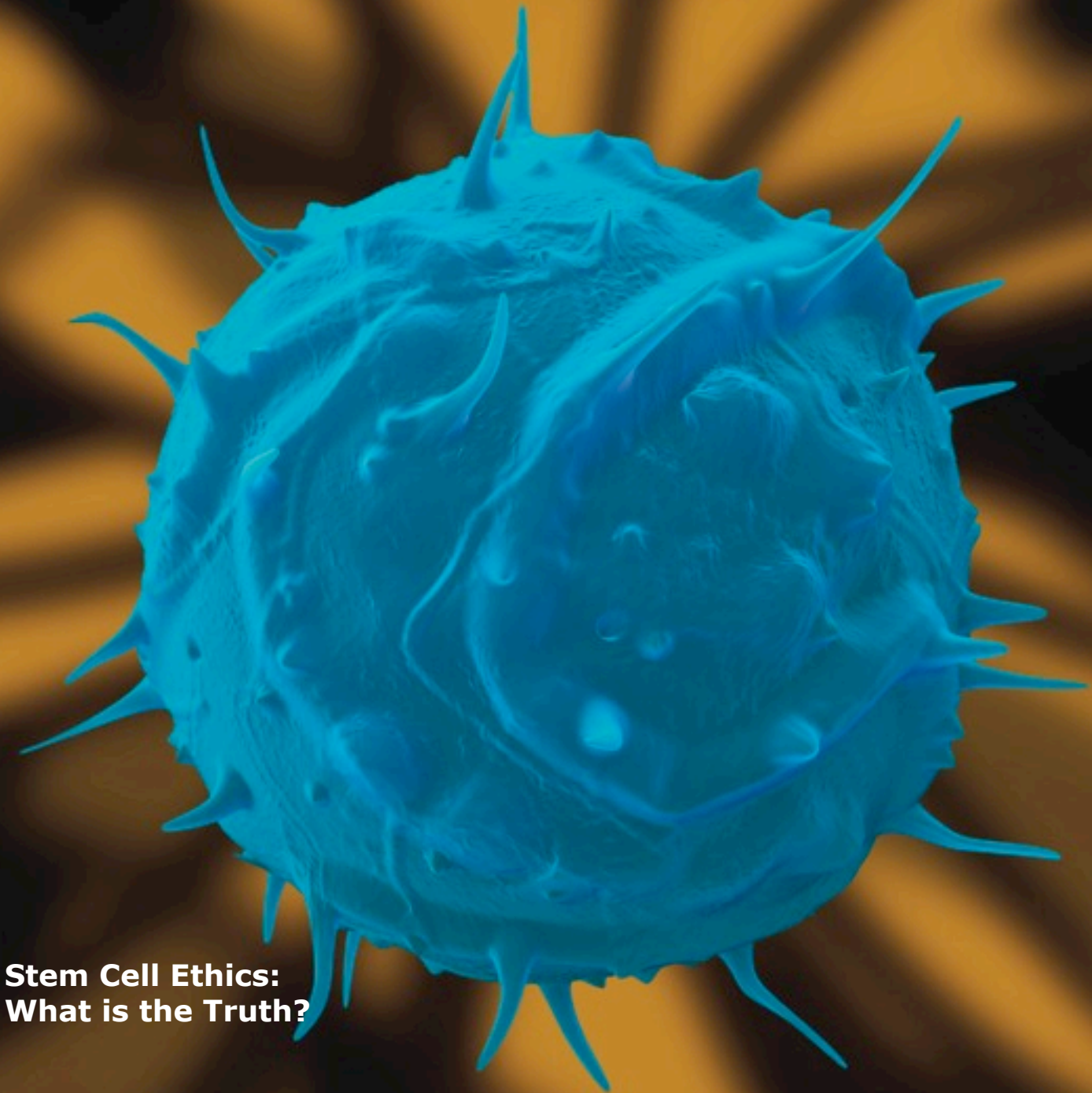


# The Sabbath Sentinel

January–February 2010



**Stem Cell Ethics:  
What is the Truth?**

**BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association**

*Jesus said, "the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath"*

# The Sabbath Sentinel

January–February 2010 Volume 62, No. 1 Issue 541

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**Our Cover:** *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart” (Jeremiah 1:5).*  
(iStockPhoto.com)

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# The Preeminence of Christ



I recently had a friendly “debate” with a close friend about whether certain people, patriarchs of the Bible, are already in heaven. My friend contends that there are well-known Bible figures already enjoying their glorification in heaven. He mentioned Enoch, Elijah, and Moses. My friend and I disagree on this subject because I believe as Jesus stated in John 3, “no man has ascended to heaven.”

We went back and forth over the period of the next few months defending our beliefs.

Over the weeks as I pondered how to answer my friend on this issue, one thought continued to come into my mind; that was the “preeminence of Christ.” I would like to spend some time discussing that with you in this editorial, but before continuing this discussion, we need to be clear about the meaning of “preeminence.” The word is derived from the Latin *prae* or *pre*, which means “ahead of” or “prior to” and *eminence*—something or someone that is superior in rank and authority, something towering or lofty such as a mountain. In other words, Christ is before all things and over all things.

Interestingly, during this same period, in our church Bible study we were examining the first few chapters of the book of 1 Corinthians in which the apostle Paul was wrestling with this same issue, the preeminence of Christ, with the Corinthian church. There were factions within the church that sided with one preacher or another. Some liked the apostle Paul, others gravitated to Apollos, a very eloquent speaker, Cephas (Peter) had his followers, and some even declared, “I am of Christ.” The contentions among these factions in the church became so disruptive that they were judging the Christianity of each other by the person they followed. This led the apostle Paul to write the famous passage in 1 Corinthians 3, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one...” (vv. 6-8). There was no friction between Paul and Apollos. They were not keeping score. Only the Corinthians were. Paul and Apollos both under-

stood that their missions were one and the same, to prepare the people to receive Christ and ready them for the kingdom of God. As the apostle Paul so eloquently stated his mission among the Corinthians, “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

The objective of all preaching is to know Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He has to be preeminent in all matters of faith. If He is not, then we of all people are most miserable. He is the only door to eternal life. There is no other. But, let’s turn to Paul’s epistle to the Colossians. In that epistle the apostle Paul is once again dealing with the issue of the preeminence of Christ.

There are two overriding themes in Paul’s epistle to the Colossians. First is the preeminence of Christ. The second is the sufficiency of Christ. Christ’s sufficiency, however, is dependent on His preeminence, so our faith in His sufficiency is dependent on His preeminence. The apostle was combatting a tendency in the Colossian church that is all too prevalent in many churches today, to allow our attention to our physical duties and church customs to overwhelm us and drive out our worship of Christ. In other words, our natural desire is to view our church life on a horizontal plane rather than on a vertical, spiritual plane. Christ loses importance in our worship as our preoccupation with our church duties increases. Of course, this was Jesus’ whole point when He told Martha that her sister Mary had chosen the better course (Luke 10:38-42). Sometimes it is better just to sit at Jesus’ feet and drink in of His wisdom than it is to be consumed by our church duties or the philosophical musings of this or that great preacher or pundit. Jesus Christ has put to shame the “wisdom of the wise” of this world.

The apostle Paul first establishes Jesus’ credentials by reminding us of His preeminence in creation. Paul is stating that our very existence would not be possible apart from Christ. In order to make his point clear, three times in the passage of Colossians 1:15-18 the apostle emphasizes that “by Him all things were created;” “All things were created through Him and for

*Continued on Page 15*

# Your Yet Unformed Future

By Kenneth Westby



When you were a mere three-week-old fetus in your mother's womb you were yet unformed. You were taking shape by the day but at that point you didn't look very human. There was, however, a powerful genetic program at work crunching out instructions at a blistering pace.

In the brain alone, neurons (nerve cells) were being created at the blinding speed of 5,000 per second for nine months to build a brain of 100 billion neurons needed to launch you into the world—and with the capacity to live almost a century.

That statement was not a misprint. Every second for nine months 5,000 neuron cells are being created within the head of a tiny unborn human being— 5,000 every second! This fact boggles my brain. How can it happen? Where does the "wisdom" and power come from to make a one hundred billion neuron brain? That's 100,000,000,000 brain cells. That's the estimated number of stars in our galaxy, the Milky Way, and the approximate number of galaxies in the entire visible universe. And that's not the half of it.

The impulse-conducting nerve cells that constitute the brain (and spinal column and nerves throughout the body) consist of a nucleus with one or more dendrites and a single axon. In an adult brain, the axon of each neuron connects with as many as a hundred thousand dendrites of other neurons. This is how a brain "talks," computes, directs, stores memories, etc.

The branching is utterly stupendous, a million billion connections. That's 1,000,000,000,000,000 points within our heads at which neurotransmitters are racing, sending information from nerve to target nerve.

I still can't comprehend 5,000 neurons being created every second in a precious little babe in the womb! Where does that energy come from? Who wrote the "program" for that explosion of productivity? By what design do all those billions of cells take their proper place in a brain? And how does the brain "know how" to operate the body of which it is a part? And how is it decided that one cell will become part of a complex eye, another cell to become skin, another bone, another part of the ear complex, etc.?

Mysteriously every part of your body was taking shape according to instructions embedded by some miraculous art, unique to the Designer, of that tiny three-week-old you. Another word for the Designer's art is Wisdom. It is a word the Bible often uses for the mystery of creation. It is also a synonym for Yahweh, the Creator.

There is profound wisdom at work in every molecule, every cell, every protein, every electro-chemical bond following "instructions" so precise and so powerful, but oh so small, that they all fit in one cell which nine months later yields a human being.

Gerald L. Schroeder, an M.I.T. trained scientist, says this about our metamorphosis from single cell to fully formed

human: "It was all programmed into one cell just nine months earlier. Amid the phenomenal complexity of biology, there exists an underlying simplicity so eloquent that it is expressed in a single molecule. In life, oneness is what we represent. A single cell at fertilization contained within it all the potential that you were ever physically to become. And every cell within your body retains that wisdom."<sup>1</sup>

In John 1:1 we read that "In the beginning was the logos"—*logos* is the Greek word for "logic," "intellect," "word." This was the creative power that made the cosmos. Centuries earlier the psalmist writes "With the word of God the heavens were made" (Ps 33:6).

