement of Faith 5

The Church

This we believe:

The church of God in Scripture is a spiritual body of believers who hold the faith of Jesus and keep the commandments of God. Under the lordship of Christ and the authority of His Word, the church exists universally and locally for purposes of worshipping God, preaching the gospel, nurturing believers, and serving humanity. Christians should participate in the church's mission by service to others and fellowship with believers.

The word in the Greek text that stands behind *church* in our English versions is *ecclesia*. It is a combination of two Greek words *ek* ("out of") and *kaleo* ("called"). Thus *ecclesia*, or *church*, means simply "called-out ones."

Translators of the New Testament into English chose the words *church* or *assembly* when they read the word *ecclesia* in the Greek text. *Ecclesia* can refer to a secular gathering of called-out people, as in Acts 19:32. Of its 118 occurrences, however, it most often describes a gathering of God's people for worship and fellowship.

As a working definition for our purpose, we may say that the church is an assembly of persons who have been called out of the world by the doctrine of the gospel to worship the true God in Jesus Christ, according to His Word.

Origin and history

The idea of *ecclesia* precedes both the word and the Greeks who used it. It originated with God himself. Taking the initiative, He fellowshiped with Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:8ff).

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), *ecclesia* is the word used for the English *assembly* or *congregation*. This *ecclesia* of God's people is referred to nearly seventy times from Genesis through Malachi, as God met with Israel and the saints of old. Examples include meeting to receive the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 9:10), to

dedicate the temple (1 Kings 8:65), and to hear Ezra read the book of the law (Nehemiah 8:1-3).

The church takes on its New Testament form and function in the book of Acts. There it is reborn by the Holy Spirit's infusion on the Day of Pentecost, nurtured and edified by the continued work of the Spirit, opposed and persecuted by enemies (both religious and secular), and edified and increased by the grace of its Lord. . . .

Metaphors of the church

The New Testament often compares the church to a body, a building, and a bride.

The church is like a body (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:23; 4:12; Colossians 1:24; 2:19). This comparison accents the role of Jesus Christ as the head of all Christians, the assortment of roles that various members play within the one body, and the importance of mutual care and interaction of all members with each other.

The church is like a building (Matthew 16:18; 1 Corinthians 3:13-17; Ephesians 2:19-22; and 1 Peter 2:5-8). This metaphor presents Jesus Christ as the foundation and chief cornerstone, the apostles and prophets as foundation stones, and all the members as living stones used to build up a holy temple to the Lord.

The church is like a bride (Ephesians 5:22-32; Revelation 19:7). In this comparison, the devotion and sacrificial love of Christ for God's people is stressed, as well as their submission and respect for the one who laid down His life for them.

The Bible uses many terms to describe God's people. Peter, for example, gives this impressive list: "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9). Other descriptors include the redeemed, the saved, the elect, children of God, Christians, the faithful, believers, saints, servants, and brethren.

The concept of church incorporates all of these. It identifies the spiritual body of believers God has called out of sin and into His family through His Son Jesus Christ. Or, as Peter says in the same verse, "that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

Members of God's church are compared to . . .

- sheep (John 10:1-18) – They know the Shepherd's voice and they follow Him.

- branches (John 15:1-8) – By their connection to and dependence on the vine, they bear much fruit.
- stones (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5) – Positioned in the building by the blueprints of the Cornerstone, they strengthen the entire structure.
- body parts (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) – For a healthy body, each part depends on and cooperates with all other parts.

These metaphors of the interrelationship between Christ and His church stress how each member is to submit to Christ and cooperate with one another.

Requisites for membership

- Not time or place: God's people – His church – have existed in every age, wherever men and women, boys and girls, have trusted and obeyed His revealed Word. The church of God has neither chronological nor geographical limitations.
- Not lineage or nationality: John the Baptist warned his audience not to boast of being Abraham's children (Luke 3:8). The great multitude of Revelation 7:9, 10 includes the saved from every nation. God's people credit their salvation to God and the Lamb, without regard to gender, ethnic, or national background.
- Not power or position: The apostle Paul says it best: "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" (1 Corinthians 1:26, NKJV).
- Not perfect knowledge or flawless conduct: If membership in God's church were contingent



upon having correct knowledge about all matters and proper behavior in all details, then membership could never be certain. A haunting fear that we haven't known enough or done well enough would always remain.

Each of these, plus all other man-made additions, has served to divide Christians and encourage feelings of superiority and pride, giving false hope. God provided a better criterion for being in His church. Jesus proclaimed, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6; see also Acts 4:12). He also said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35, NKJV).

Membership is contingent upon turning toward Jesus as Savior and Lord (faith) and turning away from sins (repentance). That's how one joins God's church. New converts are baptized as an outward expression of the inner change already experienced through the Spirit's work. . . .

Conclusion

The faithful church takes seriously Christ's commission to go and make disciples of all the weary and scattered masses of people. The church is the place for sinners to find warm, sincere acceptance from Christians who will challenge them to experience forgiveness through the Savior. It is where those coming to Christ will find a family to cherish them and nurture their newfound faith. The church will invite them to serve, provide opportunities for them to discover and utilize God-given abilities and strengths, and be available to fully incorporate and assimilate them into the family of God.

The church is the place for the redeemed to be nurtured into greater Christlikeness. It is where all may receive instruction in truth as the Word is taught and preached. It is where they will be trained to assist in carrying out the Great Commission. In the midst of a thirsty, selfish world, the church is an oasis where acceptance, encouragement, and support are offered and received. In the midst of a tired, busy world, the church is where peace and rest are a blessed reality. In a lonely world, the church offers the rare gift of genuine fellowship.

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version, except where noted.

From pages 61-71

Statement of Faith 6

Christian Ordinances

This we believe:

Christ prescribed two ordinances that confirm faith in Him: 1) water baptism, preceded by a confession of faith in Christ and repentance, represents the believer's initial union with Christ by depicting death to sin, burial by immersion in water, and rising to a Spirit-controlled life; and 2) Lord's Supper, a memorial to Christ's atoning death. Believers commemorate Christ's death by eating the bread of communion and drinking from its cup, symbols of His broken body and shed blood, thus demonstrating fellowship with our Savior until He returns. It is accompanied by the washing of feet. We observe this Supper annually in the season it was instituted and are charitable toward those who observe it at other times. **BA**

Order your own copy of *This We Believe* at cog7.org/online-store/.



The image shows two book covers side-by-side. The left cover is titled 'Christian Baptism' and features a photograph of a river with a waterfall. The right cover is titled 'The Lord's Supper' and features a photograph of a golden chalice. Below the covers, there is a lighthouse on a rocky shore at night. At the bottom of the image, there is a call to action.

Want to learn more about Christian ordinances? Visit publications.cog7.org.

THE BIBLE ADVOCATE



AND HERALD OF THE COMING KINGDOM

"THY WORD IS A LAMP UNTO MY FEET, AND A LIGHT UNTO MY PATH."

Thoughts on the Sabbath School Lesson

LESSON FOR FEBRUARY 6, 1937

TRUE LOVE

Scripture Reading: 1 John 3:9-16.

Golden Text: 1 John 3:11.

Last week we learned from the first verse of the reading, 1 John 3:1, that we are children of God by adoption, that is, God calls us His children. Now with the beginning of the reading we have a new thought brought to us. "Whosoever is born of God..." Going to the Greek on this text we find that the word "born" comes from the Greek word "Genni" which means to beget. This agrees with what Peter says in 1 Peter 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." If we have been begotten again by having believed in the resurrection of Christ and if He has given us His Spirit to direct us as we grow more like Him, then we do not commit sin because His seed, that is his power of making us into sinless creatures, remains in us. But if we turn away from the leading of His Spirit then we can commit sin and do because we no longer have His power but are depending on our own selves to be overcomers.

This thought further agrees with what Paul wrote to the Roman brethren, (Rom. 6:1-4). When we turn from the world and believe in the resurrection of Christ, and prove our faith by being baptized, thus having our sins forgiven and our sinful desires buried in the watery grave, then new desires, desires of righteousness, come into our lives and we start to grow like the Master, walking in "newness of life." John says (1 John 3:10) that this is the way we can know who God has begotten and who He has not. God, from the very beginning, has commanded us to love our brother and our God. And if we love God and love our brother and fellowmen we will do the will of our heavenly Father. Mark 3:35. Then if we do not love one another it shows that we are not the children of God. What we are is shown by our attitude toward our fellowmen. Cain did not have love for his brother Abel and so when he had opportunity he slew him because he had hatred instead of love. If we love God and keep His commandments we can expect the world to hate us. Christ loved all and the world hated Him and thus if we love we will be like Him. That was why Cain wanted to kill Abel. Abel was righteous while Cain was wicked and had hatred in his heart. Thus as we examine

ourselves, if we find that we love the brethren we can know that we have been begotten again and have passed from death unto life. That is, we are living that new life (Rom. 6:4). Yet, as Paul says (Gal. 2:20) it is not us living but Christ living in us. Col. 3:3.

