

The Sabbath Sentinel

March–April 2014



Is your marriage on the Rocks?

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BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

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

The Sabbath Sentinel

March–April 2014 Volume 65, No. 2 Issue 566

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Our Cover: (Source: *Istock Photo*)

Marriage on the rocks

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Saving Faith



I attended a funeral recently. It was a funeral for one of our neighbors. He was a World War II veteran and a likable and talkative guy. He was nearing the age of 90. He had a lovely wife and daughter.

At the funeral the pastor at the man's Presbyterian church gave a fitting and very uplifting service. He thoroughly understood of the needs of the family and how to tie Scripture to their needs. One of the Scriptures that the pastor quoted was from Isaiah 25:6-9 (all Bible quotes taken from the NKJV):

And in this mountain
The Lord of hosts will make for all people
A feast of choice pieces,
A feast of wines on the lees,
Of fat things full of marrow,
Of well-refined wines on the lees.

And He will destroy on this mountain
The surface of the covering cast over all people,
And the veil that is spread over all nations.

He will swallow up death forever,
And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces;
The rebuke of His people
He will take away from all the earth;
For the Lord has spoken.

And it will be said in that day:
"Behold, this is our God;
We have waited for Him, and He will save us.
This is the Lord;
We have waited for Him;
We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

In this discussion of saving faith we will go through several Scriptures that exemplify how our faith in Christ saves us. As you can see from the Scripture in Isaiah quoted above, it is God's desire to lift the veil from all humanity and save every possible person who does not unalterably reject His offer of salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ. As we see clearly from John 3:16-17, God loves the world so much that He gave His Son, who offered Himself willingly, to save all people on the face of the earth.

Let's go back to Genesis and see what provisions God made for the salvation of mankind.

So the Lord God said to the serpent:

"Because you have done this,
You are cursed more than all cattle,
And more than every beast of the field;
On your belly you shall go,
And you shall eat dust
All the days of your life.

And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed;
He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:14-15).

The Seed of the woman, of course, is Christ who will deliver a fatal blow to the head of the serpent, *i.e.* the devil. Predicted from the very beginning of man's time on earth is the triumph of Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords. Is there any doubt of God's intention of saving all mankind? He told Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply." Those two first parents and Noah after the Flood account for every person living on earth today. Because Noah was a righteous man, God allowed men and women to continue to exist on this earth. This shows incredible mercy and patience on God's part.

Remember that Jesus is called "...the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).

What are you willing to give up for Christ?

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is now worthy of me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me (Matthew 10:37-38).

Within a Christian home the family can provide encouragement in one's walk with Christ. However, if the family is hostile to your Christian beliefs, then the family has to be put well behind Christ in terms of your priorities. That's very hard in many families, even in some Christian families, because of the traditions associated with family gatherings. My wife and I have both experienced this in our families.

One of the things that many new Christians have to deal with is the reaction of their friends. I had to deal with that when I played baseball in college.

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“My Marriage is On the Rocks!”

Sad words. Having performed hundreds of weddings for couples filled with hope, and having dealt with hundreds of couples unhappy in marriage or planning divorce, there are priceless lessons we can discover. What makes for a marriage mistake or a marriage success? A deeper look into what the institution of marriage itself is required if we are to understand how this highest plane of human relationship should work as God designed it.



by Kenneth Westby

With our 50th wedding anniversary just weeks away, I’ve been reflecting on why ours has lasted so long and delivered such happiness. Did JoAn and I just *luck out*? Did we have to *work* at making our marriage a success? What was the nature of that *work*? Was it painful or rewarding work?

Full disclosure: During 50 years of marriage we’ve had a lively profile of challenges and problems. There were ups and downs. We are not super-smart or super-spiritual humans, just regular, fallible, weak folks of the flesh. We had to *work* at keeping our relationship healthy and growing. We also had to *work* at rearing four children and *work* at our careers. It was work that paid in tender beyond computation.

A happy, successful marriage is no accident. It is built one decision at a time with a goal in view—like a beautiful painting on the canvas of life. It should be begun with the end in view. Each stroke can contribute toward creating a scene of beauty, or, let’s be realistic, each stroke can create a confused or ugly mess upon the canvas. It is up to the painter. In the case of marriage, there are two painters wielding two brushes. Things will get complex.

Marriage as an institution stands embattled from all directions of our fallen culture. It is attacked or weakened by increasing divorce, polygamy, homosexuality, adultery, single-motherhood, absent or unknown fathers, government supported and created “new family” structures, secular resistance to religious tradition, and the list goes on. Building and maintaining a strong and happy marriage, while the surrounding culture seems to be slowly abandoning marriage, presents a greater challenge to couples. It will require of couples a rock-strong commitment to the institution of marriage that God designed and gave as a gift to mankind.

A Sacrament?

Marriage is often spoken of as one of the sacraments, the sacred rites ordained by Jesus like baptism, the Eucharist (Lord’s Supper, Passover bread and wine), and matrimony—things having a sacred character and mystical meaning. Paul recognized the deep mystery of

marriage when he drew a parallel between it and Christ’s “marriage” to the Church:

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh [quoting from Genesis 2:24]. This is a *profound mystery*—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband” (Ephesians 5:31-33).

Becoming one flesh at the human level is a mystery as is becoming one with Christ on the spiritual plane. Mystery, as Paul uses the term, does not mean unknowable, or permanently hidden or magical, but something that is profound with a depth and meaning beyond the superficial; something that has an intricately beautiful and divine design that must be sought after carefully with knowledge and wisdom. Divine mysteries usually require divine revelation to fully understand. Marriage is an example.

The Gospel [the good news of God bringing his Kingdom to earth and giving eternal life to his image-bearers] is also a mystery that is being revealed. Paul said his life was dedicated to “fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.”¹ For Paul, all God’s marvelous mysteries are being revealed to those with eyes to see and ears to hear. The best book on how to have a happy and successful marriage is in your hands and it is authored by the creator of the sacrament of matrimony.

What Makes a Marriage Last

How can a couple of love-sick kids vowing to live together “till death do them part” end up separating, splitting up kids, and walking away as sad failures at one of the major enterprises of life? Well, it happens too often. I won’t catalogue all the reasons marriages fail, for my emphasis is on how they can succeed. But divorce happens and it is always painful. Sometimes it is unavoidable and occasionally the only wise thing to do in certain bad situations. Whatever the mistakes in

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EMPATHY:

The Engine that Drives Effective Prayer & Action

By Brian Knowles



Many years ago, a young reporter visited the killing fields of Vietnam. The carnage and suffering were so horrendous that he had to leave and come home. “I simply couldn’t deliver what my heart demanded,” he explained. Most of us who have been around for a while are familiar with the images that have emerged from that awful war: A little girl running naked down a war-torn street, an officer holding a gun to the head of a hapless victim and blowing him away etc. War anywhere is an awful business. But, it’s not just war that is awful — it’s the state of much of the world today.

I don’t know whether it’s just better reporting, or more advanced communications technology, or what, but the world seems to be darkening. Evil appears to be expanding its reach. More and more we are reading of terrorist bombings, piracy on the high seas, sectarian warfare, religious persecution, the trashing of human rights, racially-motivated crimes, the slaughter of thousands in drug wars, corruption in business and politics etc. Try reading one day’s edition of *The Drudge Report* on the web.

More and more ordinary people are falling victim to random acts of violence — school teachers, judges, military personnel, movie goers and children in school are being shot for no good reason. We’re seeing acts of wanton cruelty like the shooting of a baby in the face in front of its mother.

It’s too much! We can’t “process” the magnitude and depth of the evil that men and women do. The world is full of homeless refugees fleeing the wars of tyrants who cling to power no matter the cost in human lives. They have no sense of the sanctity of life. Any life is dispensable if there’s a political or religious reason to take it. After all, man is just a highly evolved animal.

In such a violent world, we feel less and less safe. Law and order are uncertain. The distorting lens of political correctness prevents people from fighting evil or helping the downtrodden. The Left is imposing a myriad of rules and regulations that hamper self-defense and being a Good Samaritan.

If you are a compassionate Christian or Jew, you can look at the state of this world and easily fall into despair. After all, what can any of us do about the carnage that thunders back and forth across the earth, bathing it in blood? When I talk to my friends about these matters, it inevitably comes down to prayer and the return of Christ. And even then, our prayers often

become perfunctory because the problems are so overwhelming and we’ve said it all so many times. Who has the time or the energy to pray about all the things that need to be prayed about?

For example, in Los Angeles County alone, on any given night, there are some 58,000 homeless people frantically trying to find a safe place to sleep on county streets. That’s a tiny fragment of the millions of homeless and refugees huddled together around the world. Many of the world’s homeless are alcoholics, drug addicts or mentally ill. They require professional help. What can any individual Christian do about anything of this magnitude?

We can contribute to charities that are doing something of course. There is strength in numbers. But even the most titanic efforts seem to yield little fruit. The problems are just too enormous. Evil and darkness are entrenched.

Jesus’ Example

Jesus was not lacking in empathy. When he looked out over the Jewish city of Jerusalem, he recognized, and reacted to, the spiritual state of it. He said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing,” (Matthew 23:37).

Jesus saw both the positive and negative potential of Jerusalem. He yearned to bring the capital under God’s sovereignty. God had sent prophet after prophet to call for repentance and a return to Torah — to little avail.

On a personal level, Jesus was often “Moved with compassion,” as he viewed the plight of the people. “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, like a shepherd he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field,’” (Matthew 9:35-38).