Proverbs 8 speaks of "wisdom" being the first cause of creation. Wisdom is the metaphysical emanation of God and permeates everything He has made. We could call that wisdom, information, or logic, or intellect, or mind, or code, or knowledge, or word. It all comes forth from the mind of Yahweh, the one God, the Creator.

Thinking humans struggle to solve the puzzle of creation, life, and particularly, the wonder of sentient humans. The science of quantum mechanics is immersed in the study of information embedded in creation—its composition, laws, forces, orbits, origins, and a host of mysteries and puzzles wanting for the discovery of more information, more wisdom.

In another book, Schroeder wrote: "Wisdom is ubiquitous, the substrate of every particle of the world and most evident in the brains and minds of humans as we puzzle over cosmic origins. The success of life is indeed "written into the fabric of the universe."<sup>2</sup>

God, in his infinite wisdom, can form life and do it with subtly, elegance, and unseen miracles by the millions. God knows how to create things beautiful. And his most complex and beautiful creation is his human family made in his image—you and I. There are stages to the "in his image" part of creation.

Clearly, the mind of man is, in important aspects, akin to God's mind, and our mind operates through an amazing organ, the human brain. The "mind" is you—your unique personality, emotions, disposition, and most important, your heart or character. It is here that God is at work in the final stage of making mankind "in his image."

## Endnotes:

1. Schroeder, Gerald L., *The Hidden Face of God, Science Reveals the Ultimate Truth*, Touchstone Books, 2001, p 87.
2. Schroeder, Gerald L., *God According to God, A Physicist Proves We've Been Wrong about God All Along*, Harper One, 2009, p 51.

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Ken Westby is a board emeritus of the BSA and founder and director of the Associations for Christian Development and the Virtual Church ([www.godward.org](http://www.godward.org)).

# DARWINISM:

## What about the Science?

Charles Darwin published his famous book, *The Origin of Species*, in November 1859. Biologist **Dr. Timothy Standish** reflects on the state of Darwinism 150 years later.

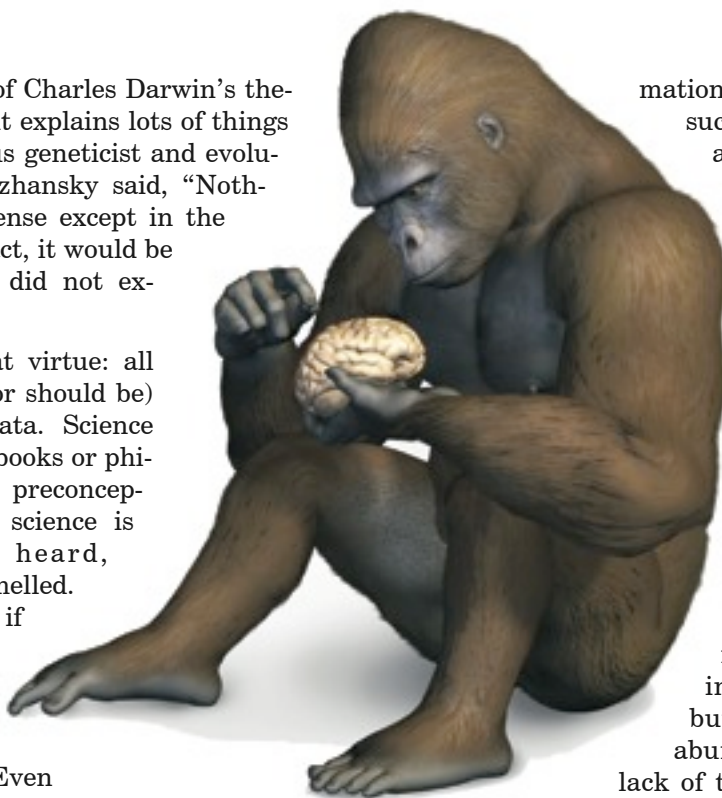
A great selling point of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution is that it explains lots of things in nature. As the famous geneticist and evolutionist Theodosius Dobzhansky said, "Nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution." In fact, it would be shocking if Darwinism did not explain many things.

Science has one great virtue: all scientific theories are (or should be) subject to empirical data. Science doesn't depend on holy books or philosophies or someone's preconceptions. What counts in science is what can be seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled. Theories are supported if they can adequately explain new data, and they are disproved when they fail to reasonably explain data. Even if a theory explains many things (and Darwinism certainly does), if it is inconsistent with data, it is typically rejected.

Two areas of science are commonly presented as unambiguously supporting Darwin's theory of evolution: The fossil record and genetic similarity among organisms. So, do the data from these two areas adequately support the theory of evolution, or do they call it into question?

### The Fossil Record

In his book *Origin of Species*, Darwin noted a problem for his theory of evolution. For it to be true, the geologic record should contain many fossils intermediate between creatures as distinct as humans and snails—but it does not. Recognizing this problem, Darwin asked, "Why then is not every geological for-



mation and every stratum full of such intermediate links? Geology assuredly does not reveal any such finely graduated organic chain; and this, perhaps, is the most obvious and gravest objection which can be urged against my theory."

Darwin hoped that as time went on, intermediate fossils would be found that supported his theory. However, after more than 150 years of diligent search, geologists have not found significantly more intermediate fossils. A few possible missing links have been identified, but Darwin's theory demands abundant missing links, and the lack of them raises serious questions about Darwinism.

- The fossil record presents another significant challenge to Darwinism. Deep in the geologic column, more and more fossils are being found that look remarkably similar to modern organisms. A dramatic example is the recent discovery of octopus fossils that look like modern octopuses. One of the discoverers noted that "these things are 95 million years old, yet one of the fossils is almost indistinguishable from living species."

Evolutionary theory suggests that ancient octopuses should have looked primitive and evolved over long periods of time into the octopuses we see today. Maybe, because fossil octopuses are very rare, the primitive ones existed even earlier than 95 million years ago, and we can say that a poor fossil record from ancient times explains why the octopus missing

links have not been found. But this still means that the time for evolution of modern-looking octopuses is reduced by 95 million years. How many million years can be taken away before there isn't enough time?

- Yet another problem for Darwinian logic is that complex organisms appear all at once in the geologic column without much apparent time to evolve. The most dramatic example is found in Cambrian rocks, which form the lowest geological layer where abundant animal fossils are found. These rocks contain the remains of numerous weird looking animals. Some resemble those living today, some do not, but all of them are complex. We can assume that they had genetic and biochemical systems similar to modern organisms. But where did these come from? For the evolutionary theory to be true, these organisms would have had to descend from earlier organisms. The problem is that fossils prior to the Cambrian period are rare, and those that do exist don't look like they were the ancestors of most Cambrian fossils. So the diverse organisms in Cambrian rocks appear to have evolved from nothing!

Thus, while the evolutionary theory can explain some of the evidence in the fossil record, other data do not fit the theory.

### Genetics

We find a similar situation in the field of genomics, which is the study of the genetic information in the DNA of organisms.

Most organisms have an inventory of about twenty to twenty-five thousand different genes, or parts, that they can use to build themselves. These genes can be compared to the parts available at a building supplies store. Imagine the many different things that can be built using bricks, wood, electrical wiring, nails, etc. One builder might build a hospital, another a shopping mall, and another a single family home. In each case, pretty much the same parts could be used. There's no need for the linoleum in a mall to be different from that in a hospital or a home.

The same principle seems to apply to genes, which explains why most organisms have an amazing number of genes in common. Some genes are unique to certain organisms, but the overlap in the general kinds of genes is remarkable. For example, most of the genes found in humans are also found in organisms as diverse as fish, birds, and frogs. A fair proportion of human genes are even found in corn and rice!

- The Darwinian explanation for why organisms have all these genes in common is that they inherited them from a common ancestor. So humans, according to Darwin's theory, might have a common ancestor with a chimpanzee a few million years ago, while hu-

mans and chimps have a common ancestor with sea urchins that lived a billion years ago. The problem for Darwinism is that if humans and sea urchins share genes that both inherited from a common ancestor that lived a billion years ago, those genes had to be present a billion years ago. This means that the genes had to have evolved even before that. The problem mentioned earlier with the fossil octopuses emerges again only this time it is a billion years that are removed. How many years can go before evolution of the large number of genes shared among organisms becomes untenable? And how did organisms survive before essential genes evolved?

Let's look at a specific example. A weird fish called a chimera, or ghost shark, swims over a mile deep in the ocean. These strange fish are very different from humans, but Darwinists believe they share an ancient common ancestor with us. Recently the chimera genome was sequenced, revealing, to everyone's surprise, that they have color vision that works on the same principles as our human color vision. According to Darwinian thinking, this means that our common ancestor with chimeras must also have had color vision, and thus our color vision must have evolved prior to the several hundred million years since humans and chimeras went their separate ways, not during those years. Again, this limits the time for evolution of human and chimera color vision.

Sometimes genes show up in organisms that are so different they can't be reasonably explained by common ancestry. Darwinists accommodate this in two ways. The first is called "convergent evolution," in which the same thing is thought to have evolved separately in different groups of organisms. Another rationalization is called "lateral gene transfer," in which genes from one organism are transferred to another. This means that Darwinism explains things when they are the same because of common ancestry, and it explains similar things when they can't share a common ancestry. This seems like too much explaining—or maybe none at all—and, without getting into the technicalities of both explanations, they seem more plausible the less one knows about how genes operate and how evolution is supposed to work.

- Lateral gene transfer—the idea of genes being swapped between very different organisms—presents another set of problems. It means that over time genes will get so shuffled up among organisms that there is not a clear ancestor descendent relationship anymore. This turns out to be the case in bacteria and certain other more complex organisms, where different genes suggest different ancestor descendent relationships. As a consequence of this, the traditional view of a single Darwinian branching tree of life is being abandoned for a kind of tangled bush of life.

