

The Sabbath Sentinel

November–December 2014



Winter Fun for Kids

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

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

The Sabbath Sentinel

November–December 2014 Volume 65, No. 6 Issue 570

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Unity in Diversity



Recently at the Feast of Tabernacles in Iowa, I gave a Bible study on the gifts of the Spirit. The study was well received and, as you can imagine, there were a lot of comments and questions from the floor.

All this got me thinking about how God accepts our diversity, yet wants us to find unity as we “live, and move, and have our being” in Him.

We all are very different from one another, yet God wants us to find common ground in Him and his Son. I would challenge anyone to dispute that.

When we go to 1 Corinthians 12 we read from the Apostle Paul, starting in v. 4: “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.”

Let’s continue on starting with verse 7: “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, and to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the same Spirit, to another the gift of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (verses 7-11).

Let’s look at the 17th chapter of John starting with verse 20: “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who believe in Me through their word: that they may all be one as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent me. And the glory which that You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in One, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may also be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You have loved Me before the foundation of the world, ... and I have declared to them Your name, and I will declare it, that the love with which You love Me may be in them, and I in them.” (vv, 20-24, 26, NVJV throughout.)

It should be obvious to everyone that God wants unity even though we are diverse as individuals. Fascinating to me is the fact that God wants us as individuals to love one another regardless of our individual differences. We have to come to terms with one another even if we don’t always believe the same things. For example, if a brother decides that it is OK to eat pork, are we willing to accept that person as a brother in Christ in spite of our differences in the food we choose to eat? Many Adventists don’t eat meat of any kind. Does that mean that we can’t associate with them? I don’t think so. We are all different from one another, and that’s the way God likes it. However, we must find unity in our diversity, no matter how different we are from each other.

One pastor in the Wichita, Kansas, area has made it his goal to bring differing groups together. So far he is succeeding. He has been able to put together non-charismatics who think that all the gifts of the Spirit were ended in the first century with others who believe that the gifts of the Spirit are still valid today. I say, “more power to you, pastor.” We need more of that kind of thinking. I know that there are some who read *The Sabbath Sentinel* who are charismatics. I personally have no problem with charismatics. When I had my heart attack several years ago, several of our friends were praying quietly in tongues for me. I really appreciated their willingness to pray for me, and that they were not afraid to pray in tongues in front of others who were not convinced that tongues are for Christians in this present age. It was refreshing and encouraging that all our friends were gathered together praying in one accord for me.

What is your issue with those who don’t believe as you do? Does it really matter if we are all interested in bringing others to Christ? I know: just how are these people interested in doing this? I guess that is an issue of separating the wheat from the chaff. Our standard is always the Word of God. That’s what we have to judge everything by. If you think that someone is not living up to the Word of God, then by all means, reject the message of that person. However, many Christians have a very narrow threshold when it comes to other Christians. Are you one of those who cannot be

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Jesus is “Torah Man”

by *Kenneth Westby*



Jesus could be called many things—Savior, Rabbi, Son of Man, Son of God, Prophet, Apostle, Anointed One, Messiah—all true and appropriate. Yet there is another description of Jesus that most people miss: he is also “Torah Man.”

I’m not introducing Jesus as a new action hero akin to Batman, Superman, Spiderman, or Ironman by calling him Torah man. He is a real hero, not a fake comic book character. A hero that was dead but now lives forever and holds the keys to the Kingdom of God. This very-much-alive Jesus bids you and me to step forward and enter his Father’s World.

Calling him Torah man may provide an insight into revealing just how he is planning to bring all humans to share eternal life with him and God.

What do I mean by such a label? Let’s start by understanding just what Torah is. Often people simply think Torah is something Jewish or the Jewish bible. Or they equate Torah with law, a list of rules from the Old Testament. But Torah is much more, so much more. It is one of the most important concepts to grasp in understanding God and his Grand Plan.

It is commonly assumed that Torah simply means law, yet this is incomplete and misleading.

In his book, *Reinventing Paul*, Princeton scholar John G. Gager writes this about the word *Torah*:

“I use this word [law] for the Hebrew Torah, regularly translated into Greek as *nomos*, into Latin as *lex* and thus into English as law. Although Torah does include a range of properly legal matters (normative rules and regulations of many sorts), it also covers broader notions such as revelation, teaching, and wisdom. It is with respect to these broader notions that the English word law proves inadequate. Thus, when I speak of the law or the law of Moses I intend it to be taken in the broadest possible manner. It means everything in and associated with the Pentateuch, the five books attributed to Moses.” (p. viii-ix, see p. 86)

In the broadest sense Torah can include the entire Hebrew scriptures, the Pentateuch, Prophets, and Writings. It can also be another way of expressing God’s revelation to man, his Word. His Word, like Torah, is to be believed, written in the heart, lived, obeyed, and proclaimed. The Word of God, and I’m not speaking of every page in the Bible (for much of the Bible is narrative history, genealogies, details of various sorts, stories, etc.), but those portions that mark the path that a man should walk before the Holy One of Israel.

The Torah is what set Israel apart from all the other nations so that, as Yahweh said, “You shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). Torah was the precious

gift God gave Israel to give them knowledge of himself and of the way they should live before him.

The Torah is the core work of the Bible and encompasses both the stipulated teachings of God as well as the story of his patient mentoring of his people from Creation to the present. Jesus became the human archetype of what a righteous follower of God would be like in word and deed.

My dear friend and colleague, the late Dr. Charles Dorothy, developed an entire series of presentations which he titled “Torah-Christ Story.” He believed the entire plan of God could be seen more clearly when the two were linked.

Jesus=The Way

At the personal/practical level Torah means instruction in the Way of God. It is God’s teaching for mankind which will enable men and women to develop the Image of God in mind, heart, character, and action. It is the essential knowledge of God and his way that all humans must eventually embrace and manifest.

When Jesus said “I am the Way” (John 14:6) he was expressing the fact that he was living the Way to God that you and I should follow. What is the “Way” if not the instruction in righteousness and the path of living upon which we are called to walk?

Jesus is the word which is to say the peak manifestation of God’s words for man. Words from God are what give life. They are Torah. Torah existed from the beginning since it comes forth from God’s mind and character and love.

In the powerful prophecy proclaiming a coming prophet like Moses, one even greater than Moses, Yahweh described how he would use him.

I will raise up for them a prophet like you [Moses] from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth and he will tell them [Israel] everything I command him (Deuteronomy 18:19).

Moses said “you must listen to him” That prophet was Jesus.

God gave the disciples a firsthand experience of the fulfillment of this prophecy when Jesus was transfigured/glorified before them on a high mountain (Matthew 17). Moses and Elijah were brought forth in this vision and they all heard the words from above saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” (vs 5).

This meant that Jesus had instructions, teachings, and commands to impart to his followers and these came directly from his Father, Yahweh. He said, “I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me” (John 8:28).

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Morality and Mortality

Daniel Botkin



The English words morality and mortality sound very similar but have very different meanings and different etymologies. The word morality is from the Latin *moralis*, which is from *mor-*, which means “custom.” Morality is related to the English word *mores*, which refers to the moral expectations within a group of people.

The word mortality is from the Latin *mortalis*, which is from *mort-*, which means “death.” Mortality is related to the English words *mortician* and *mortuary*.

Even though morality and mortality have different meanings and have no linguistic link to each other, there is an important link that connects these two subjects together. The words themselves are not connected, but the realities represented by the two words morality and mortality are linked together in a profound way, as we shall soon see.

Mortality is just a nice way of saying we are all going to die, because we are all mortal.

Let me talk about death. I do not have a morbid fascination with death. However, since my childhood, I have had a very conscious and continuous awareness of mortality in the world around me.

My continuous awareness of mortality began one day when I was about ten years old. It was a Friday early in February. It started out as a typical day in my happy childhood. I went to school and came home on the bus. When I went into the house, my mom was weeping. She told me and my little sister that my pet beagle, Sniffy, had been hit by a truck and killed.

My little heart was broken. I loved that dog. I had gotten her as a puppy and raised her. She had been my constant companion as I explored the fields and woods around our house. I cried all that evening and cried myself to sleep that night. When I woke up the next morning, I cried most of that day, and cried intermittently for days after that. I was inconsolable.

That was my introduction to mortality. I learned that day that pets don’t live forever.

A few years later, when I was thirteen, another day started as a typical day in my childhood. It was a Tuesday, April 3, 1962. I came home from school and saw an ambulance in our driveway. When my sister and I got off the school bus, our weeping mother came running out to us and cried, “Oh, kids, your daddy’s dead!”

I was stunned into a state of disbelief. “Oh, no! ” I cried. “He can’t be! He can’t be dead!”