We find as we look about at the world that a murderer is looked down upon as a terrible being, yet many of the people who have this feeling about their fellowmen are in the same condition themselves and do not know it. Of old, under the Old Covenant in order to be a murderer a man had to actually kill his fellow man, but now, under the New Covenant Christ has magnified the law and if we have a desire in our heart to violate any of the commands of God we are a sinner. Thus if we have hatred in our life toward any one, according to Christ (Matt. 5:21, 22) we are a murderer at heart. This agrees with John in our lesson. 1 John 3:15. How much should we love the brethren. And how can we show this love? Christ was our example. (1 Peter 2:21). He not only said He loved us but proved it by His life. He not only loved those who were following Him but also the wicked as well (Romans 5:8 and John 10:11). If we are God's children and thus brethren of Christ we also will lay down our life for the world to save them from sin as well as to help our brethren. Does this mean that we must be crucified or beheaded? No, I think not. If we are devoting our lives to the cause of God by preaching the gospel or working for God in some other capacity, or if we are giving of the means that God has intrusted to our care in order that some one else may carry the gospel message to the world then we are showing our love for our fellowmen. We are thus giving our life for the world. Or if called upon to die for our faith in our Savior we must not draw back but go like the martyr of old bravely to our death bearing our cross for Him. This is perfect love and if we have this perfect love then it gives us strength to endure all things for Him. 1 Cor. 13:7.

—L. I. Rodgers

Read this article in its entirety, along with the February 1937 issue, at baonline.org.

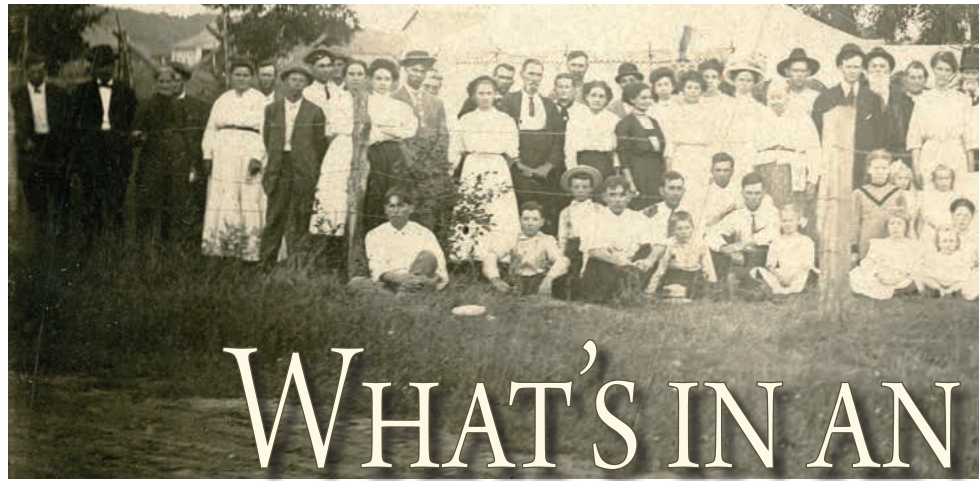
Our church historian explains CoG7's understanding of baptism and the Lord's Supper through the years.
by Robert Coulter

The Church of God (Seventh Day) has observed two ordinances since our inception in 1858. We have always baptized new converts by immersion in water, in the name of Jesus. But our observance of the Lord's Supper service evolved from "whenever" to annually. Unfortunately, our observance of the Lord's Supper service has been beset by much unnecessary controversy over the years.

Beginnings

After the Church of Christ in Michigan (former name of the Church of God [Seventh Day]) was organized in 1858, and her congregations grew, she began holding quarterly weekend meetings that rotated among her churches. They began on Friday evening with an opening preaching service, followed by a full day of preaching on Sabbath, and concluded with observing the Lord's Supper and foot washing on Sunday afternoon before dismissal.

These popular weekend services drew large crowds from the statewide membership. They were frequently attended by representatives from independent Sabbathkeeping churches whose teachings likened those of the Church of Christ, such as the Church of God in Wisconsin and



occasionally the Church of the First Born in New England.

But beside the quarterly meetings' observance of a communion service, ministers of the churches of Christ in Michigan and the churches of Jesus Christ in Iowa held communion services whenever they felt the occasion called for it.

Gilbert Cranmer reported conducting a funeral in northwestern Michigan one December and conducting preaching services for a few nights following the funeral, which he concluded with a communion service.

Samuel Davison held a Lord's Supper service for the Church of Jesus Christ at Fairfield, Iowa, in July 1865. But by 1872, Davison had become convinced that the Lord's Supper should be observed annually at the time of Jesus' death in the spring. He wrote an article for *The Hope of Israel* purporting that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper the night before He was crucified on the Jewish Passover as a memorial to His impending death. Davison reasoned that the Passover, a memorial to Israel's deliverance from Egypt, was an annual observance. Therefore, the Lord's Supper, a memorial of Jesus' death,

should be observed annually like the Passover, around the time of the Passover.

Davison's argument for an annual communion service received such wide support from the churches' membership in Michigan, Iowa, and Missouri that Jacob Brinkerhoff, editor of *The Hope of Israel*, began publishing an annual date for the churches to observe the Lord's Supper. Brinkerhoff did not have access to a Jewish calendar to know the exact date of the annual Passover. Therefore, he published dates near the spring equinox so all the churches that subscribed to an annual communion service could observe it in unison.

Eventually Brinkerhoff learned of the perpetual calendar for all the Hebrew festivals, and he published the actual date of the Passover as the date for observing the Church's annual communion service. He announced the date for the annual Lord's Supper service for 1885 in the *Advent and Sabbath Advocate* magazine: "The 14th day of the first month (Passover), occurs this year on the night after Sunday, March the 30th, according to Roman time."

However, the Church gave



members freedom to observe their communion service at the beginning of the Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan, or twenty-four hours later on the beginning of the fifteenth day (the beginning of the annual Passover Sabbath). Some members believed that was when the Israelites kept the first Passover in Egypt and that memorializing Jesus' death should follow His crucifixion.

Developments

The annual observance of the Lord's Supper on the date of the Passover became an official doctrine of the Church of God when Andrew N. Dugger, president of the General Conference, included a doctrinal statement in his revision of its doctrines in 1917.

But by the 1920s, Dugger was teaching that the Lord's Supper must be observed precisely in the evening following the thirteenth and at the beginning of the fourteenth day of Nisan, according to the Hebrew calendar. He rightly contended that Jesus gathered in the upper room with His disciples and instituted the Lord's Supper at the beginning of the fourteenth of Nisan. However, in recognizing that the Lord's

Supper is a memorial to Jesus' death, Dugger persisted in referring to it as the Passover, causing confusion and contention over its real purpose and date of observance.

Reportedly, the Church's ministry devoted three full days of intense debate on the subject in 1933, without resolving the issue. But the Church's Ministerial Council adopted a doctrinal statement in 1949 that said, "The Lord's Supper . . . should be observed annually (on the beginning of the fourteenth of the Hebrew month Nisan)."

The fourteenth of Nisan became the official time for the Church of God to observe the Lord's Supper, but her ministerial body made a verbal concession known as the "gentleman's agreement" in 1948. It permitted

some members or congregations to observe their communion service twenty-four hours later at the beginning of the fifteenth of Nisan, if they wished to do so. But even then there were critics of that concession who referred to them as "the fifteneers."

Current thought

By the 1980s the Church of God was becoming more Christ centered and grace based, and the Ministerial Council's 1994 revision of the Church's doctrines incorporated the gentleman's agreement: "Because the first Lord's Supper was at Passover, we have chosen to observe it on Nisan fourteen of the Hebrew calendar. We extend charity toward those who may observe communion at other times."

Currently the Church of God's Statement of Faith concerning the observance of her communion service says, "We observe this Supper annually in the season it was instituted and are charitable toward those who observe it at other times." **BA**

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



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Divine Interruption

by Jeanette Levellie

I stared in shock and almost stopped leading the song “Nearer, My God, to Thee” as she walked through the door of our little country church. Long, stringy hair hung over her eyes, her slight frame lost in baggy clothes. She stood in the doorway, looking around the crowd as if searching for help.

What is she doing here, interrupting our church service? I thought, my face heating with irritation. Can't she see we are worshiping God?

Kevin, my husband and the pastor, stood up from his place at the piano and gently guided the stranger into the vestibule. We continued with our service. But every eye was on the door, waiting to see if Kevin would return with or without the mysterious lady.

A few tense moments passed before both of them reentered the sanctuary. Kevin took his seat at the piano and the stranger stayed, sitting in the second row. She sang the hymns without a book, never missing a word. She even participated in the praise and sharing time, raising her hand when I asked for prayer requests. “My name is Tammy, and I’d like you to pray for my only brother, Joel, who needs a heart transplant.” She went into great detail about Joel’s health issues, as if we all knew him.