If common ancestry explains things and lateral gene transfer explains things, and if Darwinism predicts either a tree of life or a tangled bush, one has to wonder what exactly Darwinism explains. It accommodates things when they are the same and when they are different, making Darwinism irrefutable with data. The belief is so flexible adherents simply shoehorn all data into it, but this is not science as it is no longer subject to data.

Thus, while modern scientific data are routinely squeezed into Darwin's theory of evolution, the amazing molecular machinery found inside cells and the intricate organisms preserved in the fossil record seem to stand in tension with it, even when Darwinian logic is used. And when Darwinism is extended from simply changing one organism into another to explaining the origin of life, it seems to impute occult properties to matter that matter does not have. In some ways it is less like science and more like animistic religions that attribute supernatural powers to rocks, fetishes, and other objects.

### Special Creation

Of course, other theories about origins, such as special creation, are subject to the same criticism. The past is never as unambiguous as the present, and sometimes the present isn't very clear either. Until scientists can travel back in time to see what actually happened, our ideas about the past will never be bias-free, maybe not even then.

The theory that God created living things clearly has a religious aspect to it. And, like Darwinism, creationism requires special accommodation of some data. Evil systems that look designed, like the poison glands and fangs of an adder, require explanation within the context of a sinful world if God's goodness along with His creatorship are to be maintained. But this diverges into the realm of theology, and the reality remains that nature is replete with elegant systems that under any other circumstances would be interpreted as designed, whether they result in good or evil.

- A hundred and fifty years of scientific study since Darwin published his *Origin of Species* has provided a more detailed understanding of the incredible worlds of biology and geology. For those willing to consider this empirical data unconfined by Darwinism, the biblical claim that God created nature seems reasonable, while many predictions arising from Darwinism remain problematic and more of a metaphysical project than a scientific theory.

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*Reprinted with permission. Signs of the Times, Nov. 2009, p. 33. Biologist Timothy G. Standish. conducts research as a research scientist at the Geoscience Research Institute in Loma Linda, California.*

## Made-over Vessels

by Donald Mansell

*The vessel ... made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it (Jeremiah 18:4).*

In 1939 my parents, who at the time were missionaries to the Azores, took my brother and me with them on an itinerary through several of the islands to visit groups of persons interested in the Advent message. On the island of Terceira we were graciously entertained in the home of a couple by the name of Mendes, who were planning to be baptized. Mrs. Mendes' bachelor brother, João, who lived next door to the couple, was a potter. His backyard was literally filled with vessels in various stages of completion. My brother and I spent many hours watching with fascination as João worked at his trade.

The method for making pottery in the Azores 43 years ago was not significantly different from that used some 2,500 years earlier in Jeremiah's time. The device João used for making his wares consisted of two flat wheels connected by a shaft about three feet long, set perpendicular to the floor, so that the upper wheel presented him with a revolving plane. The inner surface of the lower wheel was used by him to make the device turn by periodically kicking it with his foot.

João would take a shapeless lump of clay, moistened to the right consistency, and would plunk it onto the middle of his wheel. He would then shape it with his hands and a small stick. More than once we watched a beautiful vessel ruined in the last stages of shaping because it contained a pebble or some other piece of undesirable material.

Imperfections of character, whether inherited or cultivated, mar the design God has for our lives. Unlike the clay, which has nothing to say about whether or not the undesirable materials shall be taken out of it, we have everything to say in determining whether or not our imperfections of character shall remain or shall be removed by the Potter. We can, after all, stubbornly hang onto them and eventually be rejected.

The Lord, through Jeremiah, asks us, "Cannot I do with you as this potter? ... Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand" (Jer. 18:6). If we allow the Master Potter to remake us according to His will, He will make us over into vessels of honor. This is never an easy or a painless process, but we may rest assured that it is always for our eternal good.

Though we may not always understand all of the Potter's reasons, "shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay?" (Rom. 9:20, 21).

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*Donald Mansell, New Every Morning, page 81. Review & Herald Publishing Ass'n. 1981.*

# Saving our Children

by Terrell Perkins

Christian churches are losing the children that grow up in them to a world of smoke and mirrors. Sabbatarian churches tend to fare even worse. In a world where Christianity is increasingly seen as a restrictive, outdated form of mythology, to be Sabbatarian, to actually keep God's commandments, is seen as even more restrictive. The Body of Christ needs to realize that we are at war with spiritual forces that will stop at nothing to destroy us. Their primary aim is our children. If our children can be led away, our future goes with them.

What our children see is a world filled with enticements and pleasures. But so many of those pleasures turn out to be traps. Ours is a world overflowing with violence, pornography, and meaningless lives. There are forces capable of saving our children from the world, but many are failing for lack of knowledge. Churches have failed for the most part, but churches are built on the foundation of solid families. The greatest influence in a child's life are his or her parents. Below are recommendations dedicated to those whose job it is to raise the next generation of God's family, the parents to whom God has entrusted them.

1. Set them the right example of a man or woman of faith. Don't tell them one thing and do something else. Even at a very young age they will be watching you. They will be learning from you how to be a man or woman and how men and women interact. Let them see how the Holy Spirit works in your life to make you a better person.

2. Be honest and straight with them. Let them know what you believe and why. Don't try to hide the realities of life from them. This is especially important in matters of money, sex, drugs, alcohol, tobacco, etc. Don't put your own head in the sand! If they don't learn them from you, they will learn from someone else.

3. Get involved with your children's lives. Go to their sporting events and school shows. Show them you care. Know who their friends are. Eat dinner with your children, and talk about your day.

4. Let your children know you believe in them. Let them know their ideas and opinions are important to you, that they matter. If they don't know you believe in them, they will find someone who does, and that will make them susceptible to being manipulated.

5. As they grow older, let them make increasingly more decisions for themselves. They need the experience of making their own decisions to become responsible adults. You'll show them you respect them as responsible and you'll build a bond of trust with them.

6. When you have to correct them, make the punishment fit the crime. First, make sure they know what you

expect of them. Only then will you be justified in any punishment. Ask them how they should be punished. Many times they will be harder on themselves than you would have been. (Only an openly rebellious spirit should merit corporal punishment.)

7. Pick your battles with them; don't fight over every little point.

8. Establish a merit system for them. Don't just punish bad behavior; reward good behavior and encourage it. Let them know when they've done something that makes you proud or happy.

9. Be as concerned with what goes into your children's minds as what goes into their bodies. The Internet is an ocean filled with reefs of pornographic and violent images. Television is little better. Know what is going into their minds from these sources and from their school.

10. Limit their use of video games and other modern electronic devices. There is an element of addiction that is only beginning to be understood about using new technologies. New research shows that there is an apparent link between Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and computer usage.

11. Pray with your children. Let them see that you are honest with God during your prayers.

12. Institute a family night once a week. Turn off the TV and the video games. Play board games. Talk to each other. Make it a fun time that they look forward to, not a burden to bear.

13. Get the men and women and their families in the local churches involved with preaching the Gospel and carrying it on. Set up a system for older members to visit newer families once a month to teach and discuss church teachings and biblical wisdom. (This will be the equivalent of a family night for your spiritual family.)

14. Get them involved with the church. Youth programs are great but unfeasible in every church. Institute a kind of mini-missionary program where the children are involved with carrying out the great commission. Use your imagination!

15. Always ask for God's guidance.

---

*Terrell Perkins graduated from Ambassador College in 1981, and has been a Sabbath keeper for about 35 years. Terrell lives in Capitan, New Mexico, and works as an artist-blacksmith hand forging metal sculptures and architectural hardware and furniture. Terrell has been a freelance writer for over 20 years.*



# What is a “Christian”?

by Brian Knowles



Despite their ubiquity in today's world, the words “Christian” or “Christians” appear only three times in the entire Bible: Acts 26:28, 1 Peter 4:16, and Acts 11:26. The last listed verse tells us that it was not until Paul's day that the term was attached to those who followed Christ: “Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch,” (Acts 11:26).

Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire. It was situated about 300 miles north of Jerusalem in the Roman province of Syria. The time was around 46 AD, more than a decade after Yeshua had been resurrected. I. Howard Marshall, writing in his commentary on Acts, tells us this: “The verb *were called* implies in all probability that ‘Christian’ was a nickname given by the populace of Antioch, and thus ‘Christ’ could well have been understood as a proper name by them, even if at this stage the Christians themselves still used it as a title...It is likely that the name contained an element of ridicule.” Marshall then cites the other two New Testament instances of use (see above) as examples of this.

Of course “Christ” was not Jesus' “last name.” “Christ” is the Greek version of the Hebrew *Mashiach* meaning “Anointed One.” He was *Yeshua* meaning “Y-H-V-H saves” (cf. Matthew 1:21). Jesus was the Anointed One through whom God would save mankind. It is also the masculine form of *yeshu'ah* meaning “salvation” (David H. Stern).

## Peter's View

Peter writes, “If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed but praise God that you bear that name,” (1 Peter 4:15-16). Of this reference, and the other in Acts, commentator Alan M. Stibbs writes, “The name *Christian* was first given to believers in Jesus as a nickname by Gentile onlookers...The name was used by Agrippa in scorn (see Acts 26:28). It is its unfriendly use that is clearly here in mind. Obviously, in some circumstances, the very fact of thus being known as a *Christian* was enough to bring upon the bearer of such a name social obloquy or ostracism or possibly official persecution.”

In the days of the apostles, the term “Christian” was anything but complimentary. It was not the name by which believers referred to themselves, except for the way Peter does it in 1 Peter 4:16. Nonetheless, the name stuck and it has become the name most commonly used for followers of Christ.

## Early Nomenclature

It must be remembered that in its beginnings, what we now call “Christian” was a wholly Jewish movement. The teaching language of Jesus was Hebrew. His “disciples” were his *talmidim* — students. Jesus taught them as a Jewish rabbi, not as a San Francisco-style hippie with an English accent (typical Hollywood depiction). As David Stern writes, “The relationship between a *talmid* and his rabbi was very close: not only did the *talmid* learn facts, reasoning processes and how to perform religious practices from his rabbi, but he regarded him as an example to be imitated in conduct and character,” (*The Jewish New Testament*, Glossary, p. 374). Stern then offers Matthew 10:24-25; Luke 6:40, John 13:13-15 and 1 Corinthians 11:1 as evidence of this relationship between Jesus and his rabbinic students.