But he was. He was only 34 years old. He had been a happy, healthy, loving family man with no apparent health problems whatsoever. But that afternoon he got up from a nap, walked into the next room, and without warning simply dropped dead.

On that day I learned a hard lesson. Not only do pets not live forever. Parents do not live forever either. Even young people can suddenly drop dead without warning.

During my teenage years I had fun, as much fun as a fatherless teenage boy could be expected to have in the 1960s, I suppose. Yet in the midst of my fun activities, I was always haunted by an overshadowing, uncomfortable presence: my continual awareness of mortality. This continual awareness of mortality planted and nurtured fear in my heart — not a fear of my own death, but the fear that my mom or my sister or my little brother might suddenly die.

That fear stayed with me and haunted me into my early 20s. But shortly after I started following the Lord, I was permanently delivered from this fear. My deliverance came when I was considering the blessings God promises in Psalm 112. When I came to verse 7, I read that one blessing promised to the man who fears the Lord and delights greatly in His commandments is this: “He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.”

When I read that verse, I knew I no longer needed to be afraid of evil tidings telling me that a loved one had died. I knew (and still know) that bad news can still come, but I no longer needed to live in fear of evil tidings.

If we have eternal life through God’s Son, we do not need to fear mortality. Some people are obsessed with mortality because they fear death. Other people try not to think about death for the very same reason. But we should neither fear nor ignore mortality, because we are all mortal.

Human mortality is first declared in God’s response to Adam’s sin: “for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19). Human mortality is again declared in the naming of Adam’s first grandchild: “And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos” (Genesis 4:26).

Enos (more accurately, Enosh) means “frail, feeble, weak” — in other words, “mortal man.” The Hebrew word most commonly used for “people” is the plural of enosh, anashim, i.e., “mortals.” We are all anashim, mortals who are even now being drawn toward the dust from which we were taken, even now in the process of dying.

“Now in the process of dying? What do you mean, Daniel? I’m young and healthy. I’m living, not dying!”

Regardless of how young and healthy you are right now, you are still in the process of dying. Today you are one day closer to the day of your death than you were yesterday. And tomorrow you will be another day closer to your appointment with death. Therefore you are dying. We are all terminal. There’s no escape, because we are all mortals. We are all anashim, descendants of Adam’s grandson Enosh.

I get slightly amused and somewhat puzzled by some people’s fear of old age. I want to get old, because the only alternative to getting old is to die young. The older I get, the less I have to worry about dying young.

I also get puzzled by the slow pace of some old people. If an old person is feeble, sick, or disabled, I understand the need to move slowly. But when I see healthy old people moving slowly, just plodding along absent-mindedly, I wonder why they aren’t moving faster. Don’t they realize that their time is short? Don’t they want to hurry up and accomplish some things before they die? I glance at the obituary page in the newspaper and I am reminded that people are dropping dead every day. And some of them are younger than me! The older I get, the faster I want to move, because I’ve got several projects I want to finish before I die. I want to finish my course like a marathon runner, powered by a final burst of speed as he approaches the finish line. As I approach old age and death, I want to speed up, not slow down, because the clock is ticking. Time is running out.

Time is running out for you, too, even if you are young. You might be young and strong and buff and have smooth skin and shiny hair right now, but it won’t last forever. Time and gravity do their work. The aging process will soon sap your strength and alter your youthful shape. Your smooth, tight skin will sag and droop and wrinkle. Your healthy, shiny hair will become dry and coarse and brittle, and will lose its color and shine.

“All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of Yahweh bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass” (Isaiah 40:6f).

It is ironic that this statement in Isaiah 40 is introduced with the words “Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God” (Isaiah 40:1). The prophet then

asks, “What shall I cry?” What message shall I cry to comfort the people, Lord? What words of comfort wilt Thou have me to speak, Lord?

Then the Lord tells him to speak these words about people being like grass that withers and fades away! Where is the comfort in those words? How is it comforting to be reminded that all flesh is grass and that our mortal body will someday wither and fade like the flower of the field? Where is the comfort in words that remind us of our mortality?

The very next verse says, “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever” (Isaiah 40:8).

There is the comfort. Even though we are mortal and temporal, there is something immortal and eternal that will outlast us. The word of our God shall stand forever. And that written word declares that our faith in God’s incarnate Word, Yeshua, guarantees that our mortal bodies will be raised to immortality. We can take comfort in this.

“For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Messiah shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

Our comfort is in knowing that our mortal state is only temporary. As we await our immortal bodies, we can also take comfort in knowing that the wicked, too, are mortal. Like the grass, they too will wither and fade away. Even the most powerful cruel tyrants are temporal. They and their evil empires will fade, but the kingdom of heaven will remain forever.

Like Isaiah, Job also compares mortal man to grass. “Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not” (Job 14:1f). The older I get, the more I realize that man is indeed “of few days,” as Job said.

“But Daniel, you’re 65 years old. That’s approximately 24,000 days. Why do you think 24,000 is “few”? If you had 24,000 dollars, would you say that you had ‘a few dollars’?”

True, 24,000 days may not seem like just a few days. But compared to eternity, it is indeed a very short time.

The older I get, the more aware I become of two twin truths, each linked to the opposite ends of this present time. I become more aware of the shortness of the time I have left, and I become aware of the shortness of my time that has already passed.

You might hear very old people say things like “I can’t believe how fast the years flew by! I can’t believe how quickly the children grew up! It seems like only yesterday when they were toddlers!”

Why does time seem to go by slowly when you are young and faster when you are old? Well, when you are ten years old, if someone says “five years,” that sounds like a long time. It seems like half a lifetime to you if you are only ten years old. But if you are 50 years old and someone says “five years,” that doesn’t sound like a real long time. It only seems like one-tenth of a lifetime to someone who’s 50.

“My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle.” Job said (Job 7:6). Your life is a tapestry being woven by the Master Weaver. Just as a weaver swiftly passes the shuttle that carries the woof to go between the threads of the warp to create the fabric, so the Master Weaver causes your days to swiftly pass as He weaves the fabric of your life. Someday the tapestry will be complete. The shuttle will make its final pass between the threads of the warp. The cord on the shuttle will be cut off from the tapestry, like an umbilical cord is cut off to separate a newborn babe from the mother. Then the tapestry will be removed from the loom, and your life will be displayed for all to see, whether your works were good or evil.

This is the reason there is a link between mortality and morality. Because “it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). Your judgment after death will be based on your deeds, whether they were good or evil, moral or immoral.

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Messiah; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Corinthians 5:10f).

Paul wrote these words to believers, not to unbelievers. If you are a believer, this judgment you will undergo will not be a judgment to determine whether you go to Paradise or get thrown into the lake of fire. This will be a judgment to determine your position and rank in the kingdom, and the measure of eternal glory that you will receive as a reward for your service to the Lord. It will be a judgment to determine how brightly you will shine for all eternity in the resurrection. “There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:41f).

A true believer is not in danger of being thrown into the lake of fire. But there is a judgment of the believer for the works done in the body, whether good or bad. This judgment is not to be taken lightly. For some be-

lievers, it will be a fearful, terror-filled judgment, which is why Paul said “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” — i.e., we persuade them to live good, moral lives.

The moral standards in America have plummeted over the past six decades since I was a kid. When I was a kid in the 1950s, people didn’t “have affairs”; they committed adultery. Unmarried couples didn’t “live together”; they were fornicators living in sin. There were no “single moms”; there were unwed mothers. There were no “children of single mothers”; there were bastards. There were no “gays”; there were homosexuals, sodomites, queers, faggots. I am not pointing this out to suggest that we return to using these pejoratives to insult sinners. I am pointing it out to show how differently sin was viewed by the general population 50 to 60 years ago.

One of my hobbies is collecting what I call Obsolete Religious Tracts. These are tracts from past decades that address various forms of behavior which probably 90% of church-going Christians nowadays consider perfectly acceptable behavior. Some of the Obsolete Religious Tract titles that I have include:

Tobacco and Its Evils; Gambling, the Subtle Sin; Card-Playing and Theater-Going ‘Christians’; Death in Cards; Minced Oaths (saying words like gosh, golly, gee, darn, heck, etc.); Bobbed Hair, the Mark of the World (women cutting their hair short); Given to Her For Her Glory (which claims “this sin of a woman cutting her hair is the most terrible sin a woman can commit, aside from rejecting Jesus or committing some immoral act”); The Painted Face (an anti-make-up tract); What About the Dance? (which says “a dancing foot and a praying knee do not grow on the same limb”); The Christian and Sports (which says “Sports are sins which ought to be exposed for what they are — darkness. They are works of Satan, and the Christian should have no part in or with it”).