Where did she come from? Why is she here? I couldn’t help but wonder. Our church is six miles away from the nearest town and on the way to almost nowhere. Rarely do we receive visitors who just happen by.

In between shaking hands and chatting with our church members as they left, Kevin told me that Tammy’s brakes on her car were slipping and she

needed help to fix them. Someone at her job had told her of a mechanic in our congregation. So she came when she knew people would be here — during our worship service!

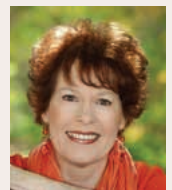
It’s true; one of our deacons, Dallas Johnson, is a superb mechanic. He wasn’t available to help Tammy, but Fred and Grace, a couple known for their generosity, gave Tammy a check to cover her car repair. She thanked all of us profusely and went on her way.

At lunch I confessed to Kevin that my priorities were out of order. “I was offended that Tammy interrupted our worship,” I said. “Yet what does God count more worshipful than helping someone in need? Aren’t we called to not only gather, sing praises, and hear the Word of God but also to reach out to ‘the least of these’ like Tammy?”

I knew the answer to my question. I could even quote Jesus’ words to His disciples: “Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40). From now on, I’d have a different view of strangers in our midst.

Tammy’s visit was a month ago. She’s not been back to worship with us since. But I’m grateful for the gift she gave me — that divine interruption. It changed my thinking from “doing church” to “being the church.” **BA**

Jeanette Levellie writes from Paris, IL.



Questions & Answers



Paul told the Corinthians to follow (“imitate,” NKJV) him as he followed Christ (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1). Why not just follow Jesus directly, instead? Why follow Paul?

You may be assured that Christians do not follow Paul in the same sense that we follow Christ. In the ultimate sense, we have only one Teacher-Rabbi-Leader (Matthew 23:8, 10), only one Savior and Lord (Ephesians 4:5), only One who takes us from the guilt and grip of our sins to the glory of God’s kingdom. That one is not Paul; it is Jesus the Christ.

Paul the apostle underscored the exclusive supremacy of God’s divine-human Son in all matters of salvation (1 Corinthians 3:11; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:18-22, 27, 28). At the core of our faith and practice, Paul would say Christians follow Christ alone (Galatians 2:20).

Does this mean that we need no human help or guidance along the way? Not at all, according to many Bible texts that speak of others’ leadership in our lives and our influence in theirs. Read this striking explanation, and note how Paul used the word *follow*: “Not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us” (2 Thessalonians 3:9).

So Christians do follow the lead of good examples, like Paul’s. In 2 Corinthians, Paul laid bold claims to church authority based on Christ’s calling and revelation to him. In Thessalonians and elsewhere, he urged his example, rather than his authority, as the chief reason he should be followed. We follow Paul and others — not just apostles — who model unselfish service to Christ. This truth is echoed in several nearby texts: 1 Thessalonians 1:6, 7; 2:13, 14; 2 Timothy 1:13; Titus 2:7; and Hebrews 6:12.

Why not just follow Jesus directly, then, rather than follow Him via Paul or any other imperfect spiritual leader? Simply put, the answer is “Because the Bible teaches the necessity and the benefit of human leadership in God’s church.”

The New Testament teaches God’s people to respectfully follow their leaders in the body of Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13; Hebrews 13:7, 17). Conversely, human leaders, the elders in every congregation, are warned against being “lords” (bosses) over God’s sheep. They are instructed rather to be “examples” to the flock (1 Peter 5:1-3). An *example* is something or someone to be followed — a pattern. All God’s people should recognize their need for a person wiser and stronger to teach us more grace and truth, and to show us how in matters of conduct and service.

One application of Paul’s example and of these texts is the mutual accountability of all members of Christ’s body, beginning in each congregation. As no obedient Christian can be independent from other Christ-followers in their area, so every local church seeks to serve in harmony and willing interaction with other congregations in their region or nation that share similar views.

This is the unity and fellowship for which Christ both prayed and died (John 17:20-23; Ephesians 2:13-22). In similar ways, if not with the same salvific result, Paul gave his life and prayers for the unity and interdependence of the church of God (1 Corinthians 1:10; 12:12—13:13). In this way, may we be true imitators of Paul, as he truly was of Christ.

— Elder Calvin Burrell



Never Alone

Loving support in a loving community of faith.

by **Judy Gann**

“You’ll never manage on your own. Is there someone who can help you after surgery?”

I live alone. These words from a spine surgery veteran stripped away my protective layers of independence and lay bare my deepest fear: What will I do if I’m unable to take care of myself? I’d dealt with other health issues in the past, but this would be the first time I’d be incapacitated with major mobility restrictions. Now six weeks before surgery, fear stood on the brink of reality.

Preparations

My to-do list of pre-surgery preparations seemed endless. I dutifully checked off each item. Move pantry items, dishes, clothes, and towels to eye-level shelves. Check. Purchase reacher and special pillows. Check. Shower chair. Check. But each time I looked at the list, the unchecked “help after surgery” need glared back at me.

Prayer filled my restless nights. “Lord, this operation didn’t catch You unaware. You already have a plan for my care in place. Help me trust in Your provision.”

In those early morning hours when sleep eluded me, I realized it wasn’t just my independent nature that made me hesitate to ask for help. After surgery I would be weak, in pain, and vulnerable. How could I let people see me at

my worst? Yes, pride had reared its ugly head.

Seeking help

One morning while I was reading in Ecclesiastes, verses I’d read dozens of times took on new meaning:

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up (Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10, NIV).

This pointed reminder that God never intended us to go it alone in this life chiseled through my walls of independence and pride. God promises us His presence. Yet He also places us in a community where we can support one another.

As I absorbed the meaning of these verses in Ecclesiastes, I realized the Lord had already prepared the way for my next step. My church was known for loving and serving members of our church family. It was past time to shed my independence and pride. I arranged to have coffee with Debbie, our Women's Ministries director.

Debbie's approachable manner put me at ease as we sat across the table in the coffee shop. Yet my hesitation to ask for help ran deep. I wrapped my hands around the Styrofoam cup of coffee for comfort and courage, as much as for warmth.

In a halting voice, I conveyed my need for assistance after surgery. "How may we help?" Debbie answered and then encouraged me to provide specifics. As we discussed details, she took careful notes. I provided her the names of a few women who might be willing to help. "Let me see what I can do," she promised.

A few days later, a series of emails popped up in my inbox. I was overwhelmed. Women responded to Debbie's request, committing to blocks of time to care for me. I lost track of the number of names, leaving the details to God and Debbie.

Unique caregivers

The day after surgery, I arrived home exhausted and in a pain medication-induced blur. Yet clear to me was that from the moment I stepped across the threshold of my house, I was enveloped in the gentle, loving care of seventeen women who would minister to me on a rotating schedule, 24/7, for the next week.

Each friend served me in a unique way, used by God to meet my needs. Shari, a nurse, changed my bandages and assisted me with my first scary shower. Kristen, who works in an assisted living facility, was the perfect person to help me through the long painful, sleepless nights. Other friends filled the role of cheerleaders, encouraging me to walk the doctor-ordered laps around my living room. At the end of the week when I was more alert,

the women who followed them on the schedule, the log included detailed notes about medication dosages, pain levels, food intake, and the number of times I'd been up and walking. My eyes welled with tears at this poignant reminder of the depth of their loving care.

I saved a list in my Bible of the seventeen ladies who served me to remind me that I need the fellowship of other believers. It's not God's plan for me to live in

“I need the fellowship of other believers. It's not God's plan for me to live in isolation.”

Terry and Judy, a couple from my small group, brought movies. Our evening of viewing provided a healing balm of normalcy.

By the next week, for the most part, I could manage on my own. Yet friends continued to text, call, and provide meals and groceries. Someone stopped by at least once a day to check on me. One friend, Margie, gave me the gift of cleaning my house weekly for two months.