Jesus also viewed his *talmidim* as his *havarim* — his friends (John 15:13-14).

As a group, Jesus' followers had a number of names. It must be remembered that they were a wholly Jewish movement operating within mainstream Judaism. In the New Testament we see references to the “sect of the Sadducees” (Acts 5:17), the sect of the Pharisees (Acts 15:5), and the “sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). A “sect” is a religious party. Jesus' party was the sect of the Nazarenes. Like the other sects, it involved a well-known rabbi, his teachings, and his example. More than anything, what Jesus raised up was a *movement* within first century Judaism. During his lifetime Jesus and his followers participated in local synagogues and in Temple services. In his early life Jesus had studied with the sages of his day (Luke 2:42).

Sometimes Jesus' followers were referred to as “The Way” movement (Acts 19:23). But there is a broader, bigger, more powerful way to think of the Way, or the Sect of the Nazarenes: the *Kingdom* movement. This picture most accurately projects who and what Jesus actually was — and is. As Dwight Pryor writes:

"The importance of the Kingdom message for Jesus...can scarcely be overestimated. In his preaching, he *proclaimed* the Kingdom; in his teaching, he *explained* the Kingdom; in his parables, he *illustrated* the Kingdom; and in his healings and deliverances Jesus *demonstrated* the present, powerful and inbreaking Kingdom of Heaven.

"In short, Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom and he personified it. Surely the disciples that bear his name and share his mission can do no less?

"Regrettably, a survey of church history past and present reveals a significant discrepancy in this regard. The Church has always proclaimed Christ — but Christ continually proclaimed the Kingdom!" *Unveiling the Kingdom of Heaven* by Dwight A. Pryor, p. ix.

It is commonly taught in some circles that a kingdom must have four prerequisites: king, territory, laws and subjects. This is incorrect; it does not require territory.

Secondly, it is commonly taught that the Kingdom of God is futuristic, not present. This notion is also incorrect; it is both present and future.

The subject of the Kingdom of God (or Heaven — a euphemism for God) deserves a larger treatment than this brief article allows. God willing, we will address it more fully, from a Hebraic perspective, in a separate article.

Once the community of believers had grown under its Jewish leadership to the point where it could organize, the synagogue provided the model for the early congregations. Modern Catholic and Protestant churches bear little resemblance to the original first-century congregations of believers. Once gentile leaders took over the Church, all things Jewish began to disappear. Church architecture changed dramatically. Church government and organization emerged along authoritarian Roman lines. The liturgy changed. Ministers became "priests." Sunday worship replaced Sabbath meetings. Just about every aspect of life was brought under the purview of the Church.

Before we get too far afield, let's return to our original question: what is a Christian? Being in, or going to, a church building or service, doesn't make one a Christian any more than being in a garage makes one an automobile. The use of "Christian" was originally an outsider's term — something unbelievers called believers. Today, it should mean those who seek to understand and follow the example and teachings of Yeshua the Anointed One. What makes one a part of the body of Christ — the Church — is not what one believes, or one's denominational affiliation. It is the possession of the Holy Spirit which God gives to those who obey him (Acts 5:32).

"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized [immersed] by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were given one Spirit to drink," (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). It is the Spirit of God that makes us a part of the Body of Christ — Christians.

It is not our nationality, ethnicity, religious affiliation, doctrine and dogma, economic or social status, occupation, or denomination that makes us truly Christian. It is the possession of the Spirit of God and our willingness to submit to its influence that makes us authentic Christians. We are how we live, not what we believe. We are Christians if we *live* as Christians.

"Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and 'Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness,'" (2 Timothy 2:19). That's an authentic Christian.

*Brian Knowles is a professional artist and writer and is a former magazine editor. Brian is an avid student of the Bible and a frequent contributor to the Association for Christian Development website ([www.godward.org](http://www.godward.org)).*

## **E.U. Endorses Jerusalem as a "Two-State" Capital**

JERUSALEM, Israel — The European Union has endorsed a watered-down foreign policy declaration calling for Jerusalem to become the capital of two states.

Israel invested major efforts to persuade the E.U. to back off from the foreign policy declaration that in essence calls for the division of Jerusalem.

The original Swedish draft called for a state of Palestine "with east Jerusalem as its capital."

On Tuesday, E.U. ministers said they would "not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders, including with regard to Jerusalem other than those agreed by the parties."

However, Israel says the declaration would have the opposite effect.

Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon says the declaration will not promote Israeli-Palestinian talks.

"A one-sided declaration is not going to be helpful in bringing the sides together in order to achieve progress toward peace," Ayalon argued. "And I do not think that one-sided resolutions, which have been consistently put against Israel is the right and it's certainly not helpful." (CBN News, 12-12-09)

# Initiating Positive Change

by Pastor David Guerrero

Speaker/Director, Rekindle the Flame Ministries



In my travels as a seminar speaker I meet many people whose marriages are on the rocks. The main line I often hear is “If only he (or she) would change, things would be different.” What then follows is the mentioning of several things that should change in their spouse that would then make the marriage better. In the next two articles, I will attempt to share what can be done to initiate positive change in our marriages.

## Treating One Another with Love

A very wise person once made a profound statement: “if you ever look over at your spouse and wish that he or she were a different person, treat them like the person that you desire them to be, and they will become that person.” This is so true! Think about it: this is how God takes the first step in effecting change in our lives. The Bible declares that while we were yet enemies of God, He was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (Romans 5:8,10). God took the initiative to cause the needed change in our lives by first demonstrating His love towards us so that we might experience life-saving transformation and salvation. God’s first move of love was to send His Son to die for each of us so that we might be saved.

The Apostle Paul tells us that Christ was treated as we deserved to be treated so that we might be treated as He deserved (2 Corinthians 8:9). God made a conscious choice to treat us as people that we certainly were not, so that we could become people that He desired us to become—people that would reflect His love! John puts it this way: “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). What awesome power there is in love!

As we treat our spouses as people we would desire them to be, our acts of love, respect, kindness, sacrifice, and dignity will have the power to transform their lives, thus increasing the potential that they will become the person we desire them to be. You may ask: “Are you saying that one person can help improve a marriage?” My answer is: Yes, my friend, one partner can improve a marriage. Just as one person (Jesus) improved our human status, condition, and lives, we too through the power of His Spirit can have power to influence change in the one to whom we are married simply by the way we treat them.

## The First Step of Prayer

I have found that a good first step in effecting change is prayer. You may ask: What should I pray for or about? Well, why not try beginning with Psalms 139:23-24: “Search me O God, and know my heart: Try me and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.” You see, oftentimes there is something in us that needs to be changed first in order for us to see and impact a change in others. As we allow God to point out and help us change the things we need to adjust in our lives, our hearts will be transformed by His love, and we can then move forward in our marriage relationship with the sweet

disposition and approach of Jesus. This change in us and the new approach that He gives us will make life in our home bear the fruit of His transforming grace. As we pray, we should ask God to remove from our hearts any negative feelings that we have towards our spouse and to heal our hearts. Listen to the counsel of the Apostle Paul:

“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ has forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:31-32)

As we ask and allow God to remove from our hearts the emotions that are destroying our attitude and behavior, we will be able to see others through His eyes of love, mercy, and compassion, and treat them as He would. As we do this, the results will be tremendous.

## Confession

The next step we can take is to confess any wrongs that we have done. Confession is not only good for the soul, it is a good ingredient for relationships. The Bible tells us that in order for true healing to take place in our relationships, we must confess the sins we have committed against one another. A truly humble person will acknowledge his or her wrongs and ask forgiveness for how they have or are contributing to the problem. You will be amazed at what will happen when you approach your spouse with an attitude of admitting your faults as well as how you have contributed to the problems in your marriage, adding to that what you intend to do so that things can improve.

## Will They Ever Change?

To make changes is not an easy task. However, there is One who can wonderfully and masterfully help us make the changes we need to make: His name is Jesus. The first steps that we need to take to see change in others is to prayerfully ask God what it is in ourselves that we need to allow Him to transform, and then to permit Him to do the work of transforming those areas of our lives. We must then adjust our attitudes by His grace, and finally we must confess any wrongs that we may have done. As we employ these biblical steps, God will perform marvelous acts of change in our lives, and our marriages will become a place of heaven on earth. Next time we will look at some more principles that we can follow to build lasting change in our marriages.

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*David Guerrero is the director of Rekindle the Flame Ministries, a nonprofit 501c3 Christian organization that seeks to aid the body of Christ in experiencing transformation of life through faith-based counseling, seminars, training, and newsletters. Please contact us at (715) 310-2196 or on the Web at [www.rekindletheflameministries.org](http://www.rekindletheflameministries.org) for more information on how we can help you or your organization.*

# Lessons from Katrina

*by Tommy Willis*

Even as a lifelong resident of New Orleans, I didn't realize the changes that I would experience with the coming of Hurricane Katrina. We had never left for a hurricane before, but I followed the principle to make no decision without much prayer. And after praying, I felt God's instruction to leave.

After leaving for the storm and trying to get back home, my parents and I wound up sleeping on chairs in a restaurant for four days, and also in the car. We couldn't leave the restaurant, because there was no gas. They needed what gas they had for government officials. Some people threatened the gas station owners. Nerves were tense.

We finally made it to some of the nearby smaller towns about 40 miles from New Orleans, and it looked like one of those apocalyptic movies with people strewn along the road sleeping in their cars or on the ground. Thousands of people flooded the small towns near New Orleans trying to get back home. Technology failed. Communication with the rest of the world was gone. No electricity, no TV, no cell phones, no Internet. All were out. It was really bad in the city itself. It was only later that I learned of all that happened with the people at the Super Dome with no water to drink.

Many people drowned in the storm. The water came up so fast the people could not get out in time. In some places the water went up to the roofs. They were still finding bodies in New Orleans a year after the storm. Many crawled into their attics to get away from the rising water, and they got trapped there. The death toll from those that died from the stress and agony after the storm cannot be estimated. Many lives were shortened.