My favorite, though, is Inspiring Temperance Hymns, a small hymnal I picked up for a nickel at a yard sale about 30 years ago. It contains the words and music for several anti-drinking songs, with titles like: “Let Rum Alone”; “His Name is Rum”; “Be Strong to Say ‘No!’”; “Bessie, the Drunkard’s Child”; “Water for Me.”

It also has an anti-smoking hymn titled “The Horrid Cigarette,” written in 1907. The first verse says: “There’s a horrid little tempter, Who seeks the heart and hand, Of all the little boys about, To kill them from the land.”

Then the chorus: “’Tis the cigarette, The horrid cigarette! He leads to woe, He leads to death, this dirty cigarette; Put him down and out [at this point a footnote instructs the singers to ‘stamp with the foot’], Be

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satisfied no matter what another Christian does? Think about that for a moment. Or, are your standards higher for others than they are for yourself? That is called hypocrisy. If you are not willing to go the extra mile for a brother, no matter how misguided you think that brother is, then that is a huge issue that you must come to grips with.

Let's look at Psalm 133: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, Descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing—Life forevermore" (vv. 1-3).

There is a blessing of life everlasting for those who dwell in unity with their brethren. How would you rate yourself in terms of "unity with your brethren?" For many that would be a tough question to answer.

I recently talked with someone from the old World Wide Church of God (WWCG) who had given up the Sabbath to worship on Sunday. As I read the Bible, the Sabbath was there from the beginning and is still applicable today. However, this person thought there was so much abuse of church members in the old WWCG that it was enough for him to give up the Sabbath. I understand the hurt that many suffered in the WWCG, but I also understand that giving up the Sabbath is not the right thing to do. In fact, the old WWCG is now known as something called Grace Fellowship, and they have left the Sabbath far behind.

Let's look at Proverbs 6:16-19: "These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren."

Notice that there are actually seven things that are and abomination to the Lord God. Note also that all of these abominations cause discord among brethren. These all of these abominations lead to discord and chaos.

Let's look at 1 Corinthians 13:8-11: "Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things."

Like it or not, we are all connected to one another and linked through Christ himself. Even if you don't get along with your brother in Christ, there is a requirement to love one another and pray for one another.

Let's go back to 1 Corinthians 12 and look at vv. 12-21: "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you; nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'"

Let's jump to verses 27 and 28: "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues."

I have my own ideas about who are today's apostles and prophets, but I'll let the reader ponder all that including who are today's miracle workers, and whether it is still "legitimate" to speak in tongues. Let me know what your thoughts on that are.

In verse 31 Paul states: "But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way."

After that the apostle Paul launches into chapter 13 which is known as the "love chapter." The more excellent way, of course, is to exalt others ahead of ourselves and show the love of Christ in our lives through our love for the brethren. The love chapter is also about serving others by making ourselves slaves to one another.

As described in Matthew 20:20-28:

"Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. And He said to her, 'What do you wish?' She said to Him, 'Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom.' But Jesus answered and said,

‘You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?’ They said to Him, ‘We are able.’ So He said to them, ‘You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.’ And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’”

As you can see, the standard for getting into God’s kingdom is very high. We cannot lord it over one another like the gentiles always did. We must become the slave of our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. Can you do that? We will all be put to the test over this issue. Will we pass the test? I hope we all do and refuse to act like gentiles who lord it over one another. That has often been the norm in God’s church. We need to set a better example than that.

Let’s look at 1 Corinthians 14

1 Corinthians 14:1-6:

Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification. But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?

Verse 9 says: “So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? for you will be speaking into the air.”

Is speaking in tongues acceptable in the churches of God these days? I think that it is not. However, what about prophesying? I think that is also not accepted in the churches of God. What other gifts are not acceptable today in the churches of God?

The apostle Paul also states in verses 18-22:

“I thank my God I speak more than you all; yet in the church I would rather speak few words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature. In the law it is written:

‘with men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; and yet, for all that, they will not hear me, says the Lord.’

Therefore tongues are a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.”

Is it possible that we have misunderstood what the Father and his Son want from us? I need to repeat that these gifts are for the edification of the whole body of Christ. They are not for our personal toys to impress others with our spiritual mindedness.

I realize that this is a very difficult topic to deal with, but we have been too long in denying these spiritual gifts might still be applicable today. I know Christians who believe in these gifts and practice them. Are you willing to welcome them as brothers?

In verse 26b the apostle Paul says: “Let all things be done for edification.” And in verses 32 and 33, the apostle says: “And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”

I have some questions for all of us to consider. First, I will preface the questions with some comments of my own. I have been healed a couple of times quite dramatically. Once was from asthma. Another time I was healed of an eye infection. Also, when I was in the hospital with my heart attack which lasted for about two and a half days, the heart doctor found no damage to my heart. This is attribute to all those who were in the hospital praying for me.

This leads me to my questions. If one of the gifts, healing, is still valid today, why are not all the gifts of the spirit still valid at this moment in history? If you have the answer to that question, write me at the e-mail address given in the magazine. I would like to know what you think about this editorial.

Finally, in verses 39-40 of 1 Corinthians the apostle Paul states: “Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.”

All the gifts of the spirit are for the edification of the body of Christ. That’s one thing that we must always keep in mind.

—Kenneth Ryland

Did Ancient Israel Commit Genocide against the Canaanites?

By R. Herbert

It is interesting that many of those who claim the Bible is not a historical book and its historical narratives cannot be trusted are quick to accept the historical nature of the statements in the Old Testament regarding the Israelites destroying the inhabitants of the Land of Canaan — which they claim to be an example of genocide.

It is true that before Israel entered the Promised Land they were told, regarding its inhabitants: "...when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy" (Deuteronomy 7:2). The Bible makes it clear that this extreme action was to be completed because of the depravity of the Canaanites (Leviticus 18:21-28, 20:2-5, 22-23, Deuteronomy 9:4-6, 12:29-31, etc.), who followed hideous practices such as infant sacrifice (see inset box).

When we move to the Book of Joshua the intent of the total destruction of the Canaanites appears to be confirmed: "So Joshua subdued the whole region, including the hill country, the Negev, the western foothills and the mountain slopes, together with all their kings. He left no survivors. He totally destroyed all who breathed, just as the Lord, the God of Israel, had commanded" (Joshua 10:40).

So it's easy to see why many understand this as brutal genocide, but there are many facts we can bring to the picture to help clarify what happened. First, we must remember that the Bible is not a historical book in the sense of modern ideas of history. It does not always give all the pertinent details for a given situation or order them in such a way that we are given a clear idea of exactly what happened and how it happened. Instead, the Bible stresses aspects that are necessary to understand its main purpose — to tell the story of God's interaction with the people who followed Him and with whom He worked — and not necessarily to give a full, blow-by-blow narrative of everything that happened along the way.

The case of Israel's treatment of the ancient Canaanites and other groups in the Promised Land clearly follows this pattern. Biblical scholars have long recognized

that the stories of the various battles in the Book of Joshua do not dovetail easily. It appears that different accounts are being brought together (note that some accounts are present tense while others are past tense) in a tapestry which omits many things that might have connected the individual events more clearly.

For example, it is not clear from the biblical accounts how many Canaanites were actually destroyed. A death toll is only given for one city ("12,000" — a noticeably round number that was often used symbolically as the equal of "totality" in Near Eastern sources), and it may be, as we will see, that only partial populations remained in most cities that were attacked. We do know that not all the Canaanites were destroyed. We are told, for example, not only that the inhabitants of four cities were spared (Joshua 9), but also that the Israelites "... did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, so the Canaanites have lived in the midst of Ephraim to this day..." (Joshua 16:10 ESV), and that in the area given to the tribe of Manasseh "...the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land" (Joshua 17:12 ESV). This is why it was necessary for Joshua, at the end of his life, to command Israel: "Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them" (Joshua 23:7, 12-14). In the Book of Judges, detailing the time directly after the Book of Joshua, it is also clear that many Canaanites were still alive and living in the land.

So was this really genocide, and moreover is the Bible consistent or does it contradict itself? If the Canaanites were all destroyed, how could any remain? To answer these questions we must focus on two essential facts. We should remember that the language used in these accounts — of the destruction of "everything that breathed," or "men and women old and young"— is typical of ancient Near Eastern victory announcements, even when fighting men, not civilians, were actually involved. This is less strange than it may seem at first. If you tell your friends that your favorite sports team recently "annihilated" or "destroyed" another team, everyone understands that you mean they won decisively. In a similar way, as scholars have long rec-

ognized, ancient Near Eastern audiences, hearing about total annihilation, understood this actually might involve a more limited military engagement and that it was total victory that was being stressed.