Blessed fellowship

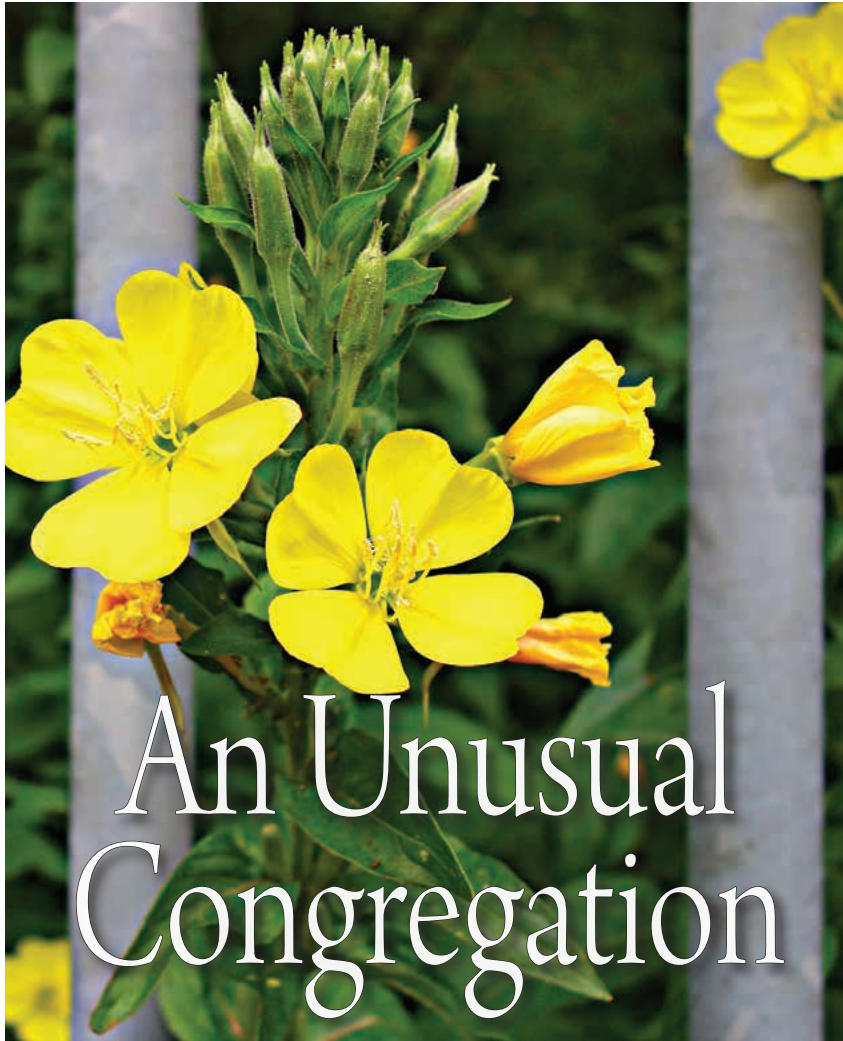
A few weeks after surgery as I was clearing off the dining room table, I came across a written log my friends kept during the week they cared for me. Intended for

isolation. God has placed me in a loving church community who, as others outside our church say when they hear my story, "knows how to do church."

When situations arise and my trust in the Lord falters, this list also reminds me that God is with me. I'm never alone. He meets my every need in any and every situation. And sometimes His greatest provision is in the form of friends. **BA**

Judy Gann writes from Lakewood, WA.





Finding the church in the most unlikely place.

by Roy A. Borges

My church is not an ordinary church. If you've never been to a prison chapel to hear the inmates testify and sing about God's amazing grace, you're missing something. Many volunteers have told me they came to give but left having received. They came thinking they knew a lot about God's grace but left knowing they had learned a lot more.

Sixteen choir members stand on the stage and sing as the men walk in and take their seats in the pews. Black, white, Native American, and Hispanic men get ready to honor God. It's an unusual congregation.

Amazing grace

The building is officially called the Religion Department because a variety of religious groups meet there. That's the reason the cross is not displayed. No one wants to offend anyone of a different faith.

Even so, every Sunday evening, the enthusiastic response of this group tells me the cross

may offend some, but Christ convicts and saves. Because of this, murderers, sex offenders, thugs, thieves, and other convicted felons worship and praise God. Men whom society has labeled losers turn to the Savior and become winners.

The thrill of witnessing God rescue lives never wanes. Every time I see this transforming event, it amazes me. Isn't it just like the Lord to choose "the foolish things of the world to confound the wise"?

My job as a chapel clerk gives me a unique perspective. I get to see the Lord invite men the world has rejected to commit their lives to Him. They learn to forgive those who have trespassed against them. They learn that the problem is not the color of their skin, but their sin. Their weaknesses become their strengths, and those who lose their lives for Christ, save them.

Prison life is mundane and depressing. The inmates have little to give their lives meaning and purpose. Anger and bitterness are prevalent; love and kindness are rare. The strong prey on the weak. They say Christianity is a crutch. The cross offends because their egos tell them they don't need anyone, not even God.

Nevertheless, when Christ comes into their lives, these people are different. God changes them. The wolves turn into sheep. They rely on the Shepherd to guide them. They react differently to tragedy. Only those who realize the depth of their sin can appreciate the complete forgiveness God offers, and those who are forgiven much, love much.

Tough testimony

One Father's Day, I gave my testimony. I had prepared all week for what I was going to say. I had only five minutes, and I wanted to say something meaningful. Tom and Paul, two other chapel clerks, helped me pray about it. One hundred ten men showed up for that Sunday evening service. I knew most of them. I knew I couldn't fool them. I had to be real.

The cordless mic stuck out of my front pocket as I sat waiting. The choir sang a couple of songs, and then the choir leader introduced me. "Happy Father's Day, everyone," I greeted them. "I heard today that Bill Glass, who use to play for the Dallas Cowboys and now runs a prison ministry, said that after interviewing thousands of prisoners around the country, he believed most of them hated their fathers or had bad relationships with them. He claims this led many to rebel against authority."

At this point, I stopped talking and stared down at the mic. I couldn't remember what I had so diligently prepared to say. My mind went blank. I just stood there.

Finally I said, "My father was a tough guy." I hadn't planned to say that, and from that point on, I don't remember exactly what I said. But I began to pour out my heart about my father and how I'd wanted to be like him. "I wanted to prove to him and to myself that I was just as tough as he was," I explained. "But when he died in 1989, I realized what I'd really hungered for was his love. What would fill that hunger now? My search led me to God. For the first time in my life, I saw

myself for the wretch I was, and I asked God to forgive me. I cried — something I thought tough guys never did. I gave my life to Jesus Christ, and nothing has been the same since. I quit trying to be something I'm not and started becoming the man God wanted me to be."

Fred, my running partner, sat up front with tears in his eyes. A big smile on his face encouraged me to say more. "Living the Christian life is like running," I told them. "It takes discipline and endurance for Fred and me to run every day. It takes discipline and endurance to live the Christian life. Keeping my eyes focused on Jesus is hard work.

“When Christ comes into these inmates’ lives, the wolves turn into sheep. They rely on the Shepherd to guide them.”

Giving up what endangers my relationship with God doesn't come easy. I stumble when I stare at myself, but when I keep my eyes on Him, I change. When I look at Him, I become a better person — one God can use."

Prison changed my priorities. Like a person on a deathbed, I suddenly saw things differently. My expectations changed. My sins have consequences I can't control, but I can be a light in the darkness.

Redeemed

After each service is over, we line up outside the chapel in two columns. The officers in brown uniforms count the prisoners in blue. Darkness has fallen. The moon and the stars light the black sky. Razor-wire fences surround us, and guards in patrol cars check the perimeter fences. Guards in the control center watch the monitors for activated sensors. No one has ever escaped from this prison. Yet every Sunday, men are set free.

As we wait for the officers to finish the count, I watch for the chaplain and listen for his dedicated farewell. He closes the

chapel doors and shouts, "Ain't Jesus good?"

The visiting pastor and his people stare in awe as all one hundred ten men turn in response and shout, "All the time!"

It is our goodbye ritual to remind us that it's not where we are that counts, but who we are in Christ. No one knows that better than a redeemed prisoner. **BA**

Roy A. Borges writes from the Union Correctional Institution in Raiford, FL.



Our Job Description

by **R. Herbert**

Throughout his epistles Paul gives us glimpses of the nature of his calling — his job description. He opens most of his letters by identifying himself as an apostle or servant of Jesus Christ, but these are primarily job titles rather than job descriptions. Similarly, in his letter to Philemon, Paul introduces himself as the prisoner of Jesus Christ because of his captivity. But once again, this is a summary of his role at that time, not an extended job description.

It is interesting to look closely at verses in which Paul elaborates more fully on the goals of his work. One such job description occurs in the apostle's letter to Titus: "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness — in the hope of eternal life . . ." (Titus 1:1, 2, NIV). This description revolves around Paul's famous triad of "faith, hope, and love," although that may not be obvious without thinking about it. Paul mentions faith and hope directly, and the third quality — love — is lightly veiled in the form of godliness, which the Bible frequently equates with love. Because God is love (1 John 4:8), godliness obviously is also the way of love. We see the equation made clear, for example, in 2 Peter 1:7, where godliness is positioned with brotherly affection and love.

But Paul does not just mention the great triad of spiritual qualities in passing. Instead, he stresses these qualities as being at the heart of his work. Reading the whole of Titus 1:1, 2, we see how Paul envisions this. The apostle clearly sees a big part of his job as furthering, or growing, the faith of those God has called, as well as their "knowledge of the

truth that leads to godliness" and their "hope of eternal life."

We may usually think of "faith, hope, and love" in the context of 1 Corinthians 13, where Paul shows that with God's help we should develop these qualities in ourselves. So it's easy to read over the same qualities in the epistle to Titus without grasping their significance for Paul as key elements in the job he was called to do. We may even study, meditate on, and pray about these very traits as things we strive to develop in ourselves. But how often do we think of them as goals we can be praying for and developing in the lives of others?