I live in the east part of the city. It is mostly marsh and some swamps. It's like living in the country. Wild packs of dogs roamed after the storm. Many deer died. One day I saw a dead deer, and the next day it was gone. I figured the dogs claimed it. The fact of how they had to rescue many of the starving dogs is a story in itself that was on PBS. Thousands of animals roamed the city. I spent three months in a tent in a nearby town. And now, thank God, I'm back in my own home again. Many people lived in tents as I did.

Some brethren told me the scenario with Katrina made them think more of what could happen in the



*Devastation was everywhere along the Gulf Coast.*

future. The economic problems could really bring us to a more diminished nation as we continue to go into debt. Many say we are selling our children into slavery with all the debt we are creating, and that it could turn into a real nightmare, as America could become like a third world nation because of this debt. And the people that will make it through the chaos best are the ones who have learned to put their trust in God. We often argue about different picky points of doctrine when our time would be better spent seeking God so that we would use the Bible to build up our relationship with Him. Our trust in God is what will pull us through. We should also learn to live a more simple life.

I was living simple before Katrina; God taught me to cut back even more as I learned more about what is truly needed in life. To buy now and pay later is as insidious as many other forms of bondage. I learned years ago the best way around the hurdle is not making more money but spending less. People won't get rich living the way I do, but most of the time it will feel like it. I still struggle with a lot of problems, but in the area of simple living I'm blessed.

We should not trust in our paycheck, but in God. We could easily become a much diminished nation with all the debt we are getting into. It's best to learn to live simply now because we are probably going to be

forced to in the future. Even if the economy does not collapse—living simply is a win-win situation because it helps us have less distraction so that we can focus more on our personal relationship with Jesus Christ. If we trust in the economy, we will fall if it does. But, if our trust and foundation are in Jesus Christ, then we can still be standing when things all around us are falling apart.

When the storm was approaching the city, I knew that if God allowed it to happen, then He would want us to learn from it. I shared that with many brethren after the storm when I was asked to give some sermons. It is from the suffering aspects of life that God has taught me the most. Katrina was no different. It was only through my contact with God that I was able to deal with the aftereffects of the storm with as much peace as I did. It was not easy. These were some of the biggest struggles of my life. And, there were others who had a lot more to deal with than I did. Some people were still sleeping in their car a year after the storm. Suicide rates went up.

I thought a lot about the suffering of life with Katrina, and the lessons God wants us to learn from the suffering in what He allows us to go through. Years ago I read about a girl raised in a millionaire's home. She had servants and lawyers to do everything for her. Then when she was let out into the world, she could not function.

I have often thought how this relates to how God knows that we can learn from the suffering that He allows us to experience in this life. It's the same principle as the girl in the millionaire's home. She was not able to function in life. She should have been allowed to experience the pains and aches of growing up and dealing with life. This is the attitude we should take towards any pain and suffering that comes our way. This attitude towards life will help us. Years ago I heard a minister say: "Everything that happens to you can be a blessing if you will not become offended." I have found this to be true from experience.

There were times when I went through trials and became offended and I brought chaos into my life. And then I learned to take it to God in prayer and repent. God then gave me the right attitude. Then I was able to deal with it with a mind at ease. It was the difference between day and night. Most of it had to do with attitude. Repentance is the best shot in the arm we can receive; it clears the way for us.

When you think about it, much of the Bible is about attitude—our attitude towards God, our fellowman, and the vicissitudes of life on this planet. Scripture tells us: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5, NIV). God knows we can't produce what Christ can; only Christ can produce through us. We need to learn to submit to Him, and let Him guide

us, and then Christ will be manifest to the world. It involves seeking Him diligently and building up our relationship with Him so that He can give us His mind and attitude towards all situations.

Life is not easy. The world can constantly throw things at us. It's how we handle those things that's important. If we seek God as we should, then He will give us more of the mind of Christ. There can be chaos all around us, and He will keep us at peace through His mind and attitude to view it all and handle it all.

Hatred is growing around the country at present, but with enough contact with God, He will have us function with His love, mercy, and forgiveness towards all people. I've had enough failure in my life by not loving people, and I paid a price for years for the unforgiving heart I had; therefore, I know God's way of love and forgiveness is the way to go. I was very judgmental with many people. He had to teach me how much of a failure I was so that I would seek His ability.

I share this because it relates to enduring through trials and can help us with the difficult days ahead: "And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Mt. 24:10-13, NKJV). Think of the connection here of staying with the love of God and enduring.

Staying with the love of God is how God helps us stay in focus. "He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes" (1 Jn. 2:10-11, NKJV).

Jesus said: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

The things I saw with Katrina made me think more of how fragile civilization is. This old world seems to be getting ready for its wildest ride in history. The storms, wars, economic chaos, and attitudes all around us can get worse and worse. But with enough contact with God, he will keep our attitude where it should be, and we will have His peace to deal with it all. This is true success. With the right attitude we will be better able to help those around us with the love of God.

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# On Stem Cells

by Joseph Howard

If you know about stem cells only what popular news programs or publications say, you may think that

- stem cells offer the promise of marvelous new treatments soon to be harvested from embryos that will mitigate or cure dreaded and terminal diseases, with breakthroughs right around the corner and more research needed to eliminate much suffering and death.
- humanitarian science ought not — indeed must not — be impeded by the feelings of confused or squeamish people with religious or philosophical objection to the killing of embryos.
- embryos killed by the stem cell extraction process are only potential life, as the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled.
- embryos killed by stem cell harvesting are excess embryos from in vitro fertilization clinics, to be destroyed if not used for experimentation; thus, none are killed and all are helped by stem cell research.

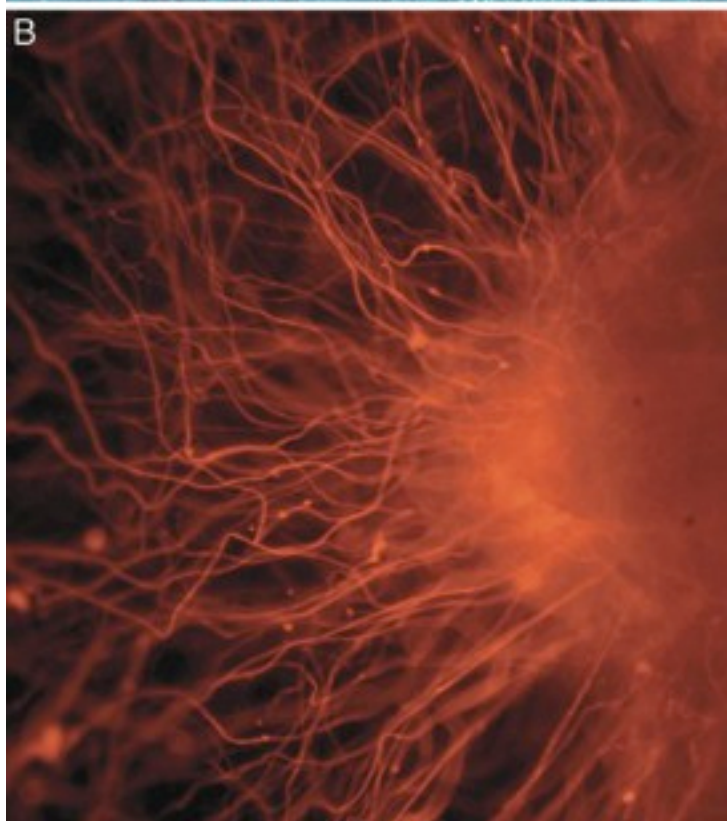
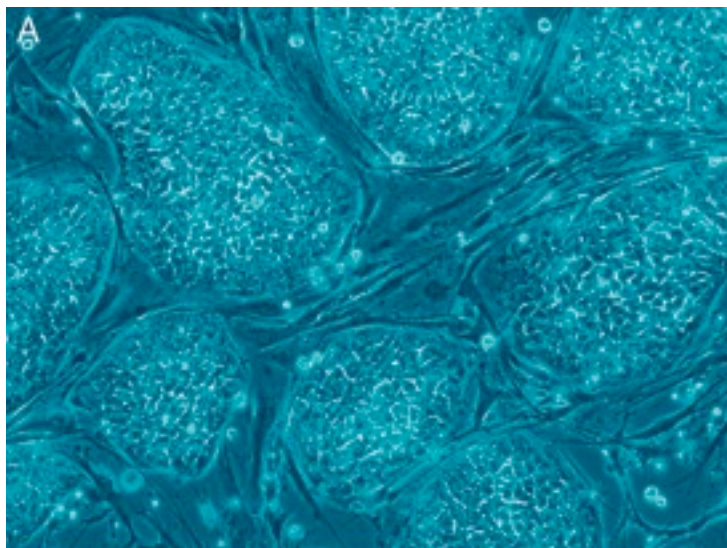
Now the reality: Genetics and embryology inform us that an entire human being, distinct from Mother and Father, comes to life at the moment of conception. An embryo is not an “it” but a he or she. Every hereditary trait is programmed into the genes as an embryonic self was built. Each of us exists now only because that self was not destroyed in the womb.

Stem cells harvested from adults, not embryos, are now being used to heal ailments recently thought to be incurable. While embryonic stem cells might be more versatile, stem cells taken from the patients’ own bodies (many in the skin) are free from rejection by the immune system, thus needing no protection by dangerous immunosuppressant drugs. It is shameful and immoral to kill pre-born people for experiments that may or may not someday yield cures.

Evangelical Christians have fought the good fight against the murder of the tiniest. Prizing the sixth commandment as much as the fourth, Sabbath keepers might well join other evangelicals, including physicians, in opposing the killing of our youngest descendants. We should learn from them and choose the best methods to advance our common cause. Working together will not only show love to our progeny but also may help erase the misunderstanding and prejudice held by many on both sides of the Sabbath/Sunday divide.

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*Bible Advocate*, Faith-Plus Forum on Politics, July-August 2009, page 15.