We should also understand that in those cases where individual cities and their inhabitants are described as being destroyed, those “cities” might well have been enemy military strongholds (Joshua 10:20) which had to be taken. We see in the earlier chapters of Joshua that the Canaanites were in great fear of the invading Israelites (Joshua 2:8-11), and it is possible that many of the inhabitants of unfortified cities simply fled, leaving only a relatively few fighters in the strongholds. This possibility may have direct indication from scripture in what God told Israel at the same time He commanded them to destroy the Canaanites:

“... remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt ...The Lord your God will do the same to all the peoples you now fear. Moreover, the Lord your God will send the hornet among them until even the survivors who hide from you have perished” (Joshua 7: 18-20).

In this and in a good many other scriptures (far more, in fact, than those that command destroying the Canaanites: Exodus 18:24-25, 23:27-28,34:24; Numbers 21:32, 32:21, 33:50-56; Deuteronomy 4:38, 9:1, 11:23, 18:14, 19:1, 23:27-30, Joshua 13:6, 14:12, 17:18, 23:5, 9, etc.), we are told the Canaanites would be driven out, and that God would drive them out before the Israelites using methods similar to the plagues He placed on Egypt. While the “hornets” mentioned in Joshua 7:20 and 24:12 may be symbolic, the Book of Exodus specifically mentions pestilence: “I will send my terror in front of you, and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. And I will send the pestilence in front of you, which shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you” (Exodus 23:27-28). Numbers 33:51 shows God commanding the Israelites themselves to drive out the inhabitants of the land, which indicates that this also may have been one of the ways many Canaanites were expelled.

So although we do not have a connected historical narrative in the form we might utilize in modern historical writing, we do find information that might well suggest the following:

God commanded Israel to completely destroy the Canaanites who still remained after He had driven many of them from the land (Exodus 23, Numbers 33, etc.). He apparently accomplished this driving out by causing great fear to fall on those peoples (Joshua 2:8-11, 9:24) and also pestilence or other disasters (Exodus 23:27-28). The Israelites themselves then drove out or destroyed the remaining people, especially those remaining in the fortified cities.

A final consideration here is the nature of genocide itself. Genocide invariably involves three salient aspects: a culture takes the law into its own hands in deciding to destroy another culture, the destruction is driven by hatred of the people being destroyed, and the destruction is part of a larger pattern of one group attempting to totally dominate another. Clearly these things did not apply to the situation with ancient Israel. The Bible shows that God was the one who commanded the Israelites to cast out or destroy their Canaanite enemies because of His judgment on them. The Bible also shows that in many cases the Israelites were happy to commingle with the native Canaanites and did not hate them or particularly desire to dominate them. We should remember, too, that God differentiated between the inhabitants of the land who were deserving of capital judgment and those who were not and who were to be allowed to live – and that He also told Israel that any of the Israelites who acted in the evil ways of the Canaanites should also be destroyed (Leviticus 18:29-30, etc.) — so it certainly was not simply a case of one culture hating and committing genocide against another, or of God commanding such a thing.

Ultimately, we do not know all the details of how or how many Canaanites God cast out and to what degree the Israelites were involved in their punishment. We can only say that God may have used ancient Israel to punish the Canaanites in the same way he used ancient Assyria and Babylon to later punish and “destroy” the Israelites themselves (though many survived into captivity). In both these cases the Bible simply shows that a just God who had given due warning drove out peoples whose sinfulness had become extreme. If we believe in God, we must believe in His wisdom and sovereign justice, as well as his love and mercy.

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Meet Them Where They Are

by Lenny Cacchio



INSET BOX: Were the Canaanites Really That Bad?

Leviticus 18 tells us that God planned to cast the Canaanites and related peoples out of the Promised Land due to their extreme depravity. That chapter accuses the Canaanites of practices such as idolatry, bestiality and every other kind of sexual deviancy, male cult prostitution and even child sacrifice.

Some sceptics have challenged whether this last practice actually existed in ancient Canaan; and many who decry God's supposed injustice in commanding the destruction of the Canaanites claim that there is no actual historical evidence of child sacrifice in ancient Canaanite society. Yet the Bible is explicit regarding this practice, saying "Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molek ... because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled" (Leviticus 18:21,24).

Actual evidence of child sacrifice by the Canaanites does exist, however, despite the doubts of some sceptics. Several ancient Egyptian wall reliefs carved around the time of Ramesses II, in the temples of Karnak and Luxor, actually depict this abominable Canaanite practice. These reliefs were made to celebrate Egypt's victories over her northern neighbors and depict Egyptian soldiers attacking Canaanite fortified cities of the type described in the Book of Joshua. In these scenes, the kings of the cities are shown with braziers making fiery offerings to their gods over the dead bodies of children on the city walls (exactly as is described of the king of Moab in 2 Kings 3:27). That these representations unquestionably depict Canaanite child sacrifice is the conclusion of the scholarly publication of these Egyptian scenes (A. Spalinger, "A Canaanite Ritual Found in Egyptian Reliefs," *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 8 (1978): 47-60.)

It is important to note that in the biblical accounts the Canaanites living within the central area of Canaan were distinguished from the peoples living on the edges of the land. The people of those cities outside the central Canaanite region, but within the area designated as belonging to Israel, were to be offered terms of peace, by which they would be forced to serve the Israelites. If such a city refused, the Israelites were told to make war against it, kill all its men, but allow the women and children to live (Deuteronomy 20:10-15). The distinction made between the core area Canaanites and the outlying cities would seem to be because the former peoples were too culturally depraved to be shown mercy, while the others were not viewed as being so morally degenerate.

On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38 NKJV).

In this passage, Jesus is attending the annual Feast of Tabernacles celebration in Jerusalem, one of the annual religious festivals listed in the Book of Leviticus as a time to celebrate and worship before God. Scholars tell us that in Jesus' day, part of the festival celebration was a water ceremony, where the priest would take water from the spring-fed pool of Siloam and would pour the water on the altar.

Clearly, Jesus was using this ceremony as a reference point for his teaching, but it is odd that this water ceremony is nowhere enjoined in the Old Testament. In spite of that, Jesus used it to teach a profound spiritual truth. Throughout the New Testament we find the great teachers and evangelists using the cultural milieu of the day to illustrate, instruct, and to pique curiosity. From Jesus' use of the water ceremony to Paul's teaching at Athens's Aeropause, they were able to spread the gospel without the aid of PowerPoint or music videos, and, may I add, were quite successful at it.

Paul himself said, "To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings" (1 Corinthians 9:20-23 NIV).

To make it work, Paul had to be thoroughly educated in the cultures in which he was working. Not only was he thoroughly steeped in the ways of the Jews, he was profoundly aware of the Greco-Roman world in which he lived. That enabled him, when he reasoned with the philosophers of Athens, to approach the big questions of life from a perspective they could understand, referring to the Unknown God that even their own poets and philosophers acknowledged, but did not know (Acts 17:16-34).

The point is, Christians above all people should be in touch with the culture of the day. Preachers of the gospel and believers in the way should be the most educated of all people in order to understand the world view of those whom we hope to reach. Even the highly educated philosophers in Athens longed for a knowledge of the Unknown God, and if Paul had not understood their need and how to address that need, he could not have piqued their interest and held their attention, even quoting their own literature to them to support his arguments (Acts 17:28).

For too long some have characterized believers as uneducated, gullible, out of touch ideologues, but the Christianity of the Bible is eminently rational and relevant to the modern world. Being educated and devout are not mutually exclusive. An apostle named Paul was proof of that.

—Lenny Cacchio

Lenny is a writer and board member of the BSA.

Divine Healing

by Kelly McDonald



In the Bible, there are dozens of stories of God healing people. These stories can be found in both the New and Old Testaments. The question will certainly arise: Does God still heal today? It is taught by some that healing died out in the 4th century when the canon of Scriptures was completed. Is this the truth? Did God stop healing people? Let's examine what the Bible says about this subject. Interestingly enough, the first healing in the Bible occurred in the book of Genesis. In Genesis 20:17, the Bible records, "Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again...". The father of our faith, Abraham, prayed for people to be healed. A little later in the Bible, God gives us a promise of healing, "If you listen carefully to the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you" (Ex. 15:26). God said this when the Israelites were coming up out of Egypt. When they left Egypt, they left whole and complete. As Psalm 105:37 reads, "He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes" (KJV). They went out healed and restored!

Healing is also mentioned at the end of the Bible. In Revelation 22:1-2, the Apostle John wrote, "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city." On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." These verses pertain to the New Heavens and the New Earth, which is the last phase of God's plan. Even at that time, healing will be necessary.

God never changes (Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 13:8). The same God who proclaimed in Exodus that He healed can still heal today! The father of our faith, Abraham, prayed for people to be healed. Did we stop being children of Abraham? Then healing did not stop. It is still available today. In Isaiah 53:5, the prophet Isaiah foretold of Jesus Christ, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." One of the reasons Jesus took the stripes upon His body is so that we could be healed! This is one of the reasons why He came. Let's face it. We cannot bear our emotional pains and physical burdens on our own. Too many times, we try to bear things on our own instead of put-

ting our burdens and illnesses on Christ! He took physical infirmity and burdens so that we did not have to!