Many Christians see the outgoing aspect of our calling as essentially helping others to initial belief in Christ, but we do not always focus beyond that point. We may understand the importance of the ongoing general encouragement of our brothers and sisters. But Paul's words show us that the job of developing faith, hope, and love/godliness lies at the heart of being the church and serving God's people.

Keeping Paul's job description in mind can help us think more about how we too can help encourage the growth of these qualities in others. How we apply this principle often depends on our circumstances. But if we want to imitate Paul as he tells us to do (1 Corinthians 4:16), as he himself imitated Christ (11:1), it's a job we can all be involved in. **BA**

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



Believe

“Blessed are those who have not seen
and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

Blessed are you who believe —
when confusion reigns,
when mountains loom high,
when faith is tried.

Blessed are you who believe —
when dark clouds gather,
and storms rage,
when calamities come crashing in.

Blessed are you who believe —
when all around is changing,
you cling to the unchanging One,
your joy secure in God.

Jewell Johnson

Practice Makes

by Amber Riggs

When my life gets out of balance, I start to have a lot in common with the tomatoes in my family garden. Left to their natural inclinations, these tomatoes flop to the ground in a clump, falling far short of the health they're capable of enjoying. The fruit that should be blessing my family and friends winds up as food for the bugs and fungi instead.

If any of those tomatoes reach our table, it's only because the plants have been staked and supported. Unless trained by outside interventions, they never get off the ground. The health of the plants and their fruit is *dependent* upon their supports. These are no substitute for sunlight and water, but they do play a vital role in training the plants to take a shape that will allow us to harvest more fruit for the nurture of human health.

Like the plants, when my stakes and supports aren't in place, and when my energy is being directed to too many branches at once, I eventually bend under the weight of what otherwise would have been good things.

Can you relate? Whatever it is you do – your job, parenting, leading small groups, preparing for worship, preaching, volunteering in your community – when it all adds up, is it too much? Does it leave you physically and spiritually exhausted?

Spiritual disciplines

We too need stakes and supports in our lives that train us for physical and spiritual vibrancy. Following Jesus' example, early Christians recognized and taught practices that aligned their lives with the work of the Holy Spirit. Because of the vital role they play in spiritual training, these positive habits have long been known as *spiritual disciplines*.

Prayer, worship, and Bible study are the best known of these, but they are only three among many. Others include solitude (Mark 1:35), silence (Isaiah 30:15), self-examination (Psalm 139), simplicity (1 Thessalonians 4:11), and confession (James 5:16). Abstention from regular activities can also be a discipline, like fasting from food, media, or entertainment (Luke 5:35). Caring for our body and observing daily and weekly rhythms of

Does your congregation teach and practice spiritual disciplines? The BA's online sister publication, Artios Magazine, would love to feature you in an upcoming article. Please share your story by emailing editor@artiosmagazine.org.

Possibilities

rest can also be included (Mark 6:31; 1 Kings 19). These are only a handful of the disciplines that Christians have been practicing for two millennia.

Practicing a new discipline

They aren't called *disciplines* because we do them without thinking about them. In fact, the discipline whose training we most need may be the most challenging to observe. For this reason, ask God to allow you to discern the one discipline that would benefit you most during your current season. Which one could you add that, instead of being a burden, would actually support and thus remove the weight you currently carry? As Martin Luther paradoxically proclaimed, "I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer." What is your paradox?

After you have identified one discipline, be intentional about practicing it. You may need to start small and work your way up in time. But that's fine, because a discipline is all about training. And sometimes, training is a slow process that happens in increments.

If the disciplines you practice

are such a part of your life that you can do them without thinking about them, it's probably a good time to be intentional about learning a new discipline.

Involve your congregation

Ironically, despite the role these tools play in spiritual growth, most people learned them not at weekly church gatherings or Bible studies but at home, through books or para-church discipleship programs. Yet if church leaders do not introduce such practices to new believers and believers who have never learned to engage in them, they may never reap the benefits.

In part because we pray, worship, and study at a congregational level, we most likely carry these practices over into our daily lives. But just because we practice them corporately doesn't mean that people know how to do them individually.

If you are a pastor, consider planning a sermon series — or, ideally, a retreat — in which you coach congregants through the specifics of how to practice spiritual disciplines. Small groups provide a great environment to learn, practice, and coach disciplines. If you're a parent, identify

a discipline that you can begin observing as a family.

A garden of possibilities

What is weighing down your congregation and its leaders right now? Just imagine the fruit you could bring to the table if each member relied on stakes and supports.

How much more enthusiasm might your congregation experience if we didn't define *rest* as participating in church services, but as actually engaging in rhythms of rest? How might their relationships and conversations be transformed if our church members practiced self-examination during the week? What if parents both taught their kids how to confess and modeled it in their own relationships? When spiritual disciplines support spiritual growth, the possibilities are endless. **BA**

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



Why Church?

Part 1



Reasons we need to be vital parts of the body of Christ.

by John Klassek

Why “do church” — gathering every Sabbath for praise, prayer, preaching, and fellowship? It is a relevant question because many Christians go “solo,” preferring to stay perhaps at home (as opposed to attending weekly church fellowship) and utilize an abundance of online Christian content.

Of course, there are all kinds of reasons for this. Some have become disillusioned with church liturgy, governance, or polity. Others have experienced personal fallouts. Yet others struggle

to find an audience to promote certain pet doctrines.

There are, however, strong and compelling reasons that we *do* gather each week and experience church as community. Generally, they are summed up in the notion that our coming together exemplifies our shared lives in Christ as the Lord intended.

The question remains whether we can legitimately replicate our full potential in Christ at home, without the foibles often inherent in church life. Also central to this discussion is the nature of the call to discipleship in the church context and how this dynamic is sewn into the very fabric of what church means. The Word of God gives us examples of why the church is critical to experience together so we can grow in our discipleship.

Biblical examples

Church is a life of worship lived within the context of shared community. This results in being more effectively taught, nurtured, and equipped for service in the Word of God. In the Word, under the terms of the new covenant in Christ, Jesus commands us to follow Him, and this incorporates the distinctiveness of the annual Lord’s Supper service. Instituted by Jesus, it is observed notably in community.

The very nature of shared suffering and communion in a spirit of sacrifice and service brings us directly into the heart of Christ community. For together we not only proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes but also follow Christ in the symbol and ordinance of foot washing: “For I have given you an example, that

you also should do just as I have done to you" (John 13:15). Thus, the sense of community that Christ modeled is exalted in His own humility and service, as well as the intentional use of the term *one another*.

This *one another* concept isn't just in the New Testament. Throughout the Old Testament, we read where God's people are called into holy convocation — a large, formal assembly of people coming together. The weekly Sabbath appears as one of God's appointed times, when faithful people gather for worship and to hear the Word. This was Jesus' practice, recorded in Luke 4, when He selected a passage from Isaiah to read out aloud on the Sabbath.

Other biblical examples of church we can follow are music and teaching. The Psalms set the stage for an ongoing life of worship, where song and music powerfully convey a language that moves heart, mind, and spirit. Those gifted in music and song serve the greater assembly. Throughout Scripture, faithful leaders, prophets, apostles, and teachers were anointed and enabled by the Holy Spirit to speak, giving life to the very words of God. The Scripture further compels the listener with "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 3:22).

We can't reflect this calling unless we're connected to Christ. Today, called by the Father through Christ, and in the Holy Spirit, we find ourselves drawn and compelled into community — the shared life of Christ. May we hear and take to heart!

Broken body

As many may testify, the church that Christ is building is still far from perfect. Working from the brokenness of sin that all humanity inherited, she exhibited major flaws and failing in the first century, within just a few decades from Jesus' ascension into heaven. Jesus' affirming and correcting words to those seven such churches in Revelation 2 and 3 could just as well be spoken to contemporary Christianity today.

Successive generations, throughout changing cultures and circumstances, are still working and growing into the holiness

ing, from broken to complete, from sick to whole is manifested in the church community as a whole, together becoming sanctified and holy.

Many of us, however, find ourselves, or the person next to us — and sadly, sometimes the entire church — less than Christlike and less than holy. We instead see a church fraught with failures and foibles, not dissimilar to our first century forebears, illustrated in Jesus' message in Revelation 2-3. Thus "going to church" can sometimes seem a burdensome effort. It needn't be that way.

The church can also appear to be more of a hospital for the sick

“Christianity isn't a spectator vocation. All participants of the body of Christ have important functions.”

and vibrancy that Christ fully intended. We want to be a vibrant 21st century church! This can happen only as Christ is formed in each of us (Galatians 4:19).

The entire church is known in Scripture as the body of Christ and is made up of many parts, with the whole ideally reflecting more completely Jesus Christ himself. As we grow and reflect the living Christ more thoroughly and deeply, the internal process of conversion from dead to liv-

than a sanctuary for the saints. Both, however, are inherently flawed views.

Three tenets

Three fundamental tenets can help someone find church community so they not only stay but also thrive in their God-given calling to become the greatest and most effective they can be within Christ community.