Compassion and empathy demand action. When disciples make other disciples, they do the same kind of work — teaching, preaching and healing — all driven by genuine caring for the people. The empathy of the believing community is illustrated Paul’s statement to the

Corinthians: "...there should be no division in the body, but its parts should have equal concern for one another. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it..." (1 Corinthians 12:25-26, excerpts). We Christians need to learn to think corporately, rather than selfishly.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul instructs Christians, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others," (Philippians 2:3-4). Obedience to that instruction requires empathy. We have to sense other's pain before we will genuinely care about relieving it.

A little later in the same letter, Paul talks about his protégé Timothy, who embodied these qualities. "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon...I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ," (Philippians 2:19-21, excerpts). Compassion, love and empathy are outgoing, not incoming.

Like most Jews of his time, Paul knew that the final age of man would be a time of great conflict and stress. He wrote to Timothy, "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God — Having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them," (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Self-love, or narcissism, is the opposite of empathy. Abusive and brutal people are devoid of empathy. Sadistic, cruel people like Saddam Hussein were unable to picture themselves experiencing the same horrors they inflicted on others. He was somehow able to subject his victims to the most heartless tortures imaginable with casual abandon. Many of the world's living dictators are equally compassionless. Lack of empathy is a mother of many evils. Jesus taught, "...whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets," (Matthew 7:12 NKJV). If you want to be treated with kindness, be kind to others.

One of the products of the indwelling spirit of God is kindness (Galatians 5:22). Kindness looks upon another person and says, "If I were that person, what would I want or need?" Then it seeks to provide it. It could be something as simple as a kind or approving word, or it could be something more substantial.

"...what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent?" (Matthew 7:9-10).

It is to people whom, in their lifetime, displayed the qualities of empathy, compassion, kindness and love that God will give reward in the world to come (Mat-

thew 25:31-46). An empathetic person meets people at their real needs even if it involves self-sacrifice and inconvenience. An example of this is the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). Study this example closely and think about the costs and inconvenience the helpful Samaritan experienced in order to help the hapless victim of thieves. The thieves had no compassion and no empathy for their victim; the Samaritan has an abundance of both, leading to his compassionate care for the man left broke, naked and bleeding in a ditch. The Samaritan could look upon the man in the ditch and ask himself, "If I were that man, what would I want and need?" Then he delivered it.

Most of us don't have to go far to discover objects of empathy. We can discover them in our own families - the sick, the aged, the mentally ill, addicts, victims, crippled folks, relatives with financial problems, widows and widowers, divorces, alienated teenagers, jailed family members, people with broken cars or household equipment, people in need of transportation, victims of crime etc., etc.

The same kind of people can be found in any neighborhood. In Los Angeles County alone, as I've mentioned in these pages many times, there are 59,000 homeless people — some of them women with children — trying to find shelter. Some of the women are victims of wife-beating husbands.

If we expand our view to the larger world — i.e. the Philippines — there is no shortage of human suffering. Cruel dictators like Assad of Syria are daily slaughtering their own people. Sectarian wars are shattering the religious world. Unspeakable acts of cruelty abound in the world of Jihadists and terrorists. Let's face it, the farther mankind drifts from the Judeo-Christian value system, the darker it becomes.

If you want to cultivate the quality of empathy in your spiritual life, try praying this prayer, "Lord God, may my heart be broken with the things that break your heart." My neighbor's daughter prayed that prayer, and the first homeless person she saw made her burst into tears. I too have prayed that prayer and its answer does make you see the world differently.

Look, I know this is a simple article. It's not theologically or exegetically complex. Much of it may seem to be made up of statements of the obvious. But it's about what it really means to be a Christian in a rapidly darkening world. We are supposed to be light and salt. Like our Lord, we should be "moved with compassion" when we view empathetically the world in which we live. Then we should pray for wisdom and discernment to determine what our role in helping should be. Prayer begets wisdom, and wisdom reveals what action, if any, is appropriate.

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).

Accepting Christ

By Terrell Perkins



All that is necessary to be a Christian is to accept Christ as one's Savior. Nothing else is called for. That's the message that evangelical Christians all over the world preach. Is that really what the Bible teaches? And just what does it mean to accept Christ as one's Savior? The fact is, most Christians don't understand what it means to accept Christ. To come to a correct understanding of it, one must understand it in the context of the entire Bible.

Even those who believe that the only thing necessary to being a Christian is accepting Christ as one's savior will admit that the message of the scriptures points to Christ. It is therefore no great leap to assert that accepting Christ means to accept the message of the Bible as a whole. Though some would have us discard the "Old Testament" (OT) and read only the "New," it is a fact that the Hebrew scriptures are the foundation for the Greek scriptures (New Testament — NT).

First, in explaining what the Bible is to someone who has never heard of it one could say: It is God's revelation to mankind. He lets us know who He is, why we are here and what He expects of us. It is His instruction manual for the care and maintenance of mankind. It's also a historical record of God's dealing with mankind and, more specifically, Israel. It recorded what happened when mankind obeyed His instructions and what happened when mankind disobeyed His instructions. It records God's grace in that it shows us a path for His forgiveness for our failures in obeying Him. And, it contains prophetic writings warning of the choices we will make. In short, it is a statement of God's love for His children. God reveals Himself to us in the scriptures.

Now, back to what it means to accept Christ, first lets us ask these questions: Why would God insist on obedience from the children of Israel for almost four thousand years, blessing them when they obeyed and punishing them when they disobeyed only to completely change His mind after Christ's death? Why would He now only require one's belief in Christ as one's savior with no further obedience? Why wouldn't He simply do that from the beginning? It would have saved a great number of people from His punishment for disobedience.

And, if all that is required of mankind is to accept Christ as one's personal savior, why isn't the Bible only a few pages in length stating that? If that were the case, then the Bible need only be the size of a pamphlet like those popular among some evangelicals. If

the Bible were only a few pages in length the gospel would be much easier to promote.

The obvious fact is that the Bible is much longer than one page and contains a great deal more than the few scriptures one finds in evangelical tracts promoting things like 'the Roman road'. *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.* 2 Timothy 3:16 (NIV) Not just those mentioned in the "Roman Road." For those that believe the OT is no longer necessary, bear in mind, when the above scripture was penned, the only scriptures the early church had were the Hebrew Scriptures.

Coupled with the belief that one need only accept Christ is the belief called "once saved, always saved." Many Christians will tell you that they believe that the Ten Commandments should be obeyed...except for the fourth because Christ fulfilled that one! Taken to its logical conclusion, however, the "once saved, always saved" doctrine implicitly means that one need do nothing further. It means that one need not obey any commandment, law or precept from the Bible. That is to say that once someone "accepts Christ," one need do nothing more as a Christian.

In considering this issue, think for a minute about a football team looking for a new coach. Say the owner hires a new coach for the team. Would anyone for a minute think that all that is necessary for the team to start winning is to accept the new coach...then, not do what he directs? That is exactly what many Christians do. "Why call you me Lord, Lord and do not what I say do?" (Luke 6:46).

Every organization has rules. When joining any organization, one agrees to obey the rules of the organization. Simply being born human means there are rules one must obey. The Body of Christ also has rules for its members. A part of what the Bible is, is a compilation of those rules.

The counter argument many Protestants have is that one need not obey any laws or commandments for salvation. Set aside for a moment what Christ told the rich man who asked him what one must do for eternal life wherein Christ answered "Keep the commandments." The above argument is correct! Commandment keeping is NOT a salvation issue. This is for our benefit...because it's impossible for flesh and blood human beings to fully keep the commandments. Salvation is by grace alone. Grace is defined as "an unearned merit." Grace, God's graciousness, lies in giving us a gift that we have not earned.

Keeping God's law is an issue of loving God. Christ reiterated that in creating two new commandments. The first was to love God; the second was to love one's neighbor. What does it mean to love God? The scriptures tell us plainly: Christ said: "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). God's commandments set the bar for our behavior high so we always have something to strive for. We are to continually strive and grow.

One must not ignore other principles in the scriptures however... Christ killed a fig tree that didn't bear fruit. Do you think He did that just because He didn't like figs? It was a lesson for us! The parable of the three men who were given talents were ALL expected to increase what they had. All Christians are expected to bear fruit...to grow in grace and knowledge. Faith without works is dead (James 2:17, 20, 26). To ignore that is to do so at one's own peril.

The fruits of the spirit are patience, mercy, kindness, gentleness, love etc. If we do not show this kind of growth we may suffer the same fate as the fig tree that Christ touched. The way we develop those fruits/attributes is by obeying God!

Let's go back to ancient Israel for a moment. For someone to offer an animal sacrifice meant that they first, accepted the concept of sin as defined by God and then accepted God's directives to atone with Him. The scriptures clearly define sin as the transgression of God's law. (1 John 3:4) It meant that they accepted the system God had established as the way to approach Him. It meant they accepted God's authority. To do so was to enter a covenant with God. In accepting Christ as the atonement for one's sins, the way a Christian is called to do, means exactly the same thing!

Many modern Christians will rail against sin but can't give you an exact definition of it. Many will attempt to define sin by their traditions. Dancing, playing cards, drinking and missing mass have all become sins according to some. In the same way that human traditions have taken the place of God's commandments to many, what constitutes sin has become a matter of human traditions. Without consciously realizing it, those who have adopted these beliefs deny the authority of the one true God. Only God can determine what is good and what is evil. Only God can determine what sin is. This is a lesson that goes back to Genesis. To accept Christ as one's savior is to accept God's authority alone.