Divine healing is supposed to be a routine experience for believers today. We need divine healing and we need to administer divine healing. To fully operate in this wonderful promise from God, we must understand some things.

There are two types of healing: natural healing and divine healing. Natural healing occurs when the body naturally heals itself. If you cut your finger, it will heal up over time. God made your body with natural healing functions. This is natural healing. When your body naturally heals itself, the part of your body that was healed will not be as strong as it was before (especially broken bones). Divine healing is different. When God Almighty heals you, He restores your body to as strong as or stronger than it was before. He does not just mend it; He heals it and reverses the cause of the sickness, disease, or accident as if it never happened! When we pray for ourselves or others to be healed, we are seeking divine healing. In Mark 3, there was a man with a shriveled hand. This man had a serious injury; he needed to be healed. He was unable to use his hand. In verse 5 the Bible reads that Jesus "...saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was **restored whole** as the other" (KJV). The Greek words translated as "restore whole" mean to completely restore to its former state. God healed that man and restored His hand to the state it was in before it was afflicted! He healed him wholly – not one part of his hand was left unrestored — it was complete and thorough.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul writes about 9 spiritual gifts that are given to believers. One of these gifts is the gift of healing. In the Greek language, both gift and healing are in the plural form. Technically, it should read, "the gifts of healings." This plural form indicates that there are multiple manifestations of the healing gift. There are also various kinds of conditions that can be healed. Some human ailments originate with physical events. If you fall off of a ladder and break your arm, this is a physical event. It requires physical healing. Other illnesses may originate with a virus, like the flu. There are also illnesses that come from emotional wounds. Sometimes an evil spirit afflicts us and causes sickness. Too many times, we want to attribute all sickness to sin or an evil spirit. This is not always the case. Afflictions can manifest in different ways. Below, I have listed five different kinds of divine healing you can find in the Bible.

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not tempted with his breath; He's a deadly foe, He's a little fiend, O this horrid cigarette."

It is five verses long. The fourth verse says: "O many a manly fellow, Who sought him for a pet, Has walked away to prison, Led by Mister Cigarette."

When a 21st-century believer reads these Obsolete Religious Tracts, it makes a person wonder: Why did Christians of 50+ years ago focus on these sorts of things? I suspect it was probably because these were the worst forms of behavior which were considered acceptable by Bible-believing Christians of those times.

Think about it. A hell-fire-and-brimstone preacher feels obligated to preach against something in the church. He looks around, and the worst things he sees Christians doing are things like playing cards, going to theaters and dances, bobbing the hair and painting the face, smoking the horrid cigarette, and saying words like gosh, golly, gee, darn, heck.

Preachers 50+ years ago did not need to preach very often against sins like fornication, adultery, homosexuality, illegal drug use, etc., because 50 years ago no true Christian questioned the sinfulness of such behavior.

All of this goes to show how far the morals have fallen in 50 years. The church has always held a higher moral standard than the moral standard held by the unsaved world. But as the unsaved world lowers its moral standards a notch at a time, the church likewise lowers its moral standards a notch at a time. We still have a higher moral standard than the world, but all we are doing is maintaining the distance between the two. As someone once said, Show me what the world considers acceptable behavior today, and I will show you what the church will consider acceptable behavior in about 10 to 15 years from now.

A case in point is homosexuality. When I was a kid, it was considered immoral and it was illegal, even between consenting adults. But let's go back in time even further, to the year 1642, and let's see how the Pilgrims dealt with perverts in Early America. The following is from the writings of Pilgrim father William Bradford, second governor of Plymouth colony:

There was a youth whose name was Thomas Granger. He was servant to an honest man of Duxbury, being about 16 or 17 years of age. (His father and mother lived at the same time at Scituate.) He was this year detected of buggery [sodomy], and indicted for the same, with a mare, a cow, two goats, five sheep, two calves and a turkey. Horrible it is to mention, but the truth of the history requires it.

He was first discovered by one that accidentally saw his lewd practice toward the mare. (I forbear particulars.) Being upon it examined and committed, in the

end he not only confessed the fact with that beast at that time, but sundry times before and at several times with all the rest of the forenamed in his indictment. And this his free confession was not only in private to the magistrates (though at first he strived to deny it) but to sundry, both ministers and others; and afterwards, upon his indictment, to the whole Court and jury; and confirmed it at his execution. And whereas some of the sheep could not be so well known by his description of them, others with them were brought before him and he declared which were they and which were not. And accordingly he was cast by the jury and condemned, and after executed about the 8th of September, 1642.

A sad spectacle it was. For first the mare and then the cow and the rest of the lesser cattle were killed before his face, according to the law, Leviticus 20:15 ["And if a man lie with a beast, he shall surely be put to death; and ye shall slay the beast"], and then he himself was executed. The cattle were all cast into a large pit that was digged of purpose for them, and no use made of any part of them. (Book II, Chapter 32. Anno Domini 1642)

What do you suppose William Bradford and his peers would think if they could see how many 21st-century American churches accept practicing perverts not only as members but even as clergy? Or what do you suppose the authors of those Obsolete Religious Tracts written 50 to 100 years ago would think if we could bring them back and discuss the various concerns which they so seriously wrote about?

"We've read your tracts," we would tell them. "We know you were serious about the things you wrote. But your tracts are just a joke now, because now we have more serious moral issues to resolve - issues like gay marriage."

"Gay marriage? What's wrong with that?" they would say. "Marriage is supposed to be happy and gay."

"Um... There's been a semantic change," we would explain. "The word gay means something totally different from what it meant in your time. Let us tell you what it now means...."

We would explain the modern meaning of gay, and tell them that Christians are debating whether or not "gay marriage" is immoral.

Their response would be, "You're joking, of course, right?"

The solution to immorality among believers is not to treat the external symptoms only, but to treat the disease. A good physician is not satisfied to just bring the patient some temporary relief by treating the symptoms. A good physician points out the symptoms to persuade

his patients that they have a serious disease. But the solution is to treat the disease, not the symptoms.

What is the disease? The disease is half-hearted allegiance to the Lord and to His kingdom. Instead of loving the Lord with all of the heart, soul, mind, and strength, many believers love Him with only 50%, or 75%, or 90% of their heart, soul, mind, and strength.

The proof of this half-hearted devotion can be seen in people's misplaced priorities. Yeshua said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [food, clothing, physical needs] shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). But instead of seeking first the kingdom of God, many believers seek first financial security to provide their food, clothing, and physical needs. Seeking the kingdom of God takes second place to seeking their physical needs.

Another proof of people's half-hearted devotion to the Lord can be seen in people's compromises with the world. The behavior, speech, goals, concerns, and external appearance of many believers is not much different — sometimes not at all different — from that of the unredeemed worldlings around them.

These are some of the symptoms of the spiritual sickness that afflicts many believers today. If you see symptoms of half-heartedness or worldly compromise in your life, wake up! Don't remain in a state of denial. Admit that you are spiritually sick, and take the cure.

What is the cure? It's not some deep, distant, mysterious secret that can only be unlocked by decoding mystical texts of kabbalistic writing or anything like that. It's a simple cure. Maybe not easy, but simple. Just sincere, genuine, old-fashioned repentance and returning to your first love for the Lord. That was the prescription that the Great Physician gave to the church at Ephesus after they left their first love, and it is the prescription He prescribes for all who have left their first love:

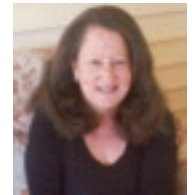
"Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works" (Revelation 2:5f).

Take this three-fold prescription. Remember, Repent, and Re-do. Remember what it was like for you when you first found the Lord. Remember the love and devotion you had for Him then. Repent of the things you have allowed to creep into your life and quench that fiery first love. Then Re-do. Get back to the basic disciplines. Seek the Lord in prayer, in His Word, in fasting, and in serving others. Do that which He put you on earth to do. Then you will not live in fear of that day when you must appear before the judgment seat of Messiah to give an account for the things you have done in your body, whether good or bad.

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A Work in Progress

By Lori Godfrey



The morning looked to be a dismal day, one that would keep a person inside. Maybe a book reading day, I thought. Or a chance to continue my memoir. As a child I would ask my mom, "Mom how do you know I will write?" "Because you love to write," she would say.

Mom was correct. I began writing at a young age and continue today. Writing a memoir is a journey into a different realm. Writing about your life takes on a new meaning. The past, with its memories, whether good or bad, come to the surface of our minds.