1. Can I basically agree with the core doctrinal/theological statements of the church?

This ranks as number one in this list. Of course, there will be lots of diverse peripheral issues and understandings within various churches and church cultures, but we're speaking here of the main pillars of belief. If you can adequately answer, "Yes, I can see that what is taught aligns with the Bible," then you can move on to the second question.

2. Am I able to worship there?

Is God's Word and presence exalted every Sabbath in praise, prayer, and preaching? Is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the center of church life? Am I personally being drawn into the very presence of God? Do I experience healing balm for the soul and the joy of knowing our Savior in deep, close communion? Am I more inspired, more empowered, and better equipped than when I first tentatively walked through those doors?

If you can resoundingly say, "Yes" to these, then here is the third and final question.

3. Am I able to serve there?

With the gifts and grace God has bestowed on each of us, for His glory and the blessing of everyone else, am I able to effectively serve in some capacity?

Christianity isn't a spectator vocation. All participants of the body of Christ have important, interdependent functions that are epitomized by service. When comparing the human body to the body of Christ, the church, Paul eloquently told those in Corinth, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you'" (1 Corinthians 12:21).

In other words, we need each other. Like a branch that needs to be connected to the vine in order to thrive and not wither (John 15), we can effectively serve together with those God has also called only when we're connected to Christ. **BA**

Read Part 2, the conclusion of "Why Church?," at baonline.org.

BAP Publications

BAP Literature

The image shows a grid of 20 tract covers. The top row includes: 'Introducing the Church of God (Seventh Day)', 'Eating the Bible Way', 'God and the Divinity of Christ', 'Will God Punish the Wicked Forever?', 'His Blessings... Our Offerings', 'The Battle of ARMAGEDDON', 'The Kingdom of God', 'The Weekly Cycle', and 'The New Birth'. The bottom row includes: 'The First Day of the Week in the New Testament', 'Military Service: Is It Biblical?', 'Death and Immortality: What Does the Bible Say?', 'Is the Sabbath for Christians?', 'What Must I Do to Be Saved?', 'God and the Holy Spirit', 'The Law of the Lord: A Blessing to the People of God', 'Top Ten Reasons for Celebrating Sabbath', and 'Finding Peace of Mind'.

All our current tracts can be read or ordered online at publications.cog7.org.

Your generous support makes this ministry possible!

John Klassek and his wife, Rebecca, have six children and five grandchildren. Living in rural Western Australia, he works bi-vocationally in IT support and ministry and pastors a CoG7 congregation near the capital city of Perth. Scripture quotations are from the *English Standard Version*.





Wheels of Old Age

by Carol Kehlmeier

Beneath colorful paintings of young women in wide hats and swishing flowered dresses, chairs roll and jerk across the cold tiled floor as the withered legs of the passengers ride the wheels of old age.

The sparkle of youth is gone from their eyes, and their bent backs carry the burden of years gone by. A glimmer of hope shines from fading smiles as they offer up soft prayers.

Memories of lemonade summers and starry nights live behind those lonely eyes. Their wheels stop beneath pastels of spring gardens, and a memory is stirred of cutting daisies and planting peas.

Framed pictures of girls walking with parasols, barefoot in the sand, adorn the walls, but eyes no longer focus clearly on the slender figures. In those chambers behind silent ears, the sound of rain, music from a carousel, and the laughter of children remains from long ago.

Their heads slump as the wheels carry their frail bodies up and down the halls. They were once young parents, laughing and playing with their children. They sacrificed their own well-being to raise children, educate them, and teach them their prayers. Now, they wheel alone through silent corridors that ooze with the scent of old age as they murmur liturgical phrases.

Many Bible stories learned from childhood linger in their cloudy memories: Jonah and the whale, Joseph and the colorful coat, Daniel in the lions' den, Ruth and Naomi. Ruth's love and devotion to her elderly widowed mother-in-law and her unselfish vows to go with Naomi express reverence as well as love for her aging mother-in-law.

Dances, parties, weddings, and births are painted in their memories. A lost lover, a found happiness, joy, sadness, and pain have been part of their long lives. There are souls behind those lonely eyes, and

their wisdom is masked by wrinkles on their brows. They have seen rainbows and wide, full moons. They have observed purple sunsets and amber fields. With wing-like grace they have walked mountains and streams.

They are not empty vessels. Their memories are filled with sights, sounds, and the tastes of lives they have lived.

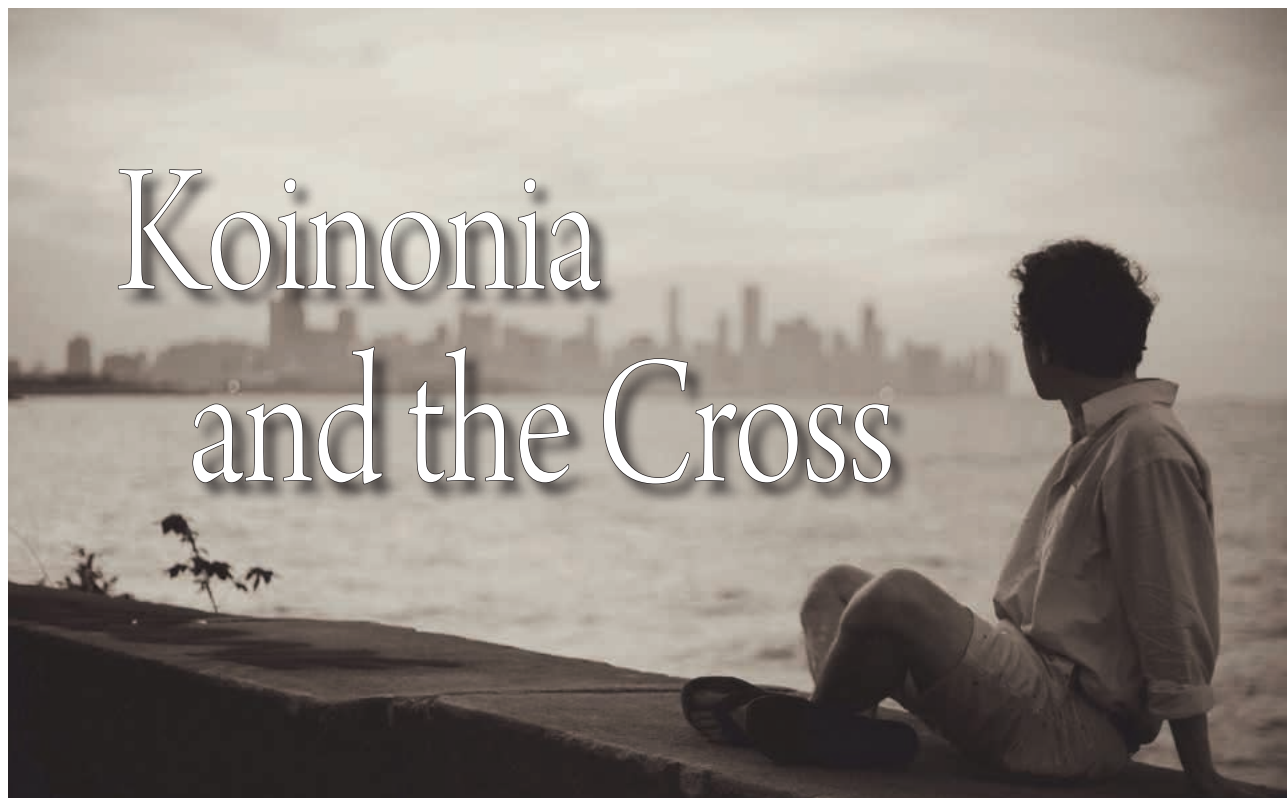
In their youth, they rode horse-drawn carriages, and in their middle years they witnessed men walk on the moon. Some served in faraway places and donated blood, funds, hours, and prayers to many worthwhile causes.

They have learned on their long spiritual journey that God has not forgotten them. Deep in their souls is a seed of a memory reminding them the Creator listens to their every prayer, blesses, and comforts them.

They wait patiently for the eternal peace promised them as they ride the wheels of old age up and down the silent corridors. **BA**

Carol Kehlmeier writes from Westerville, OH.

Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity. Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day (1 Timothy 5:1-5).



Koinonia and the Cross

Deep reflections on the mystery of human sin and divine communion.

by **Jonathon Hicks**

Paradox is a Christian word. That is, God is larger than logic, which means God, by His nature, is paradoxical. His grace that forgives us through the cross of Christ allows relationship with Him, contradicting how we should be treated for our sins. When we are brought into new life with Him, we begin to experience this paradox, and that can create tension. Nowhere is this dynamic more poignant than with the two realities of sin and koinonia.

Poignant paradox

These realities are presented in Scripture as antithetical. *Koinonia* is the New Testament word for *communion*, the intimate relationship with God we enjoy every day but celebrate every year at Lord's Supper. Think of the significance of this. In the Old Testament, koinonia was not possible between a mortal and the divine. Humans could at best become God's servants, but they could never have partnership with Him in koinonia. Sin destroyed the relationship between God and His image bearers, causing Adam to hide from God in the garden. And sin is the reason He had "hidden his face from you," Isaiah said to Israel (59:2). In the Old Testament, intimate communion with God was limited because Israel and the whole world was in sin.