To accept Christ as our savior is to enter a covenant with God. That's how God deals with people, through covenants.* A covenant, Brth in Hebrew, is a kind of contract. God says: "I will do this and you must do that." Action is implied in a Brith. It is not simply to accept a belief.**

All the animal sacrifices represented a type of Christ. They pointed to Christ as the ultimate sacrifice. Each of the five major types of sacrifices pointed to different aspects of Christ's sacrifice.*** All did the same thing in the sense that they impressed upon the offender that

the penalty of sin was death. To commit sin was to earn the death penalty. Sin demanded blood. Something had to die to atone for the sin committed. That's how serious sin is in God's eyes. That's how God teaches us about obedience. Obedience is DOING something...not just believing something.

What the accepted sacrifice did was to erase the penalty of the sin. **It did not erase the law that defined the sin.** That is to say that if one say committed adultery, one was forgiven of the offense. One was spared the penalty that the sin incurred. One was NOT given the license to commit adultery again. That heresy crept into Christianity over time because the carnal mind is at war with God's way. The carnal mind hates God's law.

For God to absolve us from the penalty of sin through Christ's sacrifice...does NOT absolve us from obeying Him. We are still covenant-bound to obey our Creator.

As Christians, the first-fruits of God's harvest of mankind, we are under the New Covenant now. God's laws are to be written in our hearts. That is ultimately what it means to accept Christ as one's savior.

End Notes

*The scriptures tell us of a time in the future when He will establish a new covenant with us. God will write His laws in our hearts. For the Christian, the first-fruits of God's people, that time is now.

See: **The Law of the Offerings: The Five Tabernacle Offerings and Their Spiritual Significance by Andrew Jukes.

***As a side note here, to get married before God is to enter a covenant with God. Most Christians don't even understand this. The marriage covenant is with God... both husbands and wives enter it as a promise to God to treat the other person in the way scriptures outline. To divorce is to break one's covenant with God. This is why homosexual unions, by whatever name they are called, will never be Holy Matrimony. They are an attempt to enter a covenant with God while completely flouting His commandments...that is NO covenant.

It is worth noting that in both modern and ancient Judaism one could be a good Jew if one did what was required. Some call this "orthopraxy." One could be an atheist and still be a good Jew if one did what was necessary. It wasn't until the first church that the concept of "orthodoxy," believing the necessary things, became a necessary part of one's faith.

We should never forget that God revealed His law to us out of His love for us. His laws are for our own good. If one accepts the truth of that assertion then one can't now claim the law is a burden.

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.

The Leaven of Apathy

Dr. Daniel Botkin



The month in which Passover occurs is the beginning of the biblical year (Exodus 12:11). In preparation for Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread this year, I suggested a spring-time “New Year’s Resolution” for our congregation: “Purge Out the Leaven this year.” For several weeks before Passover, my teaching each Sabbath revolves around leaven and its biblical symbolism. I focused especially on what I call The Leaven of Apathy.

Apathy is defined as indifference.

If a person is apathetic toward something, he has little or no concern about it. He is detached and unemotional. He is without feeling or passion. (Note the negating prefix and *-pathos*, the root of the word.)

It’s okay to be apathetic about some things. For example, I am totally apathetic about sports. I don’t even know for sure what the “Super Bowl” is. (I do know that it has something to do with a football game, which is more than my sister knew. She thought it was a basketball game.) There are many subjects which disciples of Yeshua can safely be apathetic about. Indeed, there are some things that we *should* be apathetic about. Soap operas and celebrity gossip come to mind. But one thing that we must *not* be apathetic about is the Kingdom of God and our personal relationship with the Lord.

Apathy about spiritual matters is like leaven. It is a creeping cancer in the soul. It is a silent, stealthy intruder that seeps into the soul unnoticed, and slowly but steadily spreads its tentacles throughout the soul until the whole is leavened. The reason apathy is so dangerous is because by the time you realize it’s there, guess what? You don’t care! Because apathy is an attitude of indifference, an apathetic person does not care about the fact that he is apathetic.

The word *apathy* does not appear in the Bible, at least not in the KJV.

Esau

Esau is perhaps the most glaring biblical example of an apathetic individual. Esau was the firstborn of Isaac, who was the beloved son and heir of Abraham, the friend of God. Esau was born to a very privileged position. He stood to inherit the blessing of God that was passed on from Abraham to Isaac. Yet Esau’s apathy earned him the curse of God. The last thing that God says about Esau is, “I hated Esau” (Malachi 1:3).

Why did God hate Esau? Because of his apathy toward spiritual things. Esau sold his birthright to his brother Jacob for a bowl of lentils and a piece of bread. In doing so, Esau “despised his birthright” the Bible says (Genesis 25:32).

Jacob had his flaws, too, but apathy toward spiritual things was not one of them. Jacob understood the surpassing value of spiritual blessings over temporal, physical

blessings. Even though Jacob was a manipulative individual in his quest to obtain the spiritual blessings, he at least understood the value of the spiritual. Esau, on the other hand, cared very little about the spiritual. Esau’s first priority was his belly. Satisfying his fleshly appetite was more important to him than the birthright.

If Esau had not sold his birthright, Yahweh might have been referred to as “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Esau” throughout all generations. But because of Esau’s apathy, Yahweh is now forever known as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Our apathy, if it is not purged out, can bring the curse of God upon us as it did for Esau, and it can have eternal consequences, as it did for Esau.

The Israelites Conquerers of Canaan

Another biblical example of apathy can be seen in the first chapter of Judges. Joshua led the children of Israel into the Promised Land, and each tribe was assigned its territory and told to conquer the enemy and dispossess the Land. The Israelites racked up enough victories to establish themselves in the land, but they stopped short of finishing the job. The first chapter of Judges is an account of one incomplete victory after another:

“And Yahweh was with Judah; and he drove out the inhabitants of the mountain, but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron ... And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites ... Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean ... Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer ... Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron ... Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho ... Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh ... and the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain.”

The Angel of Yahweh came and rebuked the Israelites for their apathy. He told them that He was not going to drive out the Canaanites, but was going to leave them to be thorns in their sides, “to prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of Yahweh to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not.” (See Judges chapter 2.) For roughly 300 years the Israelites suffered at the hands of one heathen nation after another, with only occasional temporary relief when a Judge was raised up as the result of the Israelites’ repentance. Then after the Judge was dead, the Israelites fell back into sin again, and God let another enemy afflict them.

Apathy brought the Israelites a lot of long-term misery, and apathy can bring a lot of long-term misery into our lives, too. Don’t be apathetic about the territory God has assigned you. Don’t be satisfied with incomplete victories over sin and temptation.

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When I became a Christian, all my priorities changed, and I received a lot of ridicule from other members of the ball team. I went to my coach in private and told him that I would no longer play on Saturday. I don't know whether it was out of pity or some other motive, but he allowed me to continue on scholarship until I graduated. That was a great blessing for me. I remember one other member of the team who was a Sabbath keeper, which I did not know at the time, approached me privately and told me that he wished he had the guts to do what I had done, but at the time I didn't think it had anything to do with my "guts." To me it was a simple matter of obeying God.

Perhaps many of you have had similar experiences in different contexts. You just know that it was more important to obey God than man. The Holy Spirit spoke to your heart and convicted you of your obligation to God. I know that many have lost jobs, spouses, and homes over this issue. It's not easy to follow Christ. If it were, everyone would be willing to do it. Each of us could probably write our own story of our journey with Christ.

Christianity is not easy for many people in the Western World. However, the walk with Christ is fraught with great peril in many parts of the world.

Our struggles to follow Christ pale in comparison to those who convert to Christianity in Muslim countries. Many are hunted down and killed by family members in what the followers of Islam call "honor killings," the idea being that these new Christians have dishonored the prophet Mohammed. To restore honor to their prophet and the family, many have sacrificed their lives for Christ.

Also, in many parts of India Christians have been run out of their villages and their homes burned to the ground by radical Hindus who spread fear of Christians in their villages. Mobs form and many Christians' lives have been lost in India.

Look at what Christians have to go through in places like North Korea. To be labeled a Christian in that country often leads to imprisonment and death by starvation in prison.

All in all, we are very fortunate in Western countries to have cultures based on Christianity. We too often take that fact for granted and become complacent, apathetic, and lazy in our love for Christ. We have "lost our first love." Many Christians have no idea what the Bible says, let alone what it means for them. Where do you stand in studying the Bible and in prayer — maybe five or ten minutes a day for each or both? I wonder.

"... nor [will I] offer burnt offerings with that which costs me nothing"

Do you remember the incident when King David numbered Israel and how much it displeased God? Joab strenuously objected to David's request, but David commanded Joab to do it anyway in spite of his objections. Joab knew that this act would greatly displease the Lord, and he didn't want any part of the plan. This incident is recorded in 1 Chronicles 21. It's good to read the entire chapter to get the context surrounding this incident. Following are the pertinent details of the story starting with verse 11.

So Gad [the "seer" or prophet] came to David and said to him, "Thus says the Lord: 'Choose for yourself, either three years of famine, or three months to be defeated by your foes with the sword of your enemies overtaking you, or else for three days the sword of the Lord—the plague in the land, with the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the territory of Israel.' Now consider what answer I should take back to Him who sent me." And David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Please let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are very great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man."