A memoir is not complete until the memories fade beneath the crevices of our mind. Writing is a work in progress, never ending until the day we die. Writers make up several class of people. There are no two alike. Just as the languages of the world are diverse, so are the ones who pen words to paper.

By the afternoon, the sun decided to peek from the clouds and a day of outdoors began. Summer had the bids on outdoor activities, writer or not. A schedule would ensue for the one who passionately pursued her craft and work in progress would continue.

Just as the seasons change, time also moves forward. Life is an entity of uncertainties but people with talent also put forth the effort to continue along the path of creativity: no matter the hours or frustration it can bring.

The work in progress stems from our ability to see within ourselves and know we can create something from the talent God has given. The question being, Do we have enough confidence in ourselves to live the life we know we're to live?

As writers, can we fulfill the call we have on our life? There are those who write for the good and those who write for the dark side. We, along with our conscience as our guide, have to arrive at the moment of decision.

Each individual has a work in progress. Our lives are a masterpiece woven between the heart and mind of the One who created us. Let us pen the words He so lovingly inspired upon our hearts with such gratitude that even we are taken back.

About Lori Godfrey: I am a Christian freelance writer reaching out to those who want answers to life's problems through creative writing. I also write for a bi-monthly Christian magazine, as well as being published in my home town newspaper. I am an author, writer, and mom. My sons and I reside in the South.

Some Timely Advice

By John Klassek



We have lived in a time of unprecedented wealth, peace and prosperity. The phenomenal rise of Western success, dominance and affluence is really quite unmatched historically. However, things aren't as they seem anymore. Ask the man in the street, and he'll probably agree that we live in a troubled world with terrorism high on the agenda, above disease, climate change and other concerns.

We must be prepared to openly admit the truth. We must find the strength of voice of love and impartiality to speak out against rising secularism and political correctness. Otherwise, we in the West will largely fail to understand and respond to perhaps the greatest threat the world has ever faced.

Islam is an unmistakable and brutal political force, driven by religious ideologies. Their stated will and ambition is to overtake the host nation, no matter how long it takes — be it through migration or direct assault. Are not the greatest migrations of peoples today Islamic in origin? There is plenty of shocking rhetoric and evidence, for example, that threatens to turn Buckingham Palace in London, UK, into a mosque. Thus Britain is now struggling with an identity crisis, as are other places elsewhere throughout Europe. Perhaps, God forbid, in a few years we'll see "Euroarabia" — Europe under sharia law simply because the voting population is greater in numbers than the original inhabitants.

Don't think it can happen in Australia, or anywhere else in the "free" world? Feel such comments are unnecessarily alarmist? Think we ought to be more politically sensitive?

Given the fact that our nations, including the USA, Britain, Canada, and New Zealand were founded on a Christian heritage and ethos, and given that by our own admission we here in Australia no longer see ourselves as a Christian country, the words of the God who in the first place blessed us ought to urgently resonate in our national conscience.

Some 3500 years ago, as recorded in Deuteronomy 28 (known as the blessings and curses chapter) the One we know as Jesus said:

Deuteronomy 28:15 GNB "But if you disobey the LORD your God and do not faithfully keep all his commands and laws that I am giving you today, all these evil things will happen to you: (33) A foreign nation will take all the crops that you have worked so hard to grow, while you receive nothing but constant oppression and harsh treatment. (36) The LORD will take you and your king away to a foreign land, where neither you nor your ancestors ever lived before; there you will serve gods made of wood and stone. (37) In the countries to which

the LORD will scatter you, the people will be shocked at what has happened to you; they will make fun of you and ridicule you. (43) Foreigners who live in your land will gain more and more power, while you gradually lose yours. (44) They will have money to lend you, but you will have none to lend them. In the end they will be your rulers. (45) All these disasters will come on you, and they will be with you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the LORD your God and keep all the laws that he gave you. (49) The LORD will bring against you a nation from the ends of the earth, a nation whose language you do not know. They will swoop down on you like an eagle. (50) They will be ruthless and show no mercy to anyone, young or old. (51) They will eat your livestock and your crops, and you will starve to death. They will not leave you any grain, wine, olive oil, cattle, or sheep; and you will die. (52) They will attack every town in the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and the high, fortified walls in which you trust will fall.

Jesus is always right. History has a way of repeating itself. It's called the natural law of "consequences". Nations who turned their back on God ended up suffering catastrophic misfortune, before simply vanishing into the ignominious sands of history.

It's time to wake up, change from our indifference towards God, and seek forgiveness, the results of which lead to healing and blessings abundant.

After all, Jesus also prefaced his warnings with powerful and encouraging motivation:

Deuteronomy 28:1-2 GNB If you obey the LORD your God and faithfully keep all his commands that I am giving you today, he will make you greater than any other nation on earth. (2) Obey the LORD your God and all these blessings will be yours: (7) The LORD will defeat your enemies when they attack you. They will attack from one direction, but they will run from you in all directions. (10) Then all the peoples on earth will see that the LORD has chosen you to be his own people, and they will be afraid of you. (13) The LORD your God will make you the leader among the nations and not a follower; you will always prosper and never fail if you obey faithfully all his commands that I am giving you today.

Prophets, pastors and preachers — please heed the call and stand up for Jesus. After all, it is His words alone that lead to true peace, power, and prosperity.

John has a program called "Message Week." John lives in Australia.

1) Healing of Physical Deformities and Injuries — In Matthew 12:1-14, Jesus prayed for a man with a withered hand. This man was healed, and his hand was completely restored. This was a physical deformity or injury that was healed.

2) Healing of Sicknesses and Diseases — In Matthew 8:14-15, Jesus prayed for Peter's mother-in-law to be healed of fever. This was a healing of an illness.

3) The Forgiveness of Sins — In Matthew 9:1-6, there was a man with palsy. Jesus said "...your sins are forgiven you..." and the man was healed. We find this reiterated in other places. In James 5:16, the Bible reads, "Confess your faults [or sins] one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." Confessing your faults or sins one to another that you may receive healing. There are times that sin brings illness or infirmity. This is not always the case, but it does happen. In this instance, you need to pray for the afflicted person to have a revelation of their sins. Pray for God to shine His light into their hearts and minds to expose the sin in them so that they can repent.

4) Casting out of Devils — In Matthew 15:21-28, Jesus cast an evil spirit out of a girl. When the spirit left, she was healed of her illness. This shows us that some illnesses originate from spiritual affliction.

5) Resurrecting the Dead — In Luke 8:49-56, Jesus went to pray for a little girl who had died. In verse 50, Jesus said that the girl could be healed if they believed. He prayed and she came back from the dead. This is a gift of healing because it is reversing the processes of sickness that caused someone to die! This restores them just as if they had never died!

Sometimes illness can be caused by emotional wounds. These emotional wounds can cause sickness, depression, and even arthritis or fibromyalgia. Wounds from within can be extremely harmful.

The amazing thing about healing is that you can pray for healing even if you do not have the gifts of healings. God already promised us in the books of Exodus that He will heal us. In the New Testament, we have a further promise that **anyone** can pray for others to be healed. James wrote, "And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven" (James 5:15). Jesus even said in Matthew 18:19, "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven." As long as we have the faith to pray for others to be healed, we can flow in this wonderful promise from God! When we pray for other people to be healed, we need to be discerning of the voice of God. As discussed, there are different kinds of illnesses and different causes for illness. When you pray, God will guide you in **how** to pray.

There are two important keys to healing: brokenness and compassion. Brokenness is a realization that neither you nor anyone else can achieve what needs to be done. Only God can do it and that you need Him to interact or intervene. It is being "needy" for God. Compassion works together with brokenness. Many times in the gospels it says that Jesus prayed for sick people out of compassion. "And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick" (Matthew 14:14). Compassion is sincere concern for others. We must have a heart that breaks at the sight of people who are hurting and disadvantaged. Out of this Godly compassion, healing virtue will flow. When compassion arises in us at the sight of sick people, it is a sign that the heart of God is active and alive in us.

Why is it important for us to pray for people to be healed? In Matthew 12:28, Jesus said, "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." The manifestation of healing is one way that the Kingdom of God is seen by others. Paul wrote, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power" (1 Corinthians 4:20). The Kingdom of God is not of this world. It is from the Heavenly realm. However, it abides within us. To defy the natural order of this world, we need a power that is not of this world. Sometimes, people need to see power of another world often before they can believe in a Kingdom from another world. They need to see divine healing instead of natural healing. For the rest of the world to experience the Kingdom of God, we must let that Kingdom out of us. One way we do this is to pray for others to receive divine healing. I have listed below some real-life examples of people who I have seen God heal. Let us go forth and manifest this wonderful promise from God!