But this all changed in the

New Testament. Suddenly, koinonia with God was not only a possibility but also a reality. John wrote, "Truly our [koinonia] is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). This is a paradox — a logical impossibility. How could sinful humanity and a holy God be in fellowship? What changed to make genuine relationship with God a position for mere mortals?

Two realities

John answers this contradiction with another in 1 John 1:1-3. There he puts forward the first reality of Jesus as divine and human as an axiom we must accept by faith. Jesus is what "was from the beginning . . . the word of life" and is "what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands . . ." (v. 1). There is no logical explana-

tion for Jesus' nature. But John is clear that the paradox of Jesus being God *and* human makes possible another reality: fellowship with God. He writes, "Truly our [koinonia] is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (v. 3). This second reality is possible only by the primary paradox of God the Son's incarnation.

These realities change who we are. "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all," John says (v. 5). Since we have been told that we have koinonia with God, there is no darkness in us, because we are in Him. The light of God has rendered impotent the darkness that clung to humanity since the Fall. Those who have faith in the first paradox of God the Son incarnated as Messiah are brought into koinonia with God as light.

But this second reality quickly turns into a second paradox when John adds this point in verse 8: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Again, John posits no reasoning for the reality that we have sin. But just like Jesus' humanity, this truth we have observed and cannot deny: Even those who have fellowship with God have sin — a paradox *because there is no darkness in Him*.

It is hard to live in reality. Most elect not to. When someone sins, they say, "My koinonia with God has been forfeited. I need to get clean." Although this is logical, the text says the opposite. We certainly have communion with God, and we absolutely have sin. These are our two realities. The tension that this paradox places upon our limited selves forces us to have faith in the God who is unlimited. He holds together

the paradox of Jesus' nature, and He holds together the paradox of our sin and koinonia. We hold His hand.

What does living in this paradox look like for the Christian? Since it combines two realities (truths), it is doing the truth and speaking the truth.

Doing the truth

God's truth of Jesus' divine-human nature and our fellowship with Him as sinners is paradox. For a finite person, doing this truth is not just hard; it is impossible. Yet the only other option is to avoid our reality of sin and koinonia, which normally means

we "do not do what is true." This is not to say that our koinonia with God isn't a reality, but that it is a truth we are not living in.

But how can we live in sin *and* koinonia? John explains: "If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (v. 7). In other words, we strive to line up with the paradoxical position we have in Christ by aiming our whole selves at walking in the light. Even though we do this, we still sin. But for those who have placed their faith in the paradox of God's grace, sin doesn't hinder their walking in the light. It is scrubbed away

“God is larger than logic,
which means God, by His nature,
is paradoxical.”

to mouth truths without applying them. John acknowledges this: "If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true" (v. 6). For the original nomadic Hebrews, walking was life, so they understood the metaphor. Walking in darkness is defining your life by what is not God. When we just use our lips to acknowledge the paradox, but we don't put forth our whole life into our relationship with God,

as they put their faith in Him, still walking in the light despite their sin.

Speaking the truth

The preceding dynamic is manifest in the Christian's life through confession — speaking the truth to God: "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (v. 9). Confession is com-

ing to Jesus as the one who binds you to God and telling Him all the reasons you should not have koinonia with Him. It might sound something like this: "Jesus, I have sin. I was just talking to Your daughter, and my sister in You, and I felt hatred. Jesus, how can I be united to You if I have this kind of reaction?"

We are not big enough for such a paradox, but our God is. And when we express the reality of our sin, He brings us into the reality of all darkness and all unrighteousness being scrubbed out of our lives.

Sin is something to be grateful for, even while we despise it.

“We rightly despise our sin,
but we must acknowledge it and
let it push us to God, who is bigger
than everything.”

It pushes us to speak the truth to God. This helps us properly understand that our koinonia with God is based solely on who Jesus is and what He did on the cross. Our sin cannot remove us from this reality. But when we properly express it in confession, sin can bring us to God as the poor beggars we are.

If, instead, we deny the paradox of sin and koinonia in our lives; if we stumble as we walk and quickly play it off as if we

didn't almost fall; if we are too scared to come to our God in contrition when the heart overflows into a cacophony of vanities, then we will miss the paradox and walk devoid of God's fellowship: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (v. 8). Sin is not what has removed us from the truth; our lie has. Our lie is denying the contradiction of our sin and our koinonia with God. And the greatest lie of all is that we have not sinned in the past in such a way as to affect our present. When we so completely reject God's paradoxical truth, we deny

the Living Word, and He does not abide in us (v. 10).

Acknowledge the paradox

John tells us all these stark realities in order that we may not sin (2:1). We have to know the first paradox of God initiated and the second paradox created by us being in Him. Knowing and acknowledging these will be the first step in our not sinning.

Therefore, I encourage you to

do something unthinkable and paradoxical as you read this. Be grateful to God for your last sin. We rightly despise our sin, but we must acknowledge it and let it push us to God, who is bigger than everything. Treat your sin like a child's skinned knee: It brings you to your Father's arms. If not for our sin, we would be more like the Pharisee who prayed, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people." He was thankful for his own righteousness. The tax collector, however, wouldn't even look up to the sky but fixed his eyes downward and cried out, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" He was asking God for a paradox. Your sin makes you cry out in confession. "I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other" (Luke 18:9-14).

In this way, we live into the paradox, which God holds together, of our sin and koinonia. In this way, we may not sin. But if we do, "we have an advocate before the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one" (1 John 2:1). You speak against yourself in confession. He will speak for you. As you sin, He will cleanse you. Have faith in Him and express it by knowing God works all things for the good of those who love Him and are called for His purposes. Praise God, this includes sin. **BA**

Jonathon Hicks and his wife, Danielle, serve the Lodi, CA congregation. Scripture quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.



Biblical Preservation



Part 5 in this series explains how God's Word has stood the test of time.

by **Gordon Feil**

So far, we've looked at issues relating to the authority of the Bible. First, we examined whether the Word was from the mind of God. Having found that it is, we discussed why we believe what God has authored made its way into the text. Once a Bible reader decides that God delivered this Word to humanity, they face how to be confident that the Bible contains the books God authored. That's what we explored in the last *Bible Advocate*.

Now we face the question of preservation. How do we know that what was in the original text

is what has been preserved in the Bibles we have today?

New Testament

This question takes us to manuscript evidence. Apart from the Bible, the works of Demosthenes, a classical writer, have the most documentary testimony. About 200 manuscripts of his writings have survived. We have 5,600 for the New Testament! These ancient Greek manuscripts don't all contain the whole New Testament; some of them were partially destroyed, so they contain only portions of the text. We also have around 10,000 old Latin texts, along with about 3,000 in other languages of the ancient world, such as Babylonian, Egyptian, Coptic, and Aramean. So that's about 20,000 New Testament texts, and the vast majority of those — somewhere between 95 and 99 percent — are what

we call the Majority Text. They agree with each other and are otherwise known as the Byzantine Text, the standard of the Greek New Testament.

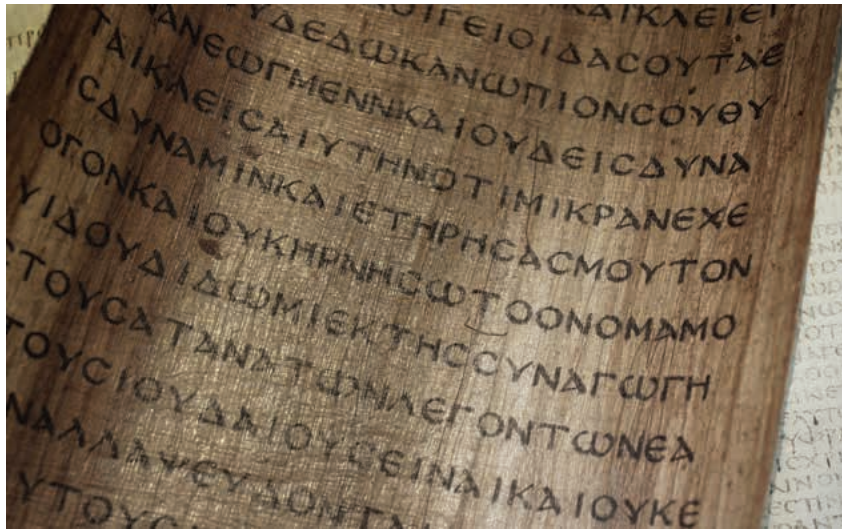
Aside from manuscripts, we have the writings of what we call early church fathers, men directly taught by original disciples of the Lord who conveyed what they learned. We can see that the very early church fathers taught essentially, and quoted liberally, the same truths we see attributed to Jesus and the apostles by modern New Testaments.