The story continues in verse 18 through verse 27:

Therefore, the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David that David should go and erect an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. So David went up at the word of Gad, which he had spoken in the name of the Lord. Now Ornan turned and saw the angel; and his four sons who were with him hid themselves, but Ornan continued threshing wheat. So David came to Ornan, and Ornan looked and saw David. And he went out from the threshing floor, and bowed before David with his face to the ground. Then David said to Ornan, "Grant me the place of this threshing floor, that I may build an altar on it to the Lord. You shall grant it to me at the full price, that the plague may be withdrawn from the people." But Ornan said to David, "Take it to yourself, and let my lord the king do what is good in his eyes. Look, I also give you the oxen for burnt offerings, the threshing implements for wood, and the wheat for the grain offering; I give it all." Then King David said to Ornan, "No, but I will surely buy it for the full price, for I will not take what is yours for the Lord, nor offer burnt offerings with that which costs me nothing." So David gave Ornan six hundred shekels of gold by weight for the place. And David built there an altar to the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called on the Lord; and He answered him from heaven by fire on the altar of burnt offering. So the Lord commanded the angel, and he returned his sword to its sheath.

One of the interesting aspects of this story is that Ornan was a Jebusite, a race of people that God

told Joshua to wipe off the face of the earth when the Israelites entered the Promised Land. How ironic! The threshing floor of Ornan was where the altar in Solomon's temple was eventually constructed.

Now Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite (2 Chronicles 3:1).

God always amazes us. Amen.

Faith that costs nothing is not saving faith. The cost of our faith in Christ is ours to bear. We must be willing to bear that cost and give up everything that we were and all that we have known before. Christ gave His life so that we might live in Him. He expects our lives for His life — a life for a life.

—Kenneth Ryland

The Prodigal Son

by Chris DeWeese



The story of the prodigal son is rich with a lot of Hebrew context. Something that is lost in our western culture is the idea of an inheritance being due to the sons. In this parable, Yeshua tells that the younger son demands his inheritance prematurely (and gets it). In our society, children get whatever the parents decide as an inheritance, if anything at all. In fact, many families separate when patriarchs or matriarchs pass away due to incredible conflict over the estate. In the waning years of an elderly person's life, it is not uncommon in our culture for that person's kids to start vying for the attention of the elderly person in the hopes of getting a bigger share of the estate. It would appear the Hebrew culture handles this much better than western society.

One clear topic in the Prodigal Son parable (Luke 15:11-32) is the topic of redemption. The younger son decided to turn his back on his family and his faith and squandered his material possessions and became impoverished due to his loose living. He had to be brought very low in order to seek repentance. He knew his father was just and treated even his hired hands well, but, more importantly, he knew what he was doing was wrong. It had been communicated to this young man that the behavior he had partaken in was wrong from a young age. He rebelled but knew the path back.

This is another problem our society lacks today at large. Many of our neighbors, especially the younger ones, lack the knowledge to repent. Western culture used to be Christ centered. While the Christianity it practiced was doctrinally troubled, at least it practiced Christianity in some measure. In fact, it is so easy to talk about Christianity in the past tense that it is rather sad. Today's culture is awash in the humanistic perspective coupled with extreme relativism. We can see this as gay marriage continues to be foisted upon the populace, the increased acceptance of intoxicants as a way of life, and a host of other societal problems that seem to be brand new. The popular culture and governmental powers seem to be united against anything that resembles the faith of the Bible. The chief problem with this is that people will lack the path to redemption. When the loose living that seems to be the new American Dream brings negative consequences, people turn to secular means to fix it. Society increasingly does not recognize sins as sins so they do not know they are doing anything wrong.

These realities bring the following scripture to mind:

And he *said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy." "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying (Revelation 22:10-15).

That's a really scary verse but an encouraging verse at the same time. The scary part is that there is coming a time when it will be too late for many to repent and be saved. The encouraging parts are that this sinful society will at some point come to an end and it is not too late for many to repent like the Prodigal Son.

Chris came to the Sabbath through his wife Diana, who is a third generation Sabbath keeper. His path lead him to the Holy Days and the other truths by way of meeting people on the internet. "Chris is an elder of a fellowship focusing on early Christianity that is based off of his website www.firstcenturychristianity.net." Chris supervises a team of Field Service Engineers in the Bio-Medical Industry for his secular career.

Who Wants to be a Pharisee?

by Janet Short



Visiting Israel for the first time, I discovered modern-day Pharisees living there. Reflecting on all we saw and felt on our tour, I began to consider if we American Christians may also be living like Pharisees.

All around Israel, but especially in Jerusalem, one sees bearded men in long black coats and odd-looking hats. They wear their sideburns in long ringlets. The women, though they don't stand out so much, always have their heads wrapped. They are Hassidic Jews.

Orthodox Judaism abounds in Israel and affects everyday life, even for a tourist. One of the most noticeable effects is the kosher foods served. Observing the laws of "clean meats," it was a relief for me to not always be asking, suspiciously "What's in it?" However, keeping a restaurant's kosher license means much more, as we discovered.

Because of the scriptural admonition to "not seethe a kid in its mother's milk," no dairy products can be served at a meal where any meat might be served. Instead, we had margarine and soy milk and non-dairy frozen sorbets. Only at breakfast were we offered real milk, butter, and cheese along with smoked turkey, fish and eggs but no beef or lamb.

As I traveled with a group of sincere evangelical Christians and listened to our Jewish guide's explanations, I observed mixed reactions to what was viewed as extreme legalism.

The real epiphany came on our first Friday night. We were warned that Shabbat dinner would be a little different, as would meals the following day. No cappuccino servers or wine stewards. Only re-heated or crock pot food.

One elevator was programmed to stop on every floor of our hotel, so observant Jews would not have to punch elevator buttons. Our rooms had an optional time clock that would turn the lights on and adjust the heat and air system. The refrigerator's interior light would not work for a day.

All around our tour group, if anything were amiss, I heard, "Maybe it's because it is Shabbat." They took it well, and with laughter. I found myself thinking, the Pharisees are alive and well in Israel, at the same time

trying to explain to my new friends how I keep the Sabbath holy.

In a Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath morning, a law-keeping gentleman explained to me that I was most definitely not keeping the Sabbath holy, if I deigned to ride in a car. He also would not shake my hand because I am a woman.

Who wants to be a Pharisee? This sect of Judaism is mentioned about ninety-five times in the New Testament and almost always in a negative light.

Jesus clumped them together with the Sadducees and called them a "generation of vipers" (Matthew 3:7) and hypocrites (Matthew 23:14, 15, 23). They then claimed he was healing the sick and casting out devils "through the prince of the devils" (Matthew 9:34, *et al*).

There was one, Nicodemus, who seemed to believe Jesus might be on the right track, who came to ask him questions at night (John 3:1) and tried to get the others to be reasonable (John 7:50-51). He then provided myrrh and aloes for the burial of Christ (John 19:39). Saul was a Pharisee before his transforming experience on the Road to Damascus (Philippians 3:5).

Generally speaking, though, a Pharisee was an enemy of Christ. Some of them were surely among the "chief priests and elders" who sought his death (Matthew 27:20) and they certainly were concerned to squelch any idea that Jesus might have supernatural power to rise from the dead (Matthew 27:62).

So do I want to be a Pharisee? I think I would prefer to not even be mentioned in the same sentence. Yet, since I started observing Saturday as the Sabbath, I have been labeled as a Pharisee, having made the blood of Christ of none effect (citing Romans 4:14) and as someone "under the law."

Since coming home from our trip to Israel, I keep thinking about various conversations in which I said, "The Pharisees are alive and well," or "We met modern-day Pharisees there."

Trying to discover exactly what the Pharisees taught and believed, I read several articles on the Internet. One posted by the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, calls the Pharisees "the spiritual fathers of modern Judaism."¹ They were made up of ordinary

men, not necessarily scribes or learned scholars. They believed in an after-life (unlike the Sadducees) and in individual prayer and assembly in synagogues.

Pharisees kept the law: both the written Torah law and the oral traditions they believed God passed on to Moses. The oral law gave definition where the written law seemed obscure or vague. And historically, we know they added to it.

Reading these accounts, I thought the Pharisees weren't all that bad. They sounded a lot like modern Sabbath-keeping churches. We believe the Ten Commandments but we also have traditions about how to interpret them.

“Thou shalt do no servile work” —does that include helping a neighbor to move his household? “Neither thou nor thy manservant...” —does that include the postman? What about waitresses? ER nurses? Each denomination of Sabbath observing churches has its own interpretations or “oral traditions” and they can vary substantially.

I remember when I was first introduced to the concept of keeping the Sabbath. I asked my new friends, “Can I do this? Would this violate the Sabbath? What does this scripture mean?” I can hardly blame them for expounding beyond what the Word actually tells us.

God's perfect law is simple, especially the most controversial one: Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Knowing exactly what that entails in a modern society of planes, trains and automobiles, crock pots and Sabbath clocks, can get complicated.

If we truly do have the law written on our hearts (Hebrews 10:16) and the Holy Spirit leading and teaching (John 14:26), do we still need the mindset of Pharisees to interpret the Law for us and write instructions for how the law ought to be carried out?

Yet the Pharisees are alive and well and influencing us in the twenty-first century. Perhaps they don't all dwell in Jerusalem. Who wants to be a Pharisee? I don't think it's for me.

End Note

1 “Ancient Jewish History: Pharisees, Sadducees & Essenes” as posted at http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/History/sadducees_pharisees_essenes.html

Janet Short wrote a weekly newspaper column for six years, much of it written from a primitive cabin in the Ouachita Mountains of Oklahoma. It used anecdotes from life to illustrate simple life principles such as the benefits of diligence, why children disobey and the awesomeness of God. She has published several magazine articles and short stories illustrating God's relationship with mankind. She now writes a weekly blog from her home in North Texas and has a devotional book under contract.

Be Wholly on the Lord's Side

“Decide today whom you will obey. Will it be the gods of your ancestors beyond the Euphrates or the gods of the Amorites here in this land? But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15, T.L.B.

In the light of eternity Joshua made the right decision, though it may not have been an easy or popular one to make.