Kaye — Suffered from severe pain due to Rheumatoid Arthritis. We prayed, and God healed her instantly! She now has full mobility with no pain! **Martha** — Healed from breast cancer! **Mary** — Healed from a shoulder condition that restricted her from moving her shoulder! **Frank** — Fractured vertebrae healed! **Jayce** — Had a torn MCL, ACL, Meniscus, and PCL from a sports injury. She was in a brace and limping. After we prayed for her, they all grew back instantly!

Adam — Torn Achilles tendon healed completely! He threw off the boot he was wearing and started walking! **Ruth** — She had carpal tunnel so bad that she required a brace for both wrists. When she was prayed for, she took off the braces from her arms and she has had no pain from that day until now! **Shana** — Healed from neuropathy! **Jasper** — Healed of depression. He is now full of joy!

Works Cited:

Unless otherwise noted, all quotes come from the New International Version.

Westby: "Torah Man" cont. from page 4.

Jesus began his teaching proclaiming the gospel. What is the Gospel? It is not some special New Testament Jesus-program in contrast to Old Testament (the Hebrew Bible) teachings. The Gospel of the Kingdom of God is the full phrase and is simply the good news (gospel) of Yahweh's rule and how man is purposed to have part in it for eternity.

God's Will=God's Way=God's Torah

See the sharp point Jesus puts in his message:

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

Jesus goes on to say,

"Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who build his house on a rock" (vs 24).

What were the words—the Torah—that Jesus passed from his Father on to his followers? Those words are at the heart of the Universal Covenant which summarized God's Grand Plan to bring man and woman into his eternal kingdom: "I will be your God and you will be my people."

The Universal Covenant is but another expression of The Gospel. Moses declared the essence of the covenant to our ancient forefathers:

Yahweh your God commands you this day to follow these decrees and laws carefully observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. You have declared this day that Yahweh is your God and that you will walk in his ways, that you will keep his decrees, commands and laws and that you will obey him. And Yahweh has declared this day that you are his people, his treasured possession as he promised, and that you are to keep all his commands. He has declared that he will set you in praise, fame and honor high above all the nations he has made and that you will be a people holy to Yahweh your God, as he promised (Deuteronomy 26:16-9).

The purpose of Torah is that we internalize God's Way in our minds and hearts. God's teachings have an object and that is to help us become in his holy image of love and character. As Jesus instructed, "Be Holy/Perfect as your heavenly Father is Holy/Perfect" (Matthew 5:48). All his Torah teaching had that aim in view.

Jeremiah quotes Yahweh expressing the Universal Covenant ("I will be their God and they will be my people") and making plain how that will come to be.

"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33).

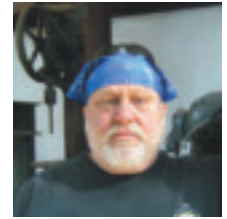
Jesus was born as fully human as any descendant of Adam. He "grew in grace and knowledge and in favor with God and man." He does all things to please his heavenly Father and thoroughly lives by every word of God. He internalizes the very words of God and they are written into his heart and mind. These are the words of God, the instructions in the way of God—Torah—that Jesus brought mankind. He and the Father had become one in mind and purpose and Jesus' words carried all the power and authority of heaven.

To Jesus we must listen! He is God's Torah-Man.

Ken Westby is a board member emeritus of the BSA, and founder and director of the Association for Christian Development and the Virtual Church (www.godward.org).

True Faith

by Terrell Perkins



The Roman Catholic Church, the largest religion on earth that lays claim to Jesus the Christ, also lays claim to being the final authority in theological matters within the faith. They do not pretend that the Bible is their ultimate authority. In the hierarchical form of their church government the Pope is the head of the church and he speaks for Christ.

There have been great abuses in that form of church government historically. If the Pope makes a declaration on a theological matter, there is no higher authority to which to appeal because he speaks for God. Because of the abuses of that form of church government Martin Luther, and others in the Protestant reformation, appealed to the authority of the scriptures. The Catholic Church had gotten so far off that track that it needed a major shake up. The ultimate authority in theological matters for Protestants became the scriptures.

There are many Protestants today that will tell you that what they believe comes from the Bible. Many will, in fact, insist on it. It is true enough that the Protestant Reformation began with the motto: "Sola Scriptura." But the fact is, a great deal of what most Christians believe is not found anywhere in the Bible.

What actually happens is that some person or group interprets what the Bible says and "that" is what is then taught as being "only the Bible." One group will assert that a particular teaching is correct and point to the scriptures to justify their view and another will point to the scriptures to prove just the opposite.

There are a lot of misconceptions about the 'faith once delivered' among Christians. The truth is, traditions from non-Christian sources have been grafted into the faith for centuries. The result is a religion that is far different in some of its principles and practices from the one that Jesus the Christ taught. The Protestant churches today have gotten so far off track that they now need a major shake up.

Some Christian sects have pointed to such things as Christmas and Easter as having pagan origins and no relationship to the teachings in the scriptures. These are some of the more obvious extra-biblical traditions that have been grafted into Christianity. But there are even more subtle teachings than those that permeate modern Christianity.

Teachings rooted in non-biblical traditions have been handed down for so long that they are most often not even questioned. They serve to cloud the true nature of the God

revealed in Holy Scripture. Some teachings even contradict the principles revealed to us so completely that they would be recognized as anti-Christian to the first century church.

It's difficult to examine the foundations of one's beliefs, especially when we grow up assuming them to be true so completely. It is in our nature to only see, that which supports what we already believe, and to not-see what is contrary to what we believe. For the sake of intellectual and spiritual honesty, however, I believe every aspect of our faith bears close scrutiny, especially our preconceived ideas.

Some will argue, quite correctly, that the Holy Spirit leads us to the truth. Without the Holy Spirit we can't understand the true depth of the scriptures. It's also true that there are other spirits that will readily lead us away from the truth. We are told to try the spirits to see if they speak the truth. The only test we have is to use the scriptures as our foundation. The true Holy Spirit would never lead us in a way contrary to the scriptures. God has given us both to guide us.

If something is found to be contradictory to the scriptures it should be discarded...no matter how engrained it has become. The motto of every honest Christian should be "Sola Scriptura." The Bible should be the "sole basis of authority." Tradition that does not find its roots in the history or principles of scripture should not be considered a part of the faith. Any ecumenical creeds should also be judged in that light. The Bible continually warns of false teachings finding their way into the Body of Christ. The only true authority of the church arises out of the principles and practices found in the scriptures. Anyone who teaches otherwise should be considered suspect. Anyone who teaches something contrary to the principles in the scriptures should be considered a false teacher...no matter how sincere.

One of the biggest misconceptions in modern Christianity is that God and Satan are somehow equal. Nothing could be further from the truth. Satan, is a created being that rebelled against God. He is completely under God's authority. There is no equality between good and evil. God allows Satan and evil to exist as they suit His purposes.

Stemming from that misconception is the notion that God is somehow in competition for the souls of man. Many believe God is desperately trying to save as many people as possible, and anyone who doesn't accept Christ as their savior is hopelessly lost. If that were the case God would be losing miserably because the vast majority of mankind has not accepted Christ. People that believe this misconception unwittingly elevate Satan in status. The God of the Bible is absolutely supreme in power and authority. God opens the hearts and minds of man in degrees. He is working with all human beings and calls them in His time.

Some people will tell you that even infants who die without knowing Christ are doomed to an eternity in hell-fire. They take one or two scriptures out of context to come to such misunderstandings. The god that that view describes is not the God revealed in the Bible. The God of the Bible is revealed to us as a just, merciful and loving Father in many, many scriptures. No fair minded judge on earth would condemn an infant in such a way, and there is no way the God revealed in the scriptures would.

Every teaching asserted by a church should be true to the principles laid down in scriptures. In other words, it should fit into the Big Picture harmoniously. The principles of eternal love, mercy, justice and humility should guide our understanding of all scripture.

Another guiding principle is "obedience to God." What God does not want is to create another Satan, another spirit being that rebels against Him. So, if it comes down to a choice between obeying God...or rationalizing why we don't have to...go with obedience. Christ obeyed His Father unto death... If you love Him you'll keep His commandments. Love is not what you feel...it's what you do. And when it comes to someone else's obedience to God, let them work that out with Him. You do what you understand. God didn't create us, or call us, to sit in judgment on whether someone else receives the gift of eternal life. He'll do that himself.

Always keep in mind, the Bible is not a book of theory or philosophy. It is not a book to simply be read and walked away from...or studied, for the sake of studying. The Bible is a users manual. When you read it, and come to understand something, you need to put those things to practice in your life.

Ultimately the Bible was written to each of us personally. We should take what God reveals to us from it and work to improve our own lives. If every Christian would do that, the example it would set for non-believers would draw them to the church in droves. God called us to walk humbly with Him and to work out our own salvation in fear and trembling, not to take it for granted. When one is focused on the beam in one's own eye... one has very little time to find the motes in others.