With Bible manuscripts, both Hebrew and Greek, oldest does not necessarily mean best. An old manuscript that has survived did so because it did not wear out. If it wasn't worn out, it wasn't used much. There may be various reasons that a manuscript would not have been used. The most common is that it was judged not as worthy of use like

certain other manuscripts that no longer exist because they were dilapidated with use. These manuscripts were copied and recopied, the earlier being destroyed once the copyists were satisfied with the accuracy.

Old Testament

The primary Old Testament texts are the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Septuagint (LXX). A mystique has grown around the MT — legends about how the text has been preserved, such as counting the number of letters in a book to make sure it agreed with the source from which the book was copied. This did happen, but such procedures probably did not begin until after errors had been transmitted, for the MT does have corruptions.



By way of example, the books of Samuel have deteriorated in places, suffering significant haplography (the omission of a letter in a word where it should be repeated: *omision* instead of *omission*).

The Qumran discovery demonstrated the existence of various versions of the Old Testament in ancient times. The MT

is a valuable text. It appears to have become the standard after it had, in some places, departed from other texts from which the Tanakh was translated into other ancient languages.

The LXX is a Greek translation of an ancient Hebrew textual tradition around 200 years before Christ. In numerous places in the New Testament, a quote from the Old Testament appears to be from this ancient version, so it seems that the early church valued the LXX. It is a good thing that translators have been able to access the MT, the LXX, and other texts besides to identify likely early copying errors. Today we have an Old Testament that is highly reliable and that we can be confident reflects what was originally written.

Disagreements?

What I have described may sound like we are guessing about what was written, but not so. The high degree of preservation of both the Old and New Testament texts is absolutely remarkable. If you doubt this, research the preservation of other ancient texts. These and versions of the

Bible books do sometimes disagree (check the marginal notes in some modern translations of your Bible to find variant readings), but these variations are in details, not in doctrine.

No important doctrine is affected by the variances between textual witnesses. The Bible is so well constructed, so solidly built, that despite textual disagreements, we still end up with modern translations in most world languages teaching substantially the same thing as each other, no matter what manuscript tradition they have been translated from. We can rely on Romans 3:4: "Let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: 'That You may be justified in Your words.'"

Going forward

There is good reason to believe that in all material ways, we have manuscripts that clearly reflect the original documents. We can believe that the words given to those men of old are from God and are what He intended. We can also believe that they've been preserved across time in the 66 books that make up the Bible in all its numerous translations and languages available to us today. **BA**

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





G. C. Ministries News

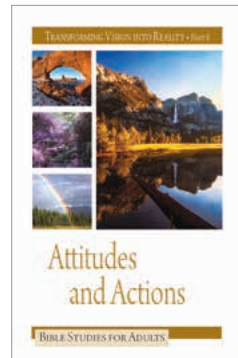
ARTIOS • MISSIONS • PUBLICATIONS

TVR Part 8 - Attitudes and Actions

By **Jody McCoy and Jason Overman**

In the final quarterly this year, we'll complete our journey of focusing on Jesus as our Savior and our Lord. We'll explore the attitudes and actions of a life being transformed by the Holy Spirit into Jesus' good and giving nature. Our responsibility is to obey His Spirit and commands. As we do, the old willful nature dies little by little, and we experience the joy of His nature living in us.

If you haven't already, please join us. Place your order for Sabbath school, small group, or family devotion at <https://cog7.org/online-store/>.



Join the Club!

A CoG7 Children's Sabbath School Forum has been created so teachers can ask questions, provide feedback, and enjoy fellowship with other teachers. If you want to become a member of this invitation-only forum, hosted at the Publications website, please email a request to jason.overman@cog7.org or dana.jensen@cog7.org.

Announcing the 2019 Bible Advocate Theme:

Resurrection Commission - Matthew 28

BA writers are needed to explore Christ's Great Commission in all its glorious detail: worship, witness, calling, evangelism, discipleship, testimonies, and more. Check our complete list of themes and deadlines under Write for Us at baonline.org.



2018 Annual World IMC Sabbath

On November 3 the Church of God in nearly sixty countries, representing more than two thousand congregations, will celebrate God's work through our international church. Videos and prayer requests will be available. Offerings received on this day will go toward theological and evangelistic training to better equip workers, leaders, and conferences to carry out their Great Commission work.

Visit imc.cog7.org for materials and other information to assist your congregation in participating, or email gcmisions@cog7.org. Please join us!

Ongoing Email Scams

From time to time, we become aware that someone has posed as one of our well-known and trusted Church leaders,



using email to solicit financial donations to a seemingly worthy cause. The most recent (June) fraudulent email purported to come from one of our key General Conference leaders. It asked for donations to a local effort to help certain children.

Please do not be taken in by such scams. It would be highly unusual (one hopes that it would never happen) for one of our leaders to unilaterally solicit funds for a personal purpose. If you should receive such an email, contact the known person directly via another method before you send funds or respond by way of that email. Or contact the General Conference offices at 303-452-7973 to verify its validity. — *Loren Stacy*



Ministry Through the IMC

Zone 2

Cuba: When God allowed us to preach the kingdom of God to Brother Esteban Valdés in front of the nation’s capitol in Havana, two men stopped to listen. As a result, on Sabbath morning we shared the Word in San Francisco de Paula in Havana, and Brother Osvaldo accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior. In the afternoon we preached in Santa Catalina at the home of Brother Valdés. We hope in God that this new mission will soon be consolidated. — *Ricardo Mendez Carreño*



Zone 3

South America: IMC President Ramón Ruiz Garza visited the Church in Peru, Argentina, and Uruguay April 9-24. Pictured at right is Brother Ruiz with Pastors Ever Cala Montes (Bolivia) and Jorge Gillig (Argentina).



Zone 4

Nepal: Greetings from Kathmandu, Nepal. Thank you so much for your partnership. There is persecution and challenge. However, even in the midst of challenges and government objections, God is at work today. Fifteen people were baptized. — *Rajendra Sundas*



Zone 5

Angola: Pastor Daniel Santos recently visited these brothers and sisters in Sacapolo. They are hungry for the Word of God and to produce good fruit for the Lord in that place. Let’s remember our brothers in this country, that the good news of Jesus Christ will be preached in power and transform the lives of many in Angola and beyond!



Zone 6

Philippines: Eleven souls were baptized on June 9 in Manawi, Loreto, Agusan del Sur, Mindano, Philippines. Brother Dodong Moreno, a recent convert, and Brother Demer preached the Word of God to members of the Manobo tribe, who are indigenous to this area and practice various rituals. Through their efforts, these new brothers and sisters were converted. Glory be to God. — *Tessi*



Zone 7

Italy: A day of great blessing was experienced as baptisms took place near Milan, Italy, with the assistance of Minister Amilcar Salmoron, president of the Church of God in El Salvador. Thanks be to God.





Nothing Like the Local Church

In his book *Courageous Leadership*, Bill Hybels writes:

There is nothing like the local church when it's working right. Its beauty is indescribable. Its power is breathtaking. Its potential is unlimited. It comforts the grieving and heals the broken in the context of community. It builds bridges to seekers and offers truth to the confused. It provides resources for those in need and opens its arms to the forgotten, the downtrodden, the disillusioned. It breaks the chains of addictions, frees the oppressed, and offers belonging to the marginalized of this world. Whatever the capacity for human suffering, the church has a greater capacity for healing and wholeness.

It is that optimistic view of local congregations of fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ that Hybels no doubt has in mind in his oft-repeated statement "The local church is the hope of the world."

The key phrase in Hybel's opening sentence above, however, is "when it's working right." Unfortunately, local churches all too often are not working right. In his book *I Am a Church Member*, Thom S. Rainer sadly acknowledges that reality and suggests a reason: "... I am proposing that we who are church members need to look in the mirror. I am suggesting that congregations across America are weak because many of us church members have lost the biblical understanding of what it means to be a part of the body of Christ." In this simple proposal and suggestion, Rainer notes the fact that local churches

are made up of local members. Because of this, churches can never be working right if their members are not working right.

Consider this "Last Word" a recommendation to every church member to thoughtfully read Rainer's book. Consider it a plea to each local church leader to use it as a regular part of new member and other discipleship training efforts. Each of this book's six brief chapters addresses an attitude or behavior critical to the ability of each local church to work right, and ends with a personal pledge. Additionally, each chapter ends with a series of questions that make this book wonderful for personal contemplation or group discussions. The chapter titles focus on such topics as being a functioning and unifying member, releasing personal preferences and desires, and praying for church leaders.

I am convinced that if the majority of each local church's members understood, took, and faithfully fulfilled these pledges, they would soon work right. I am convinced that if the majority of each local church's members understood, took, and faithfully fulfilled these pledges, they would truly be the hope of the world. By means of this "Last Word," dear reader, I challenge you to be the one who begins making your local church even better than it currently is. Read *I Am a Church Member*. Faithfully fulfill the pledges, and encourage others in your local church to do the same. Begin making your church the hope of the world, the place where people can see the body of Christ working right.

— Loren Stacy



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