Do you remember the story of the real estate agent who was electrocuted when he touched a high-tension wire while showing a client some property? But have you ever seen a bird perch on a power line and receive no harm? What makes the difference? Simply this: the bird is touching nothing but a single wire. Were he simultaneously to touch the ground or another, oppositely charged, wire he too would be electrocuted.

In the internment camp where our family spent 37 months I came to know a couple who were part Caucasian and part Filipino. This couple owned considerable real estate in Mountain Province, and they were determined to hold onto it, regardless of who won the war. They devised a plan that appeared to be foolproof-almost. Joe made it quite evident that he was pro-American; Frances, a very attractive woman, made it quite plain that her sympathies lay with the Japanese. One of the first benefits they reaped from this arrangement was Frances' release from camp. Joe, of course, remained a prisoner.

The plan seemed to work perfectly until the tide of war turned against the Japanese, and Frances tried to change sides. A fatal hitch developed in their plan when the Japanese army was forced to evacuate Baguio, and Frances, pleading illness, tried to remain behind and take her chances with the incoming Americans. The problem was that the Japanese refused to leave her and the other collaborators behind, explaining that they would be shot if they were captured by the Americans. So, willy-nilly, Frances and her fellow collaborators were obliged to accompany the Japanese into the mountains of northern Luzon.

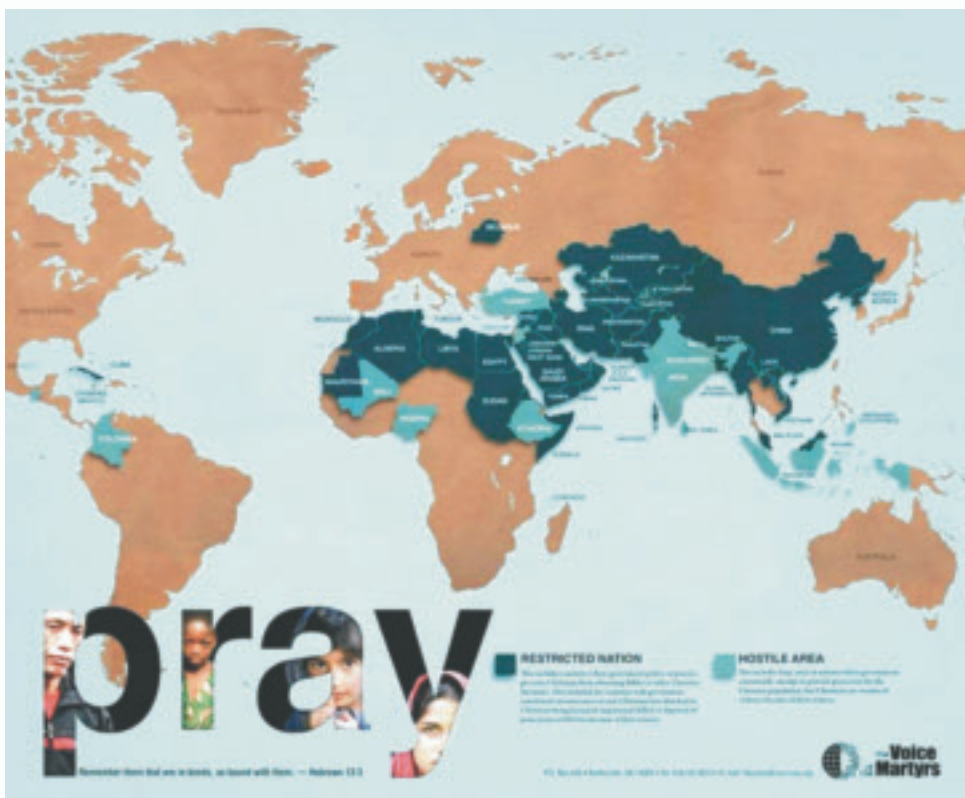
Exactly what happened next no one seems to know, but apparently the Japanese got wind that the collaborators were not as loyal to their cause as they had pretended to be. At any rate, all of them, including Frances, were herded into a gold mine and shot.

Being wholly on the Lord's side pays, perhaps not always in this life, but always in the long run. Those who try to hold onto this present world, while trying to grasp the world to come, will ultimately lose both worlds. Jesus put it this way: “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

Donald Mansell, New Every Morning, page 114. Review & Herald Publishing Association. 1981.

Pray for Boldness

by Lenny Cacchio



“So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord” (Acts 4:24).

This prayer given early in the history of the church reveals something about their commitment and their expectations. Peter and John had just been released from prison for healing someone from a life-long disability and afterwards claiming that Jesus had something to do with it. That did not go well with the leadership of the day, men who had been complicit in his crucifixion.

The boldness of such a proclamation was enough to land them in the dungeon for a night.

That arrest and their subsequent release was probably enough to both rattle and discourage the church, motivating them to “raise their voice to God”, as it would any believer.

Yet, their prayer is remarkable in a number of ways. A group under persecution and threat would surely and understandably pray for deliverance, and there is everything understandable if they had made such a request.

But this crowd was different.

They begin their prayer quoting a Psalm and relating it to how everyone from Herod to Pilate to the Gentiles and to Israel itself seems to be arrayed against them and their Messiah. They ask God to look on these threats, but instead of removing these threats they do something that seems to be completely foreign to our nature and expectations:

“Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to your servants that with all boldness they may speak your word” (verse 29).

In the face of legal action, persecution, and even potential martyrdom, they pray not for the persecution to cease, but for boldness to see the persecution through.

Ringling in their ears were the words of Jesus just a few weeks before who told them, “These things I have spoken to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you

will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) Instead of an expectation of a gospel of ease, they were promised a world of tribulation. They had been primed for a challenge and expected both great success and powerful opposition. Jesus by his example and words left them no other option.

Many followers of Jesus today understand well this principle of danger, a danger that escapes many of us in First Amendment America.

Iraq in 2003 was home to 1.5 million Christians. Due to persecution, war, and exile that number is now 450,000. Terrorists target Christian churches in Egypt. Pakistani Christians face the death penalty on merely an accusation of blasphemy against the Muslim religion, blasphemy effectively defined as a simple disagreement that we would consider a normal discourse.

In many parts of China Christians run a grave risk if they meet as brethren apart from government sanctioned churches. In North Korea those engaged in non-sanctioned religious activity are subject to imprisonment, torture, and execution. Possessing a Bible or saying “Jesus” or “God” can be a capital offense.

Jesus knew what he was talking about, and so did the early Christians. In the world his followers will have tribulation, and we must pray for boldness in the face of that tribulation. But, may I add, there is everything right about praying for deliverance too, and our voices in one accord with theirs for a deliverance from evil is indeed in order today.

If you want to be humbled, visit the Voice of the Martyrs website (www.persecution.com) and see how people around the globe suffer for their faith.

You can catch all of Lenny's latest commentaries on <http://morningcompanion.blogspot.com> and on the BSA Web site at <http://www.biblesabbath.org/>. Lenny is a member of the BSA board of directors.

CONTROLLING ANGER: The Teaching and Example of Jesus

R. Herbert

Anger is a universal human emotion. We all experience it and only differ in the way and the degree in which we express it. Like all emotions, we need properly controlled anger — it is there for a reason: if we did not have it, we would live lives in which we calmly accepted anything and wrong would go largely unchecked and unpunished. The Bible clearly shows that anger is a trait which God Himself exhibits (Exodus 4:14, and in many other places), but the Bible is equally clear in condemning unrestrained anger and its results. So how are we to deal with this situation — what are the key elements of understanding that we should utilize in rightly managing this volatile emotion? Fortunately, we can find guidance in looking a little more closely at the teachings and example of Christ Himself.

The Teachings of Jesus — Heated Words Have Chilling Consequences

Most people familiar with the New Testament recognize the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:22:

“... whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”

We may have no idea what “*Raca*” means, but we can guess that it’s a bad word, and the meaning of the verse clearly seems to be that angry feelings or words can land us in serious spiritual trouble. But the verse is not very clear in the KJV — or even in many more modern translations — and a bit of background can help us better understand its important lesson.

During the time of Jesus, ancient Israel had two kinds of legal courts. First there were small regional courts of a type called the *Beth Din*, or “House of Judgment,” which dealt with minor legal problems at the local level. Then there was the *Sanhedrin*, the “Assembly” or “Council.” Every city in the land of Israel had a “lower Sanhedrin;” and there was a “Great Sanhedrin” in Jerusalem which functioned as the nation’s Supreme Court. The Sanhedrin dealt with serious infractions of the Mosaic law and other religious issues. Knowing this, we can better see the progression that is implicit in Christ’s words:

“... whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the local court [Beth Din]: and whosoever shall say to his brother, *Raca*, shall be in danger of the higher court [Sanhedrin]: but whosoever shall say, You fool, shall be in danger of hell fire [the punishment of God].”

Let’s look at these infractions individually:

“Angry with his brother without cause” is understandable, but note that early manuscripts of the New Testa-

ment do not have the words “without cause,” which may have been added later to try to explain the verse. Not being angry at all may seem impossible for human beings, but the anger that is meant is doubtless the kind of intense anger that is potentially murderous — and actually murderous within the heart, just as Jesus showed lustful adultery within the heart (Matthew 5:27).

“*Raca*” is a word of derision in both Aramaic and Hebrew. It essentially means “empty headed” in a very insulting way. Using “*Raca*” would be akin to calling a person stupid or an idiot.