Where others are concerned...be ready to always to give an answer for what you believe. Love them like you love yourself. Forgive them when they wrong you. Feed them if they're hungry. Clothe them if they're cold. Visit them if they're lonely. And be there when they need a hand. Treat them the way you would like to be treated. Always remember that love isn't just what you feel...it's what you do. You can't go wrong with those principles. Live those and you'll get it...

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.

About Ebola

by Whaid G. Rose



Everyone is talking about the deadly Ebola virus, especially now that two Americans have come down with this disease here at home.

But overseas missions agencies are talking about a different “viral trend”: medical missions. David Stevens, CEO of Christian Medical & Dental Associations, recently reported “a huge renaissance in medical missions.” In recent months CMDA has registered 1,500 new students planning careers in missions around the world, joining hundreds already in the field.

These thoughts are gleaned from a page in the latest issue of Christianity Today magazine which shows medical workers in full protective gear carrying an infected Ebola patient—under the caption, *Here Come The Healers*. The article notes that “up to 70 percent of health care in Africa is provided by faith-based groups,” whose commitment to serving the poorest of the poor remains undaunted amid the rising threat of disease and death.

This is a timely reminder that not all in the world are living for themselves; many are given to selfless service and sacrifice. And it is a testimony to the power and credibility of the gospel; people don’t put their lives on the line for that which isn’t real. As Jim Elliot wrote in his diary the day he was killed by Aka Indians in Ecuador, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.”

So I’m rejoicing in this “huge renaissance in medical missions,” grateful that many still go! And I’m meditating on the lyrics of Ira Stanphill’s song, *Follow Me*, for it beautifully captures this commitment to foreign missions. Here’s the last stanza:

Oh Jesus, if I die upon a foreign field someday,
’Twould be no more than love demands, no less could I repay;
“No greater love hath mortal man than for a friend to die.”
These are the words He gently spoke to me:
If just a cup of water I place within your hand,
then just a cup of water is all that I demand.
But if by death to living they can Thy glory see,
I’ll take my cross and follow close to Thee.

Yours for a culture of excellence,

Whaid G. Rose

Whaid Rose is the president of the Church of God 7th Day.

Truth or Tradition

by Bryant Buck



I have entitled this Bible study Truth or Tradition. In fact, I have deliberately mistitled this Bible study to get your attention. A tradition can be either a true tradition or a false tradition. So a more accurate title for this particular Bible study would be True Tradition or False Tradition. That being said, whenever Jesus talked about traditions, He talked about the false traditions of religious people. The truth then consists of traditions other than the false traditions adhered to by religious people.

Webster's large Print Dictionary defines tradition as follows: "1. Handing down of beliefs, customs, etc., through generations. 2. Something so handed down." Generally traditions involve more than just beliefs; they involve customary ways of doing things. For example, it is the custom in the United States to observe the 4th of July as our national day of independence from Great Britain. Although a fireworks show was not part of the original Independence Day, in 1776, it has become our custom to have fireworks shows on the 4th of July. Over time many people in our country have come to associate the 4th of July more with fireworks displays than with the independence of our country from Great Britain. This is a simple example of how a custom that originally had nothing to do with a particular holiday has come to be the essence of the holiday itself.

The two positive references to traditions in the Scriptures are both found in the epistle of 2 Thessalonians. "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us." (2 Thessalonians 2:15 NAS) "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us." (2 Thessalonians 3:6 NAS) The first Scripture lays out the principle that we adhere to the traditions of truth as they were maintained by the early church. The second Scripture brings out one particular tradition of the early church — that is, that we as Christians should avoid fellow Christians who lead an unruly life. Although the text doesn't specify what an unruly life is, we know from experience that anyone

who has a drug addiction or is an alcoholic leads an unruly life. Moreover, the context in 2 Thessalonians 3 seems to indicate that anyone who refuses to work leads an unruly life. All that being said, the main principle laid out in II Thessalonians 2:15 is that we should continue in the true traditions adhered to by the early church. This makes sense because the early church received revelation directly from Yeshua as to what traditions are true.

In Matthew 15:1-3 (NAS) we read this exchange between Jesus and some Pharisees: "Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 'Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.' And He answered and said to them, 'Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?'" In this exchange we have "the tradition of the elders" versus "the commandment of God." Obviously the commandment of God takes precedence over the tradition of the elders. However, what we fail to take out of this passage is that since the 2nd Century AD many leaders of the Christian church have been replacing the commandments of God with their own traditions.

The same encounter is covered in Mark 7:1-8 (NIV). "The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean," that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.) So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, 'Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with "unclean" hands?' He replied, 'Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men." You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.'" The wording in

Mark is almost the same as it was in Matthew: Here we have “the tradition of the elders” versus “the commands of God.” Obviously the commands of Yahweh take precedence over the tradition of the elders. Moreover, regarding the traditions of the Pharisees, the Lord declared that “their teachings are but rules taught by men.”

Any evangelical Christian knows that the medieval church corrupted numerous truths of the Scriptures into vain traditions of men. But the truth is that this process of replacing the true traditions given to the 1st Century apostles with the false traditions of religious men began as early as the 2nd Century AD. Of course, evangelical Christians have done away with many of the false traditions of the medieval church. For example, the truth of salvation by faith in Christ alone has replaced the false tradition of salvation by various good works. False traditions such as selling indulgences for salvation and bailing out on one’s deathbed with extreme unction have been thrown out by evangelical Christians. Likewise, infant sprinkling before repentance has been replaced by immersion in water after repentance in most evangelical denominations. Does that mean that we have at last eliminated all the false traditions that have crept into the Christian church since early in the 2nd Century AD? If we had, I believe that the Christian church would be a far more victorious church than it is now.

The problem isn’t just traditions; it’s our zeal for them. Paul testified of his personal experience with the problem this way: “For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews’ religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: and profited in the Jews’ religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.” (Galatians 1:13-14 KJV) Until his conversion Paul was more zealous for the traditions he had learned from his teachers in Judaism than for the truths of the Scriptures. If we discover that certain “truths” we have been taught all our lives are actually traditions of men, what are we going to do? Passionately defend our traditions? Or will be like Paul and investigate the truths of the Scriptures even if it means that we have to give up traditions which we have observed all our lives?

Truth or tradition? True tradition or false tradition? We must not measure any tradition by its support from large circles of Christian teachers or by its popularity with large numbers of Christians. Then only measure of whether any tradition is true or false is whether the Bible itself verifies that the tradition is true or false.

Bryant Buck is a writer and a member of the BSA board.

Watching for the Morning

by Donald Mansell

My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning (Psalm 130:6).

The psalmist’s repetition of the phrase “more than they that watch for the morning” is done for emphasis. Have you ever spent a sleepless night in anticipation of some great event? Do you remember how the hours dragged by? Do you recall how you watched for the morning, which seemed as though it would never come? Have you ever waited on the Lord for an answer to prayer that seemed like waiting for the morning?

Our attitude of mind affects the apparent passage of time. We know, of course, that in the absolute sense time marches on in steady, relentless pace, but the way in which we relate to the passage of time can make it seem to go slow or fast. It was Emily Dickinson who wrote: “To wait an hour is long, If love is just beyond: To wait eternity is short, If love be at the end.”

We cannot always predict when or how God is going to answer a certain prayer, even when it is according to His will as revealed in His Word. Sometimes the period of waiting is relatively short; sometimes it is relatively long. Daniel waited for only a few minutes before his prayer, recorded in Daniel 9, was answered; the disciples waited for ten days before the Lord’s promise to send His Holy Spirit was realized; the man at the Pool of Bethesda waited 38 years before he was healed.

But waiting on the Lord means more than waiting idly for His answer to come along. It means adopting an attitude of total submission to God’s will while we wait. It means developing a confident, trustful attitude, that God will do for us that which is for our best and eternal good. It means assuming a cheerful attitude of hope. Says the psalmist, “I wait upon the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope” (Psalm 130:5). By being submissive, trustful, hopeful, we can make our waiting for God to answer our prayers seem shorter.

I have never met a Christian who adopted these attitudes who was not calm, cheerful, and a joy to be around. There are incalculable benefits to be gained by retiring for a while at the beginning of each day and waiting upon the Lord. It is in these seasons of prayer, meditation, and the study of God’s Word that we develop those attitudes that transform waiting upon the Lord from a drudgery into a pleasure.

Whenever the morning of fulfillment seems long delayed, remember that your attitude can make a difference. David, who had learned the lesson of waiting, urges: “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord” (Psalm 27:14).

Donald Mansell, New Every Morning, page 20. Review & Herald Publishing Association. 1981.

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