## **Human embryonic stem cells**

*A: Cell colonies that are not yet differentiated.*

*B: Nerve cell*

*(Source: Wikipedia)*

*Editorial: "Preeminence of Christ" cont. from page 3.*

Him;" and "He is before all things, and in Him all things consist." The apostle then seals the significance of Jesus to the Church by stating, "...He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence."

After proving to the Colossians that Jesus indeed has a right to our worship, the apostle Paul continues this theme of the supremacy of Christ, but he emphasizes our Savior's authority in bringing about our redemption and salvation. In this context the apostle also places himself in the role of a facilitator of our reconciliation with the Father through the work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

In verse 19 Paul makes the point that it was pleasing to the Father that "in Him all the fullness should dwell." The fullness of what, you might ask? The apostle Paul makes that clear in chapter 2, verse 9, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily [in bodily form]." In other words, Christ was God in a fleshly body. Paul goes out of his way to make sure there is no misunderstanding about who Christ was and is, and if he left doubt in one passage, he clears it up in the next.

Because of His preeminence in the creation of all things, He was able through the destruction of His own body on the cross to redeem us from destruction and reconcile us to the Father. But it is not only our own reconciliation that was accomplished through Christ. The entire created universe was reconciled through Him. Starting back in verse 19, we read, "For it pleased the Father that ... by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross" (v. 20).

In several verses the apostle Paul emphasizes the cosmic nature of Christ's existence and sacrifice. His presence not only affects the earth and us who live on it; it affects the entirety of the universe. "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist" (vv. 16, 17).

Paul verily begs the Colossians to understand the greatness of their Savior, Jesus Christ. Then, after establishing the enormity of Christ's power and authority in the universe, he explains to them that all this has taken place for their benefit—for their redemption and salvation. In a sense, he is making the

same appeal that he made to the Philippians about Christ. In that epistle in chapter 2, verse 5, he states, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in the appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."

Later in the first chapter of Colossians the apostle Paul explains that he was given a stewardship by God to present to them God's ultimate goal for us, His people. Paul was "to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and generations, but now has been revealed to [us] His saints ... Christ in you, the hope of glory" (1:25-27). In other words, our only hope of glory is to have the very Spirit of the One who created all things on earth and in heaven living within us. This universe belongs to Christ. It was "created through Him and for Him." It is not possible for salvation to come through any other means.

The point that the apostle Paul makes so eloquently in Colossians is the same one that is made throughout the New Testament. He who set the galaxies in their courses, the one by whom "... all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth" cared so deeply for you that even though He "did not consider it robbery to be equal with God ... [came] in the likeness of men ... and humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." His authority in heaven and earth had no limit, but he gave it up for you.

For these reasons Paul in chapter 2 of Colossians begins to outline the ways in which Christ has freed us from the philosophies of the world's wisest men, their unjust judgments of us, and from oppressive, enslaving worship. We are no longer chained down by the slavish rules of "an appearance of wisdom" and "false humility."

As children of the One True Living God, we have been exalted beyond our wildest imaginations. This is how God sees us. He sees our exaltation because we were "raised with Christ" (3:1). "When Christ, who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (3:4).

Now that we see clearly what the preeminence of Christ means and how it affects each one of us, let's go back to the beginning and solve our puzzle. My friend insisted that certain patriarchs are now in heaven. Why is that not possible? Because of the

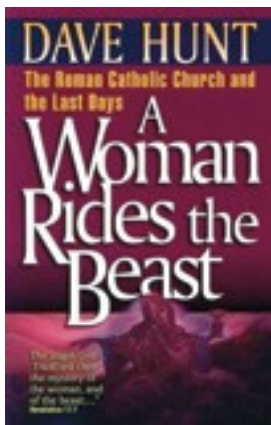
preeminence of Christ. It is not possible for any man to precede our Lord to heaven because He must be first in all things. He is the Head of the body, and "... [He] is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead that in all things He may have the preeminence." It is not possible that Moses, who died and was buried, should be "firstborn from the dead" because that privilege belongs to Christ alone. The same goes for any other patriarch.

In all of the e-mails to my friend I was making it too hard. Yes, Jehoram received a letter from Elijah some 10 years after he was taken up in a whirlwind, and yes, Hebrews 11 states that "these all died having not received the promise," but the real answer is that in all things Christ must come first. Amen.

—*Kenneth Ryland*

### Postscript

In thinking about this matter of the preeminence of Christ, it occurred to me that the theme we see in Colossians is repeated in other books of the New Testament. If you examine the book of Hebrews, for example, you will see that the writer of this letter to Jewish Christians begins by establishing the credentials of Christ as Creator of the universe and as a God who deserves our worship because the angels worship Him. The apostle John works the same theme into his gospel at the very beginning of the book, and many of the disputes that Jesus had with the Pharisees and other religious sects revolved around His elevated stature and His authority over nature itself as well as our worship. He is greater than both the Temple and Abraham: "Before Abraham was, I AM." I would encourage anyone who wishes to enrich his worship experience to study the preeminence of Christ and ponder the greatness of our Lord.



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## Keeping the Sabbath Holy

by *Kelly McDonald*



In Exodus 20:8-11 God says, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." The Sabbath is a day of rest, but it is also a day that God commands us to keep *holy*. The word "holy" in the Bible means to set something apart for special use by God.

We tend to think of holy as an abstract term, but the term holy actually refers to specific, set-apart actions that honor God. One holy or set-apart action that God commands for us to do on the Sabbath is to abstain from work. However, isn't refraining from work on the Sabbath enough to say that we are keeping the Sabbath holy? The commandment reads, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." The Sabbath is more than just a 24-hour "time-out," a period during which we simply abstain from work.

In the second sentence of the Sabbath commandment, God says that "the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God." It is not just that the Sabbath is a day of rest, but that the Sabbath is a day devoted to the Lord our God. The commandment to abstain from work on the Sabbath is not the end of keeping the day holy, but instead, it is the means to keeping the Sabbath holy. During the week our jobs dictate what we do and when we do it, but the Sabbath is a day of freedom from work. With no job or other secular commitments, we are free to do whatever is necessary to make the Sabbath a holy day to the Lord our God.

The key is to remember that the Sabbath is not a day to ourselves or to someone else, but a day to *Him*. Isaiah 58:13b-14a says, "...if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord..." Are you "going your own way" on the Sabbath and not dedicating it solely to the Lord? Watching TV, getting on the internet, and playing video games may be going your own way, but what are you doing instead of these activities? Are you pray-



ing more? Are you studying to understand God's Holy Word more fully? Are you spending time with your family on the Sabbath? Do you know why you believe the way that you do? You see, the commandment to abstain from work on the Sabbath was given so that we could devote this 24-hour span of time to advancing His Kingdom in our lives and in the lives of others. Every relationship takes time, and God set aside the Sabbath in the very beginning for us to grow closer to Him (Genesis 2:1-3).

In the third sentence of the Sabbath commandment, God commands us not to have our family, working animals, or servants do any work. This does not only mean that the Sabbath is a day of rest for our families, but it is also a special time to spend with our families. Part of the Lord's command in Isaiah 58:13b-14a is that we are to "call the Sabbath a delight." One of the ways we can make the Sabbath a delight is by spending quality time with our families. During the week we are not always able to spend the time with our families that they need from us.

Children and grandchildren need that special time with their parents and grandparents to discuss the things going on in their lives. What better time to spend that quality time with them than on the Sabbath? Not only can you spend time with them, but you can also counsel them in the word of God. You can teach them the meaning of the Sabbath and why we keep the commandments of God. By doing these things, your children and grandchildren, no matter where they are and what they are doing, will always remember when you are keeping the Sabbath and how you are keeping it.

Making the home a refuge from the dizzying activities of the world on the Sabbath teaches the family a valuable spiritual lesson that is foundational to the Sabbath: just as the home is a place for counsel and fellowship with family, so the Sabbath is a place in time for counsel and fellowship with Christ. Spending time with family in this manner can make the Sabbath a delight for your whole family, and certainly help set the Sabbath apart as a holy day.

Too often, though, our idea of keeping the Sabbath holy involves a list of do-not's instead of a pursuit of God's Kingdom.\* There's nothing wrong with **not** watching TV, not getting on the Internet, not playing video games, or not participating in other activities as we might do on the other days of the week, but when we abstain from something for God on the Sabbath, it needs to be so that we can draw closer to

God. We need time in the Word of God, we need to develop our relationship with God by knowing Him more intimately, and we need our families to see that the Sabbath is an opportunity to grow closer to God.

Another aspect of the Sabbath that the Bible mentions is to assemble with believers. In Leviticus 23:3, God says that the Sabbath is a "sacred assembly" or "holy convocation." A holy convocation is a public assembly or gathering of God's holy people. Just as the Sabbath is a time for family, the Sabbath is also a time to spend with our spiritual family in worship. We may be scattered about with our jobs and other commitments during the week, but the Sabbath is a set-apart time when we can come together in unity. We get "beat up" by the world and attacked spiritually during the week, but on the Sabbath we have the time and opportunity to be edified by God and the brethren for the upcoming week.

Keeping the Sabbath holy is not all about a list of rules. If you read the gospels, you can see what Jesus thought about the Pharisees' rules for keeping the Sabbath holy. Jesus, several times, pointed out that the Pharisees' rules prevented people from keeping the Sabbath. Aside from abstaining from work and worshipping with the brethren, how you choose to set apart the Sabbath as holy is up to you. But remember that the Sabbath is a day dedicated solely to God. It is a time to bring our families, our communities, our friends, and our lives closer to God. Every Sabbath is a holy time, but it is also a holy opportunity to strengthen our and others' relationships with God.

#### **End Note:**

\*Spending time with family is part of advancing God's Kingdom because the family is where the values of the Kingdom of God are nurtured and grown. The Sabbath is an ideal time for this because the Sabbath is a prophetic representation of the Kingdom of God. Just as we work for six days and rest on the seventh, man has ruled the earth for about six millennia (6,000 years), but Christ will rule in the seventh millennium.