“You fool” is a translation of the Hebrew word *Nabal* which is worse than *Raca* as it means someone who is evil as well as foolish. Isaiah defines the word for us: “For the fool [*nabal*] speaks folly, his mind is busy with evil: He practices ungodliness and spreads error concerning the LORD; the hungry he leaves empty and from the thirsty he withholds water” (Isaiah 32:6). So using this term is akin to judging someone in the worst way — accusing them not only of being foolish, but also evil.

Putting this all together we can paraphrase the verse something like this:

“Everyone that is angry with his brother is in danger of the local court. Everyone that says to his brother ‘you are stupid’ is in danger of the higher court, and everyone that says ‘you are an evil fool’ is in danger of the fire of *gehenna* [the punishment of God].”

The progression of crimes is clear. First the *feeling* of intense anger, which is wrong, but is at least contained at this point. Next the *expression* of anger with words which are demeaning and wrong. Finally, *judging* another human in unrestrained negative terms — a sin that Jesus warned against repeatedly. The progression of punishment for these errors is clear also. The Beth Din could punish, but not impose the death penalty; the Sanhedrin could impose the death penalty for serious crimes; the *gehenna* judgment fire involves only the death penalty.

God can be angry without sin, but for humans it’s not so easy. Paul says “be angry and sin not,” so it is possible to be angered yet to contain one’s anger and not let it rise to dangerous levels. But Jesus’ words show we need to take great care in this situation. Even servants of God as great as Moses failed in this regard: “By the waters of Meribah they angered the LORD, and trouble came to Moses because of them; for they rebelled against the Spirit of God, and rash words came from Moses’ lips” (Psalms 106: 32-33). Moses spoke “rashly” under the trying conditions he faced from the children of Israel, and as a result

“trouble came to Moses.” We may not know all the details of that trouble, but the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:22 put this event in context. We place ourselves in danger of serious trouble — likened by Jesus to punishment in court — if we allow ourselves to become overly angry. We put ourselves in danger of even greater punishment if we allow our anger to boil over into angry and demeaning speech. Allowing ourselves to verbally lash out at someone who has angered us — and to sin by judging that individual and perhaps unjustly accusing the person of evil — can place us in real spiritual danger.

We might do well to remember the words of Jude in this regard: “But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’” (Jude 1:9). There is no story of dispute over the literal body of Moses in the Old Testament, and some biblical scholars (see, for example, Peter Leithart, <http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/leithart/>) have shown there are a number of reasons to believe that in this verse Jude refers to Zechariah 3:1-2: that the “body of Moses” is the Old Covenant congregation (as the “body of Christ” is the New Testament Church), that the “Archangel” is the “Angel of the Lord” of the Old Testament — the preincarnate One who became Jesus, and that Michael, whose name means “who is like God,” is indeed the Lord Himself. If this is so, and the Lord Himself did not openly accuse Satan, but simply rebuked him (as he did later in the temptation in the wilderness), then the words of Jesus in Matthew 5 are even more clearly placed in focus.

In any event, Jesus showed that uncontrolled anger and the words which stem from it, as well as the possible judging of another, have no place in the life of the Christian. And angry words are not all alike, as Jesus’ warning shows. They can all too easily escalate from punishable words that could metaphorically “land us in court,” to words which could have a far greater repercussion on our own futures. Jesus’ teaching is clear in this — we should avoid spiraling anger and heated words or risk the chilling consequences.

The Example of Jesus — Not Rushing to Anger

All the Gospels tell the story of Jesus casting the money changers and animal sellers from the temple. It’s a powerful story. As you remember, when He found people keeping animals in the temple and making profit in various ways He reacted dramatically. He overturned the tables of those who changed the common Greek and Roman money for Jewish coins (which were acceptable for Temple offerings) and used a whip to drive out the animals and birds being sold there (for sacrifices), saying: “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” (John 2:16).

The picture painted in the Gospels is clearly one of Jesus displaying righteous anger at the way in which the temple was being polluted and commercially used, and

at least one modern portrayal of the story depicts Jesus as seeing the situation and flying into a sudden and furious anger. It may be easy to imagine it that way, but the Gospels actually show that nothing could be further from the truth. Mark’s account is particularly interesting in that it gives us extra information which shows that Jesus did not just act with natural impulsive anger, but with a controlled anger based on prior thought.

Alone of the Gospels, Mark adds this fascinating detail to the temple cleansing narrative. After his humble but triumphant entry into Jerusalem, as recorded by the other Gospel writers, Mark tells us that “Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve” (Mark 11:11). Then Mark continues, “The next day ... On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there” (Mark 11:12-15). It is clear from Mark’s addition that Jesus must have already seen the sellers and money changers in the Temple courts, but He chose to return to Bethany for the night — doubtless thinking and praying about what He had seen — before returning the following day to cleanse the temple.

Jesus’ driving out of the animals and the money changers and salesmen was clearly the opposite of hasty, impulsive anger, and John’s Gospel adds yet a further detail that also shows this. “In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts...” (John 2:14-15). The Greek indicates that the “whip” used by Jesus was made from the rushes used as the bedding for the animals and also indicates that he “plaited” the whip — combining multiple rushes into a serviceable whip — something that would have taken some time. Once again we see that unlike the common picture of Jesus seeing the money changers and instantly driving them out in great anger, when He did return to the temple, He actually took time to plait or weave the whip he used.

So Christ’s behavior in this circumstance was the opposite of rushing to anger and provides a clear lesson for us. Even in the most justifiable instances of provocation, we need to think and pray about how we should respond. The apostle James stresses this: “... Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires” (James 1:19-20). Like Jesus, rather than rushing to anger, we too need to take the time to figuratively plait the rushes.

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Westby: "Marriage on the Rocks" from page 4.

judgment, the sins, or violations of the marriage covenant, upon repentance God will forgive. He is the merciful God of a second chance—and, boy, do we need second chances.

God can forgive the sin of divorce. However the terms for a second marriage are exactly the same: one hundred percent commitment to the marriage itself and to the chosen mate. One would hope that after the suffering of a divorce one would avoid making the same mistakes of choosing poorly and/or behaving poorly that caused the previous marriage to fail. God wants his children to learn to be happy and enjoy the gifts he has made available. Divorce is not the unpardonable sin, but even though God forgives the sin the consequences remain for us to deal with in wisdom and love.

Sometimes divorce happens despite the valiant efforts of one of the parties. The truth is plain: you can't control what another person thinks or does. That other person must be responsible for himself/herself and pay the price of that behavior. Good character cannot be passed along with a kiss. It must be developed in the heart guided by the will. If you can't control your mate, which is a given, you can control yourself and manifest good behavior yourself. This solves half of potential problems and is a good basis upon which to build a relationship.

Having a happy and long-lasting marriage is not an accident. A little thought and a few interviews of example couples will validate that claim. It is almost easier for a man to walk on the moon than to build and maintain a life-long happy marriage. Going to the moon requires getting in harmony with all the laws of physics that would allow man to escape earth and land on the moon. It is technically feasible to do and was done the first time back in the late 1960s and has been repeated several times since. It is difficult yet achievable if done rightly.

Having a successful marriage also requires getting in harmony with a lot of laws, some psychological, some physical, some spiritual, and doing it in tandem with another independent human being. That is a challenge on par with any of the greatest of human achievements.

Commitment is King

One of the keys to a lasting marriage is commitment. I know that is a scary word to couples nowadays—especially men—but it is the cement that holds the marriage covenant together through the rough road of life. A commitment to the institution itself which was brought in force by your word, your promise, to become one with your mate, to love, to honor, to pro-

tect, to care for in sickness and health as long as you both shall live. Honoring a vow, made before God, is no casual thing to be discarded at first signs of boredom or conflict.

I liken it to a husband and wife being on a little boat in the middle of the ocean. They must partner together in order to survive and save each other. They are in the same boat and one of them jumping out would likely mean both of them would perish. Sticking together is the only option worth considering. This is a rather harsh illustration, yet it isn't that marriage is like facing disaster in the ocean, but that the commitment to each other is the one and only option.

Commitment wins in marriage. Love in a marriage, like the tide, will at times seem to flow out, but if there is commitment you will be there to welcome love when it flows back in on the high tide. Commitment is akin to faithfulness, standing by your promises with an unflinching determination to fulfill them. It is the faithfulness of God that inspires our trust in him. We know God is good to his word and will fulfill his promises. "Abraham was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise."² Peter advises Christians that they "should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good."³

Committed to a Fault-filled Mate?

I appreciate that JoAn is committed to a fault-filled fellow like me. I'm sure at times she has to work at that commitment, but what a strengthening effect it has upon me. My wife has many gifts and attributes and it is a privilege to be known as her husband. In fact, over the years I asked her to come with me to events she didn't really need to attend. I wanted her company for sure, but I knew people always thought more highly of me when they met her. A bit selfish? Yes, but I need all the help I can get and I like being identified with her.

What is truly remarkable is that Yahweh, the God of Glory, so often chooses to identify himself with people whose lives are full of obvious flaws. Does he not identify himself in terms of "The God of Abraham," "The God of Jacob"? Did these fellows have faults? Many! Yet God was not ashamed to be called their God. He is not ashamed to be called your God, "The God of Patty," "The God of Larry." And there is a challenge here for us—not to be ashamed of Him.

God is committed to the fault-filled, struggling sons and daughters he has called into his church. Can we not be committed for life to our less than perfect mates? One must be accepting and committed to the mate as she/he is now, not with exception clauses like "if you were this way instead of the way you now are then I could love you and commit to you, etc." We must be committed to our mate's growth and progress

in all ways, but always loving them as they are right now, faults and all. This is how God deals with us and doesn't that provide a deep security and safety in our relationship with him?

Where Does Love Come In?

You talk about commitment, Westby, but isn't marriage all about love? Yes, it is. But like I noted, love can ebb and flow with the emotions stirred by temptations, trials, finances, children, disappointments, arguments, fights, health issues, and a host of things. Some couples have come to actual blows over common irritants of the human condition. At that moment "love" is out the window, and sometimes the word "hate" is even spoken in anger. Does that mean that the marriage is over for good? No, not if each is committed to keeping their marriage intact. Cooling down, apologies, forgiveness, and then love can come back.

Love is a decision. It is something you give from your heart. You cannot be compelled to give it. When you do give love it usually has a profound effect upon the recipient—your wife or husband. Jesus spoke about the most important commandments which at their center each called for love.

"The most important one...is this: 'Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one, Love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."⁴

Did Jesus have it right? He gets this directly from the Hebrew Scriptures which for him carries the same authority they always did. How would one apply those principles to marriage? Loving with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength is a total commitment to God. The second commandment is similar as it implies a loving self-sacrificial commitment to others. The closest relationship we will have with another person is the marriage relationship so this commandment fits perfectly in holy matrimony.

Selfishness the Big Destroyer of Marriage

One might wonder about the origins, or source of love. Paul says it comes "from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."⁵ The heart is the command center of a person's inner self. A pure heart is one that has been set free from self-absorption and the web of selfish pursuits that strangle love, sap energy, and ignore the call to love your mate as yourself.

Selfishness is probably the most common killer of marriage. Always thinking about yourself, what you like, what you want, what will make you happy, what will advance you, what will titillate you, with little thought to what is going on in your mate's heart, their list of wants and needs.

Many a "successful" man has left behind one or more failed marriages. Was he a real success in life? The saddest failure in life is to succeed in all the wrong things. It's a path that some unhappy "career women" are waking up to late in life. The right thing is to succeed in love. This is the greatest commandment.

Gary Inrig in his fine book, *True North*, notes that with all the goals people measure their lives by, love doesn't feel very compelling. He quotes Malcolm Muggeridge, the English agnostic journalist who became a Christian:

When I look back on my life nowadays, which I sometimes do, what strikes me most forcibly about it is that what seemed at the time most significant and seductive, seems now most futile and absurd. For instance, success in all of it various guises; being known and being praised; ostensible pleasures, like acquiring money or seducing women, or traveling, going to and fro in the world and up and down in it like Satan, explaining and experiencing whatever Vanity Fair has to offer. In retrospect, all these exercises in self-gratification seem pure fantasy, what Pascal called, "licking the earth."⁶

Many a self-centered man or woman has closed out their lives in utter loneliness, the crushing feeling of being alone and no one really caring. Just a coming notice in the obituary section and not a tear will be shed. In his earlier years he didn't want the "shackles of marriage" so he put on a gold chain, silk shirt, and tried to pick up chicks in his sports car. Now he has only his TV for company and no memories of family, children, travel and adventures to share with the wife of his youth. I've seen this sad end-of-the-line stop for many a foolish man who violated his marriage vows and disrespected the wife of his youth. No hot chicks now, No sex thing anymore—just cold junk food and the wasteland of TV.

The Zenith of Human Relationship

Marriage is the highest plane of human relationship and demands the best out of each party to bring forth the full flower of its blessings and beauty. There is something to chase after in marriage. There awaits a prize, a treasure, that all too few couples ever pursue faithfully enough to discover. I often tell couples prior to performing their wedding that they can create the most perfect marriage possible. It is up to them. God is certainly on their side offering to make it a reality. But this zenith of relationships will require the apex of action out of each of them.

The most on-target advice to achieving the full fruit of marriage is what Paul gives us, which I quoted near the beginning of this article. Take special note of what Paul emphasizes for each mate. Here is the rest of the passage:

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy,

cleaning her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body but feeds and cares for it just as Christ does the church....he must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”⁷

Wives are also advised to demonstrate an attitude of submission to their husbands (vs 22-24) akin to the way in which the husband submits himself to the love and care of wife. All married people should privately ponder these words and understand how that can apply to daily interaction. These principles set a bar high that will require sincere effort to reach. A man treating his wife like Jesus treats us, the church? Talk about the opposite of selfish ambition, here we have giving yourself, in love, for the betterment of your wife in every aspect her life.

Why does Paul stress *men* loving wives so much? Surly women are also to love their husbands. True, but it is as if Paul is assuming that woman typically or normally will love their husbands, but husbands will have a harder time expressing love to their wives. Typically, wives get taken for granted more easily. Yet their security in the marriage is determined by whether they believe they are loved by their husband. That is critical to their happiness. Many men don't realize that their expressed love, in work and action, imparts security and trust to the wife. She can't feel safe and secure to care for children and everything else without it.

Why did Jesus devote so much of his energy and words toward assuring his disciples (the nascent church) that he loved them and would stick with them to the very end of the age? Did it help them to courageously continue in his ministry? Did it cause them to respect and love him in response? I think we can see how this works.

Wives need to be coached to respect their husbands both for the husband's sake and for their own good. If a man is respected by his wife, who knows him best—warts and all, he is strong to battle a world in which there may be little respect. With his wife's respect he has reason to protect and prosper the family and be bold in making his way in the world. Without that respect he is weak and will go looking for it elsewhere or just escape the negative judgment against him. He knows he has faults, but he still craves and believes he merits respect.

Some wives feel they can shape up and improve their husband by picking at his faults. But the focus upon faults breeds a spirit of disrespect, or at least, it is perceived as such by the one being continually shown to not measure up. This strips the best of masculinity away from a man and leaves him resentful and weak.

Paul says no man hates his own body. True. If he finds an uncomfortable lump under the sheets he removes it for he is concerned for his comfort. If like concern is directed to the happiness, growth, joy, and comfort of the wife what a difference that would make. The one flesh rule applies to the wife in the same way. No woman hates her own body which she would be doing by withholding respect for her husband. Giving respect is giving love, it is building the other up so that they can be happy and prosper. Don't let pride stop you from giving that respect.

Selfish people spend a lot of time picking at the lacks or perceived lacks of their mates. This practice amounts to messing in your own nest—there is a cruder expression, but you know what it means. Paul gives a cure that follows the second great commandment of loving your neighbor (wife/husband) as yourself. Give love and respect. It is in your power to do it. Why wouldn't you?

Avoiding the Rocks

Boats have rudders attached to a helm that steers them. The captain and first mate have a compass and maps. Using the resources at their disposal the boat can avoid the rocks. But lose the maps and compass and take your hand off the helm and the rocks may be the end of the boat. God just doesn't want you to avoid crashing on the rocks, he has positive rewards for you to enjoy in his marriage design. Even the jaded but wise king acknowledged that the favor of God gets no better than “living with the wife whom you love”....“to rejoice in the wife of your youth.”⁸ We must seek the treasures God designed into marriage. They wait our discovery.

Next time I will address dealing with some specific and common marital problems; how to negotiate through problems; what to do with the “baggage” your mate brings to the marriage; and what is the greatest treasure of an enduring marriage.

End Notes

¹ Ephesians 6:19-20

² Hebrews 11:11

³ 1 Peter 4:19

⁴ Mark 12:29-31

⁵ 1 Timothy 1:5

⁶ Inrig, Gary, *True North: Discovering God's Way in a Changing World*, Discovery House, 2002, p. 88, quoting Muggeridge in *A Twentieth Century Testimony*, Thomas Nelson, 1978.

⁷ Inrig, Gary, *True North: Discovering God's Way in a Changing World*, Discovery House, 2002, p. 88, quoting Muggeridge in *A Twentieth Century Testimony*, Thomas Nelson, 1978.

⁸ Ecclestees. 9:9; Proverbs 5:18

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My Dad Taught Me How to Say "No" and "Yes"

By Bill Ellis



Special to ASSIST News Service

SCOTT DEPOT, WEST VIRGINIA (ANS) — My mother and father tried to teach me some manners, how to behave at home and anywhere else and the proper way to speak to my elders. It was not just "yes" or "no." To my Dad it was always "yes sir" and "no sir" and "thank you mam, please."

Slang was pretty well ruled out. I am not sure they could spell the words "etiquette," "protocol," or "propriety" any better than I could or can. There was no such thing as "talking back" or "sassing your mother" which was almost as bad as robbing a bank and the penalty for doing so seemed to be worse.

Defining "etiquette," Will Cuppy called it "Behaving yourself a little better than is absolutely essential."

In my teenage years and even before there were always new words being passed around from kid to kid, teen to teen and if I ever uttered a word, Mom and Dad either one did not approve, I would be called on it.

That silly old excuse, "everybody," did not include me in anything my parents did not approve. I was theirs and responsible to them. They had an approved dictionary for me.

That applied to profanity, cursing, smoking and alcohol, which for anything other than a sore muscle was prohibited. I never wanted to say or do anything that would embarrass or disappoint my parents. They taught me lessons that saved me from big trouble.

I can remember hearing some boys who thought they were "big time tough guys," refer to their dad as "the old man" or to their mother as "the old woman." Had I said anything like that and Dad heard about it, I would probably still be pulling splinters from my posterior area.

Dad taught me how to deal with bullies, a problem we hear about in many schools and in the workplace. He believed bullies were cowards. One evening he watched as the "town bully" pushed and shoved me and I did nothing. It was then that I heard his loud whistle. I looked up and he motioned me home. As last, I was rescued.

I arrived at home feeling relieved, but that was all quickly dissolved. Dad said, "I've been watching. That

bully is making you afraid of him. You go back to that play area and if begins again pushing and shoving you around, you whip him or I'll whip you." That was the last thing I wanted.