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## Movie Review:

# *The Perfect Stranger*

by Bill Stough

Chicago wife, mother, and lawyer Nikki Cominsky wants her husband, Matt, to take her out to an Italian restaurant, but he plans to go to a Cubs baseball game with a coworker. The couple's daughter, Sara, intends to go camping with another family. There is tension in the home, and Nikki senses there is something missing in her life. Nevertheless when Nikki arrives at work she finds an invitation on her desk to the very restaurant she and her husband had just talked about. She is puzzled, however, because it is signed by Jesus Christ!

She assumes her husband is playing a gag on her so she goes to the restaurant after work expecting to find Matt there. When she gets there, however, she does not find her husband but a stranger who does say he is Jesus. She wants to find out who arranged this scam so she stays to eat with him.

The stranger does not look like the "conventional" Jesus. He has short hair and is dressed in a suit and tie. Among the many humorous moments in the movie is a scene when Nikki tells him he doesn't look like Jesus. "You look like somebody who just got off work from Merrill Lynch."

The conversation gets into all kinds of profound questions. Nikki asks how Christ can be the only way to salvation. "Can't you do it through Hinduism or Islam?" The stranger says you cannot.

The movie has the guts to take on Islam. The stranger says that God did not speak to Mohammed. He says Mohammed got many things wrong and that is proof God never spoke to him. He brings out other lacks in Islam.

Hinduism, he says, doesn't square with modern science. They discuss why humans suffer. Nikki asks why her own parents divorced and why her father died.

The stranger asks, "What is eternal life?" He says it is not simply a period of time. It is being united with himself and the Father. He explains that a human must have food for existence or he will die. That food is required for physical life. The Father and Son have an eternal spirit and it must become part of a human or we will not continue. (That is a concept I had never quite grasped in that way.) Many other subjects are covered. The movie lasts ninety minutes and makes

you think about some of the most important things to all of us.

There are things about the movie I did not like. One was the fact that the stranger said there is a real hell where you don't want to be, implying the standard teaching that hell is a place of eternal torture. That traditional teaching doesn't square with the caring Christ shown in this movie. Another was the closing scene where the stranger walks away and changes into a Christ wearing a white robe.

Who would find this movie useful? It's possible to give it to a person who is asking those questions and who may be seeking God. But another use is to help those of us who are already Christians and sometimes find ourselves in discussions with others who think about the issues covered in the movie. God may be working with such people.

Many of us are scattered without a congregation. In our case, only three of us get together on the Sabbath and we are typical of many people. We had our regular study last Sabbath then played the DVD of this movie. The movie affected each of us in different ways. We had a discussion of it afterward, and it added to the value of the Sabbath.

The movie portrays a personal Christ who really cares about us and knows our interests. It can make us think about the Jesus who really does care.



### *The Perfect Stranger*

By filmmaker Jefferson Moore  
Kelly's Filmworks, copyright  
2005, Running Time: 105 min.  
Available on DVD.

Adapted from the book *Dinner  
with a Perfect Stranger* by David  
Gregory.

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Reprinted from "Faith Networks" newsletter, Oct. 2008.

# The Call to Holiness

By Terril D. Littrell, Ph. D.



*In the Old Testament the Hebrew word "Kadosch" (holy) meant being separated from the secular or profane, or dedicated to God's service, as Israel was said to be holy because it was the people of God. The holiness of God identified His separation from all evil. And, among creatures they are holy by their relation to Him. Holiness in creatures is either subjective or objective or both. It is subjective essentially by the possession of divine grace, and morally by the practice of virtue. Objective holiness in creatures denotes their exclusive consecration to the service of God.*

In times past the nation of Israel was particularly called to serve God. However, because of unbelief, God has set His servant nation aside.

As God's chosen people, Israel was called to serve as a witness to the other nations that the Lord God of Israel, Yahweh the Eternal, was the One True and Living Creator God (Isa. 41:8-9; 43:1; 10:12; Neh. 1:6,10; Lk. 1:54).

Israel was to fear the Lord God of Israel and serve Him alone (Deut. 6:12-14). They were to "walk in all His ways, and to love Him" and their service was to be with sincere earnestness of "heart" and "soul" (Deut. 10:12; Josh. 22:5; 24:14). While the Levites were a special service tribe within the twelve tribes of Israel, an important part of God's covenant promise was that there would eventually be a priesthood made up of all the tribes (Ex. 19:5-6). The tribe of Levi served God by maintaining the Tabernacle and later the Temple. From among the Levites, the family line of Aaron served by performing the duties of the priesthood. This tribal service system was internal in that the priesthood served on behalf of God toward His chosen people Israel, to direct them in the ways of the Lord by teaching the Law (Deut. 33:10), and acting as an intermediary through the blood sacrifices (Lev. 1:1-6:30). This included freewill offerings and sin offerings to provide atonement for the sins of individuals (Lev. 4:1-12), for the nation as a whole (Lev. 4:13-21; 16:1-34), and for the national leaders (Lev. 4:22-35).

When Israel obeyed God and He blessed them, the other nations would fear them because they would know that Israel's God was the True God who rules over both heaven and earth (Deut. 28:9-10; Josh. 2:8-11) because "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29).

God has not revoked His covenant promises to Israel, and will eventually fulfill them. In due time the "Day of the Lord" will come, and Jesus Christ will return to earth to establish His righteous rule over the entire earth, but for the time being, Israel is a castaway among the nations.

In the meantime, the responsibility for the service of God belongs to the Church of today, the Body of Christ, the Saints, those who are "in Christ" through faith, have been "made free from sin" and have become "servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:18).

Called to be saints, or holy ones (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2), all believers have been summoned to serve God, but He has left it up to us to choose whether we will or not.

The Holy Scriptures instruct us that everything that we do is to be done "to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). We are not to seek the approval of men, but we are to carry out our daily activities, whatever they are, "as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service as to the Lord, and not to men" (Eph. 6:6-7).

## Submission of our Will to God's Will

This is what the Apostle Paul is calling for when he asks us to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God (Rom. 12:1). The idea is to yield our will to God's will (Rom. 12:2).

The believer's body, which was previously an instrument of sin, is now to be presented to God as an instrument through which His righteousness is lived out (Rom. 6:22-23). The believer is to have the same attitude or mind set that Jesus Christ had when He prayed to the Father, "not my will but yours be done" (Lk. 22:42). Using our Lord Jesus' example, the Apostle Paul addresses this issue of service in his letter the Philippians; "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus ... (who) humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:5-8). In other words, just as our Savior gave His life for us in accord with the Father's will, we are to live our lives for Him according to the Father's will. To be the servants that God wants us to be, we must submit, or yield, to Him as the Sovereign God that He is.

Ultimately God is in control and He has promised that nothing can separate us from His love "which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35-39), and that He will cause all things to "work together for good to them

that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). It is only when we acknowledge that God is sovereign that we can trust Him with our lives, knowing that He has a better plan than we do. We will only submit our will to His to the extent that we believe that He is personally involved in our life and knows what is best for us.

### **The Lordship of Jesus Christ**

As the Father has given all authority to the Son, it is He whom we are to serve. When we finally are called to give an account of our service to God in this life, it will be "before the Judgment Seat of Christ" that we will stand (Rom. 14:10,12; 2 Cor. 5:10; (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

The Word of God is clear; the believer is to submit every area of life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. "And whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by Him" (Col. 3:17); "And whatsoever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:23-24). Once the believer is "alive in Christ," the issue is no longer one of salvation, but is one of sanctification.

### **The Guidance of the Holy Spirit**

We cannot offer acceptable service to God in our own power. Instead of trusting in ourselves, God wants every believer to trust Him and to live our lives according to His will. To do this, believers must turn from the spiritual darkness the world walks in and "walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). Through the Word of God we learn to distinguish good from evil, righteousness from unrighteousness, and truth from error (Eph. 5:9), which gives us a basis for "proving" or discerning between what is unacceptable and "what is acceptable to the Lord" (Eph. 5:10; 1 Cor. 2:12-16).

In Paul's letter to the saints at Colossae, he expressed his desire that they "might be filled with the knowledge of His [God's] will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col. 1:9). From this passage of Holy Scripture, we can say with all certainty that every believer can know God's will. It comes through the knowledge of God's Word when it is applied wisely to real-life situations with understanding of God's purpose and plan for those who have been redeemed by the blood of His own Son.

God's future purpose for every member of the Body of Christ is for them to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29) and to share His glory with them (Rom. 8:17-18, 30; Col. 1:27). In relation to this future hope it is God's will that every believer "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10). A believer is guided by the Holy Spirit when illu-

minated in mind and heart by the truths expressed in God's Word, and when the believer chooses to walk in the light of that truth. It is a choice to believe God rather than man and to live by His power rather than in self-reliance.

The same principle of depending on the Holy Spirit to guide us in knowing and walking in the will of God is found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, "wherefore be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:17-18). In other words, the Lord's will is for us is to be "filled" or controlled by the Holy Spirit. In this passage the contrast between being drunk on alcohol and filled with the Spirit of God is one of attitudes, thoughts, and actions. When people get drunk, they are moved toward ungodly attitudes, improper thoughts, and immoral actions. On the other hand, those who are "filled," or controlled, by the Holy Spirit are guided into a godly attitude (Phil. 2:5) that produces proper thinking (Phil. 4:8), which leads to a walk (actions) that is "acceptable" and "pleasing" to God (Eph. 5:10; Col. 1:10). Our service to God can only be acceptable if our life is pleasing to Him.

### **A Saint's Life Should Be Characterized by Holiness**

The Bible actually refers to the members of the Body of Christ as "saints" (Rom. 1:7; 8:27; etc.). The basic meaning of the word from which we get the term "saint" means "holy." A saint, then, is a "holy one." The Apostle Paul admonished the Ephesians to "walk worthy of the vocation [calling] wherewith you are called" (Eph. 4:1). All believers are "called to be saints" (Rom. 1:7). This is essentially a call to every member of the Body of Christ to consistently demonstrate holiness in their lives because in God's sight they have been made holy and acceptable to Him through the blood of Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:6-7).