A few minutes later the fight was on. I won by a unanimous decision. The bully never caused me any more trouble. We became friends. Dad had brought me to a decision to say "no" to the community bully. We never again had a problem.

There may be many things going on in your community, county, state and nation that you and others need to say a strong, "NO" to. We commonly hear, "Silence gives consent."

By word and example, I could trust my dad - he always meant what he said. Jesus when forbidding oaths and profanity said, "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'" (Matthew 5:37).

We need to be parents who can be trusted to mean what we say to our children. Children like parents should always tell the truth.

Pythagoras, 582-500 B.C., the famous Greek philosopher, said, "The oldest, shortest words — 'yes' and 'no' — are those which require the most thought." John Wilson, a writer of Scotland, wrote, "The knowledge of words is the gate of scholarship."

Learn enough, know enough, experience enough to say what you mean and mean what you say. That will add significance to your life and those to whom you speak.

Bill Ellis is a syndicated columnist, and convention and conference speaker on every continent. He is the writer of more than 2,000 newspaper and magazine columns, articles, and contributions to books. He is also a widely known motivational speaker and pulpit guest who utilizes enjoyment of life and just plain fun and laughter while speaking to high school, university and professional sports teams as well as to business and professional groups of all kinds. His keen understanding of human problems makes him a favorite speaker for youth, parent, and senior adult meetings. He is accompanied by Kitty, his wife, favorite singer, editor and publisher.

Botkin: "The Leaven of Apathy" from page 9.

Haggai's Generation

After the period of the Judges and the Kings, the Jews were conquered and carried off to Babylon because of their sins. After 70 years they were allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. They laid the foundation for the Temple with a lot of fanfare and rejoicing. Then some of the Jews' enemies objected to the rebuilding of the Temple and made them stop. So they stopped.

As the years went by, the Jews grew apathetic about the rebuilding of God's house. They became a people who were content with just the foundation. The work had stopped for approximately 15 years when Haggai appeared and addressed the apathy of the Jews:

"Thus speaketh Yahweh of hosts, saying, This people say, "The time is not come, the time that Yahweh's house should be built. Then came the word of Yahweh by Haggai the prophet, saying, "is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?" (Haggai 1:2-4).

The people were apathetic about God's house. They were more concerned about their own private homes. "Consider your ways," Haggai told them. "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes" (1:6).

The people's lack of prosperity and blessing was due to their apathy about the work which God had assigned them to do as a *community*. Some believers get so wrapped up in their personal lives that they grow apathetic about the world-wide Body of Messiah. Some people are so self-absorbed that they are apathetic even about their own local body. This sort of selfishness will result in the same kind of disappointment and frustration that the apathetic, self-absorbed people of Haggai's generation suffered.

Malachi's Generation

The Jews of Haggai's generation heeded the words of the prophet, repented of their apathy, and finished rebuilding the Temple. But some years later, in Malachi's time, apathy had set in once again. The Temple was rebuilt and the priesthood was functioning; however, the priests and the people were worshipping with an apathetic, half-hearted attitude. The priests' attitude toward the altar was:

"The table of Yahweh is contemptible ... Behold, what a weariness it is!" (Malachi 1:7,13). For offerings, the people were bringing animals that were lame, blind, sick, and torn. Instead of offering Yahweh the best of their flocks and herds, they were offering Him that which was inferior. They were giving God their garbage and their leftovers.

The leaven of apathy in an individual's soul can make the table of the Lord seem contemptible. Apathy takes the sweetness out of fellowship with the Lord. Apathy can cause a man to say of his prayer time, "Behold, what a weariness it is!" He may not say these words aloud, but this is how he feels inside when it's time to

pray. The leaven of apathy also causes people to give God their leftovers. If a person spends five hours a day watching trashy TV and then gives only five minutes of prayer to the Lord before he drops off to sleep, it is obvious that the leaven of apathy has done its work.

The apathetic worshippers in Malachi's day offered God that which was *lame, blind, sick, and torn*. Apathetic worshippers today do the same thing. They offer to walk with God, but it is a *lame* walk that they offer, because they still have one foot in the world and one foot in the Kingdom. They offer *blind* prayers and praise, because their minds are somewhere else even as they speak. They offer their hearts to God, but it is *sick* hearts that they offer because their apathy has caused them to fill their minds with spiritual junk food. They offer their souls to the Lord, but it is *torn* souls that they offer because they are torn between a desire for God on the one hand and a desire for the things of the world on the other hand.

"Thus ye brought an offering. Should I accept this of your hand?' saith Yahweh" (Malachi 1:13). The answer should be obvious. He did not want offerings that were lame, blind, sick, and torn in Malachi's day, and He does not want offerings that are lame, blind, sick, and torn today.

What YAHWEH Threatens to Do to Apathetic Worshippers

Malachi tells us what Yahweh threatens to do to apathetic worshippers. It's not very nice, and it's rather graphic. If any readers are offended by this imagery, please remember that this imagery is taken from the Holy Scriptures, which were penned by a holy prophet who was moved by the Holy Spirit to write these holy words. This is what the Lord threatens to do to apathetic worshippers: "Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts" (Malachi 2:3).

Half-hearted worship, caused by the leaven of apathy, stinks like dung in the nostrils of the Almighty. If your religious observance and solemn feast observance is full of it, then "it" is going to come out. Your apathy will be exposed like dung on the floor, and God will rub your nose in it and smear it all over your face. He has done it to famous big-shot televangelists, and He can do it to you.

If your soul is totally infected with the leaven of apathy, you will not be concerned about any of the warnings presented in this article. If, on the other hand, this article has helped you to wake up and start purging out the leaven of apathy, then there is hope for you. May we all continue to Purge Out the Leaven this year — and in every year following, too!

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Mail from our Readers



Dear Brothers,

May the Almighty Father and His Son Yashua Ha Massiach be with you all upon these short lines.

Your articles are very interesting and a good source of information to study the Word of G-d.

Thank you for your ministry to us, the incarcerated community. I always share your articles with fellow brothers even though sometimes there are differences in points of view. Nevertheless, there is always good discussion in the form of mutual respect. Such a beautiful opportunity.

Keep up the good work. The world needs ministries like yours.

Thank you so much.

May the Lord Almighty bless you.

Martín Hernandez.
Centerville, Florida

Dear Mrs. Nickels,

I want to write a note and say how much I enjoyed the short article "How Were Early American Sabbatarians Viewed" in the recent issue of the magazine.

I have a great interest in history, and material such as this contributes to our knowledge

of the history of Sabbatarian groups. In reality, we know little of our history prior to, say, the seventeenth century.

More articles such as this will be welcomed. Thank you for it. Thanks also to the author.

George Dellinger.
Indianapolis, Indiana.

To whom it may concern,

My mother, Thelma May Lawrence, has been a member for several years. She thoroughly enjoyed reading *The Sabbath Sentinel*. She occasionally ordered book or pamphlets to share with others. Sadly, Mom passed away July 16, 2013. She was my best friend, a good example for myself, my sisters, and the rest of the family. She loved the Bible Sabbath Association and all it offered.

Thank you for the edification, uplifting and inspiration you gave my mothers, which in turn had a ripple effect on her family and friends just the way God intended. God is good.

Cindi Nowlin

From "unknown,"

I really like the cover of the Sept-Oct. *Sabbath Sentinel* — Jesus walking on the water.

Notices and Advertisements

Feast of Tabernacles Celebration!

Come celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles with Hungry Hearts Ministries! We will celebrate this great premier Feast with festive celebration and worship, which will continue throughout the Feast. We will have great, insightful messages delivered with passion and anointing. We also have a variety of classes on many subjects of interest during this festival season. This Feast site is designed to strengthen mature Christians who seek a personal encounter with the Living God. For a Feast Planning Kit, email your mailing address to hungryheartsmi@aol.com, or snail mail us at PO Box 10334, Jackson, TN 38308.

Get your copy of her book,
*The House of Yahweh My Side
of the Story.*

Send \$12.95 to
Kay Hawkins,
P.O. Box 921,
Abilene, TX 79604

Be sure to check out the BSA Web site. We are making a lot of changes and additions to our site, which we think you will want to take advantage of. You can access the BSA site at

<http://www.biblesabbath.org>

Advertise in The Sabbath Sentinel

Classified ads (20% discount for second time, 30% thereafter) are available at the rate of \$1.00 per word (including each word and each group of numbers in the address; telephone numbers count as one word) for each issue in which the ad is published.

Display ads are available at \$150 per quarter page for each issue the ad is published. Where possible your camera-ready copy will be utilized, or we will design your display ad for you. Send copy for all ads and payment to The Bible Sabbath Association, 802 N.W. 21st Ave., Battle Ground, WA, USA.

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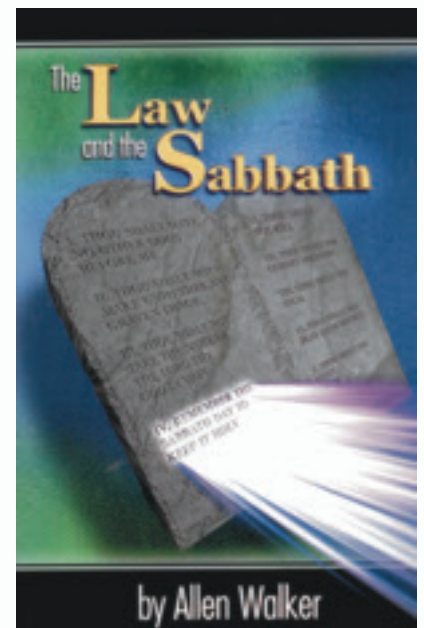
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