The problem is not that God has called believers to walk in holiness, but that many have the wrong idea of what holiness is. They mistakenly think that a person's holiness is shown through their participation in religious activities and rituals. However, God's Word tells us that He is not concerned with empty rituals and a public show of piety, but with an attitude of heart that is compatible with His. The believer's life is to be marked by love for God and love for others. Love and holiness cannot be separated (Col. 3:12-14). As we allow the Holy Spirit working through God's Word to transform how we think, our hearts will be changed. By experiencing His great love for us and for all of mankind, we will learn to love others in His power. We will understand the same love He demonstrated in a real way on the cross by His Son, Jesus Christ, who died for us (see Rom. 5:8 and Eph. 5:2). Three important aspects of living a sanctified, or holy life are:

**An Attitude of Prayer.** A spiritually mature Christian will be a person of prayer who regularly takes all concerns to the Lord in prayer and thanksgiving (Phil. 4:6; 1 Thes. 5:17-18). Because he or she knows that nothing is too trivial or too great for Him to be concerned with, such a person will pray about anything and everything. Living in an attitude of prayer will result in a life of prayer that is not limited by artificial boundaries set up by unbelief.

As God saves sinners as whole persons (spirit, soul, and body; see 1 Thes. 5:23) and believers are admonished to glorify God in every aspect of their lives (see 1 Cor. 10:31), there can be no doubt that He wants us to pray about all that goes on in our lives. All prayer to God demonstrates a love and trust of Him. When prayer is offered on behalf of others, it demonstrates a desire for their well being, which is a mark of love which should characterize every saint of God.

**An Attitude of Sacrifice.** Believers are called to “walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor” (Eph. 5:2). To fulfill this calling, there has to be a willingness to give up something of value on behalf of someone else. The ultimate example of self-sacrifice on behalf of others is Jesus Christ’s sacrifice of Himself for our sins so that we might be saved.

Of course, we cannot give ourselves for the sins of others as the sinless Son of God did for us, but we can surrender our will to God and put the wellbeing of others ahead of our own needs and desires (see Phil 2:1-4). We cannot walk in love while selfishly hoarding all of our time, our talents, and our treasures for our own pleasure and use. Sacrifice does not take place until something of value is willingly offered up. The giving of one’s self as a living sacrifice is an act of holiness (Rom. 12:1).

**An Attitude of Service.** Service is that which is done to benefit others. The Scriptures refer to service as “good works” (Titus 3:8). In the book of Ephesians we are told that as believers “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:8-10). Not every member of the Body of Christ is called to serve in the same way, but all are called to serve in some capacity to edifying the Body as a whole (Eph. 4:16). As individual members of the Body minister to other members, the Body is built up in love.

A prayerful heart attitude coupled with a willingness to sacrifice and a desire to serve will result in a life that testifies of God’s love and is a picture of holiness.

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## Comfort Zones

A prophet can lead a lonely and disillusioned life. Often it is the prophet’s job to deliver unpleasant news to non-receptive people, and that tends to separate the prophet from the company of others. Who wants a Grinch in one’s social network?

A people person prophet would have been an especially miserable prophet, and therefore many very good prophets leaned toward being task-oriented as opposed to people-oriented guys. That may be why God gave Elisha a very special assignment.

There was a woman in Elisha’s life who had shown him some special kindnesses. Whenever he passed through her part of the world, she and her husband made sure that he had a decent meal and a place to stay.

Read the account in 2 Kings 4 and see that, in spite of their hospitality, Elisha seemed to keep a cool and formal distance from this family, often communicating by proxy even as he was just a few yards from them. He clearly appreciated all they had done, reciprocating with kindness of his own, but we don’t see him exuding warm fuzzies, instead asking his servant to be involved in the human interaction so that he could maintain his customary aloofness.

This woman of Shunem was God’s gift to Elisha, not just because of her hospitality, but also because of what she argues him into doing during her time of need. When Elisha tried to send his assistant Gehazi as a sort of stand-in for the man of God, she would have none of it. “I’m not leaving here without you,” she said. We can almost hear Elisha sighing in resignation as he grabs his travel gear and treks with her back to Shunem. It is in Shunem that he finds her dead son whom Elisha’s servant could not revive.

God had arranged the circumstances in such a way that they compelled Elisha out of his normally detached comfort zone. To do his job, Elisha had to allow himself some physical contact with another human being. Not being a “hugger” to begin with, this would have been an especially unpleasant event for him. But what he did was not only a good thing for the family (the resulting miracle restored their son), it was also good for Elisha. He needed the lesson of the importance of human touch.

Now here’s the point: Some management gurus teach that one’s skills are best optimized only if that person steps outside of his comfort zone. Personally, I hate leaving my comfort zone, but thank God (literally) that frequently I have been forced to do so. If you are facing some new challenges that you think are just not “you,” maybe God is trying to stretch your world of experiences a bit so that you can be more effective in his service.

—Lenny Cacchio (<http://morningcompanion.blogspot.com>)

# The Church in the World

## Iran Releases Two Christian Women from Evin Prison

*No bail required, but charges of 'proselytizing' and 'apostasy' remain.*

ISTANBUL, November 18 (CDN) — Two Christian Iranian women, Maryam Rostampour, 27, and Marzieh Amirzadeh Esmailabad, 30, were released from prison this afternoon with no bail amid an international campaign calling for their freedom since their arrest on March 5.

The two women, whose health deteriorated while in detention at the notorious Evin prison in Tehran, are at their homes recovering from their nine-month ordeal, an Iranian source told Compass. They still could face charges of proselytizing and "apostasy," for leaving Islam.

The women were released at 3:30 p.m.

"Words are not enough to express our gratitude to the Lord and to His people who have prayed and worked for our release," the two women said in a statement from United Kingdom-based Elam Ministries.

The women's lawyer had been working to secure their release, and although they were expected to be released yesterday, he was not able to do so because of the high bail the court was demanding. The Compass source said that it was too soon to determine how the lawyer was able to secure their release without bail today, a rarity for Christians released from prison in Iran.

The source credited their release to international lobbying and pressure on the Iranian government.

"It was from the international pressure, and also the government couldn't handle it anymore," said the source. "Already their detention was illegal. At the same time, the government wasn't ready to prosecute them for apostasy. They already have many headaches. They cannot handle everything."

The source said he suspected the two women will be very closely watched and would not have full freedom of movement, limiting their contact with others.

"It is too soon to give all the details," he said. "It is not just about them. When people get out of jail we need time to get information ... it is very difficult."

Rostampour and Esmailabad were arrested in March and detained on charges of "acting against state security," "taking part in illegal gatherings" and apostasy under Iran's Revolutionary Court system.

On Aug. 9 the women appeared before a judge who pressured them to recant their faith and return to Islam or spend more time in prison. The two women refused. Last



month, on Oct. 7, they were acquitted of the charge of "anti-state activities," and their case was transferred to the General Court.

The charges of proselytizing and apostasy remain against them but are not handled by the Revolutionary Court. While proselytizing and apostasy are not crimes specified in the current Penal Code, judges are required to use their knowledge of Islamic law in cases where no codified law exists.

An article mandating death for apostates in accordance with sharia (Islamic law) reportedly has been stricken from a draft penal code, but experts on Iran say The Council of Guardians and Iran's Supreme Leader still have the final say on who receives capital punishment for leaving Islam.

Elam reported that the women were "doing as well as could be expected, and are rejoicing in the Lord's faithfulness to them." The women reportedly lost a lot of weight during their imprisonment. Esmailabad suffered from back pain, an infected tooth and intense headaches, and Rostampour got severe food poisoning last month.

Elam requested continued prayers as the women may still be called to court hearings. The Iranian source said that all Christians released from prison in the last year have pending court cases against them, but almost none of them have been given court dates.

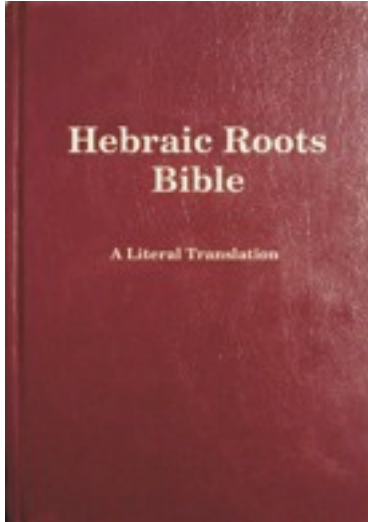
"Maryam and Marzieh have greatly inspired us all," Director of Elam Ministries Sam Yeghnazar said today in a press statement. "Their love for the Lord Jesus and their faithfulness to God have been an amazing testimony."

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*Compass Direct News (Compassdirect.org)*

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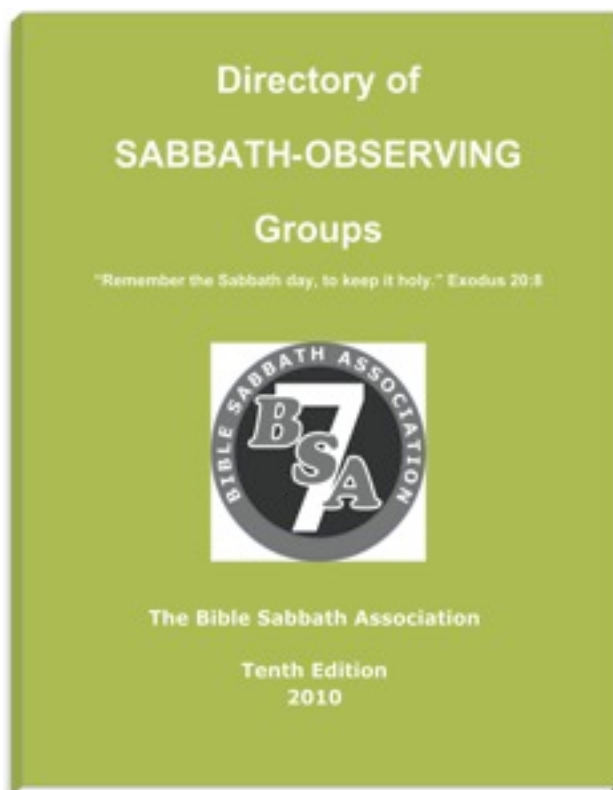
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